

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH
PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE
A C T S O F T H E A P O S T L E S.

We have with an abundant satisfaction seen the foundation of our holy religion laid in the history of our blessed Saviour, its great Author, which was related and left upon record by four several inspired writers, who all agree in this sacred truth, and the incontestable proofs of it, That *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Upon this rock the christian church is built*; and how it began to be built upon this rock, comes next to be related in this book which we have now before us. Of this we have the testimony only of *one witness*; for the matters of fact concerning Christ, were much more necessary to be fully related and attested than those concerning the apostles. Had Infinite Wisdom seen fit, we might have had as many books of the Acts of the Apostles as we have Gospels, nay, as we might have had Gospels; but, for fear of overburthening the world, (John 21. 25.) we have sufficient to answer the end, if we will but make use of it.

The history of this book (which was always received as a part of the sacred canon) may be considered, I. As looking back to the preceding gospels, giving light to them, and greatly assisting our faith in them. The promises there made, we here find made good; particularly the great promise of the *descent of the Holy Ghost*, and his wonderful operations, both on the apostles, (whom here in a few days we find quite other men than what the gospels left them; no longer weak-headed and weak-hearted, but able to say that which then they were not able to bear, (John 16. 12.) and bold as lions to face those hardships which then as lambs they trembled at the thought of,) and also *with* the apostles, making the word mighty to the *pulling down of Satan's strong holds*, which had been before comparatively preached in vain. The commission there granted to the apostles we here find executed, and the powers there lodged in them exerted in miracles wrought on the bodies of people—miracles of mercy, restoring sick bodies to health, and dead bodies to life—miracles of judgment, striking rebels blind or dead; and much greater miracles wrought on the minds of people, in conferring spiritual gifts upon them, both of understanding and utterance; and this in pursuance of Christ's purposes, and in performance of his promises, which we had in the gospels. The proofs of Christ's resurrection, which the gospels closed with, are here abundantly corroborated, not only by the constant and undaunted testimony of those that conversed with him after he rose, (who had all deserted him, and one of them denied him, and would not otherwise have been rallied again but by his resurrection, but must have been irretrievably dispersed, and yet by that were enabled to own him more resolutely than ever, in defiance of bonds and deaths,) but by the working of the Spirit with that testimony for the conversion of multitudes to the faith of Christ, according to the word of Christ, that his resurrection, the sign of the prophet Jonas, which was reserved to the last, should be the most convincing proof of his divine mission. Christ had told his disciples that they should be his witnesses, and this book brings them in witnessing for him; that they should be *fishers of men*, and here we have them enclosing multitudes in the gospel-net; that they should be the *lights of the world*, and here we have the world enlightened by them; but that day-spring from on high which we there discerned in the first appearing of, we here find shining more and more. The *corn of wheat*, which there fell to the ground, here springs up and bears *much fruit*; the *grain of mustard-seed* there is here a *great tree*; and the *kingdom of heaven*, which was then at hand, is here set up. Christ's predictions of the virulent persecutions which the preachers of his gospel should be afflicted with (though one could not have imagined that a doctrine so well worthy of all acceptance should meet with so much opposition) we here find abundantly fulfilled, and also the assurances he gave them of extraordinary supports and comforts under their sufferings. Thus, as the latter part of the history of the Old Testament verifies the promises made to the fathers in the former part, (as appears by that famous and solemn acknowledgment of Solomon's, which runs like a receipt in full, 1 Kings 8. 56. *There has not failed one word of all his good promise which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant*.) so the latter part of the history of the New Testament exactly answers to the word of Christ in the former part of it: and thus they mutually confirm and illustrate each other.

II. As looking forward to the following epistles, which are an explication of the gospels, which open the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, the history whereof we had in the gospels. This book introduces them, and is a key to them, as the history of David is to David's psalms. We are members of the christian church, that *tabernacle of God among men*, and it is our honour and privilege that we are so. Now this book gives us an account of the framing and rearing of that tabernacle. The four gospels shewed us how the foundation of that house was laid; this shews us how the superstructure began to be raised. 1. Among the Jews and Samaritans, which we have an account of in the former part

of this book. 2. Among the Gentiles, which we have an account of in the latter part : from thence, and downward to our own day, we find the christian church subsisting in a visible profession of faith in Christ, as the Son of God and Saviour of the world, made by his baptized disciples, incorporated into religious societies, stately meeting in religious assemblies, attending on the apostles' doctrine, and joining in prayer and breaking of bread, under the conduct and precedence of men that gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word, and in a spiritual communion with all in every place that do likewise. Such a body as this there is now in the world, which we belong to : and, to our great satisfaction and honour, in this book we find the rise and original of it, vastly different from the Jewish church, and erected upon its ruins ; but undeniably appearing to be of God, and not of man. With what confidence and comfort may we proceed in, and adhere to, our christian profession, as far as we find it agrees with this *pattern in the mount* ; to which we ought religiously to conform and confine ourselves.

Two things more are to be observed concerning this book. (1.) The penman of it. It was written by Luke, who wrote the third of the four gospels, which bears his name ; and who (as the learned Dr. Whitby shews) was, very probably, one of the seventy disciples, whose commission (Luke 10. 1, &c.) was little inferior to that of the twelve apostles. This Luke was very much a companion of Paul in his services and sufferings. *Only Luke is with me*, 2 Tim. 4. 11. We may know by his style in the latter part of this book, when and where he was with him, for then he writes, *We did so and so*, as *ch.* 16. 10. —20. 6. and from thenceforward to the end of the book. He was with Paul in his dangerous voyage to Rome, when he was carried thither a prisoner ; was with him when from his prison there he wrote his epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, in both which he is named. And it should seem that St. Luke wrote this history when he was with St. Paul at Rome, during his imprisonment there, and was assistant to him ; for the history concludes with St. Paul's preaching there in his *own hired house*. (2.) The title of it ; *The Acts of the Apostles ; of the holy Apostles*, so the Greek copies generally read it, and so they are called, Rev. 18. 20. *Rejoice over her, ye holy apostles*. One copy inscribes it, *The Acts of the Apostles by Luke the Evangelist*. [1.] It is the history of the apostles ; yet here is in it the history of Stephen, Barnabas, and some other apostolical men, who, though not of the twelve, were indued with the same Spirit, and employed in the same work. And of those that were apostles, it is the history of Peter and Paul only that is here recorded ; (and Paul was now of the twelve ; Peter the apostle of the circumcision, and Paul the apostle of the Gentiles, Gal. 2. 7. But this suffices as a specimen of what the rest did in other places, pursuant to their commission, for they were none of them idle. And as we are to think what is related in the gospels concerning Christ sufficient, because Infinite Wisdom thought so, the same we are to think here concerning what is related of the apostles, and their labours ; for what more is told us from tradition of the labours and sufferings of the apostles, and the churches they planted, is altogether doubtful and uncertain, and what I think we cannot build upon with any satisfaction at all ; this is *gold, silver, and precious stones*, built upon the *foundation* ; that is *wood, hay, and stubble*. [2.] It is called their *acts*, or *doings*. *Gesta apostolorum*. So some. Πράξεις—their practices of the lessons their Master had taught them. The apostles were active men ; and though the wonders they did were by the word, yet they are fitly called *their acts* ; they spake, or rather the Spirit by them *spake*, and it *was done*. The history is filled with their sermons and their sufferings ; yet so much did they labour in their preaching, and so voluntarily did they expose themselves to sufferings, and such were their achievements by both, that they may very well be called their *acts*.

THE ACTS, I.

CHAP. I.

The inspired historian begins his narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, I. With a reference to, and a brief recapitulation of, his gospel, or history of the life of Christ, inscribing this, as he had done that, to his friend Theophilus, v. 1, 2. II. With a summary of the proofs of Christ's resurrection, his conference with his disciples, and the instructions he gave them during the forty days of his continuance on earth, v. 2. . 5. III. With a particular narrative of Christ's ascension into heaven, his disciples' discourse with him before he ascended, and the angels' discourse with them after he was ascended, v. 6. . 11. IV. With a general idea of the embryo of the christian church, and its state from Christ's ascension to the pouring out of the Spirit, v. 12. . 14. V. With a particular account of the filling up of the vacancy that was made in the sacred college by the death of Judas, by the electing of Matthias in his room, v. 15. . 26.

1. **T**HE former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2. Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen : 3. To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty

days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God : 4. And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me. 5. For John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

In these verses,

1. Theophilus is put in mind, and we in him, of St. Luke's gospel, which it will be of use for us to cast an eye upon before we enter upon the study of this book, that we may see not only how this begins there where that breaks off, but that, *as in water face answers to face*, so do the *acts of the apostles* to the acts of their Master, the acts of his grace.

1. His patron, to whom he dedicates this book, (I should rather say his *pupil*, for he designs, in dedicating it to him, to instruct and direct him, and not to crave his countenance or protection,) is, Theophilus, v. 1. In the epistle dedicatory before his gospel, he had called him *most excellent Theophilus*, here he calls him no more than *O Theophilus*, not that he had lost his excellency, or that it was diminished and become less illustrious ; but either he

had now quitted his place, whatever it was, for the sake of which that title was given him; or, he was now grown into years, and despised such titles of respect more than he had done; or Luke was grown more intimate with him, and therefore could address him with the more freedom. It was usual with the ancients, both christian and heathen writers, thus to inscribe their writings to some particular persons. But the directing some of the books of the scripture so, is an intimation to each of us to receive them as if directed to us in particular; to us by name; for whatsoever things were written before time, were *written for our learning*.

2. His gospel is here called the *former treatise which he had made*, which he had an eye to in writing this, intending this for a continuation and confirmation of that, *πρῶτον λόγον*—*the former word*. What is written of the gospel, is the word as truly as what was spoken; nay, we know no unwritten word that we are to give credit to, but as it agrees with that which is written. He made the former treatise, and now is divinely inspired to make this, for Christ's scholars must *go on toward perfection*, Heb. 6. 1. And therefore their guides must help them on, *must still teach the people knowledge*, (Eccl. 12. 9.) and not think that their former labours, though ever so good, will excuse them from further labours; but they should rather be quickened and encouraged by them, as St. Luke here, who, because he had laid the foundation in a former treatise, will build upon it in this. Let not this therefore drive out that; let not new sermons and new books make us forget old ones, but put us in mind of them, and help us to improve them.

3. The contents of his gospel were, *that, all that, which Jesus began both to do and teach*; and the same is the subject of the writings of the other three evangelists. Observe, (1.) Christ both did and taught. The doctrine he taught was confirmed by the miraculous works he did, which proved him a *teacher come from God*, John 3. 2. And the duties he taught were copied out in the holy gracious works he did, for he hath *left us an example*, and that such as proves him a *teacher come from God* too, for by their fruits ye shall know them. Those are the best ministers, that both do and teach, whose lives are a constant sermon. (2.) He began both to do and teach; he laid the foundation of all that was to be taught and done in the christian church. His apostles were to carry on and continue what he began, and to do and teach the same things. Christ set them in, and then left them to go on, but sent his Spirit to empower them both to do and teach. It is a comfort to those who are endeavouring to carry on the work of the gospel, that Christ himself began it. The great salvation *at the first began to be spoken by the Lord*, Heb. 2. 3. (3.) The four evangelists, and Luke particularly, have handed down to us *all that Jesus began both to do and teach*; not all the particulars, the world could not have contained them; but all the heads, samples of all, so many, and in such variety, that by them you may judge of the rest. We have the beginnings of his doctrine, (Matt. 4. 17.) and the beginnings of his miracles, John 2. 11. Luke had spoken, had treated, of all Christ's sayings and doings, had given us a general idea of them, though he had not recorded each in particular.

4. The period of the evangelical story is fixed to the day in which he was taken up, v. 2. Then it was that he left this world, and his bodily presence was no more in it. St. Mark's gospel concludes with the *Lord's being received up into heaven*, (Mark 16. 19.) and so does St. Luke's, Luke 24. 51. Christ continued *doing and teaching* to the last, *till he was taken up* to the other work he had to do within the veil.

II. The truth of Christ's resurrection is maintained and evidenced, v. 3. That part of what was related in the *former treatise*, was so material, that it was necessary to be upon all occasions repeated. The great evidence of his resurrection, was, that *he shewed himself alive to his apostles*; being *alive*, he *shewed himself* so, and *he was seen of them*. They were honest men, and one may depend upon their testimony; but the question is, whether they were not imposed upon, as many a well-meaning man is. No, they were not; for,

1. The proofs were infallible, *τεκμηρία*—*plain indications*, both that he was *alive*, (he walked and talked with them, he ate and drank with them,) and that *it was he himself, and not another*, for he shewed them again and again the marks of the wounds in his hands, and feet, and side; which was the utmost proof the thing was capable of, or required.

2. They were many, and often repeated; *he was seen by them forty days*; not constantly residing with them, but frequently appearing to them, and bringing them by degrees to be fully satisfied concerning it, so that all their sorrow for his departure was done away by it. Christ's staying upon earth so long after he was entered upon his state of exaltation and glory, to confirm the faith of his disciples, and comfort their hearts, was such an instance of condescension and compassion to believers, as may fully assure us, *that we have a high-priest that is touched with the feeling of our infirmities*.

III. A general hint given of the instructions he furnished his disciples with, now that he was about to leave them. Since he *breathed on them, and opened their understandings*, they were better able to receive them.

1. He instructed them concerning the work they were to do; *He gave commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen*. Note, Christ's choice is always attended with his charge. Those whom he elected into the apostleship, expected he should give them preferments, but, instead of that, he gave them *commandments*. When he took his journey, and gave authority to his servants, and to every one his work, (Mark 13. 34.) he gave them *commandments through the Holy Ghost*, which he was himself filled with as Mediator, and which he had *breathed into them*. In giving them the *Holy Ghost*, he gave them his *commandments*; for the Comforter will be a commander; and his office was to bring to their remembrance what Christ had said. He charged those that were apostles by the *Holy Ghost*; so the words are placed. It was their receiving the *Holy Ghost*, that sealed their commission, John 20. 22. He was *not taken up* till after he had given them their charge, and so *finished his work*.

2. He instructed them concerning the doctrine they were to preach; *He spake to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. He had given them a general idea of that kingdom, and the certain time it should be set up in the world; (in his parable, Mark 13.) but here he let them more into the nature of it, as a kingdom of grace in this world, and of glory in the other; and opened to them that covenant which is the great charter by which it is incorporated. Now this was intended, (1.) To prepare them to receive the *Holy Ghost*, and to go through that which they were designed for. He tells them in secret what they must tell the world; and they shall find that the *Spirit of truth, when he comes*, will say the same. (2.) To be one of the proofs of Christ's resurrection; so it comes in here; the *disciples*, to whom he shewed himself alive, knew that it was he, not only by what he shewed them, but by what he said to them. None but he could speak thus clearly, thus fully, of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He did not entertain them with discourses of politics or the kingdoms of men,

of philosophy or the kingdom of nature, but pure divinity and the kingdom of grace; *the things* which most nearly concerned them, and those to whom they were sent.

IV. A particular assurance given them, that *they should now shortly receive the Holy Ghost*, with orders given them to expect it; (v. 4, 5.) *he being assembled together with them*, probably in the interview at *the mountain in Galilee*, which he had appointed before his death; for there is mention of *their coming together again*, (v. 6.) to attend his ascension. Though he had now ordered them to *Galilee*, yet they must not think to continue there; no, they must *return to Jerusalem, and not depart thence*. Observe,

1. The command he gives them to wait; this was to raise their expectations of something great; and something very great they had reason to expect from their exalted Redeemer. (1.) They must *wait till the time appointed*, which is now *not many days hence*. They that by faith hope promised mercies will come, must with *patience* wait till they do come; according to *the time, the set time*. And when *the time draws nigh*, as now it did, we must, as Daniel, look earnestly for it, Dan. 9. 3. (2.) They must *wait in the place appointed, in Jerusalem, for there the Spirit must be first poured out*, because Christ was to be as *King upon the holy hill of Zion*; and because *the word of the Lord must go forth from Jerusalem*; that must be the mother-church. There Christ was *put to shame*, and therefore there he will have *this honour done him*; and this favour is done to Jerusalem, to teach us to forgive our enemies and persecutors. The apostles were more exposed to danger at Jerusalem than they would have been in Galilee; but we may cheerfully trust God with our safety, when we keep in the way of our duty. The apostles were now to put on a public character, and therefore must venture in a public station; Jerusalem was the fittest candlestick for those lights to be set up in.

2. The assurance he gives them that they shall not wait in vain; the blessing designed them shall come, and they shall find it was worth waiting for; *You shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost*: that is, (1.) "*The Holy Ghost shall be poured out upon you more plentifully than ever*." They had already been *breathed upon with the Holy Ghost*, (John 20. 22.) and they had found the benefit of it; but now they shall have larger measures of his gifts, graces, and comforts, and *be baptized with them*; where there seems to be an allusion to those Old Testament promises of *the pouring out of the Spirit*, Joel 2. 28. Isa. 44. 3.—32. 15. (2.) "*Ye shall be cleansed and purified by the Holy Ghost*, as the priests were baptized and washed with water, when they were consecrated to the sacred function; They had the sign, ye shall have the thing signified. Ye shall be *sanctified by the truth*, as the Spirit shall lead you more and more into it, and *your consciences purged by the witness of the Spirit*, that ye may serve the living God in the apostleship." (3.) "Ye shall hereby be more effectually than ever engaged to your Master, and to his conduct, as Israel was *baptized unto Moses in the cloud, and in the sea*; ye shall be tied so fast to Christ, that ye shall never, for fear of any sufferings, forsake him again, as once you did."

Now *this gift of the Holy Ghost* he speaks of, [1.] As *the promise of the Father, which they had heard of him*, and might therefore depend upon.

First, *The Spirit was given by promise*, and it was at this time the great promise, as that of the Messiah was before, (Luke 1. 72.) and that of eternal life is now, 1 John 2. 25. Temporal good things are given by Providence, but *the Spirit and spiritual blessings are given by promise*, Gal. 3. 18. *The*

Spirit of God is not given as *the spirit of men* is given us, and formed within us, by a course of nature, (Zech. 12. 1.) but by *the word of God*. 1. That the gift may be the more valuable, Christ thought *the promise of the Spirit* a legacy worth leaving to his church. 2. That it may be the more sure, and that *the heirs of promise* may be confident of the *immutability of God's counsel* herein. 3. That it may be of *grace, peculiar grace*, and may be *received by faith, laying hold on the promise*, and depending upon it. As Christ, so the Spirit is received by faith.

Secondly, It was *the promise of the Father, of Christ's Father*. Christ, as Mediator, had an eye to God as his Father, fathering his design, and owning it all along. Of our Father, who, if he give us the adoption of sons, will certainly give us the Spirit of adoption, Gal. 4. 5, 6. He will give the Spirit, as the Father of lights, as the Father of spirits, and as the Father of mercies; it is the promise of the Father.

Thirdly, This promise of the Father they had heard from Christ many a time, especially in the farewell sermon he preached to them a little before he died, wherein he assured them, again and again, that *the Comforter should come*. This confirms the promise of God, and encourages us to depend upon it, that we have heard it from Jesus Christ; for in him all the promises of God are yea, and amen. "You have heard it from me, and I will make it good."

[2.] As the prediction of John Baptist; for so far Christ here directs them to look; (v. 5.) "You have not only heard it from me, but you had it from John; when he turned you over to me, he said, (Matt. 3. 11.) *I indeed baptize you with water, but he that comes after me, shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost*." It is a great honour that Christ now does to John, not only to quote his words, but to make this great gift of the Spirit, now at hand, to be the accomplishment of them. Thus he confirmeth the word of his servants, his messengers, Isa. 44. 26. But Christ can do more than any of his ministers. It is an honour to them to be employed in dispensing the means of grace, but it is his prerogative to give the Spirit of grace. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost; shall teach you by his Spirit, and give his Spirit to make intercession in you; which is more than the best ministers preaching with us.

Now this gift of the Holy Ghost thus promised, thus prophesied of, thus waited for, is that which we find the apostles received in the next chapter, for in that this promise had its full accomplishment; that was it that shall come, and we look for no other; for it is here promised to be given *not many days hence*. He does not tell them how many, because they must keep every day in a frame fit to receive it. Other scriptures speak of the gift of the Holy Ghost to ordinary believers, this speaks of that particular power which, by the Holy Ghost, the first preachers of the gospel, and planters of the church, were endued with, enabling them infallibly to relate to that age, and record to posterity, the doctrine of Christ, and the proofs of it; so that by virtue of this promise, and the performance of it, we receive the New Testament as of divine inspiration, and venture our souls upon it.

6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7. And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come

upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11. Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

In Jerusalem Christ, by his angel, had appointed his disciples to meet him in Galilee; there he appointed them to meet him in Jerusalem again, such a day; thus he would try their obedience, and it was found ready and cheerful; *they came together*, as he appointed them, to be the witnesses of his ascension; which here we have an account of. Observe,

I. The question they asked him at this interview. *They came together* to him, as those that had consulted one another about it, and concurred in the question, *nemine contradicente—unanimously*; *they came* in a body, and put it to him as the sense of the house; *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* Two ways this may be taken.

1. "Surely thou wilt not at all restore it to the present rulers of Israel, the chief priests and the elders, that put thee to death, and, to compass that design, tamely gave up the kingdom to Cæsar, and owned themselves his subjects! What! Shall those that hate and persecute thee and us, be trusted with power? *That be far from thee.*" Or rather,

2. "Surely thou wilt now restore it to the Jewish nation, as far as it will submit to thee as their king!" Now two things were amiss in this question:

(1.) Their expectation of the thing itself. They thought Christ would restore the kingdom to Israel, that is, that he would make the nation of the Jews as great and considerable among the nations as it was in the days of David and Solomon, of Asa and Jehoshaphat; that, as Shiloh, he would restore the sceptre to Judah, and the lawgiver; whereas Christ came to set up his own kingdom, and that a kingdom of heaven, not to restore the kingdom to Israel, an earthly kingdom. See how apt even good men are to place the happiness of the church too much in external pomp and power! As if Israel were not glorious unless the kingdom were restored to it, nor Christ's disciples honoured unless they were peers of the realm; whereas we are bid to expect the cross in this world, and to wait for the kingdom in the other world. See how apt we are to retain what we have imbibed, and how hard it is to get over the prejudices of education! The disciples having sucked in this notion with their milk, that the Messiah was to be a temporal prince, they were long before they could be brought to have any idea of his kingdom as spiritual. See also how naturally we are biassed in favour of our own people! They thought God would have no kingdom in the world, unless it were restored to Israel; whereas the kingdoms of this world were to become his, in whom he would be glorified, whether Israel sink or swim. See also how apt we are to misunderstand scripture, and to understand that literally, which is spoken figuratively, and to expound scripture by our schemes, whereas we ought to form our schemes by the scriptures. But when the Spirit shall be poured out from

on high, our mistakes will be rectified, as the apostles' soon after were.

(2.) Their inquiry concerning the time of it; "*Lord, wilt thou do it at this time?*" Now that thou hast called us together, is it for this purpose, that proper measures may be concerted for the restoring of the kingdom to Israel? Surely there cannot be a more favourable juncture than this." Now herein they missed it, [1.] That they were inquisitive into that which their Master had never directed or encouraged them to inquire into. [2.] That they were impatient for the setting up of that kingdom in which they promised themselves so great a share, and would anticipate the divine counsels. Christ had told them that they should sit on thrones, (Luke 22, 30.) and now nothing will serve them but they must be in the throne immediately, and cannot stay the time; whereas he that believeth, doth not make haste, but is satisfied that God's time is the best time.

II. The check which Christ gave to this question, like that which he had a little before given to Peter's inquiry concerning John, *What is that to thee?* v. 7. *It is not for you to know the times and seasons.* He does not contradict their expectation that the kingdom would be restored to Israel, because that mistake would soon be rectified by the pouring out of the Spirit, after which they never had any more thoughts of the temporal kingdom; and also because there is a sense of the expectation which is true, the setting up of the gospel-kingdom in the world; and their mistake of the promise, shall not make it of no effect; but he checks their inquiry after the time.

1. The knowledge of this is not allowed to them, *It is not for you to know*, and therefore it is not for you to ask. (1.) Christ is now parting from them, and parts in love; and yet he gives them this rebuke, which is intended for a caution to his church in all ages, to take heed of splitting upon the rock which was fatal to our first parents—an inordinate desire of forbidden knowledge, and intruding into things which we have not seen, because God has not shewn. *Nescire velle quæ magister maximus docere non vult, erudita inscitia est—It is folly to covet to be wise above what is written, and wisdom to be content to be no wiser.* (2.) Christ had given his disciples a great deal of knowledge above others, (*To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God*,) and had promised them his Spirit, to teach them more; now, lest they should be puffed up with the abundance of the revelations, he here lets them understand that there were some things which it was not for them to know. We shall see how little reason we have to be proud of our knowledge, when we consider how many things we are ignorant of. (3.) Christ had given his disciples instructions sufficient for the discharge of their duty, both before his death, and since his resurrection, and this knowledge he will have them to be satisfied in; for it is enough for a christian, in whom vain curiosity is a corrupt humour, to be mortified, and not gratified. (4.) Christ had himself told his disciples the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and had promised that the Spirit should shew them things to come concerning it, John 16. 13. He had likewise given them signs of the times, which it was their duty to observe, and a sin to overlook, Matt. 24. 33. 16. 3. But they must not expect or desire to know, either all the particulars of future events, or the exact times of them. It is good for us to be kept in the dark, and left at uncertainty concerning the times and moments (as Dr. Hammond reads it) of future events concerning the church, as well as concerning ourselves; concerning all the periods of time and the final period of it, as well as concerning the period of our own time.

Prudenti futuri temporis exitum

Caliginosa nocte premit Deus—

But Jove, in goodness ever wise,

Hath hid, in clouds of thickest night,

All that in future prospect lies

Beyond the ken of mortal sight.—Horn.

As to the times and seasons of the year, we know in general, there will be summer and winter counter-changed, but we know not particularly which day will be fair or which foul, either in summer or in winter; so, as to our affairs in this world, when it is a summer-time of prosperity, that we may not be secure, we are told there will come a winter-time of trouble; and in that winter, that we may not despond and despair, we are assured that summer will return; but what this or that particular day will bring forth, we cannot tell, but must accommodate ourselves to it, whatever it is, and make the best of it.

2. The knowledge of it is reserved to God as his prerogative; it is what the Father hath put in his own power; it is hid with him. None besides can reveal the times and seasons to come; known unto God are all his works, but not to us, ch. 15. 18. It is in his power, and in his only, to declare the end from the beginning; and by this he proves himself to be God, Isa. 46. 10. And though he did think fit sometimes to let the Old Testament prophets know the times and the seasons, (as of the Israelites' bondage in Egypt four hundred years, and in Babylon seventy years,) yet he has not thought fit to let you know the times and seasons, no not just how long it shall be before Jerusalem be destroyed, though you be so well assured of the thing itself. He hath not said that he will not give you to know something more than you do of the times and seasons; he did so afterward to his servant John; but he has put it in his own power to do it or not, as he thinks fit; and what is in that New Testament prophecy discovered concerning the times and the seasons, is so dark, and hard to be understood, that, when we come to apply it, it concerns us to remember this word, that it is not for us to be positive in determining the times and the seasons. Buxtorf mentions a saying of the Rabbins concerning the coming of the Messiah; *Rumpatur spiritus eorum qui suffutant tempora—Perish the men who calculate the time.*

III. He cuts them out their work, and with authority assures them of an ability to go on with it, and of success in it; "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, that will do you no good; but know this, (v. 8.) that ye shall receive a spiritual power, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon you, and shall not receive it in vain, for ye shall be witnesses unto me and my glory, and your testimony shall not be in vain, for it shall be received here in Jerusalem, in the country about and all the world over," v. 8. If Christ make us serviceable to his honour in our own day and generation, let that be enough for us, and let not us perplex ourselves about times and seasons to come. Christ here tells them,

1. That their work should be honourable and glorious; *Ye shall be witnesses unto me.* (1.) They shall proclaim him King, and publish those truths to the world, by which his kingdom should be set up, and he would rule. They must openly and solemnly preach his gospel to the world. (2.) They shall prove this, shall confirm their testimony, not as witnesses do, with an oath, but with the divine seal of miracles and supernatural gifts; *Ye shall be martyrs to me, or my martyrs*, as some copies read it; for they attested the truth of the gospel with their sufferings, even unto death.

2. That their power for this work should be sufficient. They had not strength of their own for it, nor wisdom or courage enough; they were naturally

of the weak and foolish things of the world; they durst not appear as witnesses for Christ upon his trial, neither as yet were they able. "But ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, (so it may be read,) shall be animated and actuated by a better spirit than your own; ye shall have power to preach the gospel, and to prove it out of the scriptures of the Old Testament," (which, when they were filled with the Holy Ghost, they did to admiration, ch. 18. 28.) "and to confirm it both by miracles and by sufferings."

Note, Christ's witnesses shall receive power for that work to which he calls them; whom he employs in his service, he will qualify them for it, and bear them out in it.

3. That their influence should be great and very extensive; "Ye shall be witnesses for Christ, and shall carry his cause," (1.) "In Jerusalem; there ye must begin, and many there will receive your testimony; and they that do not, will be left inexcusable." (2.) "Your light shall from thence shine throughout all Judea, where before ye have laboured in vain." (3.) "Thence ye shall proceed to Samaria, though at your first mission ye were forbidden to preach in any of the cities of the Samaritans." (4.) "Your usefulness shall reach to the uttermost part of the earth, and ye shall be blessings to the whole world."

IV. Having left these instructions with them, he leaves them; (v. 9.) *When he had spoken these things, and had said all that he had to say, he blessed them;* (so we were told, Luke 24. 50.) and while they beheld him, and had their eye fixed upon him, receiving his blessing, he was gradually taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. We have here Christ's ascending on high; not fetched away, as Elijah was, with a chariot of fire and horses of fire, but rising to heaven, as he rose from the grave, purely by his own power; his body being now, as the bodies of the saints will be at the resurrection, a spiritual body, and raised in power and incorruption. Observe,

1. He began his ascension in the sight of his disciples, even while they beheld. They did not see him come up out of the grave, because they might see him after he was risen, which would be satisfaction enough; but they saw him go up toward heaven, and had actually their eye upon him, with so much care and attention of mind, that they could not be deceived. It is probable that he did not fly swiftly up, but moved upwards gently, for the further satisfaction of his disciples.

2. He vanished out of their sight, in a cloud, either a thick cloud, for God said that he would dwell in the thick darkness; or a bright cloud, to signify the splendour of his glorious body. It was a bright cloud that overshadowed him in his transfiguration, and most probably this was so, Matt. 17. 5. This cloud received him, it is probable, when he was gone about as far from the earth as the clouds generally are; yet it was not such a spreading cloud as we commonly see, but such as just served to enclose him. Now he made the clouds his chariot, Ps. 104. 3. God had often come down in a cloud, now he went up in one. Dr. Hammond thinks that the clouds receiving him here, were the angels receiving him; for the appearance of angels is ordinarily described by a cloud, comparing Exod. 15. 22. with Lev. 16. 2. By the clouds there is a sort of a communication kept up between the upper and lower world, in them the vapours are sent up from the earth, and the dews sent down from heaven; fitly therefore does he ascend in a cloud, who is the Mediator between God and man, by whom God's mercies come down upon us, and our prayers come up to him. This was the last that was seen of him, the eyes of a great many witnesses followed him into

the cloud: if we would know what came of him then, we may find, (Dan. 7. 13.) *That one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him in the clouds as he came near before him*

V. The disciples, when he was gone out of their sight, yet still continued looking up steadfastly to heaven, (v. 10.) and this longer than it was fit they should; and why so?

1. Perhaps, they hoped that Christ would presently come back to them again, *to restore the kingdom to Israel*, and were loath to believe they should now part with him for good and all; so much did they still dote upon his bodily presence, though he had told them that it was expedient for them that he should go away. Or, they look after him, as doubting whether he might not be dropped, as the sons of the prophets thought concerning Elijah, (2 Kings 2. 16.) and so they might have him again.

2. Perhaps, they expected to see some change in the visible heavens, now upon Christ's ascension, *that either the sun should be ashamed, or the moon confounded*, (Isa. 24. 23.) as being out-shone by his lustre; or rather, that they should shew some sign of joy and triumph; or perhaps they promised themselves a sight of the glory of the invisible heavens, upon their opening to receive him. Christ had told them, *that hereafter they should see heaven opened*; (John 1. 51.) and why should not they expect it now?

VI. Two angels appeared to them, and delivered them a seasonable message from God. There was a world of angels ready to receive our Redeemer, now that he made his public entry into the Jerusalem above: we may suppose these two loath to be absent then; yet, to shew how much Christ had at heart the concerns of his church on earth, he sent two of those that came to meet him, back to his disciples, who appear as *two men in white apparel*, bright and glistening; for they know, according to the duty of their place, that they are really serving Christ, when they are ministering to his servants on earth. Now we are told what they said to them,

1. To check their curiosity; *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?* He calls them *men of Galilee*, to put them in mind of the rock out of which they were hewn. Christ had put a great honour upon them, in making them his ambassadors; but they must remember that they are men, earthen vessels, and men of Galilee, illiterate men, looked upon with disdain. Now, say they, *"Why stand ye here, like Galileans, rude and unpolished men, gazing up into heaven?"* What would ye see? You have seen all that ye were called together to see, and why do ye look any further? *Why stand ye gazing*, as men frightened and perplexed, as men astonished and at their wits' end?" Christ's disciples should never stand at a gaze, because they have a sure rule to go by, and a sure foundation to build upon.

2. To confirm their faith concerning Christ's second coming. Their Master had often told them of that, and the angels are sent at this time seasonably to put them in mind of it; *"This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, and whom ye are looking thus long after, wishing ye had him with you again, is not gone for ever, for there is a day appointed, in which he will come in like manner thence, as ye have seen him go thither, and ye must not expect him back till that appointed day."* (1.) *"This same Jesus shall come again in his own person, clothed with this glorious body; this same Jesus, who came once to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, will appear a second time without sin,* (Heb. 9. 26. 28.) *who came once in disgrace to be judged, will come again in glory to judge. The same Jesus, who has given you your charge, will come*

again to call you to an account, how you have performed your trust; he, and not another," Job 19. 27. (2.) *"He shall come in like manner. He is gone away in a cloud, and attended with angels; and behold, he comes in the clouds, and with him an innumerable company of angels? He is gone up with a shout and with the sound of a trumpet,* (Ps. 47. 5.) *and he will descend from heaven with a shout and with the trump of God,* 1 Thess. 4. 16. *Ye have now lost the sight of him in the clouds and in the air; and whither he is gone, ye cannot follow him now, but shall then, when ye shall be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."* When we stand gazing and trifling, the consideration of our Master's second coming should quicken and awaken us; and when we stand gazing and trembling, the consideration of it should comfort and encourage us.

12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath-days' journey. 13. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper-room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. 14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

We are here told,

1. From whence Christ ascended; *from the mount of Olives*, (v. 12.) from that part of it where the town of Bethany stood, Luke 24. 50. There he began his sufferings, (Luke 22. 39.) and therefore there he rolled away the reproach of them by his glorious ascension, and thus shewed that his passion and his ascension had the same reference and tendency. Thus would he enter upon his kingdom in the sight of Jerusalem, and of those undutiful ungrateful citizens of his, *that would not have him to reign over them*. It was prophesied of him, (Zech. 14. 4.) *That his feet shall stand upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem, shall stand last there; and presently it follows, The mount of Olives shall cleave in two. From the mount of Olives he ascended, who is the good Olive-tree, whence we receive the unction,* Zech. 4. 12. Rom. 11. 24. This mount is here said to be near Jerusalem, a sabbath-day's journey from it, that is, a little way; no further than devout people used to walk out on a sabbath-evening, after the public worship was over, for meditation; some reckon it a thousand paces, others two thousand cubits; some seven furlongs, others eight. Bethany indeed was fifteen furlongs from Jerusalem, (John 11. 18.) but that part of the mount of Olives which was next to Jerusalem, whence Christ began to ride in triumph, was but seven or eight furlongs off. The Chaldee paraphrast on Ruth 1. says, *We are commanded to keep the sabbaths and the holy days, so as not to go above two thousand cubits; which they build upon Josh. 3. 4. where, in their march through Jordan, the space between them and the ark was to be two thousand cubits.* God had not then thus limited them, but they limited themselves; and thus far it is a rule to us, not to journey on the sabbath any more than in order to the sabbath-work; and as far as is necessary to that, we are not only allowed, but enjoined, 2 Kings 4. 23.

2. Whither the disciples returned; *They came to Jerusalem*, according to their Master's appointment,

though there they were in the midst of enemies ; but it should seem that though immediately after Christ's resurrection they were watched, and were in fear of the Jews, yet after it was known that they were gone into Galilee, no notice was taken of their return to Jerusalem, nor any further search made for them. God can find out hiding-places for his people in the midst of their enemies, and so influence Saul, that he shall not seek for David any more. At Jerusalem they went up into an upper room, and there abode ; not that they all lodged and dined together in one room, but there they assembled every day, and spent time together in religious exercises, in expectation of the descent of the Spirit. Divers conjectures the learned have about this upper room ; some think it was one of the upper rooms in the temple ; but it cannot be thought that the chief priests, who had the letting of those rooms, would suffer Christ's disciples constantly to reside in any of them. It was said indeed, by the same historian, that they were continually in the temple ; (Luke 24. 53.) but that was in the courts of the temple, at the hours of prayer, where they could not be hindered from attending ; but, it should seem, this upper room was in a private house. Mr. Gregory, of Oxford, is of that mind, and quotes a Syriac scholiast upon this place, who says that it was the same upper room in which they had eaten the passover ; and though that was called, *ἡ ἀνωρομή*, this, *ἡ ἐν τῷ ἑσπέρῳ*, both may signify the same. "Whether," says he, "it was in the house of St. John the evangelist, as Euodius delivered, or that of Mary the mother of John Mark, as others have collected, cannot be certain." Notes, ch. 13.

3. Who the disciples were, that kept together. The eleven apostles are here named, (v. 13.) so is Mary the mother of our Lord, (v. 14.) and it is the last time that ever any mention is made of her in the scriptures. There were others that are here said to be the brethren of our Lord, his kinsmen according to the flesh ; and, to make up the hundred and twenty spoken of, (v. 15.) we may suppose that all or most of the seventy disciples were with them, that were associates with the apostles, and were employed as evangelists.

4. How they spent their time ; They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. Observe,

(1.) They prayed, and made supplication. All God's people are praying people, and give themselves to prayer. It was now a time of trouble and danger with the disciples of Christ, they were as sheep in the midst of wolves ; and, *Is any afflicted ? Let him pray ;* that will silence cares and fears. They had new work before them, great work, and before they entered upon it, they were instant in prayer to God for his presence with them in it. Before they were first sent forth, Christ spent time in prayer for them, and now they in prayer for themselves. They were waiting for the descent of the Spirit upon them, and therefore abounded thus in prayer. The Spirit descended upon our Saviour when he was praying, Luke 3. 21. Those are in the best frame to receive spiritual blessings, that are in a praying frame. Christ had promised now shortly to send the Holy Ghost ; now that promise was not to supersede prayer, but to quicken and encourage it. God will be inquired of for promised mercies, and the nearer the performance seems to be, the more earnest we should be in prayer for it.

(2.) They continued in prayer, spent much time in it more than ordinary, prayed frequently, and were long in prayer. They never missed an hour of prayer ; they resolved to persevere herein till the Holy Ghost came, according to the promise ; to pray, and not to faint. It was said, (Luke 24. 53.) They were praising and blessing God ; here, They

continued in prayer and supplication ; for as praise for the promise is a decent way of begging for the performance, and praise for former mercy of begging further mercy ; so, in seeking to God, we give him the glory of the mercy and grace which we have found in him.

(3.) They did this with one accord ; that intimates that they were together in holy love, and that there was no quarrel or discord among them ; and those who so keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, are best prepared to receive the comforts of the Holy Ghost. It also speaks their worthy concurrence in the supplications that were made ; though but one spake, they all prayed, and if, when two agree to ask, it shall be done for them, much more when many agree in the same petition. See Matt. 18. 19.

15. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty,) 16. Men and brethren, This Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. 17. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. 18. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity ; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. 19. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem ; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. 20. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein : and his bishopric let another take. 21. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. 23. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, 25. That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. 26. And they gave forth their lots ; and the lot fell upon Matthias ; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The sin of Judas was not only his shame and ruin, but it made a gap in the college of the apostles. They were ordained twelve, with an eye to the twelve tribes of Israel, descended from the twelve patriarchs ; they were the twelve stars that make up the church's crown, (Rev. 12. 1.) and for them twelve thrones were designed, Matt. 19. 28. Now being twelve when they were learners, if they were

but eleven when they were to be teachers, it would occasion every one to inquire what was become of the twelfth, and so revive the remembrance of the scandal of their society; and therefore care was taken, before the descent of the Spirit, to fill up the vacancy, which now we have an account of the doing of, our Lord Jesus, probably, having given directions about it, among other things which he spake *pertaining to the kingdom of God*. Observe,

1. The persons concerned in this affair.

1. The house consisted of *about an hundred and twenty*. These were the number of the names, that is, the persons; some think, the men only, distinguished from the women. Dr. Lightfoot reckons that the *eleven apostles, the seventy disciples*, and about thirty-nine more, all of Christ's own kindred, country, and concourse, made up *this one hundred and twenty*, and that these were a sort of synod, or congregation of ministers, a standing presbytery, (ch. 4. 23.) to whom none of the rest durst join themselves, (ch. 5. 13.) and that they continued together till the persecution at Stephen's death dispersed them all but the apostles; (ch. 8. 1.) but he thinks that beside these there were many hundreds in Jerusalem, if not thousands, at this time, *that believed*; and we have indeed read of many that *believed on him there, but durst not confess him*, and therefore I cannot think, as he does, that they were now formed into distinct congregations, for the preaching of the word, and other acts of worship; nor that there was any thing of that till *after the pouring out of the Spirit*, and the conversions in the following chapter. Here was the beginning of the christian church: *this hundred and twenty was the grain of mustard seed that grew into a tree, the leaven that leavened the whole lump*.

2. The speaker was Peter, who had been, and still was, the most forward man; and therefore notice is taken of his forwardness and zeal, to shew that he had perfectly recovered the ground he lost by his denying his Master; and Peter being designed to be the apostle of the circumcision, while the sacred story stays among the Jews he is still brought in, as afterward, when it comes to speak of the Gentiles, it keeps to the story of Paul.

II. The proposal which Peter made for the choice of another apostle. He stood up in the midst of the disciples, v. 15. He did not sit down, as one that gave laws, or had any supremacy over the rest, but stood up, as one that had only a motion to make, in which he paid a deference to his brethren, standing up when he spake to them. Now in his speech we may observe,

1. The account he gives of the vacancy made by the death of Judas, in which he is very particular, and, as became one that Christ had breathed upon, takes notice of the fulfilling of the scriptures in it. Here is,

(1.) The power to which Judas had been advanced; (v. 17.) *He was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry* which we are invested with. Note, Many are numbered with the saints in this world, that will not be found among them in the day of separation between the precious and the vile. What will it avail us to be added to the number of christians, if we partake not of the spirit and nature of christians? Judas's having *obtained part of this ministry*, was but an aggravation of his sin and ruin, as it will be of theirs who *professed in Christ's name*, and yet were *workers of iniquity*.

(2.) The sin of Judas, notwithstanding his advancement to this honour; he was *guide to them that took Jesus*, not only informed Christ's persecutors where they might find him, (which they might have done effectually, though he had kept out of sight,) but he had the impudence to appear

openly at the head of the party that seized him. He went before them to the place, and, as if he had been proud of the honour, gave the word of command, *That same is he, hold him fast*. Note, Ring-leaders in sin are the worst of sinners; especially if those that by their office should have been guides to the friends of Christ, are guides to his enemies.

(3.) The ruin of Judas by this sin; perceiving the chief priests to seek the life of Christ and his disciples, he thought to save his by going over to them, and not only so, but to get an estate under them, of which his wages for his service, he hoped, would be but an earnest; but see what came of it.

[1.] He lost his money shamefully enough; (v. 18.) *He purchased a field with the thirty pieces of silver*, which were the reward of his iniquity. He did not purchase the field, but the wages of his unrighteousness did: and it is very elegantly expressed thus, in derision of his projects to enrich himself by this bargain; he thought to have *purchased a field* for himself, as Gehazi did with what he got from Naaman by a lie, (see 2 Kings 5. 26.) but it proved the purchase of a field to bury strangers in; and what the better was he for that, or any of his? It was to him an unrighteous *mammon*, it deceived him; and the reward of his iniquity was the *stumbling-block of his iniquity*.

[2.] He lost his life more shamefully. We were told (Matt. 27. 5.) that he *went away* in despair, and was suffocated; (so the word signifies there, and no more;) here it is added (as latter historians add to those who went before) that, being strangled, or choked with grief and horror, he *fell headlong, fell on his face*, (so Dr. Hammond,) and partly with the swelling of his own breast, and partly with the violence of the fall, he *burst asunder in the midst*, so that *all his bowels tumbled out*. If, when the devil was cast out of a child, he *tore him, threw him down, and rent him*, and almost killed him, (as we find Mark 9. 26. Luke 9. 42.) no wonder if, when he had full possession of Judas, he threw him headlong, and burst him. The suffocating of him, which Matthew relates, would make him swell till he burst, which Peter relates. He burst asunder *with a great noise*, (so Dr. Edwards,) which was heard by the neighbours, and so, as it follows, it came to be known, (v. 19.) *His bowels gushed out*; Luke writes like a physician, understanding all the entrails of the middle and lower ventricle. Bowelling is part of the punishment of traitors. Justly do those *bowels gush out*, that were shut up against the Lord Jesus. And perhaps Christ had an eye to the fate of Judas, when he said of the wicked servant, that he would *cut him in sunder*, Matt. 24. 51.

(4.) The public notice that was taken of this; *It was known to all the dwellers in Jerusalem*. It was (as it were) put into the newspapers, and was all the talk of the town, as a remarkable judgment of God upon him that betrayed his Master, v. 19. It was not only discoursed of among the disciples, but it was in every body's mouth, and nobody disputed the truth of the fact. *It was known*, that is, it was known to be true, incontestably so; now one would think this should have awakened those to repentance, that had had any hand in the death of Christ, when they saw him that had the first hand, thus made an example. But their hearts were hardened, and as to those of them that were to be softened, it must be done by the word, and the Spirit working with it.

Here is one proof of the notoriety of the thing mentioned, that the field which was purchased with Judas's money, was called *Aeldama—the field of blood*, because it was bought with the price of blood which perpetuated the infamy not only of him that sold that innocent precious blood, but of them that

bought it too. Look how they will answer it, when God shall make inquisition for blood.

(5.) The fulfilling of the scriptures in this, which had spoken so plainly of this, *that it must needs be fulfilled*, v. 16. Let none be surprised or stumble at it, that this should be the exit of one of the twelve, for David had foretold not only his *sin*, (which Christ had taken notice of, John 13. 18. from Ps. 41. 9. *He that eateth bread with me, hath lift up the heel against me*,) but had also foretold,

[1.] His *punishment*; (Ps. 69. 25.) *Let his habitation be desolate*. That Psalm refers to the Messiah: mention was made but two or three verses before, of their giving him *gall and vinegar*, and therefore the following predictions of the destruction of David's enemies must be applied to the enemies of Christ, and particularly to Judas. Perhaps he had some habitation of his own at Jerusalem, which, upon this, every body was afraid to live in, and so it became desolate. This prediction signifies the same with that of Bildad concerning the wicked man, that his *confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and shall bring him to the king of terrors: it shall dwell in his tabernacle, because it is none of his; brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation*, Job 18. 14, 15.

[2.] The substitution of another in his room. His bishopric, or his office, (for so the word signifies in general,) *shall another take*, which is quoted from Ps. 109. 8. With this quotation Peter very aptly introduces the following proposal. Note, We are not to think the worse of any office that God has instituted, (whether magistracy or ministry,) either for the wickedness of any that are in that office, or for the ignominious punishment of that wickedness; nor will God suffer any purpose of his to be frustrated, any commission of his to be vacated, or any word of his to be undone, for the miscarriages of them that are intrusted therewith. *The unbelief of man shall not make the promise of God of none effect*. Judas is hanged, but his bishopric is not lost. It is said of his habitation, that *no man shall dwell therein*, there he shall have no heir; but it is not said so of his bishopric, there he shall not want a successor; it is with the officers of the church as with the members of it, if the *natural branches be broken off*, others shall be *grafted in*, Rom. 11. 17. Christ's cause shall never be lost for want of witnesses.

2. The motion he makes for the choice of another apostle, v. 21, 22. Here observe,

(1.) How the person must be qualified, that must fill up the vacancy; it must be one of *these men*, these seventy disciples, *that have companied with us*, that have constantly attended us *all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us*, preaching and working miracles for three years and a half, *beginning from the baptism of John*, which the gospel of Christ commenced from, *unto that same day that he was taken up from us*. Those that have been diligent, faithful, and constant, in the discharge of their duty in a lower station, are fittest to be preferred to a higher; those that have been faithful in a little, shall be intrusted with more. And none should be employed as ministers of Christ, preachers of his gospel, and rulers in his church, but those that are well acquainted with his doctrine and doings, from first to last. None shall be an apostle but one that has companied with the apostles, and that continually; not that has visited them now and then, but been intimately conversant with them.

(2.) To what work he is called, that must fill up the vacancy; he must be a *witness with us of his resurrection*. By this it appears that others of the disciples were with the eleven when Christ appeared to them, else they could not have been *witnesses with them*, as competent witnesses as they of his resur-

rection. The great thing which the apostles were to attest to the world, was, *Christ's resurrection*, for that was the great proof of his being the Messiah, and the foundation of our hope in him. See what the apostles were ordained to, not to a secular dignity and dominion, but to *preach Christ*, and the *power of his resurrection*.

III. The nomination of the person that was to succeed Judas in his office as an apostle.

1. Two, who were known to have been Christ's constant attendants, and men of great integrity, were set up as candidates for the place; (v. 23.) *They appointed two*; not the *eleven*, they did not take upon them to determine who should be put up, but the *hundred and twenty*, for to them Peter spake, and not to the eleven. The two they nominated, were, *Joseph and Matthias*, of neither of whom do we read elsewhere, except this Joseph be the same with that *Jesus* who is called *Justus*, whom Paul speaks of, (Col. 4. 11.) and who is said to be *of the circumcision*, a native Jew, as this was; and who was a *fellow-worker with Paul unto the kingdom of God*, and a comfort to him; and then it is observable, that though he came short of being an apostle, he did not therefore quit the ministry, but was very useful in a lower station; for, *Are all apostles? Are all prophets?* Some think this Joseph is he that is called *Joses*, (Mark 6. 3.) the *brother of James the less*, (Mark 15. 40.) and was called *Joses the just*, as another person was called *James the just*. Some confound this with that *Joses* mentioned Acts 4. 36. But that was of Cyprus, this of Galilee; and, it should seem, to distinguish them, that was called *Barnabas—a son of consolation*; this *Barsabas—a son of the oath*. These two were both of them such worthy men, and so well qualified for the office, that they could not tell which of them was fitter, but all agreed it must be one of these two. They did not propose themselves nor strive for the place, but humbly sat still, and were appointed to it.

2. They applied themselves to God by prayer for direction, not which of the *seventy*, for none of the rest could stand in competition with these in the opinion of all present, but *which of these two?* v. 24, 25.

(1.) They appeal to God as the searcher of hearts; *“Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, which we do not, and better than they know their own.”* Observe, When an apostle was to be chosen, he must be chosen by his heart, and the temper and disposition of that. Yet Jesus, who knew all men's hearts, for wise and holy ends, chose Judas to be one of the twelve. It is comfortable to us, in our prayers for the welfare of the church and its ministers, that the God we pray to, *knows the hearts of all men*, and has them not only under his eye, but in his hand, and turns them which way soever he will; can make them fit for his purpose, if he do not find them so, by giving them *another Spirit*.

(2.) They desire to know *which of these God had chosen*; *Lord, shew us that*, and we are satisfied. It is fit that God should choose his own servants; and so far as he any way, by the disposals of his providence, or the gifts of his Spirit, shews *whom he hath chosen*, or what he hath chosen, for us, we ought to comply with him.

(3.) They are ready to receive him as a brother, whom God hath chosen; for they are not contriving to have so much the more dignity themselves, by keeping out another, but desire to have one to *take part of this ministry and apostleship*, to join with us in the work, and share with us in the honour, *from which Judas by transgression fell*, threw himself, by deserting and betraying his Master, *from the place of an apostle*, which he was unworthy of, that he might go to *his own place*, the place of a traitor, the fittest place for him, not only to the gibbet, but to

hell; that was his own place. Note, Those that betray Christ, as they *fall from the dignity of relation to him, so they fall into all misery*. It is said of Balaam, (Numb. 24. 25.) that he *went to his own place*, that is, says one of the Rabbins, he *went to hell*. Dr. Whitby quotes Ignatius saying, There is appointed to every man *ἰδίος τόπος*—*a proper place*, which speaks the same with that of God's rendering to every man according to his works. And our Saviour has said, that *Judas's own place* should be such, that it *had been better for him that he had never been born*; (Matt. 26. 24.) his misery was such as to be worse than not being. Judas had been a hypocrite, and hell is the proper place of such; other sinners, as inmates, have their portion with them, Matt. 24. 51.

(4.) The doubt was determined by lot, (v. 26.) which is an appeal to God, and lawful to be used for the determining matters not otherwise determinable, provided it be done in a solemn religious manner, and with prayer, the prayer of faith; for *the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord*, Prov. 16. 33. Matthias was not ordained by the imposition of hands, as presbyters were, for he was chosen by lot, which was the act of God; and therefore as he must be baptized, so he must be ordained, by the Holy Ghost, as they were all not many days after. Thus the number of the apostles was made up, as afterwards, when James, another of the twelve, was martyred, Paul was made an apostle.

CHAP. II.

Between the promise of the Messiah's coming (even the latest of those promises) and his coming, many ages intervened; but between the promise of the Spirit and his coming, there were but a few days; and during those days, the apostles, though they had received orders to preach the gospel to every creature, and to begin at Jerusalem, yet lay perfectly wind-bound, incognito—concealed, and not offering to preach. But in this chapter the north-wind and the south-wind awake, and then they awake, and we have them in the pulpit presently. Here is, I. The descent of the Spirit upon the apostles, and those that were with them, on the day of pentecost, v. 1. . 4. II. The various speculations which this occasioned among the people that were now met in Jerusalem from all parts, v. 5. . 13. III. The sermon which Peter preached to them hereupon, wherein he shews that this pouring out of the Spirit was the accomplishment of an Old Testament promise, (v. 14. . 21.) that it was a confirmation of Christ's being the Messiah, which was already proved by his resurrection, (v. 22. 32.) and that it was a fruit and evidence of his ascension into heaven, v. 33. . 36. IV. The good effect of this sermon in the conversion of many to the faith of Christ, and their addition to the church, v. 37. . 41. V. The eminent piety and charity of those primitive christians, and the manifest tokens of God's presence with them, and power in them, v. 42. . 47.

1. **AND** when the day of pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

We have here an account of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples of Christ. Observe, I. When, and where, this was done, which is particularly noted for the greater certainty of the thing.

1. It was *when the day of pentecost was fully come*. There seems to be a reference to the manner of the

expression in the institution of this feast, where it is said, (Lev. 23. 15.) Ye shall count unto you *seven sabbaths complete*, from the day of the offering of the first-fruits, which was the next day but one after the passover, the sixteenth day of the month Abib, which was the day that Christ rose. This day was *fully come*, that is, the night preceding, with a part of the day, was fully past.

(1.) The Holy Ghost came down at the time of a *solemn feast*, because there was then a great concourse of people to Jerusalem from all parts of the country, and of proselytes from other countries, which would make it the more public, and the fame of it to be spread the sooner and further, which would contribute much to the propagating of the gospel into all nations. Thus now, as before at the passover, the Jewish feasts served to toll the bell for gospel-services and entertainments.

(2.) This feast of pentecost was kept in remembrance of the giving of the law upon mount Sinai, whence the incorporating of the Jewish church was to be dated, which Dr. Lightfoot reckons to be just one thousand four hundred and forty-seven years before this. Fitly, therefore, is the Holy Ghost given at that feast, in fire and in tongues, for the promulgation of the evangelical law, not as that to one nation, but to *every creature*.

(3.) This feast of pentecost happened on the *first day of the week*, which was an additional honour put on that day, and a confirmation of it to be the christian sabbath, *the day which the Lord hath made*, to be a standing memorial in his church of those two great blessings—the resurrection of Christ, and the pouring out of the Spirit, both on that day of the week. This serves not only to justify us in observing that day under the style and title of *the Lord's day*, but to direct us in the sanctifying of it to give God praise particularly for those two great blessings; every Lord's day in the year, I think, there should be a full and particular notice taken in our prayers and praises of these two, as there is by some churches of the one, once a year, upon Easter-day, and of the other, once a year, upon Whit-sunday. Oh! that we may do it with suitable affections!

2. It was when they were *all with one accord in one place*. What place it was, we are not told particularly, whether in the temple, where they attended at public times, (Luke 24. 53.) or whether in their own upper room, where they met at other times. But it was at Jerusalem, because it had been the place which God chose to put his name there; the prophecy was, that *from hence* the word of the Lord should go forth to all nations, (Isa. 2. 3.) and it was now the place of the general rendezvous of all devout people; there God had promised to meet them, and bless them, here therefore he meets them with this blessing of blessings. Though Jerusalem had done the utmost disonour imaginable to Christ, yet he did this honour to Jerusalem, to teach us not to fall out with places, nor conceive prejudices against them; for God has his remnant in all places, he had so in Jerusalem.

Here they were in one place, and they were not as yet so many, but that one place, and no large one, would hold them all. And here they were *with one accord*. We cannot forget how often, while their Master was with them, there were *strifes among them, which should be the greatest*; but now all these strifes were at an end, we hear no more of them; what they had received already of the Holy Ghost, when Christ breathed on them, had in a good measure rectified the mistakes upon which those contests were grounded, and had disposed them to holy love. They had prayed more together of late than usual, (ch. 1. 14.) and that made them love one another better. By his grace he thus prepared them for the gift of the Holy Ghost; for that blessed dove

comes not where there is noise and clamour, but moves upon the face of the still waters, not the rugged ones. Would we have the Spirit poured out upon us from on high? Let us be all of one accord, and, notwithstanding variety of sentiments and interests, as, no doubt, there was among those disciples, let us agree to love one another; for where brethren dwell together in unity, there it is that the Lord commands his blessing.

II. How, and in what manner, the Holy Ghost came upon them. We often read in the Old Testament of God's coming down in a cloud; as when he took possession of the tabernacle first, and afterward of the temple, which intimates the darkness of that dispensation. And Christ went up to heaven in a cloud, to intimate how much we are kept in the dark concerning the upper world. But the Holy Ghost did not descend in a cloud; for he was to dispel and scatter the clouds that overspread men's minds, and to bring light into the world.

1. Here is an audible summons given them to awaken their expectations of something great, v. 1. It is here said, (1.) That it came suddenly, did not rise gradually, as common winds do, but was at the height immediately. It came sooner than they expected, and startled even them that were now together waiting, and, probably, employed in some religious exercises. (2.) It was a sound from heaven, like a thunder-clap, Rev. 6. 1. God is said to bring the winds out of his treasures, (Ps. 35. 7.) and to gather them in his hands, Prov. 30. 4. From him this sound came, like the voice of one crying, *Prepare ye the way of the Lord*. (3.) It was the sound of a wind, for the way of the Spirit is like that of the wind; (John 3. 8.) thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it comes, or whither it goes. When the Spirit of life is to enter into the dry bones, the prophet is bid to prophesy unto the wind; *Come from the four winds, O breath*, Ezek. 37. 9. And though it was not in the wind that the Lord came to Elijah, yet that prepared him to receive his discovery of himself in the still small voice, 1 Kings 19. 11, 12. *God's way is in the whirlwind and the storm*; (Nah. 1. 3.) and out of the whirlwind he spake to Job. (4.) It was a rushing mighty wind; it was strong and violent, and came not only with a great noise, but with a great force, as if it would bear down all before it. This was to signify the powerful influences and operations of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, and thereby upon the world, that they should be mighty through God to the casting down of imaginations. (5.) It filled not only the room, but all the house, where they were sitting. Probably, it alarmed the whole city, but, to shew that it was supernatural, presently fixed upon that particular house; as some think the wind that was sent to arrest Jonah, affected only the ship that he was in, (Jon. 1. 4.) and as the wise men's star stood over the house where the child was. This would direct the people who observed it, whither to go, to inquire the meaning of it. This wind filling the house, would strike an awe upon the disciples, and help to put them into a very serious, reverend, and composed frame, for the receiving of the Holy Ghost. Thus the convictions of the Spirit make way for his comforts; and the rough blasts of that blessed wind prepare the soul for its soft and gentle gales.

2. Here is a visible sign of the gift they were to receive. They saw cloven tongues, like as of fire; (v. 3.) and it sat—*ἵκατο*, not they sat, those cloven tongues, but he, that is, the Spirit, (signified thereby,) rested upon each of them, as he is said to rest upon the prophets of old. Or, as Dr. Hammond describes it, "There was an appearance of something like flaming fire, lighting on every one of them, which divided asunder, and so formed the resem-

blance of tongues, with that part of them that was next their heads, divided or cloven." The flame of a candle is somewhat like a tongue: and there is a meteor which naturalists call *ignis lambens*—a gentle flame, not a devouring fire; such was this. Observe,

(1.) There was an outward sensible sign, for the confirming of the faith of the disciples themselves, and for the convincing of others. Thus the prophets of old had frequently their first mission confirmed by signs, that all Israel might know them to be established prophets.

(2.) The sign given was fire, that John Baptist's saying concerning Christ might be fulfilled, *He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*: with the Holy Ghost, as with fire. They were now, in the feast of pentecost, celebrating the memorial of the giving of the law upon mount Sinai; and as that was given in fire, and therefore is called a fiery law, so is the gospel. Ezekiel's mission was confirmed by a vision of burning coals of fire, (ch. 1. 13.) and Isaiah's by a coal of fire touching his lips, ch. 6. 7. The Spirit, like fire, melts the heart, separates and burns up the dross, and kindles pious and devout affections in the soul, in which, as in the fire upon the altar, the spiritual sacrifices are offered up. This is that fire which Christ came to send upon the earth. Luke 12. 49.

(3.) This fire appeared in cloven tongues. The operations of the Spirit were many; that of speaking with divers tongues was one, and was singled out to be the first indication of the gift of the Holy Ghost, and to that this sign had a reference. [1.] They were tongues; for from the Spirit we have the word of God, and by him Christ would speak to the world, and he gave the Spirit to the disciples, not only to endue them with knowledge, but to endue them with a power to publish and proclaim to the world what they knew; for the dispensation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. [2.] These tongues were cloven, to signify that God would hereby divide unto all nations the knowledge of his grace, as he is said to have divided to them by his providence the light of the heavenly bodies, Deut. 4. 19. The tongues were divided, and yet they still continued all of one accord; for there may be a sincerity of affections, where yet there is a diversity of expression. Dr. Lightfoot observes, that the dividing of tongues at Babel, was the casting off of the heathen; for when they had lost the language in which alone God was spoken of and preached, they utterly lost the knowledge of God and religion, and fell into idolatry. But now, after above two thousand years, God, by another dividing of tongues, restores the knowledge of himself to the nations.

(4.) This fire sat upon them for some time, to show the constant residence of the Holy Ghost with them. The prophetic gifts of old were conferred sparingly and but at some times; but the disciples of Christ had the gifts of the Spirit always with them; though the sign, we may suppose, soon disappeared. Whether these flames of fire passed from one to another, or whether there were as many flames as there were persons, is not certain. But they must be strong and bright flames, that would be visible in the day-light, as it now was, for the day was fully come.

III. What was the immediate effect of this?

1. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, more plentifully and powerfully than they were before. They were filled with the graces of the Spirit, and were more than ever under his sanctifying influences; were now holy, and heavenly, and spiritual, more weaned from this world, and better acquainted with the other. They were more filled with the comforts of the Spirit, rejoiced more than ever in the love of Christ and the hope of heaven, and in it

all their griefs and fears were swallowed up. They were also, for the proof of this, filled with the *gifts* of the Holy Ghost, which is especially meant here; they were endued with miraculous powers for the furtherance of the gospel. It seems evident to me, that not the twelve apostles only, but all the hundred and twenty disciples, were *filled with the Holy Ghost* alike at this time; all the seventy disciples, who were apostolical men, and employed in the same work, and all the rest too that were to preach the gospel; for it is said expressly, (Eph. 4. 8, 11.) *When Christ ascended on high*, (which refers to this, v. 33.) *he gave gifts unto men*, not only *some apostles*, such were the twelve; but *some prophets*, and *some evangelists*, such were many of the seventy disciples, itinerant preachers, and some *pastors and teachers* settled in particular churches, as we may suppose some of these afterward were. The *all* here, must refer to the *all* that were together, *ch. 1. 14, 15.*—v. 1.

2. *They began to speak with other tongues*, beside their native language, though they had never learned any other. They spake not matters of common conversation, but the word of God, and the praises of his name, *as the Spirit gave them utterance*, or gave them to speak, *ἀποφθέγγεσθαι—to speak apophthegms*, substantial and weighty sayings, worthy to be had in remembrance. It is probable that it was not only one that was enabled to speak one language, and another another, (as it was with the several families that were dispersed from Babel,) but that every one was enabled to speak divers languages, as he should have occasion to use them. And we may suppose that they understood not only themselves, but one another too, which the Builders of Babel did not, Gen. 11. 7. They did not speak here and there a word of another tongue, or stammer out some broken sentences; but spake it as readily, properly, and elegantly, as if it had been their mother-tongue; for whatever was produced by miracle, was the best of the kind. They spake not from any previous thought or meditation, but *as the Spirit gave them utterance*; he furnished them with the matter as well as the language. Now this was, (1.) A very great miracle, it was a miracle upon the mind, (and so had most of the nature of a gospel-miracle,) for in the mind words are framed. They had not only never learned these languages, but had never learned any foreign tongue, which might have facilitated these; nay, for aught that appears, they had never so much as heard these languages spoken, or had any idea of them. They were neither scholars nor travellers; nor had had any opportunity of learning languages either by books or conversation. Peter indeed was forward enough to speak in his own tongue; but the rest of them were no spokesmen, nor were they quick of apprehension; yet now not only *the heart of the rash understands knowledge*, but *the tongue of the stammerers is ready to speak elegantly*, Isa. 32. 4. When Moses complained, *I am slow of speech*, God said, *I will be with thy mouth*, and Aaron shall be thy spokesman. But he did more for these messengers of his; he that made man's mouth, new made theirs. (2.) A very proper, needful, and serviceable miracle. The language *the disciples* spake, was Syriac, a dialect of the Hebrew; so that it was necessary that they should be endued with the gift, both for the understanding of the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, in which it was written, and of the original Greek of the New Testament, in which it was to be written. But that was not all; they were commissioned to preach the gospel *to every creature*, to disciple *all nations*. But here is an insuperable difficulty at the threshold; How shall they master the several languages so as to speak intelligibly to all nations? It will be the work of a man's life to

learn their languages. And therefore to prove that Christ could give authority to preach to the nations, he gives ability to preach to them in their own language. And it should seem, that this was the accomplishment of that promise which Christ made to his disciples, (John 14. 12.) *Greater works than these shall ye do*. For, this may well be reckoned, all things considered, a greater work than the miraculous cures Christ wrought; Christ himself did not speak with other tongues, nor did he enable his disciples to do it while he was with them; but it was the first effect of the *pouring out of the Spirit* upon them. And Archbishop Tillotson thinks it probable, that if the conversion of infidels to christianity were now sincerely and vigorously attempted by men of honest minds, God would extraordinarily countenance such an attempt with all fitting assistance, as he did the first publication of the gospel.

5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak, Galileans? 8. And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9. Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10. Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11. Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. 12. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13. Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

We have here an account of the public notice that was taken of this extraordinary gift, with which the disciples were all on a sudden endued. Observe,

I. The great concourse of people that there was now at Jerusalem; it should seem, more than usually was at the feast of pentecost. *There were dwelling or abiding at Jerusalem*, Jews that were *devout men*, disposed to religion, and that had the fear of God before their eyes, (so the word properly signifies,) some of them *proselytes of righteousness*, that were circumcised, and admitted members of the Jewish church, others only *proselytes of the gate*, that forsook idolatry, and gave up themselves to the worship of the true God, but not to the ceremonial law; some of those there were at Jerusalem now, *out of every nation under heaven*, whither the Jews were dispersed, or from whence proselytes were come. The expression is hyperbolic, denoting that there were some from most of the then known parts of the world; as much as ever Tyre was, or London is, the rendezvous of trading people from all parts, Jerusalem at that time was of religious people from all parts. Now,

1. We may here see what were some of those countries whence those strangers came; (v. 9, 11.) some from the eastern countries, as the *Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and dwellers in Mesopotamia*, the posterity of Shem; from thence we come in order to Judea, which ought to be mentioned, because,

though the language of them in Judea was the same with that which the disciples spake, yet, before, they spake it with the north-country tone and dialect, (*Thou art a Galilean, and thy speech bewrays thee,*) but now they spake it as fine as the inhabitants of Judea themselves did*. Next come the inhabitants of Cappadocia, Pontus, and that country about Propontis, which was particularly called *Asia*, and these were the countries in which those strangers were scattered, to whom St. Peter writes, 1 Pet. 1. 1. Next come the dwellers in Phrygia and Pamphylia, which lay westward, the posterity of Japhet, as were also the strangers of Rome; there were some also that dwelt in the southern parts of Egypt, in the parts of Libya about Cyrene; there were also some from the island of Crete, and some from the deserts of Arabia; but they were all either Jews originally, dispersed into those countries; or proselytes to the Jewish religion, but natives of those countries. Dr. Whitby observes, that the Jewish writers about this time, as Philo and Josephus, speak of the *Jews as dwelling every where through the whole earth*; and that *there is not a people upon earth among whom some Jews do not inhabit*.

2. We may inquire, what brought all those Jews and proselytes together to Jerusalem at this time? not to make a transient visit thither to the feast of pentecost, for they are said to *dwell* there; they took lodgings there, because there was at this time a general expectation of the appearing of the Messiah; for Daniel's weeks were just now expired, the sceptre was departed from Judah, it was then generally thought that *the kingdom of God should immediately appear*, Luke 19. 11. This brought those who were most zealous and devout to Jerusalem, to sojourn there, that they might have an early share in the kingdom of the Messiah, and the blessings of that kingdom.

II. The amazement which these strangers were seized with, when they heard the disciples speak in their own tongues. It should seem, the disciples spake in various languages, before the people of those languages came to them; for it is intimated, (v. 6.) that the spreading of the report of this abroad was it that *brought the multitude together*, especially those of different countries, who seem to have been more affected with this work of wonder than the inhabitants of Jerusalem themselves.

1. They observe that the speakers are all *Galileans*, that know no other than their mother tongue; (v. 7.) they are despicable men, from whom nothing learned or polite is to be expected. God chose the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty. Christ was thought to be a Galilean, and his disciples really were so; unlearned and ignorant men.

2. They acknowledged that they spake intelligibly and readily their own language, (which they were the most competent judges of,) so right and exact, that none of their own countrymen could speak it better; *We hear every man in our own tongue wherein we were born*; (v. 8.) that is, we hear one or other of them speak our native language. The Parthians hear one of them speak their language, the Medes hear another of them speak theirs; and so of the rest, v. 11. *We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God*. Their respective languages were not only unknown at Jerusalem, but, probably, despised and undervalued, and therefore it was not only a surprise, but a pleasing surprise, to them to hear the language of their own country spoken, as it naturally is to those that are strangers in a strange land.

(1.) The things they heard the apostles discourse of, were the *wonderful works of God*, *μεγαλὺν τὸ*

Θεοῦ—Magnalia Dei—the great things of God. It is probable that the apostles spake of Christ, and redemption by him, and the grace of the gospel; these are indeed the *great things of God*, which will be for ever *marvellous in our eyes*.

(2.) They heard them both praise God for these great things and instruct the people concerning these things, *in their own tongue*, according as they perceived the language of their hearers, or those that inquired of them, to be. Now though, perhaps, by dwelling some time at Jerusalem, they were got to be so much masters of the Jewish language, that they could have understood the meaning of the disciples, if they had spoken that language, yet, [1.] This was more strange, and helped to convince their judgment, that this doctrine was of God; for *tongues were for a sign* to them that believed not, 1 Cor. 14. 22. [2.] It was more kind, and helped to engage their affections, as it was a plain indication of the favour intended to the Gentiles, and that the knowledge and worship of God should no longer be confined to the Jews, but the partition-wall should be broken down: and this is to us a plain intimation of the mind and will of God, that the sacred records of God's wonderful works should be preserved by all nations *in their own tongue*; that the scriptures should be read, and public worship performed, in the vulgar languages of the nations.

3. They wonder at it, and look upon it as an astonishing thing; (v. 12.) *They were all amazed*, they were in an *ecstasy*, so the word is; and they were in doubt what the meaning of it was, and whether it was to introduce the kingdom of the Messiah, which they were big with the expectation of; they asked themselves and one another *τί αὐτοῖς τὸτο εἶναι—Quid hoc sibi vult?—What is the tendency of this?* Surely it is to dignify, and so to distinguish, these men as messengers from heaven; and therefore, like Moses at the bush, they will *turn aside, and see this great sight*.

III. The scorn which some made of it, who were natives of Judea and Jerusalem, probably the Scribes and Pharisees, and chief priests, who always resisted the Holy Ghost; they said, *These men are full of new wine, or sweet wine*; they have drunk too much this festival-time, v. 13. Not that they were so absurd as to think that wine in the head would enable men to speak languages which they never learned; but these, being native Jews, knew not, as the others did, that these were really the languages of other nations, and therefore took what they said to be gibberish and nonsense, such as drunkards, those *fools in Israel*, sometimes talk. As when they resolved not to believe the *finger of the Spirit* in Christ's miracles, they turned off with this, "He casteth out devils by compact with the prince of the devils;" so when they resolved not to believe the *voice of the Spirit* in the apostles' preaching, they turned it off with this, *These men are full of new wine*. And if they called the Master of the house a wine-bibber, no marvel if they so call them of his household.

14. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: 15. For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. 16. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 17. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your

* This is far more ingenious than probable.—ED.

sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: 18. And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: 19. And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: 20. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: 21. And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. 22. Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: 23. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: 24. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. 25. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: 26. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: 27. Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 28. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. 29. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. 30. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; 31. He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. 32. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. 33. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. 34. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, 35. Until I make thy foes thy footstool. 36. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

We have here *the first fruits of the Spirit* in the sermon which Peter preached immediately, directed, not to those of other nations in a strange language, (we are not told what answer he gave to those that were amazed, and said, *What meaneth this?*) but to the Jews in the vulgar language, even to them that mocked, for he begins with the notice of that, (v. 15.) and addresses his discourse (v. 14.) *to the men of Judea and inhabitants of Jerusalem*; but we have reason enough to think that *the other disciples* continued to speak to those who understood them, (and therefore flocked about them,) in the languages of their respective countries, *the wonderful works of God*. And it was not by Peter's preaching only, but that of all, or most, of the rest of the hundred and twenty, that *three thousand souls* were that day converted, and added to the church; but Peter's sermon only is recorded, to be an evidence for him that he was thoroughly recovered from his fall, and thoroughly restored to the divine favour; he that had sneakingly denied Christ, now as courageously confesses him. Observe,

I. His introduction or preface, wherein he craves the attention of the auditory, or demands it rather; *Peter stood up* (v. 14.) to shew that he was not drunk, *with the eleven*, who concurred with him in what he said, and, probably, in their turns spake likewise to the same purport; they that were of greatest authority, stood up to speak to the scoffing Jews, and to confront those who contradicted and blasphemed, but left *the seventy disciples* to speak to the willing proselytes from other nations, who were not so prejudiced, *in their own language*. Thus among Christ's ministers, some of greater gifts are called out to instruct those that oppose themselves, to take hold of sword and spear; others of meaner abilities are employed in instructing those that resign themselves, and to be vine-dressers and husbandmen. *Peter lifted up his voice*, as one that was both well assured of, and much affected with, what he said, and was neither afraid nor ashamed to own it. He applied himself to *the men of Judea, and Jerusalem*—the men that were Jews; so it should be read; "And you especially that dwell at Jerusalem, who were accessory to the death of Jesus, be this known unto you, which you did not know before, and which you are concerned to know now, and to hearken to my words, who would draw you to Christ, and not to the words of the Scribes and Pharisees, that would draw you from him. My Master is gone, whose words you have often heard in vain, but shall hear no more as you have done, but he speaks to you by us; *hearken now to our words*."

II. His answer to their blasphemous calumny; (v. 15.) "*These men are not drunken, as you suppose*. These disciples of Christ, that now speak with other tongues, speak good sense, and know what they say, and so do these they speak to, who are led by their discourses into the knowledge of *the wonderful works of God*. You cannot think they are drunk, for it is but the third hour of the day;" nine of the clock in the morning; and before that time, on the sabbaths and solemn feasts, the Jews did not use to eat or drink: nay, ordinarily *they that are drunk, are drunk in the night*, and not in the morning; those are besotted drunkards indeed, who, *when they are awake, presently seek it yet again*, Prov. 23. 35.

III. His account of the miraculous effusion of the Spirit, which is designed to awaken them all to embrace the faith of Christ, and to join themselves to his church. Two things he resolves it into—that it was the fulfilling of the scripture, and the fruit of Christ's resurrection and ascension, and, consequently, the proof of both.

1. That it was the accomplishment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, which related to the kingdom of the Messiah, and therefore an evidence

that that kingdom is come, and the other predictions of it are fulfilled. He specifies one, that of the *prophet Joel*, ch. 2. 28. It is observable, that though *Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake with tongues as the Spirit gave him utterance*, yet he did not set aside the *scriptures*, nor think himself above them; nay, much of his discourse is quotation out of the Old Testament, to which he appeals, and with which he proves what he says. Christ's scholars never learn above their Bible; and the *Spirit* is given not to supersede the *scriptures*, but to enable us to understand and improve the *scriptures*. Observe,

(1.) The text itself that Peter quotes, v. 17—21. It refers to the *last days*, the times of the gospel, which are *therefore* called the *last days*, because the dispensation of God's kingdom among men, which the gospel sets up, is the last dispensation of divine grace, and we are to look for no other than the continuation of that to the end of time. Or, in the *last days*, that is, a great while after the ceasing of prophecy in the Old Testament church. Or, in the day immediately preceding the destruction of the Jewish nation, in the *last days* of that people, just before that great and notable day of the Lord, spoken of, v. 20. "It was prophesied of and promised, and therefore you ought to expect it, and not to be surprised at it; to desire it, and bid it welcome, and not to dispute it, as not worth taking notice of." The apostle quotes the whole paragraph, for it is good to take the scripture entire; now it was foretold,

[1.] That there should be a more plentiful and extensive effusion of the *Spirit* of grace from on high than had been ever yet. The prophets of the Old Testament had been filled with the *Holy Ghost*, and it was said of the people of Israel, that God gave them his good Spirit to instruct them, Neh. 9. 20. But now the *Spirit* shall be poured out, not only upon the Jews, but upon all flesh, Gentiles as well as Jews; though yet Peter himself did not understand it so, it appears, ch. 11. 17. Or, upon all flesh, that is, upon some of all ranks and conditions of men. The Jewish doctors taught, that the *Spirit* came only upon wise and rich men, and such as were of the seed of Israel; but God will not tie himself to their rules.

[2.] That the *Spirit* should be in them a Spirit of prophecy; by the *Spirit* they should be enabled to foretell things to come, and to preach the gospel to every creature. This power shall be given without distinction of sex; not only your sons, but your daughters shall prophesy; without distinction of age, both your young men and your old men shall see visions, and dream dreams, and in them receive divine revelations, to be communicated to the church; and without distinction of outward condition, even the servants and handmaids shall receive of the *Spirit*, and shall prophesy, (v. 18.) or, in general, men and women, whom God calls his servants and his handmaids. In the beginning of the age of prophecy in the Old Testament, there were schools of the prophets, and, before that, the Spirit of prophecy came upon the elders of Israel that were appointed to the government; but now the *Spirit* shall be poured out upon persons of inferior rank, and such as were not brought up in the schools of the prophets, for the kingdom of the Messiah is to be purely spiritual. The mention of the daughters (v. 17.) and the handmaidens (v. 18.) would make one think that the women which were taken notice of, (ch. 1. 14.) received the extraordinary gifts of the *Holy Ghost*, as well as the men. Philip, the evangelist, had four daughters who did prophesy, (ch. 21. 9.) and therefore St. Paul, finding abundance of the gifts both of tongues and prophecy in the church of Corinth, saw it needful to prohibit women's use of those gifts in public, 1 Cor. 14. 26, 34.

[3.] That one great thing which they should prophesy of should be the judgments that were coming upon the Jewish nation, for this was the chief thing that Christ himself had foretold (Matt. 24.) at his entrance into Jerusalem, (Luke 19. 41.) and when he was going to die; (Luke 23. 29.) and these judgments were to be brought upon them, to punish them for their contempt of the gospel, and their opposition to it, though it came to them thus proved. They that would not submit to the power of God's grace in this wonderful effusion of his Spirit, should fall and lie under the pourings out of the vials of his wrath. They shall break, that will not bend.

First, The destruction of Jerusalem, which was about forty years after Christ's death, is here called that great and notable day of the Lord, because it put a final period to the Mosaic economy; the Levitical priesthood and the ceremonial law were thereby for ever abolished and done away. The desolation itself was such as was never brought upon any place or nation, either before or since. It was the day of the Lord, for it was the day of his vengeance upon that people for crucifying Christ, and persecuting his ministers; it was the year of recompenses for that controversy; yea, and for all the blood of the saints and martyrs, from the blood of righteous Abel, Matt. 23. 35. It was a little day of judgment; it was a notable day: in Joel it is called a terrible day, for so it was to men on earth; but here *τις αρα*, (after the Seventy, shews) a glorious, illustrious day, for so it was to Christ in heaven, it was the epiphany, his appearing, so he himself spake of it, Matt. 24. 30. The destruction of the Jews was the deliverance of the christians, that were hated and persecuted by them; and therefore that day was often spoken of by the prophets of that time, for the encouragement of suffering christians, that the Lord was at hand, the coming of the Lord drew nigh, the Judge stood before the door, James 5. 8, 9.

Secondly, The terrible presages of that destruction are here foretold; There shall be wonders in heaven above, the sun turned into darkness, and the moon into blood; and signs too in the earth beneath, blood and fire. Josephus, in his preface to his history of the wars of the Jews, speaks of the signs and prodigies that preceded them, terrible thunders, lightnings and earthquakes; there was a fiery comet that hung over the city for a year, and a flaming sword was seen pointing down upon it; a light shone upon the temple and the altar at midnight, as if it had been noon-day. Dr. Lightfoot gives another sense of these presages; The blood of the Son of God, the fire of the Holy Ghost now appearing, the vapour of the smoke in which Christ ascended, the sun darkened, and the moon made blood, at the time of Christ's passion, were all loud warnings given to that unbelieving people to prepare for the judgments coming upon them. Or, it may be applied, and very fitly, to the previous judgments themselves, by which that desolation was brought on. The blood points at the wars of the Jews with the neighbouring nations, with the Samaritans, Syrians, and Greeks, in which abundance of blood was shed, as there was also in their civil wars, and the struggles of the seditious, (as they called them,) which were very bloody; there was no peace to him that went out, or to him that came in. The fire and vapour of smoke, here foretold, literally came to pass in the burning of their cities, and towns, and synagogues, and temple at last. And this turning of the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood, speaks the dissolution of their government, civil and sacred, and the extinguishing of all their lights.

Thirdly, The signal preservation of the Lord's people is here promised; (v. 21.) Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, (which is the description of a true christian, 1 Cor. 1. 2.) shall be

saved, shall escape that judgment, which shall be a type and earnest of everlasting salvation. In the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, there was a remnant sealed to be hid in the day of the Lord's anger; and in the destruction by the Romans not one christian perished. They that distinguish themselves by singular piety, shall be distinguished by special preservation. And observe, the saved remnant are described by this, that they are a praying people; they call on the name of the Lord; which intimates that they are not saved by any merit or righteousness of their own, but purely by the favour of God, which must be sued out by prayer. It is the name of the Lord which they call upon, that is their strong tower.

(2.) The application of this prophecy to the present event; (v. 16.) *This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; it is the accomplishment of that, it is the full accomplishment of it. This is that effusion of the Spirit upon all flesh, which should come, and we are to look for no other, no more than we are to look for another Messiah; for as our Messiah ever lives in heaven, reigning and interceding for his church on earth; so this Spirit of grace, the Advocate, or Comforter, that was given now, according to the promise, will, according to the same promise, continue with the church on earth to the end, and will work all its works in it and for it, and every member of it, ordinary and extraordinary, by the means of the scriptures and the ministry.*

2. That it was the gift of Christ, and the product and proof of his resurrection and ascension. From this gift of the Holy Ghost, he takes occasion to preach unto them Jesus; and this part of his sermon he introduces with another solemn preface; (v. 22.) *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words. It is a mercy that ye are within hearing of them, and it is your duty to give heed to them."* Words concerning Christ should be acceptable words to the men of Israel. Here is,

(1.) An abstract of the history of the life of Christ, v. 22. He calls him *Jesus of Nazareth*, because by that name he was generally known, but (which was sufficient to roll away that reproach) he was a *Man approved of God among you*, censured and condemned by men, but *approved of God*; God testified his approbation of his doctrine by the power he gave him to work miracles: *a man marked out by God*; so Dr. Hammond reads it; "signalized, and made remarkable among you that now hear me; he was sent to you, set up, a glorious Light in your land; you yourselves are witnesses, how he became famous by miracles, wonders, and signs, works above the power of nature, out of its ordinary course, and contrary to it, which God did by him; that is, which he did by that divine power, with which he was clothed, and in which God plainly went along with him; for no man could do such works, unless God were with him." See what a stress Peter lays upon Christ's miracles! [1.] The matter of fact was not to be denied; "They were done in the midst of you, in the midst of your country, your city, your solemn assemblies, as ye yourselves also know. Ye have been eye-witnesses of his miracles; I appeal to yourselves, whether ye have any thing to object against them, or can offer any thing to disprove them." [2.] The inference from them cannot be disputed; the reasoning is as strong as the evidence; if he did those miracles, certainly God approved him, declared him to be, what he declared himself to be, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; for the God of truth would never set his seal to a lie.

(2.) An account of his death and sufferings, which they were witnesses of also but a few weeks ago; and this was the greatest miracle of all, that a *Man approved of God* should thus seem to be abandoned

of him; and a *Man thus approved among the people*, and in the midst of them, should be thus abandoned by them too! But both these mysteries are here explained, (v. 23.) and his death considered,

[1.] As God's act; and in him it was an act of wonderful grace and wisdom. He delivered him to death; not only permitted him to be put to death, but gave him up, devoted him; this is explained Rom. 8. 32. *He delivered him up for us all.* And yet he was approved of God, and there was nothing in this that signified the disapproving of him; for it was done by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, in infinite wisdom, and for holy ends, which Christ himself concurred in, and in the means leading to them. Thus divine justice must be satisfied, sinners saved, God and man brought together again, and Christ himself glorified. It was not only according to the will of God, but according to the counsel of his will, that he suffered and died; according to an eternal counsel, which could not be altered. This reconciled him to the cross, Father, thy will be done; and Father, glorify thy name; let thy purpose take effect, and let the great end of it be attained.

[2.] As the people's act; and in them it was an act of prodigious sin and folly; it was fighting against God, to persecute one whom he approved as the Darling of heaven; and fighting against their own mercies, to persecute one that was the greatest Blessing of this earth. Neither God's designing it from eternity, nor his bringing good out of it to eternity, would in the least excuse their sin; for it was their voluntary act and deed, from a principle morally evil; and therefore they were wicked hands with which ye have crucified and slain him. It is probable that some of those were here present, who had cried, *Crucify him, crucify him*; or had been otherwise aiding and abetting in the murder; and Peter knew it. However, it was justly looked upon as a national act, because done both by the vote of the great council and by the voice of the great crowd. It is a rule, *Refertur ad universos quod publice fit per majorem partem*—We attribute to all, that which is done publicly by the greater part. He charges it particularly on them as parts of the nation on which it would be visited, the more effectually to bring them to faith and repentance, because that was the only way to distinguish themselves from the guilty, and discharge themselves from the guilt.

(3.) An attestation of his resurrection, which effectually wiped away the reproach of his death; (v. 24.) *Whom God raised up*; the same that delivered him to death, delivered him from death, and thereby gave a higher approbation of him than he had done by any other of the signs and wonders wrought by him, or by all put together. This therefore he insists most largely upon.

[1.] He describes his resurrection; God loosed the bands of death, because it was impossible that he should be holden of it; *Sivas*—the sorrows of death; the word is used for *travailing pains*; and some think it signifies the trouble and agony of his soul, in which it was exceeding sorrowful, even to the death; from these pains and sorrows of soul, this travail of soul, the Father loosed him, when at his death, he said, *It is finished*. Thus Dr. Goodwin understands it: "Those terrors which made Heman's soul lie like the slain, (Ps. 88. 15.) these had hold of Christ; but he was too strong for them, and broke through them; this was the resurrection of his soul, (and it is a great thing to bring a soul out of the depths of spiritual agonies,) this was not leaving his soul in hell; as that which follows, that he should not see corruption, speaks of the resurrection of his body; and both together make up the great resurrection." Dr. Lightfoot gives another sense of this: "Having

assolved the pains of aeath, in reference to all that believe in him, God raised up Christ, and by his resurrection broke all the power of death, and destroyed its pangs upon his own people. He has abolished death, has altered the property of it, and because it was not possible that he should be long holden of it, it is not possible that they should be for ever holden." But most refer this to the resurrection of Christ's body. And death, (says Mr. Baxter,) as a separation between soul and body, is by privation a penal state, though not dolorous by positive evil. But Dr. Hammond shews, that the Septuagint, and from them the apostle here, uses the word for *cords* and *bands*, (as Ps. 18. 4.) to which the metaphor of loosing and being held best agree. Christ was imprisoned for our debt, was thrown into the *bands of death*; but divine justice being satisfied, it was not possible he should be detained there, either by right or by force; for he had life in himself, and in his own power, and had conquered the prince of death.

[2.] He attests the truth of his resurrection; (v. 32.) God hath raised him up, whereof we are all witnesses; we apostles, and other our companions, that were intimately acquainted with him before his death, were intimately conversant with him after his resurrection, did eat and drink with him. They received power, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them, on purpose that they might be skilful, faithful, and courageous witnesses of this thing, notwithstanding their being charged by his enemies as having stolen him away.

[3.] He shewed it to be the fulfilling of the scripture, and, because the scripture had said that he must rise again before he saw corruption, therefore it was impossible that he should be holden by death and the grave; for David speaks of his being raised, so it comes in, v. 25. The scripture he refers to, is that of David, (Ps. 16. 8—11.) which, though in part applicable to David as a saint, yet refers chiefly to Jesus Christ, of whom David was a type. Here is,

First, The text quoted at large, (v. 25—28.) for it was all fulfilled in him, and shews us,

1. The constant regard that our Lord Jesus had to his Father in his whole undertaking; *I foresaw the Lord before me continually*. He set before him his Father's glory as his end in all; foresaw that his sufferings would redound abundantly to the honour of God, and would issue in his own joy; these were set before him, and these he had an eye to, in all he did and suffered; and with the prospect of these he was borne up and carried on, John 13. 31, 32.—17. 4, 5.

2. The assurance he had of his Father's presence and power going along with him; *"He is on my right hand, the hand of action, strengthening, guiding, and upholding that, that I should not be moved, or driven off from my undertaking, notwithstanding the hardships I must undergo;"* this was an article of the covenant of redemption; (Ps. 89. 21.) *With him my hand shall be established, my arm also shall strengthen him;* and therefore he is confident the work shall not miscarry in his hand. If God be at our right hand, we shall not be moved.

3. The cheerfulness with which our Lord Jesus went on in his work, notwithstanding the sorrows he was to pass through; *"Being satisfied that I shall not be moved, but the good pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in my hand, therefore doth my heart rejoice, and my tongue is glad, and the thought of my sorrow is as nothing to me."* Note, It was a constant pleasure to our Lord Jesus to look to the end of his work, and to be sure that the issue would be glorious; so well pleased was he with his undertaking, that it does his heart good to think how the issue would answer the design! He rejoiced in spirit, Luke 10. 21. *My tongue was glad*. In the psalm

it is, *My glory rejoiceth*; which intimates, that our tongue is our glory, the faculty of speaking is an honour to us, and never more so, than when it is employed in praising God. Christ's tongue was glad, for when he was just entering upon his sufferings, in the close of his last supper, he sang a hymn.

4. The pleasing prospect he had of the happy issue of his death and sufferings; this was it that carried him, not only with courage, but with cheerfulness, through them; he was putting off the body, but *my flesh shall rest*; the grave shall be to the body, while it lies there, a bed of repose, and hope shall give it a sweet repose; *it shall rest in hope, and that thou wilt not leave my soul in hell*; what follows is the matter of his hope, or assurance rather:

(1.) That the soul shall not continue in a state of separation from the body; for, beside that that is some uneasiness to a human soul made for its body, it would be the continuance of death's triumph over him who was in truth a Conqueror over death; *"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;"* (in *hades*, in the invisible state, so *hades* properly signifies;) "but, though thou suffer it for a time to remove thither, and to remain there, yet thou wilt remand it; thou wilt not leave it there, as thou dost the souls of other men."

(2.) That the body shall lie but a little while in the grave; *Thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption*; the body shall not continue dead so long, that it should begin to putrefy, or become noisome; and therefore it must return to life, on, or before, the third day after its death. Christ was God's Holy One, sanctified and set apart to his service in the work of redemption; he must die, for he must be consecrated by his own blood; but he must not see corruption, for his death was to be unto God of a sweet smelling savour. This was typified by the law concerning the sacrifices, that no part of the flesh of the sacrifices which was to be eaten, should be kept till the third day, for fear it should see corruption, and begin to putrefy, Lev. 7. 15—18.

(3.) That his death and sufferings should be not to him only, but to all his, an inlet to the blessed immortality; *"Thou hast made known to me the ways of life, and by me made them known to the world, and laid them open."* When the Father gave to the Son to have life in himself, a power to lay down his life, and to take it again, then he shewed him the ways of life, both to and fro: the gates of death were opened to him, and the doors of the shadow of death, (Job 38. 17.) to pass and repass through them, as his occasions led him, for man's redemption.

(4.) That all his sorrows and sufferings should end in perfect and perpetual felicity; *Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance*. The reward set before him, was, joy, a fullness of joy, and that in God's countenance, in the countenance he gave to his undertaking, and to all those, for his sake, that should believe in him. The smiles with which the Father received him, when, at his ascension, he was brought to the Ancient of days, filled him with joy unspeakable; and that is the joy of our Lord, into which all his shall enter, and in which they shall be for ever happy.

Secondly, The comment upon this text, especially so much of it as relates to the resurrection of Christ. He addresses himself to them with a title of respect. *Men and brethren*, v. 29. "You are men, and therefore should be ruled by reason; you are brethren, and therefore should take kindly what is said to you by one who, being nearly related to you, is heartily concerned for you, and wishes you well. Now, give me leave freely to speak to you concerning the patriarch David, and let it be no offence to you, if I tell you, that David cannot be understood here as speaking of himself, but of the Christ to come." David is here called a patriarch, because

he was *the father of the royal family*, and a man of great note and eminency in his generation, and whose name and memory were justly very precious. Now when we read that psalm of his, we must consider,

1. That he could not say *that of himself*, for he died, and was buried, and his sepulchre remained in Jerusalem till now, when Peter spake this, and his bones and ashes in it; nobody ever pretended that he had risen, and therefore he could never say of himself, *that he should not see corruption*; for it was plain he did see corruption. St. Paul urges this, ch. 13. 35—37. Though he was a man after God's own heart, yet he went the way of all the earth, as he saith himself, (1 Kings 2. 2.) both in death and burial.

2. Therefore certainly he spake it as a prophet, with an eye to the Messiah, whose sufferings the prophets testified beforehand, and with them the glory that should follow; so did David in that psalm, as Peter here plainly shews.

(1.) David knew that the Messiah should descend from his loins, (v. 30.) that God had sworn to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. He promised him a Son, the throne of whose kingdom should be established for ever, 2 Sam. 7. 12. And it is said, (Ps. 132. 11.) God swore it in truth unto David. When our Lord Jesus was born, it was promised that the Lord God would give him the throne of his father David, Luke 1. 32. And all Israel knew that the Messiah was to be the Son of David, that is, that, according to the flesh, he should be so by his human nature; for otherwise, according to the spirit, and by his divine nature, he was to be David's Lord, not his son. God having sworn to David, that the Messiah, promised to his fathers, should be his Son and Successor, the Fruit of his loins, and Heir to his throne, he kept this in view, in penning his psalms.

(2.) Christ being the Fruit of his loins, and, consequently, in his loins when he penned that psalm, (as Levi is said to be in Abraham's loins, when he paid tithes to Melchizedek,) if what he says, as in his own person, be not applicable to himself, (as it is plain that it is not,) we must conclude it points to that Son of his that was then in his loins, in whom his family and kingdom were to have their perfection and perpetuity; and therefore, when he says that his soul should not be left in its separate state, nor his flesh see corruption, without doubt he must be understood to speak of the resurrection of Christ, v. 31. And as Christ died, so he rose again, according to the scriptures; and that he did so, we are witnesses.

3. Here is a glance at his ascension too. As David did not rise from the dead, so neither did he ascend into the heavens, bodily, as Christ did, v. 34. And further, to prove that when he spake of the resurrection, he meant it of Christ, he observes that when in another psalm he speaks of the next step of his exaltation, he plainly shews that he spake of another person, and such another as was his Lord; (Ps. 110. 1.) The Lord said unto my Lord, when he had raised him from the dead, "Sit thou at my right hand, in the highest dignity and dominion there; be thou intrusted with the administration of the kingdom both of providence and grace; sit there as King until I make thy foes either thy friends or thy footstool," v. 35. Christ rose from the grave to rise higher, and therefore it must be of his resurrection that David spake, and not his own, in the 16th Psalm; for there was no occasion for him to rise out of his grave, who was not to ascend to heaven.

We now come to the application of this discourse concerning the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

1.) This explains the meaning of the present

wonderful effusion of the Spirit in those extraordinary gifts. Some of the people had asked, (v. 12.) What meant this? I will tell you the meaning of it, says Peter. This Jesus being exalted to the right hand of God; so some read it, to sit there; exalted by the right hand of God; so we read it, by his power and authority, it comes all to one; and having received of the Father, to whom he is ascended, the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath given what he received, (Ps. 68. 18.) and hath shed forth this which you now see and hear; for the Holy Ghost was to be given when Jesus was glorified, and not before, John 7. 39. You see and hear us speak with tongues that we never learned; probably, there was an observable change in the air of their countenances, which they saw, as well as heard the change of their voice and language; now this is from the Holy Ghost, whose coming is an evidence that Jesus is exalted, and he has received this gift from the Father, to confer it upon the church, which plainly speaks him to be the Mediator or middle Person between God and the church. The gift of the Holy Ghost was, [1.] A performance of divine promises already made; here it is called the promise of the Holy Ghost; many exceeding great and precious promises the divine power has given us, but this is the promise, by way of eminency, as that of the Messiah had been, and this is the promise that includes all the rest; hence God's giving the Holy Spirit to them that ask him, (Luke 11. 13.) is his giving them all good things, Matt. 7. 11. Christ received the promise of the Holy Ghost, that is, the promised gift of the Holy Ghost, and has given it to us; for all the promises are yea and amen in him. [2.] It was a pledge of all divine favours further intended; what you now see and hear, is but an earnest of greater things.

(2.) This proves what you are all bound to believe, that Christ Jesus is the true Messiah and Saviour of the world; this he closes his sermon with, as the conclusion of the whole matter, the quod erat demonstrandum—the truth to be demonstrated; (v. 36.) Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that this truth has now received its full confirmation, and we our full commission to publish it, That God has made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. They were charged to tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ, till after his resurrection; (Matth. 16. 20.—17. 9.) but now it must be proclaimed on the house-tops, to all the house of Israel; he that has ears to hear, let him hear it; it is not proposed as probable, but deposed as certain; Let them know it assuredly, and know that it is their duty to receive it as a faithful saying, [1.] That God has glorified him whom they have crucified. This aggravates their wickedness, that they crucified one whom God designed to glorify; and put him to death as a deceiver, who had given such pregnant proofs of his divine mission: and it magnifies the wisdom and power of God, that though they crucified him, and thought thereby to have put him under an indelible mark of infamy, yet God had glorified him, and the indignities they had done him, served as a foil to his lustre. [2.] That he has glorified him to that degree, as to make him both Lord and Christ: these signify the same; he is Lord of all, and he is not a usurper, but is Christ anointed to be so. He is one Lord to the Gentiles, who had had lords many; and to the Jews he is Messiah, which includes all his offices. He is the King Messiah, as the Chaldee-paraphrast calls him; or as the angel to Daniel, Messiah the Prince, Dan. 9. 25. This is the great truth of the gospel which we are to believe, that that same Jesus, the very same that was crucified at Jerusalem, is he to whom we owe allegiance, and from whom we are to expect protection, as Lord and Christ.

37. Now when they heard *this* they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.

We have seen the wonderful effect of *the pouring out of the Spirit*, in its influence upon the preachers of the gospel. Peter, in all his life, never spake at the rate that he had done now, with such fullness, perspicuity, and power. We are now to see another blessed fruit of *the pouring out of the Spirit*, in its influence upon the hearers of the gospel; from the first delivery of that divine message, it appeared that there was a *divine power going along with it*, and it was mighty, through God, to do wonders; thousands were immediately brought by it to the obedience of faith; it was the rod of God's strength sent out of Zion, Ps. 110. 2, 3. We have here the first fruits of that vast harvest of souls, which by it were gathered into Jesus Christ. Come and see, in these verses, *the exalted Redeemer riding forth*, in these chariots of salvation, conquering, and to conquer, Rev. 6. 2.

In these verses we find the word of God, the means of beginning and carrying on a good work of grace in the hearts of many, *the Spirit of the Lord working by it*. Let us see the method of it.

I. They were startled, and convinced, and put upon a serious inquiry, v. 37. When they heard, or having heard, having patiently heard Peter out, and not given him the interruption they had been used to give to Christ in his discourses, (this was one good point gained, that they were become attentive to the word,) they were pricked to the heart, or in the heart, and, under a deep concern and perplexity, applied themselves to the preacher with this question, *What shall we do?* It was very strange that such impressions should be made upon such hard hearts all of a sudden! They were Jews, bred up in the opinion of the sufficiency of their religion to save them, had lately seen this Jesus crucified in weakness and disgrace, and were told by their rulers that he was a deceiver; Peter had charged them with having a hand, a wicked hand, in his death, which was likely to have exasperated them against him; yet, when they heard this plain scriptural sermon, they were much affected with it.

(1.) It put them in pain; they were pricked in their hearts. We read of those that were cut to the heart with indignation at the preacher, (ch. 7. 54.) but these were pricked to the heart with indignation at themselves for having been accessory to the death of Christ. Peter, charging it upon them, awakened their consciences, touched them to the quick, and the reflection they now made upon it, was as a sword in their bones, it pierced them as they had pierced Christ. Note, Sinners, when their eyes are opened, cannot but be pricked to the heart for

sin, cannot but experience an inward uneasiness; this is having the heart rent, (Joel 2. 13.) a broken and contrite heart, Ps. 51. 17. Those that are truly sorry for their sins, and ashamed of them, and afraid of the consequences of them, are pricked to the heart. A prick in the heart is mortal, and under those commotions (says Paul) I died, Rom. 7. 9. "All my good opinion of myself and confidence in myself failed me."

(2.) It put them upon inquiry. Out of the abundance of the heart, thus pricked, the mouth spake. Observe,

(1.) To whom thus they addressed themselves; to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, some to one and some to another, to them they opened their case; by them they had been convinced, and therefore by them they expect to be counselled and comforted. They do not appeal from them to the Scribes and Pharisees, to justify them against the apostles' charge, but apply to them, as owning the charge, and referring the case to them. They call them men, and brethren, as Peter had called them; (v. 29.) it is a style of friendship and love, rather than a title of honour; "You are men, look upon us with humanity; you are brethren, look upon us with brotherly love." Note, Ministers are spiritual physicians, they should be advised with by those whose consciences are wounded; and it is good for people to be free and familiar with those ministers, as men and their brethren, who deal for their souls as for their own.

(2.) What the address is; *What shall we do?*

[1.] They speak as men at a fluncheon, that did not know what to do; in a perfect surprise; "Is that Jesus, whom we have crucified, both Lord and Christ? Then what will become of us who crucified him? We are all undone!" Note, No way of being happy, but by seeing ourselves miserable. When we find ourselves in danger of being lost for ever, there is hope of our being made for ever, and not till then.

[2.] They speak as men at a point, that were resolved to do any thing they shall be directed to, immediately; they are not for taking time to consider, or for adjourning the prosecution of their convictions to a more convenient season, but desire now to be told what they must do to escape the misery they were liable to. Note, Those that are convinced of sin, would gladly know the way to peace and pardon, ch. 9. 6.—16. 30.

(II. Peter and the apostles direct them in short what they must do, and what in so doing they might expect, v. 38, 39. Sinners convinced must be encouraged; and that which is broken must be bound up; (Ezek. 34. 16.) they must be told that though their case is sad, it is not desperate, there is hope for them.

(1.) He here shews them the course they must take.

(1.) *Repent*; that is a plank after shipwreck. "Let the sense of this horrid guilt which you have brought upon yourselves by putting Christ to death, awaken you to a penitent reflection upon all your other sins, as the demand of some one great debt brings to light all the debts of a poor bankrupt, and to bitter remorse and sorrow for them." This was the same duty that John the Baptist and Christ had preached, and now that the Spirit is poured out, it is still insisted on; "Repent, repent; change your mind, change your way; admit an after-thought."

(2.) *Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ*, that is, "firmly believe the doctrine of Christ, and submit to his grace and government; and make an open solemn profession of this, and come under an engagement to abide by it, by submitting to the ordinance of baptism; be proselyted to Christ and to his holy religion, and renounce your

infidelity." They must be baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ*. They did believe in the *Father* and the *Holy Ghost* speaking by the prophets; but they must also believe in the name of Jesus, that he is the Christ, the Messiah promised to the Fathers; "Take Jesus for your King, and by baptism swear allegiance to him; take him for your Prophet, and hear him; take him for your Priest, to make atonement for you;" which seems peculiarly intended here; for they must be baptized *in his name* for the remission of sins upon the score of his righteousness.

(3.) This is pressed upon each particular person, *every one of you*; "Even those of you that have been the *greatest sinners*, if they repent and believe, are welcome to be baptized; and those that think they have been the *greatest saints*, have yet need to repent, and believe, and be baptized. There is grace enough in Christ for every one of you, be ye ever so many, and grace suited to the case of *every one*. Israel of old were baptized unto Moses in the camp, the whole body of the Israelites together, when they passed *through the cloud and the sea*, (1 Cor. 10. 1, 2.) for the covenant of peculiarity was national; but now *every one of you* distinctly must be baptized *in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and transact for himself in this great affair." See Col. 1. 28.

(2.) He gives them encouragement to take that course:

(1.) "It shall be for the *remission of sins*. Repent of your sin, and it shall not be your ruin; be baptized into the faith of Christ, and in truth you shall be justified, which you could never be by the law of Moses." Aim at this, and depend upon Christ for it, and this you shall have. As the cup of the Lord's supper is the *New Testament in the blood of Christ* for the remission of sins, so baptism is in the name of Christ for the remission of sins. Be washed, and you shall be washed."

(2.) "You shall receive the *gift of the Holy Ghost* as well as we; for it is designed for a general blessing: some of you shall receive these external gifts, and each of you, if you be sincere in your faith and repentance, shall receive his internal graces and comforts, shall be *sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*." Note, All that receive the remission of sins, receive the *gift of the Holy Ghost*. All that are justified, are sanctified.

(3.) "Your children shall still have, as they have had, an interest in the covenant, and a title to the external seal of it. Come over to Christ, to receive those inestimable benefits; for the promise of the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, is *to you and to your children*," v. 39. It was very express, (Isa. 44. 3.) *I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed*. And, (Isa. 59. 21.) *My Spirit and my word shall not depart from thy seed, and thy seed's seed*. When God took Abraham into covenant, he said, *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed*; (Gen. 17. 7.) and, accordingly, every Israelite had his son circumcised at eight days old. Now it is proper for an Israelite, when he is by baptism to come into a new dispensation of this covenant, to ask, "What must be done with my children? Must they be thrown out, or taken in with me?" "Taken in," (says Peter,) "by all means; for the promise, that great promise, of God's being to you a God, is as much to you and to your children now as ever it was."

(4.) "Though the promise is still extended to your children as it has been, yet it is not, as it has been, confined to you and them, but the benefit of it is *designed for all that are afar off*," we may add, *and their children*, for the blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ, Gal. 3. 14. The promise had long pertained to the Israelites; (Rom. 9. 4.) but now it is sent to *those that are afar off*, the remotest nations of the Gentiles, and *every one* of them too, all that are afar off. To this gene-

ral the following limitation must refer, even *as many of them*, as many particular persons in each nation, *as the Lord our God shall call effectually* into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. Note, God can make his call to reach those that are ever so far off, and none come but whom he calls.

III. These directions are followed with a needful caution; (v. 40.) *With many other words* to the same purport, *did he testify* gospel-truths, and exhort to gospel-duties; now that the word began to work he followed it; he had said much in a little, (v. 38, 39.) and that which, one would think, included all, and yet he had more to say. When we have heard those words which have done our souls good, we cannot but wish to hear more, to hear many more such words. Among other things he said, (and it should seem inculcated it,) *Save yourselves from this untoward generation*. Be ye free from them. The unbelieving Jews were an untoward generation, perverse and obstinate, they walked contrary to God and man, (1 Thess. 2. 15.) wedded to sin and marked for ruin. Now as to them,

1. "Give diligence to save yourselves from the ruin, that you may not be involved in that, and may *escape all those things*;" (as the Christians did;) "*repent, and be baptized*;" and then you shall not be sharers with them in destruction, whom you have been sharers with in sin." *O gather not my soul with sinners*.

2. "In order to this, continue not with them in their sin, persist not with them in infidelity. *Save yourselves*, that is, separate yourselves, distinguish yourselves, from this untoward generation. *Be not rebellious like this rebellious house*; partake not with them in their sins, that you share not with them in their plagues." Note, To separate ourselves from wicked people, is the only way to save ourselves from them; though we thereby expose ourselves to their rage and enmity, we really save ourselves from them; for if we consider whether they are hastening, we shall see it is better to have the trouble of swimming against their stream than the danger of being carried down their stream. Those that repent of their sins, and give up themselves to Jesus Christ, must evidence their sincerity by breaking off all intimate society with wicked people. *Depart from me, ye evil doers*, is the language of one that determines to keep the *commandments of his God*, Ps. 119. 115. We must *save ourselves* from them; which denotes avoiding them with dread and holy fear, as we would save ourselves from an enemy that seeks to destroy us, or from a house infected with the plague.

IV. Here is the happy success and issue of this, v. 41. The Spirit wrought with the word, and wrought wonders by it. These same persons that had many of them been eye witnesses of the death of Christ, and the prodigies that attended it, and were not wrought upon by them, were yet wrought upon by the preaching of the word, for that is it that is the *power of God unto salvation*.

1. They received the word; and *then* only the word does us good, when we do receive it, embrace it, and bid it welcome. They admitted the conviction of it, and accepted the offers of it.

2. They gladly received it. Herod *heard* the word gladly, but these *gladly received* it, were not only glad that they had it to receive, but glad that by the grace of God they were enabled to receive it, though it would be a humbling changing word to them, and would expose them to the enmity of their countrymen.

3. They were baptized; believing with the heart, they made confession with the mouth, and enrolled themselves among the disciples of Christ by the sacred rite and ceremony which he had instituted. And though Peter had said, "Be baptized in the

name of *the Lord Jesus*," (because the doctrine of Christ was the present truth,) yet we have reason to think that, in baptizing them, the whole form Christ prescribed was used *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*. Note, Those that receive the christian covenant, ought to receive the christian baptism.

4. Hereby there were added to the disciples to the number of about *three thousand souls that same day*. All those that had received the Holy Ghost, had their tongues at work to preach, and their hands at work to baptize; for it was time to be busy, when such a harvest was to be gathered in. The conversion of these three thousand with these words, was a *greater work* than the feeding of four or five thousand with a few loaves. Now Israel began to multiply after the death of our Joseph. They are said to be *three thousand souls*, which word is generally used for persons when women and children are included with men, as Gen. 44. 21. *Give me the souls*, (Gen. 14. 27.) *seventy souls*, which intimates that those that were here baptized, were not so many men, but so many heads of families, as with their children and servants baptized, might make up *three thousand souls*. These were added to them. Note, They who are joined to Christ, are added to the disciples of Christ, and join with them. When we take God for our God, we must take his people to be our people.

42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

We often speak of the primitive church, and appeal to it, and to the history of it; in these verses we have the history of the *truly primitive church*, of the *first days* of it, its state of infancy indeed, but, like that, the state of its greatest *innocence*.

1. They kept close to holy ordinances, and abounded in all instances of piety and devotion, for christianity, admitted in the power of it, will dispose the soul to communion with God in all those ways wherein he has appointed us to meet him, and promised to meet us.

1. They were diligent and constant in their attendance upon the *preaching of the word*. They continued in the *apostles' doctrine*, and never disowned or deserted it; or, as it may be read, they continued constant to the *apostles' teaching or instructions*; by baptism they were disciplined to be taught, and they were willing to be taught. Note, Those who have given up their names to Christ, must make conscience of hearing his word; for thereby we give honour to him, and build up ourselves in our most holy faith.

2. They kept up the *communion of saints*. They continued in *fellowship*, (v. 42.) and continued daily *with one accord in the temple*, v. 46. They not only had a mutual affection to each other, but a

great deal of mutual conversation with each other; they were much together. When they withdrew from the *untoward generation*, they did not turn hermits, but were very intimate with one another, and took all occasions to meet; wherever you saw one disciple, you should see more, like *birds of a feather*. See how *these christians love one another*. They were concerned for one another, sympathized with one another, and heartily espoused one another's interests. They had fellowship with one another in religious worship; they met *in the temple*; there was their rendezvous; for joint-fellowship with God is the best fellowship we can have with one another, 1 John 1. 3. Observe, (1.) They were daily in the temple, not only on the days of the sabbaths and solemn feasts, but on other days, every day. Worshipping God is to be our daily work, and where there is opportunity, the oftener it is done publicly the better. God loves the gates of Zion, and so must we. (2.) They were *with one accord*; not only no discord or strife, but a great deal of holy love among them; and they heartily joined in their public services. Though they met with the Jews in the courts of the temple, yet the Christians kept together by themselves, and were unanimous in their separate devotions.

3. They frequently joined in the ordinance of the Lord's supper; they continued in *breaking of bread*, in celebrating that memorial of their Master's death, as those that were not ashamed to own their relation to, and their dependence upon, Christ and him crucified. They could not forget the death of Christ, yet they kept up this memorial of it, and made it their constant practice, because it was an institution of Christ, to be transmitted to the succeeding ages of the church. They broke bread *from house to house*; κατ' οἶκον—house by house; they did not think fit to celebrate the eucharist in the temple, for that was peculiar to the christian institutes, and therefore they administered that ordinance in private houses, choosing such houses of the converted christians as were convenient, to which the neighbours resorted: and they went from one to another of these little synagogues or domestic chapels, houses that had churches in them, and there celebrated the eucharist with those that usually met there to worship God.

4. They continued in *prayer*. After the Spirit was poured out, as well as before, while they were waiting for him, they continued instant in prayer; for prayer will never be superseded till it comes to be swallowed up in everlasting praise. *Breaking of bread* comes in between the *word* and *prayer*, for it has reference to both, and is a help to both. The Lord's supper is a sermon to the eye, and a confirmation of God's word to us; and it is an encouragement to our prayers, and a solemn expression of the ascent of our souls to God.

5. They abounded in thanksgiving; were continually praising God, v. 47. That should have a part in every prayer, and not be crowded into a corner. They that have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, will be much in praise.

II. They were loving one to another, and very kind; their charity was as eminent as their piety, and their joining together in holy ordinances knit their hearts to each other, and very much endeared them to one another.

1. They had frequent meetings for christian converse; (v. 44.) *All that believed, were together*; not all those thousands in one place; (that was impracticable;) but, as Dr. Lightfoot explains it, they kept together in several companies or congregations, according as their languages, nations, or other references, brought them and kept them together. And thus joining together, because it was apart from those that believed not, and because it was in the

same profession and practice of the duties of religion, they are said to be together, *ἐν τῷ αἵματι*. They associated together, and so both expressed and increased their mutual love.

2. They had *all things common*: perhaps they had common tables, (as the Spartans of old,) for familiarity, temperance, and freedom of conversation; they *ate together*, that they who had much might have the less, and so be kept from the temptations of abundance; and they who had little might have the more, and so be kept from the temptations of want and poverty. Or, there was such a concern for one another, and such a readiness to help one another, as there was occasion, that it might be said, They had *all things common*, according to the law of friendship, one wanted not what another had; for he might have it for the asking.

3. They were very cheerful, and very generous in the use of what they had. Beside the religion that was in their sacred feasts, (their *breaking bread from house to house*), a great deal of it appeared in their common meals; they did *eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*. They brought the comforts of God's table along with them to their own, which had two good effects upon them: (1.) It made them very pleasant, and enlarged their hearts in holy joy; they did eat their bread with joy, and *drank their wine with a merry heart*, as knowing that *God now accepted their works*. None have such cause to be cheerful as good christians have; it is pity but that they should always have hearts to be so. (2.) It made them very liberal to their poor brethren, and enlarged their hearts in charity. They did *eat their meat with singleness of heart*, *ἐν ἀφελότητι καὶ καρδίας*—*with liberality of heart*; so some; they did not eat their morsels alone, but bid the poor welcome to their table, not grudgingly, but with all the hearty freedom imaginable. Note, It becomes christians to be open-hearted and open-handed, and in every good work to sow plentifully, as those on whom God hath sowed plentifully, and who hope to reap so.

4. They raised a fund for charity; (v. 45.) They *sold their possessions and goods*; some sold their lands and houses, others their stocks and the furniture of their houses, and *parted the money* to their brethren, *as every man had need*. This was to destroy, not property, (as Mr. Baxter says,) but selfishness. Herein, probably, they had an eye to the command which Christ gave to the rich man, as a test of his sincerity, *Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor*. Not that this was intended for an example to be a constant binding rule, as if all christians in all places and ages were bound to sell their estates, and give away the money in charity. For St. Paul's epistles, after this, often speak of the distinction of rich and poor, and Christ hath said, that *the poor we have always with us*, and shall have, and the rich must be always doing them good out of the rents, issues, and profits, of their estates, which they disable themselves to do, if they sell them, and give all away at once. But here the case was extraordinary. (1.) They were under no obligation of a divine command to do this, as appears by what Peter said to Ananias; (ch. 5. 4.) *Was it not in thine own power?* But it was a very commendable instance of their raisedness above the world, their contempt of it, their assurance of another world, their love to their brethren, their compassion to the poor, and their great zeal for the encouraging of christianity, and the nursing of it in its infancy. The apostles left all to follow Christ, and were to give themselves wholly to the word and prayer, and something must be done for their maintenance; so that this extraordinary liberality was like that of Israel in the wilderness toward the bulding of the tabernacle, which needed to be restrained, Exod. 36. 5, 6. Our rule

is, to give according as God hath blessed us; yet in such an extraordinary case as this, those are to be praised, who give *beyond their power*, 2 Cor. 8. 3. (2.) They were Jews that did this, and they who believed Christ, must believe that the Jewish nation should shortly be destroyed, and an end put to the possession of estates and goods in it, and, in the belief of that, they sold them for the present service of Christ and his church.

III. God owned them, and gave them signal tokens of his presence with them; (v. 43.) *Many wonders and signs were done by the apostles* of divers sorts, which confirmed their doctrine, and incontestably proved that it was from God. They that could work miracles, could have maintained themselves and the poor that were among them miraculously, as Christ fed thousands with a little food; but it was as much for the glory of God that it should be done by a miracle of grace (inclining people to sell their estates to do it) as if it had been done by a miracle in nature.

But the Lord's giving them power to work miracles, was not all he did for them; he *added to the church daily*. The word in their mouths *did wonders*, and God blessed their endeavours for the increase of the number of believers. Note, It is God's work to add souls to the church; and it is a great comfort both to ministers and christians to see it.

IV. The people were influenced by it; they that were without, the standers by, that were spectators.

1. They *feared them*, and had a veneration for them; (v. 43.) *Fear came upon every soul*, that is, upon very many who saw the *wonders and signs* done by the apostles, and were afraid lest their not being respected as they should be would bring desolation upon their nation. The common people stood in awe of them, as Herod feared John. Though they had nothing of external pomp to command external respect, as the *Scribes' long robes* gained them the *greetings in the market-places*, yet they had abundance of spiritual gifts that were truly honourable, which possessed men with an inward reverence for them. Fear came upon *every soul*; the *souls* of people were strangely influenced by their awful preaching and living.

2. They *favoured them*. Though we have reason to think there were those that despised them and hated them, (we are sure the Pharisees and chief priests did,) yet far the greater part of the common people had a kindness for them—they *had favour with all the people*. Christ was so violently run upon, and run down, by a *packed mob*, which cried, *Crucify him, crucify him*; that one would think his doctrine and followers were never likely to have an interest in the common people any more. And yet here we find them in *favour with them all*; by which it appears that their prosecuting of Christ, was a sort of a force put upon them by the artifices of the priests; now they returned to their wits, to their right mind. Note, Undissembled piety and charity will command respect; and cheerfulness in serving God will recommend religion to those that are without. Some read it, *They had charity to all the people*—*χαρὴν ἔχοντες πρὸς πάντας τοὺς λαοὺς*; they did not confine their charity to those of their own community, but it was *catholic and extensive*; and this recommended them very much.

3. They *fell over to them*. Some or other were daily coming in, though not so many as the first day; and they were such as *should be saved*. Note, Those that God has designed for eternal salvation, shall one time or other be effectually brought to Christ; and those that are brought to Christ, are *added to the church* in a holy covenant by baptism, and in holy communion by other ordinances.

CHAP. III.

In this chapter, we have a miracle and a sermon: the miracle wrought to make way for the sermon, to confirm the doctrine that was to be preached, and to make way for it into the minds of the people; and then the sermon to explain the miracle, and to sow the ground which by it was broken up. I. The miracle was the healing of a man that was lame from his birth, with a word speaking, (v. 1. . 8.) and the impression which this made upon the people, v. 9. . 11. II. The scope of the sermon which was preached hereupon, was, to bring people to Christ, to repent of their sin in crucifying him; (v. 12 . 19.) to believe in him now that he was glorified, and to comply with the Father's design in glorifying him, v. 20. . 26. The former part of the discourse opens the wound, the latter applies the remedy.

1. **N**OW Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, *being the ninth hour*. 2. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; 3. Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. 4. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. 5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. 6. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. 7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. 8. And he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. 9. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. 10. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. 11. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

We were told in general, (*ch. 2. 43.*) that *many signs and wonders were done by the apostles*, which are not written in this book; but here we have one given us for an instance. As they wrought miracles, not upon every body, as every body had occasion for them, but as the Holy Spirit gave direction, so as to answer the end of their commission; so all the miracles they did work, are not *written in this book*, but such only are recorded as the Holy Ghost thought fit to answer the end of this sacred history.

I. The persons by whose ministry this miracle was wrought, were, *Peter and John*, two principal men among the apostles; they were so in Christ's time, one speaker of the house for the most part, the other favourite of the Master; and they continue so. When, upon the conversion of thousands, the church was divided into several societies, perhaps Peter and John presided in that which Luke associated with, and therefore he is more particular in recording what they said and did, as afterward what

Paul said and did, when he attended him: both the one and the other being designed for a specimen of what the other apostles did.

Peter and John had each of them a brother among the twelve, with which they were coupled when they were sent out; yet now they seem to be knit together more closely than either of them to his brother; for the bond of friendship is sometimes stronger than that of relation; there is a *friend that sticks closer than a brother*. Peter and John seem to have had a peculiar intimacy after Christ's resurrection more than before, John 20. 2. The reason of which, (if I may have liberty to conjecture,) might be this; that John, a disciple made up of love, was more compassionate to Peter upon his fall and repentance, and more tender of him in his *bitter weeping* for his sin, than any other of the apostles were, and more solicitous to restore him in the *spirit of meekness*; which made him very dear to Peter ever after: and it was a good evidence of Peter's acceptance with God, upon his repentance, that Christ's favourite was made his bosom-friend. David prayed, after his fall, *Let them that fear thee, turn unto me*, Ps. 119. 79.

II. The time and place are here set down:

1. It was in the *temple*, whither Peter and John went up *together*, because it was the place of concourse; there were the shoals of fish, among whom the net of the gospel was to be cast, especially during the days of pentecost, within the compass of which we may suppose this to have happened. Note, It is good to go up to the temple, to attend on public ordinances; and it is comfortable to go up *together* to the temple; *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go*. The best society is society in worshipping of God.

2. It was at the *hour of prayer*, one of the hours of public worship, commonly appointed and observed among the Jews: time and place are two necessary circumstances of every action, which must be determined by consent, as is most convenient for edification. With reference to public worship, there must be a *house of prayer*, and an *hour of prayer*: the *ninth hour*, that is, three o'clock in the afternoon, was one of the hours of prayer among the Jews; nine in the morning, and twelve at noon, were the other two. See Ps. 55. 17. Dan. 6. 10. It is of use for private christians so far to have their hours of prayer as may serve, though not to bind, yet to remind, conscience; every thing is *beautiful in its season*.

III. The patient is here described, on whom this miraculous cure was wrought, v. 2. He was a poor lame beggar at the temple-gate.

1. He was a cripple, not by accident so, but born so; he was *lame from his mother's womb*, as it should seem, by a paralytic distemper, which weakened his limbs; for it is said in the description of his cure, (v. 7.) *His feet and ankle-bones received strength*. Some such piteous cases now and then there are, which we ought to be affected with, and look upon with compassion, and which are designed to shew us what we all are by nature spiritually; *without strength*, lame from our birth, unable to work or walk in God's service.

2. He was a beggar; being unable to work for his living, he must live upon alms; such are *God's poor*. He was *laid daily* by his friends at *one of the gates of the temple*, a miserable spectacle, unable to do any thing else for himself but to *ask alms of them that entered into the temple* or came out. There was a concourse, and a concourse of devout good people, from whom charity might be expected, and a concourse of such people, when it might be hoped they were in the *best frame*; and there he was *laid*. Those that need, and cannot work, must not be ashamed to beg. He would not have been laid there, and laid daily there, if he had not been used to meet

with supplies, daily supplies there. Note, Our *prayers* and our *alms* should go together; Cornelius's did, *ch.* 10. 4. Objects of charity should be in a particular manner welcome to us when we go up to the temple to pray; it is pity that common beggars at church-doors should any of them be of such a character as to discourage charity; but they ought not always to be over-looked; some there are surely that merit regard, and better feed ten drones, yea and some wasps, than let one bee starve. The *gate of the temple* at which he was laid, is here named, it was called *Beautiful*, for the extraordinary splendour and magnificence of it. Dr. Lightfoot observes, that this was the gate that led out of the court of the Gentiles into that of the Jews, and supposes that the cripple would beg only of the Jews, as disdaining to ask any thing of the Gentiles. But Dr. Whitby takes it to be at the first entrance into the temple, and beautified sumptuously, as became the frontispiece of that place where the Divine Majesty vouchsafed to dwell; and it was no diminution to the beauty of this gate, that a poor man lay there begging.

3. He begged of Peter and John, (*v.* 3.) begged an alms, that was the utmost he expected from them who had the reputation of being charitable men, and who, though they had not much, yet did good with what they had. It was not many weeks ago that the *blind and the lame* came to Christ in the temple, and were healed there, *Matt.* 21. 14. And why might not he have asked more than an alms, if he knew that Peter and John were Christ's messengers, and preached and wrought miracles in his name? But he had that done for him, which he looked not for; *asked an alms*, and had a cure.

IV. We have here the method of the cure:

1. His *expectations were raised*. Peter, instead of turning his eyes *from him*, as many do from objects of charity, turned his eyes *to him*, nay he *fastened his eyes upon him*, that his eye might affect his heart with compassion toward him, *v.* 4. John did so too, for they were both guided by one and the same Spirit, and concurred in this miracle; they said, *Look on us*. Our eye must be ever toward the Lord, (the eye of our mind,) and, in token of that, the eye of the body may properly be fixed on those whom he employs as the ministers of his grace. This man needed not be bidden twice to look on the apostles; for he justly thought this gave him cause to *expect* that he should *receive something from them*, and therefore he *gave heed to them*, *v.* 5. Note, We must come to God both to attend on his word, and to apply ourselves to him in prayer, with hearts fixed and expectations raised. We must look up to heaven, and expect to receive benefit by that which God speaks from thence, and an answer of peace to the prayers sent up thither. *I will direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.*

2. His *expectations of an alms were disappointed*; Peter said, "*Silver and gold have I none*, and therefore none to give thee;" yet he intimates that if he had had any he would give him an alms, not brass, but silver or gold. Note, (1.) It is not often that Christ's friends and favourites have abundance of the wealth of this world. The apostles were very poor, had but just enough for themselves, and no overplus. Peter and John had abundance of money laid at their feet, but that was appropriated to the maintenance of the poor of the church, and they would not convert any of it to their own use, nor dispose of it otherwise than according to the intention of the donors. Public trusts ought to be strictly and faithfully observed. (2.) Many, who are well inclined to works of charity, are yet not in a capacity of doing any thing considerable, while others, who have wherewithal to do much, have not a heart to do and thing.

3. His expectations, notwithstanding, were quite *outdone*; Peter had no money to give him; but, (1.) He had that which was better, such an interest in heaven, such a power from heaven, as to be able to cure his disease. Note, Those who are poor in the world, may yet be rich, very rich, in spiritual gifts, graces, and comforts; certainly there is that which we are capable of receiving, which is infinitely better than silver and gold; the merchandise and gain of it better, *Job* 28. 12, &c. *Prov.* 3. 14, &c. (2.) He gave him that which was better—the cure of his disease, which he would gladly have given a great deal of silver and gold for, if he had had it, and it could have been so obtained. This would have enabled him to work for his living, so that he should not need to beg any more; nay, he would *have to give to them that needed*, and it is *more blessed to give than to receive*. A miraculous cure would be a greater instance of God's favour, and would put a greater honour upon him, than thousands of gold and silver could. Observe, When Peter had no silver and gold to give, yet (says he) *such as I have I give thee*. Note, Those may be, and ought to be, otherwise *charitable and helpful* to the poor, who have not wherewithal to give in charity; they who have not silver and gold, have their limbs and senses, and with these may be serviceable to the blind, and lame, and sick; which if they be not, as there is occasion, neither would they give to them if they had silver and gold. *As every one has received the gift, so let him minister it.*

Let us now see how the cure was wrought:

[1.] Christ *sent his word, and healed him*; (*Ps.* 107. 20.) for healing grace is given by the word of Christ; that is the vehicle of the healing virtue derived from Christ. Christ spake cures by himself, the apostles spake them *in his name*. Peter bids a lame man *rise up and walk*; which would have been a banter upon him, if he had not premised *in the name of Jesus of Nazareth*; "I say it by warrant from him, and it shall be done by power from him, and all the glory and praise of it shall be ascribed to him." He calls Christ *Jesus of Nazareth*, which was a name of reproach, to intimate, that the indignities done him on earth served but as a foil to his glories now that he was in heaven. "Give him what name you will, call him if you will in scorn *Jesus of Nazareth*, in that name you shall see wonders done; for because he *humbled himself*, thus highly was he exalted." He bids the cripple *rise up and walk*; which does not prove that he had power in himself to do it, but proves (if he attempt to *rise and walk*, and, in a sense of his own impotency, *depend upon* a divine power to enable him to do it) that he shall be *enabled*; and by *rising and walking* he must evidence that that power has wrought upon him; and then let him take the comfort, and let God have the praise. Thus it is in the healing of our souls, that are spiritually impotent.

[2.] Peter *lent his hand, and helped him*; (*v.* 7.) He *took him by the right hand* in the same name in which he had spoken to him to *arise and walk, and lifted him up*. Not that this could contribute any thing to his cure; it was but a sign, plainly intimating the help he should receive from God, if he *exerted himself* as he was bidden. When God *by his word* commands us to *rise, and walk* in the way of his commandments, if we mix faith with that word, and lay our souls under the power of it, he will give his Spirit to *take us by the hand, and lift us up*. If we set ourselves to do what we can, God has promised his grace to enable us to do what we cannot; and by that promise we *partake of a new nature*; and that grace shall not be in vain; it was not here; *his feet and ankle-bones received strength*; which they had not done, if he had not attempted to rise, and been helped up; he does his part, and Peter

does his, and yet it is Christ that does all: it is he that *fruits strength into him*. As the bread multiplied in the breaking, and the water was turned into wine in the pouring out, so strength was given to the cripple's feet in his stirring them and using them.

V. Here is the impression which this cure made upon the patient himself, which we may best conceive of, if we put our soul into his soul's stead.

1. He *leaped up*, in obedience to the command, *Arise*. He found in himself such a degree of strength in his *feet and ankle-bones*, that he did not *steal up*, with fear and trembling, as weak people do when they begin to recover strength; but he *started up*, as one refreshed with sleep, boldly, and with great agility, and as one that questioned not his own strength. The incomes of strength were *sudden*, and he no less *sudden* in shewing them. He leaped, as one glad to quit the bed or pad of straw on which he had lain so long *lame*.

2. He *stood*, and *walked*; he *stood* without either leaning or trembling, stood straight up, and *walked* without a staff; he trod *strongly*, and moved *steadily*; and this was to manifest the cure, and that it was a thorough cure. Note, Those who have had experience of the working of divine grace upon them, should evidence what they have experienced. Has God put strength into us? Let us stand before him in the exercises of devotion, let us walk before him in all the instances of a religious conversation. Let us stand up resolutely for him, and walk cheerfully with him, and both in strength derived and received from him.

3. He *held Peter and John*, v. 11. We need not ask why he held them. I believe he scarcely knew himself: but it was in a transport of joy that he embraced them as the best benefactors he ever met with, and hung upon them to a degree of rudeness; he would not let them go forward, but would have them stay with him, while he published to all about him what God had done for him by them. Thus he testified his affection to them, he held them, and would not let them go. Some suggest that he clung to them for fear lest, if they should leave him, his lameness should return. Those whom God hath healed, love them whom he made instruments of their healing, and see the need of their further help.

4. He *entered with them into the temple*. His strong affection to them *held them*; but it should not hold them so fast as to keep them out of the temple, whither they were going to preach Christ. We should never suffer ourselves to be diverted by the most affectionate kindnesses of our friends, from going in the way of our duty. But if they will not *stay with him*, he is resolved to *go with them*, and the rather because they are going *into the temple*, whence he had been so long kept by his weakness and his begging. The impotent man whom Christ cured, was presently *found in the temple*, John 5. 14. He *went into the temple*, not only to offer up his praises and thanksgivings to God, but to hear more from the apostles of that Jesus in whose name he had been healed. Those that have experienced the power of Christ, should earnestly desire to grow in their acquaintance with Christ.

5. He was there *walking, and leaping, and praising God*. Note, The strength God has given us both in mind and body, should be made use of to his praise, and we should study how to honour him with it. Those that are healed *in his name*, must *walk up and down in his name*, and in his strength, Zech. 10. 12. This man, as soon as he could leap, leaped for joy in God, and praised him. Here was that scripture fulfilled, (Isa. 35. 6.) *Then shall the lame man leap as a hart*. Now that this man was newly cured, he was in this excess of joy and thankfulness. All true converts walk, and praise God; but perhaps young converts leap more in his praises.

VI. How the people that were eye-witnesses of this miracle, were influenced by it, we are next told.

1. They were entirely satisfied in the truth of the miracle, and had nothing to object against it. They knew it *was he that sat begging at the Beautiful gate of the temple*, v. 10. He had sat there so long, that they all knew him; and for that reason he was chosen to be the vessel of this mercy. Now they were not so perverse as to make any doubt whether he was the same man, as the Pharisees had questioned concerning the blind man that Christ cured, John 9. 11. They now saw him *walking, and praising God*, (v. 9.) and perhaps took notice of a change in his mind: for he was now as loud in praising God as he had used to be in begging relief. The best evidence that it was a complete cure, was, that he praised God for it. Mercies are *then* perfected, when they are sanctified.

2. They admired at it; they were *filled with wonder and amazement*, (v. 10.) *greatly wondering*, v. 11. They were in an *ecstasy*. There seems to be this effect of the pouring out of the Spirit, that the people, at least those in Jerusalem, were more affected with the miracles the apostles wrought than they had been with those of the same kind that had been wrought by Christ himself; and this was in order to the miracles answering their end.

3. They gathered about Peter and John; *All the people ran together unto them in Solomon's porch*: some, only to gratify their curiosity with the sight of men that had such power; others, with a desire to hear them preach, concluding that their doctrine must needs be of divine original, which thus had a divine ratification. They flocked to them in Solomon's porch, a part of the court of the Gentiles, where Solomon had built the outer porch of the temple. Or, it was some cloisters or piazzas which Herod had erected upon the same foundation which Solomon had built that stately porch upon, that bore his name; Herod being ambitious herein to be a second Solomon. Here the people met, to see this great sight.

12. And when Peter saw *it*, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

13. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *him* go. 14. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15. And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. 16. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. 17. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye *did it*, as *did* also your rulers. 18. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. 19. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the

times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; 20. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: 21. Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. 22. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. 23. And it shall come to pass, *that* every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. 24. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. 25. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. 26. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

We have here the sermon which Peter preached after he had cured the lame man. *When Peter saw it.* 1. *When he saw* the people got together in a crowd, he took that opportunity to preach Christ to them, especially the temple being the place of their concourse, and Solomon's porch there, let them come and hear a more excellent wisdom than Solomon's, for *behold, a greater than Solomon is here preached.* 2. *When he saw* the people affected with the miracle, and filled with admiration, then he sowed the gospel-seed in the ground, which was thus broken up, and prepared to receive it. 3. *When he saw* the people ready to adore him and John, he stepped in immediately, and diverted their respect from them, that they might be directed to Christ only; to this *he answered* presently, as Paul and Barnabas at Lystra. See *ch.* 14. 14, 15. In the sermon,

I. He humbly disclaims the honour of the miracle as not due to them, who were only the ministers of Christ, or instruments in his hand for the doing of it. The doctrines they preached were not of their own invention, nor were the seals of it their own, but his whose the doctrines were. He addresses himself to them as *men of Israel*, men, to whom pertained, not only the law and the promises, but the gospel and the performances, and who were nearly interested in the present dispensation. Two things he asks them:

1. Why they were so surprised at the miracle itself; *Why marvel ye at this?* It was indeed marvellous, and they justly wondered at it, but it was no more than what Christ had done many a time, and they had not duly regarded it, or been affected with it. It was but a little before, that Christ had raised Lazarus from the dead; and why should this then seem so strange? Note, Stupid people think that strange now, which might have been familiar to them, if it had not been their own fault. Christ had lately risen from the dead himself; why did they not marvel at that? Why were they not convinced at that?

2. Why they gave so much of the praise of it to

them that were only the instruments of it; *Why look ye so earnestly on us?* (1.) It was certain that they had made this man to walk, by which it appeared that the apostles not only were sent of God, but were sent to be blessings to the world, benefactors to mankind, and were sent to heal sick and distempered souls, that were spiritually lame and impotent, to set broken bones, and make them rejoice. (2.) Yet they did not do it by any power or holiness of their own; it was not done by any might of their own, any skill they had in physic or surgery, or any virtue in their word; the power they did it by, was wholly derived from Christ; nor was it done by any merit of their own; the power which Christ gave them to do it they had not deserved, it was not by their own holiness; for as they were weak things, so they were foolish things, that Christ chose to employ; Peter was a sinful man. What holiness had Judas? Yet he wrought miracles in Christ's name. What holiness any of them had, it was wrought in them, and they could not pretend to merit by it. (3.) It was the people's fault that they attributed it to their power and holiness, and accordingly looked at them. Note, The instruments of God's favour to us, though they must be respected, must not be idolized; we must take heed of reckoning that to be done by the instrument, which God is the Author of. (4.) It was the praise of Peter and John, that they would not take the honour of this miracle to themselves, but carefully transmitted it to Christ. Useful men must see to it that they be very humble. *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name, give glory.* Every crown must be cast at the feet of Christ; not I, but the grace of God with me.

II. He preaches Christ to them, that was his business, that he might lead them into obedience to Christ.

1. He preaches Christ, as the true Messiah promised to the fathers, *v.* 13. for, (1.) He is Jesus the Son of God; though they had lately condemned Christ as a blasphemer, for saying that he was the Son of God, yet Peter avows it; he is his Son Jesus; to him, dear as a Son; to us, Jesus, a Saviour. (2.) God hath glorified him, in raising him up to be King, Priest, and Prophet, of his church; he glorified him in his life, and in his death, as well as in his resurrection and ascension. (3.) He hath glorified him as the God of our fathers, whom he names with respect, for they were great names with the men of Israel, and justly, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. God sent him into the world, pursuant to the promises made to those patriarchs, that in their seed the families of the earth should be blessed, and the covenant made with them, that God would be a God to them, and their seed. The apostles call the patriarchs, their fathers, and God, the God of those patriarchs, from whom the Jews were descended; to intimate to them, that they had no evil design upon the Jewish nation, (that they should look upon them with a jealous eye,) but had a value and concern for it, and were hereby well-wishers to it; and the gospel they preached, was the revelation of the mind and will of the God of Abraham. See *ch.* 26. 7, 22. Luke 1. 72, 73.

2. He charges them flat and plain with the murder of this Jesus, as he had done before. (1.) "You delivered him up to your chief priests and elders, the representative body of the nation; and you of the common people were influenced by them, to clamour against him, as if he had been a public grievance." (2.) "You denied him, and you disowned him, would not have him then to be your King, could not look upon him as the Messiah, because he came not in external pomp and power; you denied him in the presence of Pilate, renounced all the expectations of your church, in the presence of the Roman governor, who justly laughed at you for it;

you denied him against the face of Pilate," (so Dr. Hammond,) "in defiance of his reasonings with you." (*Pilate had determined to let him go, but the people opposed it, and over-ruled him.*) "You were worse than Pilate, for he would have released him, if you had let him follow his own judgment. *You denied the Holy One, and the Just,* who had approved himself so, and all the malice of his persecutors could not disprove it." The holiness and justice of the Lord Jesus, which are something more than his innocency, were a great aggravation of the sin of those that put him to death. (3.) "*You desired a murderer to be released, and Christ crucified;* as if Barabbas had deserved better at your hands, than the Lord Jesus; than which a greater affront could not be put upon him." (4.) *You killed the Prince of life.* Observe the antithesis: "*You preserved a murderer, a destroyer of life; and destroyed the Saviour, the Author of life. You killed him who was sent to be to you the Prince of life,* and so not only forsook, but rebelled against, your own mercies. *You did an ungrateful thing, in taking away his life, who would have been your Life. You did a foolish thing, to think you could conquer the Prince of life, who has life in himself, and would soon resume the life he resigned.*"

3. He attests his resurrection as before, *ch. 2. 32.* "You thought the *Prince of life* might be deprived of his life, as any other prince might be deprived of his dignity and dominion, but you found yourselves mistaken, for *God raised him from the dead;* so that in putting him to death, you fought against God, and were baffled. *God raised him from the dead,* and thereby ratified his demands, and confirmed his doctrine, and rolled away all the reproach of his sufferings, and for the truth of his resurrection, *we are all witnesses.*"

4. He ascribes the cure of this impotent man to the power of Christ; (*v. 16.*) *His name, through faith in his name,* in that discovery which he hath made of himself, *has made this man strong.* He repeats it again, *The faith which is by him hath given him this soundness.* Here, (1.) He appeals to themselves concerning the truth of the miracle; the man, on whom it was wrought, is one *whom ye see, and know, and have known;* he was not acquainted with Peter and John before, so that there was no room to suspect a compact between them; "You know him to be a cripple from a child. The miracle was wrought publicly, *in the presence of you all;* not in a corner, but *in the gate of the temple;* you see in what manner it was done, so that there could be no juggle in it; you had liberty to examine it immediately, and may yet. The cure is complete, it is a *perfect soundness;* you see *the man walks and leaps,* as one that has no remainder either of weakness or pain." (2.) He acquaints them with the power by which it was wrought. [1.] It is done by the *name of Christ,* not merely by naming it as a spell or charm, but it is done by us as professors and preachers of *his name,* by virtue of a commission and instructions we have received from him, and a power which he has invested us with; *that name* which Christ has *above every name;* his authority, his command, *has done it;* as writs run in the king's name, though it is an inferior officer that executes them. [2.] The power of Christ is fetched in, *through faith in his name,* a confidence in him, a dependence on him, a believing application to him, and expectation from him, even that *faith which is δι' αὐτοῦ—by him,* which is of his working; *it is not of ourselves, it is the gift of Christ; and it is for his sake,* that he may have the glory of it; for he is both the *Author and Finisher of our faith.* Dr. Lightfoot suggests, that faith is twice named in this verse, because of the apostles' faith in doing this miracle, and the cripple's faith in receiving it; but

I suppose it relates chiefly, if not only, to the former. They that wrought this miracle by faith, derived power from Christ to work it, and therefore returned all the glory to him. By this true and just account of the miracle, Peter both confirmed the great gospel-truth they were to preach to the world—that Jesus Christ is the Fountain of all power and grace, and the great Healer and Saviour; and recommended the great gospel duty of faith in him, as the only way of receiving benefit by him. It explains likewise the great gospel-mystery of our salvation by Christ; it is *his name that justifies us,* that glorious name of his, *The Lord, our Righteousness;* but we, in particular, are justified by *that name through faith* in it, applying it to ourselves. Thus does Peter preach unto them *Jesus, and him crucified,* as a faithful friend of the Bridegroom, to whose service and honour he devoted all his interest.

III. He encourages them to hope that, though they had been guilty of putting Christ to death, yet they might find mercy; he does all he can to convince them, yet is careful not to drive them to despair. The guilt was very great, but,

1. He mollifies their crime by a candid imputation of it to their *ignorance.* Perhaps, he perceived by the countenance of his hearers, that they were struck with an exceeding horror, when he told them that they had *killed the Prince of life,* and were ready either to sink down, or to fly off, and therefore he saw it needful to mitigate the rigour of the charge, by calling them *brethren;* and well might he call them so, for he had been himself a brother with them in this iniquity; *he had denied the Holy One, and the Just,* and sworn that he did not *know* him; he did it by surprise; and for your parts, *I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers, v. 17.* This was the language of Peter's charity, and teaches us to make the best of those whom we desire to make better. Peter had searched the wound to the bottom, and now he begins to think of healing it up, in order to which it is necessary to beget in them a good opinion of their physician; and could any thing be more winning than this? That which bears him out in it, is, that he has the example of his Master's praying for his crucifiers, and pleading in their behalf, that *they knew not what they did.* And it is said of the rulers, that *if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.* See 1 Cor. 2. 8. Perhaps some of the rulers, and of the people, did therein rebel against the light and the convictions of their own consciences, and did it through malice; but the generality went down the stream, and *did it through ignorance;* as Paul persecuted the church, *ignorantly, and in unbelief,* 1 Tim. 1. 13.

2. He mollifies the effect of their crime—the death of the *Prince of life;* this sounds very dreadful, but it was *according to the scriptures,* (*v. 18.*) the predictions of which, though they did not necessitate their sin, yet did necessitate his sufferings; so he himself saith, *Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer. You did it through ignorance,* may be taken in this sense; "*You fulfilled the scripture,* and did not know it; *God, by your hands, hath fulfilled what he shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer;* that was his design in delivering him up to you, but you had views of your own, and were altogether ignorant of that design: *you meant not so, neither did your heart think so.* God was fulfilling the scripture, when you were gratifying your own passions." Observe, It was not only *determined in the secret counsel of God,* but declared to the world many ages before, *by the mouth and pen of the prophets, that Christ should suffer,* in order to the accomplishment of his undertaking; and it was God himself that *shewed* it by them, who will see that his words

be made good ; what he *shewed*, he *fulfilled* ; he so *fulfilled*, so as he had *shewed*, punctually and exactly, without any variation. Now, though this is no extenuation at all of their sin in hating and persecuting Christ *to the death*, (that still *appears exceeding sinful*,) yet it was an encouragement to them to repent, and hope for mercy upon their repentance ; not only because in general God's gracious designs were carried on by it, (and thus it agrees with the encouragement *Joseph gave to his brethren*, when they thought their offence against him almost unpardonable ; *Fear not*, saith he, *you thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good*, Gen. 50. 15, 20.) but because in particular the death and sufferings of Christ were for the *remission of sins*, and the ground of that display of mercy which he now encouraged them to hope for.

IV. He exhorts them all to turn Christians, and assures them it would be unspeakably for their advantage to do so ; it would be the making of them for ever. This is the application of his sermon.

1. He tells them what they must believe.

(1.) They must believe that Jesus Christ is the *promised Seed*, that *Seed* in which, God had told Abraham, *all the kindreds of the earth should be blessed*, v. 25. This refers to that promise made to Abraham, (Gen. 12. 3.) which promise was long ere it was fulfilled, but now at length had its accomplishment in this *Jesus*, who was of the *seed of Abraham, according to the flesh*, and in him *all the families of the earth are blessed*, and not the families of Israel only ; all have some benefits by him, and some have all benefits.

(2.) They must believe that Jesus Christ is a *Prophet*, that *Prophet like unto Moses*, which God had promised to *raise up to them from among their brethren*, v. 22. This refers to that promise, Deut. 18. Christ is a *Prophet*, for by him God *speaks unto us* ; in him all divine revelation centres, and by him it is handed to us ; he is a *Prophet, like unto Moses*, a Favourite of Heaven ; more intimately acquainted with the divine counsel, and more familiarly conversed with, than any other prophets. He was a Deliverer of his people *out of bondage*, and their Guide *through the wilderness, like Moses* ; a *Prince and a Lawgiver, like Moses* ; the Builder of the true tabernacle, as Moses was of the typical one. Moses was *faithful as a servant*, Christ as a *Son*. Moses was murmured against by Israel, defied by Pharaoh, yet God owned him, and ratified his commission. Moses was a pattern of meekness and patience, so is Christ. Moses died by the *word of the Lord*, so did Christ. *There was no prophet like unto Moses*, (Numb. 12. 6, 7. Deut. 34. 10.) but a greater than Moses is here where Christ is. He is a *Prophet of God's raising up*, for he took not this honour of himself, but was *called of God* to it. He was raised up unto Israel in the first place ; he executed this office in his own person, among them only ; they had the first offer of divine grace made to them ; and therefore he was *raised up from among them ; of them, as concerning the flesh, Christ came* ; which, as it was a great honour done to them, so it was both an obligation upon them, and an encouragement to them, to embrace him. If he *come to his own*, one would think, they should *receive him*. The Old Testament church was blessed with many prophets, with *schools of prophets*, for many ages with a constant succession of prophets ; (which is here taken notice of, from *Samuel, and those that follow after*, v. 24. for from him the prophetic era did commence ;) but those servants being abused, last of all God sent them his Son who had been in his bosom.

(3.) They must believe that *times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord*, (v. 19.) and that they will be the *times of the restitution of*

all things, v. 21. There is a future state, another life after this ; *those times will come from the presence of the Lord*, from his glorious appearance at that day, his coming at the *end of time*. The absence of the *Lord* occasions many of the securities of sinners, and the distrusts of saints ; but his *presence* is hastening on, which will for ever silence both. *Behold, the Judge standeth before the door*. The *presence of the Lord* will introduce, [1.] *The restitution of all things*, (v. 21.) the *new heavens, and the new earth*, which will be the product of the dissolution of *all things*, (Rev. 21. 1.) the renovation of the whole creation, which is that which it grieves after, as its present burthen under the sin of man is that which it groans under. Some understand this of a state on this side the end of time ; but it is rather to be understood of that *end of all things, which God hath spoken of by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began* ; for this is that which *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of*, (Jude 14.) and the temporal judgments, which the other prophets foretold, were typical of that which the apostle calls the *eternal judgment*. This is more clearly and plainly revealed in the New Testament than it had been before, and all that receive the gospel have an expectation of it. [2.] With this will come the *times of refreshing*, (v. 19.) of consolation to the *Lord's people*, like a cool shade to those that have borne the burthen and heat of the day. All Christians look for a rest that remains for the people of God, after the travels and toils of their present state, and, with the prospect of that, they are borne up under their present sufferings, and carried on in their present services. The *refreshing* that then comes from the *presence of the Lord*, will continue eternally in the *presence of the Lord*.

2. He tells them what they must do.

(1.) They must *repent*, must bethink themselves of what they have done amiss, must return to their right mind, admit a second thought, and submit to the convictions of it ; they must begin anew. Peter, who had himself denied Christ, repented, and he would have them to do so too.

(2.) They must be *converted*, must face about, and direct both their faces and steps the contrary way to what they had been ; they must *return to the Lord their God*, from whom they had revolted. It is not enough to *repent* of sin, but we must be *converted* from it, and not return to it again. They must not only exchange the profession of Judaism for that of Christianity, but the power and dominion of a carnal, worldly, sensual, mind, for that of holy, heavenly, and divine, principles and affections.

(3.) They must hear Christ, the *great Prophet* ; *"Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you"*. Attend his dictates, receive his doctrine, submit to his government. *Hear him* with a divine faith, as prophets should be heard, that come with a divine commission. *Him shall ye hear*, and to him you shall subscribe with an implicit faith and obedience. *Hear him in all things* ; let his laws govern all your actions, and his counsels determine all your submissions. Whenever he has a mouth to speak, you must have an ear to hear." Whatever he saith to us, though ever so displeasing to flesh and blood, bid it welcome. *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears*.

A good reason is here given why we should be observant of, and obedient to, the word of Christ ; for it is at our peril if we turn a deaf ear to his call, and a stiff neck to his yoke ; (v. 23.) *Every soul which will not hear that Prophet*, and be directed by what he saith, *shall be destroyed from among the people*. The destruction of the city and nation, by war and famine, was threatened for slighting the prophets of the Old Testament ; but the destruction of the soul, a spiritual and eternal destruction, is

threatened for slighting Christ, *this great Prophet*. They that will not be advised by the *Saviour*, can expect no other than to fall into the hands of the destroyer.

3. He tells them what they might expect.

(1.) That they should have the pardon of their sins; this is always spoken of as the great privilege of all those that embrace the gospel; (v. 19.) *Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out*. This implies, [1.] That the remission of sin is the blotting of it out, as a cloud is blotted out by the beams of the sun, (Isa. 44. 22.) as a debt is crossed and blotted out, when it is remitted. It intimates, that when God forgives sin, he remembers it no more against the sinner; it is forgotten, as that which is blotted out; all the bitter things written against the sinner, (Job 13. 26.) are wiped out as it were with a sponge; it is the cancelling of a bond, the vacating of a judgment. [2.] We cannot expect that our sins should be pardoned, unless we repent of them, and turn from them to God. Though Christ has died to purchase the remission of sin, yet, that we may have the benefit of that purchase in the forgiveness of our sins, we must repent, and be converted: if no repentance, no remission. [3.] Hopes of the pardon of sin upon repentance should be a powerful inducement to us to repent. Repent, that your sins may be blotted out: and that repentance is evangelical, which flows from an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, and the hopes of pardon. This was the first and great argument, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. [4.] The most comfortable fruit of the forgiveness of our sins will be when the times of refreshing shall come; if our sins be forgiven us, we have now reason to be of good cheer; but the comfort will be complete, when the pardon shall be allowed in open court, and our justification published before angels and men; when, whom he justified, them he glorifies, Rom. 8. 30. As now we are the sons of God, (1 John 3. 2.) so now we have our sins blotted out; but it doth not yet appear what are the blessed fruits of it, till the times of refreshing shall come. During these times of toil and conflict, (doubts and fears within, troubles and dangers without,) we cannot have that full satisfaction of our pardon, and in it, that we shall have when the refreshing times come, which shall wipe away all tears.

(2.) That they should have the comfort of Christ's coming, (v. 20, 21.) "*He shall send Jesus Christ, the same Jesus, the very same which before was preached unto you*; for you must not expect another dispensation, another gospel, but the continuance and completion of this; you must not expect another prophet like unto Jesus, as Moses bid you expect another like unto him; for though the heavens must receive him till the times of the restitution of all things, yet, if you repent and be converted, you shall find no want of him; some way or other he shall be seen to you."

[1.] We must not expect Christ's personal presence with us in this world; for the heavens, which received him out of the sight of the disciples, must retain him till the end of time. To that seat of the blessed his bodily presence is confined, and will be to the end of time, the accomplishment of all things; so it may be read: and therefore those dishonour him, and deceive themselves, who dream of his corporal presence in the eucharist. It is agreeable to a state of trial and probation, that the glorified Redeemer should be out of sight, because we must live by that faith in him, which is the evidence of things not seen; because he must be believed on in the world, he must be received up into glory. Dr. Hammond reads it, *Who must receive the heavens*, that is, who must receive the glory and power of the upper world; he must reign till all be made subject to him, 1 Cor. 15. 25. Ps. 75. 2.

[2.] Yet it is promised that he shall be sent to all that repent, and are converted; (v. 20.) "*He shall send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you by his disciples, both before and since his resurrection, and is, and will be, all in all to them*." First, "You shall have his spiritual presence; he that is sent into the world, shall be sent to you; you shall have the comfort of his being sent; he shall be sent among you in his gospel, which shall be his tabernacle, his chariot of war." Secondly, "*He shall send Jesus Christ to destroy Jerusalem, and the nation of unbelieving Jews, that are enemies to Christ and christianity, and to deliver his ministers and people from them, and give them a quiet profession of the gospel, and that shall be a time of refreshing, which you shall share in*." Then had the churches rest; so Dr. Hammond. Thirdly, "*The sending of Christ to judge the world, at the end of time, will be a blessing to you; you shall then lift up your heads with joy, knowing that your redemption draws nigh*." It seems to refer to this, for till then the heavens must receive him, v. 21. As God's counsels from eternity, so his predictions from the beginning of time, had a reference to the transactions of the last day, when the mystery of God shall be finished, as he had declared to his servants the prophets, Rev. 10. 7. The institution of all things in the church, had an eye to the restitution of all things at the end of time.

4. He tells them what ground they had to expect these things, if they were converted to Christ. Though they had denied him, and put him to death, yet they might hope to find favour through him, upon the account of their being Israelites. For,

(1.) As Israelites, they had the monopoly of the grace of the Old Testament, they were, above any other, God's favourite nation, and the favours God bestowed upon them were such as had a reference to the Messiah, and his kingdom; Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant. A double privilege!

[1.] They were the children, that is, the disciples, of the prophets, as children at school; not sons of the prophets, in the sense that we read of such in the Old Testament, from Samuel and downward, who were, or are, trained up to be endued with the spirit of prophecy; but you are of that people, from among whom prophets were raised up, and to whom prophets were sent. It is spoken of as a great favour to Israel, that God raised up of their sons for prophets, Amos 2. 11. All the inspired writers, both of the Old and New Testament, were of the seed of Abraham; and it was their honour and advantage, that unto them were committed the oracles of God, Rom. 3. 2. Their government was constituted by prophecy, that is, by divine revelation: and by it their affairs were for many ages very much managed. See Hos. 12. 13. By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved. Those of the latter ages of the church, when prophecy had ceased, might yet be fitly called the children of the prophets, because they heard, though they did not know, the voices of the prophets, which were read in their synagogues every sabbath-day, Acts 13. 27. Now this should quicken them to embrace Christ, and they might hope to be accepted of him; for their own prophets had foretold, that this grace should be brought unto them at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (1 Pet. 1. 13.) and therefore ought not to be neglected by them, nor should be denied to them. Those that are blessed with prophets and prophecy, (as all are, that have the scriptures,) are concerned not to receive the grace of God therein in vain. We may apply it particularly to ministers' children, who, if they plead that effectually with themselves, as an inducement to be faithful and forward in religion,

may comfortably plead it with God, and hope that the children of God's servants shall continue.

[2.] They were the children, that is, the heirs, of the covenant which God made with our fathers, as children in the family. God's covenant was made with Abraham and his seed, and they were that seed with whom the covenant was made, and on whom the blessings of the covenant were entailed; "The promise of the Messiah was made to you, and therefore if you forsake not your own mercies, and do not by an obstinate infidelity put a bar in your own door, you may hope it shall be made good to you." That promise here mentioned, as the principal article of the covenant, *In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed*, though referring principally to Christ, (Gal. 3. 16.) yet may include the church also, which is his body, all believers, that are the spiritual seed of Abraham. All the kindreds of the earth were blessed in having a church for Christ among them; and those that were the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, stood fairest for this privilege. If all the kindreds of the earth were to be blessed in Christ, much more that kindred, his kinsmen according to the flesh.

(2.) As Israelites, they had the first offer of the grace of the New Testament. Because they were the children of the prophets and the covenant, therefore to them the Redeemer was first sent; which was an encouragement to them to hope that if they did repent, and were converted, he should be yet further sent for their comfort; (v. 20.) "He shall send Jesus Christ, for to you first he hath sent him, v. 26. Unto you first, you Jews, though not to you only, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, appointed and authorized him to be a Prince and a Saviour, and, in confirmation of that, raised him from the dead, sent him to bless you, to make a tender of his blessing to you, especially that great blessing of turning every one of you from his iniquities; and therefore it concerns you to receive this blessing, and turn from your iniquities, and you may be encouraged to hope that you shall."

[1.] We are here told whence Christ had his mission; God raised up his son Jesus, and sent him. God raised him up, when he constituted him a Prophet, owned him by a voice from heaven; and filled him with his Spirit without measure, and then sent him; for to that end he raised him up, that he might be his Commissioner to treat of peace. He sent him to bear witness of the truth, sent him to seek and save lost souls, sent him against his enemies, to conquer them. Some refer the raising of him up, to the resurrection, which was the first step toward his exaltation; that was, as it were, the renewing of his commission; and though, having raised him up, he seemed presently to take him from us, yet he did really send him afresh to us in his gospel and Spirit.

[2.] To whom he was sent; "Unto you first. You of the seed of Abraham, you that are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant, to you is the tender made of gospel-grace." The personal ministry of Christ, as that of the prophets, was confined to the Jews; he was not then sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and he forbade the disciples he then sent forth, to go any further. After his resurrection, he was to be preached indeed to all nations, but they must begin at Jerusalem, Luke 24. 47. And when they went to other nations, they first preached to the Jews they found therein. They were the first-born, and, as such, had the privilege of the first offer. So far were they from being excluded for their putting of Christ to death, that, when he is risen, he is first sent to them, and they are primarily intended to have benefit by his death.

[3.] On what errand he was sent; "He is sent to you first to bless you, that is his primary errand, not

to condemn you, as you deserve, but to justify you, if you will accept of the justification offered you, in the way wherein it is offered; but he that sends him first to bless you, if you refuse and reject that blessing, will send him to curse you with a curse." Mal. 4. 6. Note, First, Christ's errand into the world was to bless us, to bring a blessing with him, for the Sun of righteousness rose with healing under his wings; and when he left the world, he left a blessing behind him, for he was parted from the disciples as he blessed them, Luke 24. 51. He sent his Spirit to be the great Blessing, the Blessing of blessings, Isa. 44. 3. It is by Christ that God sends blessings to us, and through him only we can expect to receive them. Secondly, The great blessing wherewith Christ came to bless us, was, the turning of us away from our iniquities, the saving of us from our sins, (Matt. 1. 21.) to turn us from sin, that we may be qualified to receive all other blessings; sin is that which naturally we cleave to, the design of divine grace is to turn us from it, nay, to turn us against it, that we may not only forsake it, but hate it; the gospel has a direct tendency to it, not only as it requires us, every one of us, to turn from our iniquities, but as it promises us grace to enable us to do so. "Therefore, do your part; repent, and be converted, because Christ is ready to do his, in turning you from your iniquities, and so blessing you."

CHAP. IV.

In going over the two last chapters, where we met with so many good things that the apostles did, I wondered what was become of the Scribes and Pharisees, and chief priests, that they did not appear to contradict and oppose them, as they had used to treat Christ himself; surely they were so confounded at first with the pouring out of the Spirit, that they were for a time struck dumb! But I find we have not lost them, their forces rally again, and here we have an encounter between them and the apostles; for from the beginning the gospel met with opposition. Here, I. Peter and John are taken up, upon a warrant from the priests, and committed to jail, v. 1. . 4. II. They are examined by a committee of the great Sanhedrim, v. 5. . 7. III. They bravely avow what they have done, and preach Christ to their persecutors, v. 8. . 12. IV. Their persecutors, being unable to answer them, enjoin them silence, threaten them if they go on to preach the gospel, and so dismiss them, v. 13. . 22. V. They apply themselves to God by prayer, for the further operations of that grace which they had already experienced, v. 23. . 30. VI. God owns them, both outwardly and inwardly, by manifest tokens of his presence with them, v. 31. . 33. VII. The believers had their hearts knit together in holy love, and enlarged their charity to the poor, and the church flourished more than ever, to the glory of Christ, v. 33. . 37.

1. **AND** as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them; 2. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. 4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

We have here the interests of the kingdom of heaven successfully carried on, and the powers of darkness appearing against them to put a stop to them. Let Christ's servants be ever so resolute, Satan's agents will be spiteful; and therefore, let Satan's agents be ever so spiteful, Christ's servants ought to be resolute.

I. The apostles, Peter and John, went on in their work, and did not labour in vain. The Spirit ena-

bled the ministers to do their part, and the people their's.

1. The preachers faithfully delivered the doctrine of Christ; *They spake unto the people*, to all that were within hearing, *v. 1.* What they said, concerned them all, and they spake it openly and publicly. *They taught the people, still taught the people knowledge; taught those that as yet did not believe*, for their conviction and conversion; and *taught those that did believe*, for their comfort and establishment. *They preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.* This doctrine of the resurrection of the *Dead*, (1.) Was verified in Jesus; this they proved, that *Jesus Christ was risen from the dead, was the First, the Chief, that should rise from the dead, ch. 26. 23.* *They preached the resurrection of Christ*, as their warrant for what they did. Or, (2.) It is secured by him to *all believers.* *The resurrection of the dead* includes all the happiness of the *future state*; this they preached through *Jesus Christ, attainable through him*, (Phil. 3. 10, 11.) and through him only. They meddled not with matters of state, but kept to their business, and preached to people heaven as their end, and Christ as their Way. See *ch. 17. 18.*

2. The hearers cheerfully receive it; (*v. 4.*) *Many of them which heard the word, believed*; not all, perhaps not the most, yet many, to the number of about five thousand, over and above the three thousand we read of before. See how the gospel got ground, and it was the effect of the *pouring out of the Spirit*! Though the preachers were persecuted, the word prevailed; for sometimes the church's suffering days have been her growing days; the days of her infancy were so.

II. *The chief priests* and their party now made head against them, and did what they could to crush them; their hands were tied a while, but their hearts were not in the least changed. Now here observe,

1. Who they were, that appeared against the apostles; they were the *priests*; you may be sure, in the first place, they were always sworn enemies to Christ and his gospel; they were as jealous for their priesthood as Cæsar for his monarchy, and would not bear one they thought their rival, now when he was preached as a Priest, as much as when he did preach as a Prophet. With them joined the *captain of the temple*, who, it is supposed, was a Roman officer, governor of the garrison that was placed in the tower of Antonia, for the guard of the temple: so that still here were both Jews and Gentiles confederate against Christ. *The Sadducees* also were zealous against them, who denied the *being of spirits and the future state*. "One would wonder (saith Mr. Baxter) what should make such brutists, as the *Sadducees* were, to be such furious silencers and persecutors. If there is no life to come, what harm can other men's hopes of it do them? But in depraved souls all faculties are vitiated. A blind mind has a malignant heart and a cruel hand, to this day."

2. How they stood affected to the apostles' preaching; *They were grieved that they taught the people, v. 2.* It grieved them, both that the gospel-doctrine was preached, (was so preached, so publicly, so boldly,) and that the people were so ready to hear it. They thought, when they had put Christ to such an ignominious death, his disciples would ever after be ashamed and afraid to own him, and the people would have invincible prejudices against his doctrine; and now it vexed them to see themselves disappointed, and that his gospel gets ground, instead of losing it. *The wicked shall see it, and be grieved, Ps. 112. 10.* They were grieved at that which they should have rejoiced in, at that which angels rejoice in. Miserable is *their* case, to whom

the glory of Christ's kingdom is a grief; for since the glory of that kingdom is everlasting, it follows of course, that their grief will be everlasting too. It grieved them that the apostles *preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.* *The Sadducees* were grieved that the *resurrection from the dead* was preached; for they opposed that doctrine, and could not bear to hear of a *future state*, to hear it so well attested. *The chief priests* were grieved that they preached the resurrection of the dead through Jesus, that he should have the honour of it; and though they professed to believe the resurrection of the dead against the *Sadducees*, yet they would rather give up that important article than have it preached and proved to be through Jesus.

3. How far they proceeded against the apostles; (*v. 3.*) *They laid hands on them*, (that is, their servants and officers did at their command,) and put them in hold, committed them to the custody of the proper officer until the next day; they could not examine them now, for it was *even-tide*, and yet would defer it no longer than *till next day*. See how God trains up his servants for sufferings by degrees, and by lesser trials prepares them for greater; now they resist unto bonds only, but afterward to blood.

5. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6. And Annas the High-Priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the High-Priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? 8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. 13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

We have here the trial of Peter and John before the judges of the ecclesiastical court, for preaching a sermon concerning Jesus Christ, and working a miracle in his name. This is charged upon them as a crime, which was the best service they could do to God or men.

1. Here is the court set; an extraordinary court, it should seem, was called on purpose upon this occasion. Observe,

1. The time when the court sat, (*v. 5.*) on the

morrow; not in the *night*, as when Christ was to be tried before them, for they seem not to have been so hot upon this prosecution as they were upon that; it was well if they began to relent. But they adjourned it to the *morrow*, and no longer; for they were impatient to get them silenced, and would lose no time.

2. The *place* where—in *Jerusalem*; (v. 6.) there it was that he told his disciples they must expect to suffer hard things, as he had done before them in that place. This seems to come in here as an aggravation of their sin, that in Jerusalem, where there were so many that *looked for redemption* before it came, yet there were more that would not look upon it when it did come. How is that faithful city become a harlot! See Matt. 23. 37. It was in the foresight of Jerusalem's standing in her own light, that Christ beheld the city, and wept over it.

3. The judges of the court. (1.) Their general character; they were *rulers, elders, and Scribes, v. 5.* The Scribes were men of learning, who came to dispute with the apostles, and hoped to confute them. The rulers and elders were men in power, who, if they could not answer them, thought they could find some cause or other to silence them. If the gospel of Christ had not been of God, it could not have made its way, for it had both the learning and power of the world against it, both the colleges of the Scribes and the courts of the elders. (2.) The names of some of them who were most considerable. Here were Annas and Caiaphas, ring-leaders in this persecution; Annas, the president of the Sanhedrim, and Caiaphas, the High-Priest, (though Annas is here called so,) and *father of the house of judgment.* It should seem that Annas and Caiaphas executed the High-Priest's office alternately, year for year; they two were most active against Christ; then Caiaphas was High-Priest, now Annas was; however, they were both equally malignant against Christ and his gospel. John is supposed to be the son of Annas; and Alexander is mentioned by Josephus, as a man that made a figure at that time. There were others likewise that were of the kindred of the High-Priest, who, having dependence on him, and expectations from him, would be sure to say as he said, and vote with him against the apostles. Great relations, and not good, have been a snare to many.

II. The prisoners are arraigned, v. 7.

1. They are brought to the bar; they *set them in the midst*, for the Sanhedrim sat in a circle, and they who had any thing to do in the court, stood or sat in the midst of them; (Luke 2. 46.) so Dr. Lightfoot. Thus the scripture was fulfilled, *The assembly of the wicked has enclosed me*, Ps. 22. 16. *They compassed me about like bees*, Ps. 118. 12. They were seated on every side.

2. The question they asked them, was, "*By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? By what authority do ye these things?*" (The same question that they had asked their Master, Matt. 21. 23.) "Who commissioned you to preach such a doctrine as this, and empowered you to work such a miracle as this? You have no warrant or license from us, and therefore are accountable to us whence you have your warrant." Some think this question was grounded upon a fond conceit that the very naming of some names might do wonders, as *ch. 19. 13.* The Jewish exorcists made use of the name of *Jesus*. Now they would know what name they made use of in their cure, and consequently, what name they set themselves to advance in their preaching. They knew very well that they preached *Jesus*, and the resurrection of the dead, and the healing of the sick, *through Jesus*; (v. 2.) yet they ask them, to tease them, and try if they could get any thing out of them that looked criminal.

III. The plea they put in, the design of which was not so much to clear and secure themselves as to advance the name and honour of their Master, who had told them that their being brought before governors and kings would give them an opportunity of preaching the gospel to those whom otherwise they could not have had access to, and it should be a *testimony against them*. Mark 13. 9. Observe,

1. By whom this plea was *drawn up*; it was dictated by the *Holy Ghost*, who fitted Peter more than before for this occasion. The apostles, with a holy negligence of their own preservation, set themselves to preach Christ, as he had directed them to do in such a case, and then Christ made good to them his promise, that the Holy Ghost should *give them in that same hour what they should speak*. Christ's faithful advocates shall never want instructions, Mark 13. 11.

2. To whom it was given in; Peter, who is still the chief speaker, addresses himself to the judges of the court, as the *rulers of the people and elders of Israel*; for the wickedness of those in power does not divest them of their power, but the consideration of the power they are intrusted with, should prevail to divest them of their wickedness. "You are rulers and elders, and should know more than others of the signs of the times, and not oppose that which you are bound by the duty of your place to embrace and advance, that is, the kingdom of the Messiah; you are rulers and elders of Israel, God's people, and if you mislead them, and cause them to err, you will have a great deal to answer for."

3. What the plea is; it is a solemn declaration.

(1.) That what they did was in the *name of Jesus Christ*, which was a direct answer to the question the court asked them; (v. 9, 10.) "*If we this day be examined, be called to an account as criminals, so the word signifies, for a good deed (as any one will own it to be) done to the impotent man, if this be the ground of the commitment, this the matter of the indictment, if we are put to the question, by what means, or by whom, he is made whole; we have an answer ready, and it is the same we gave to the people, (ch. 3. 16.) we will repeat it to you, as that which we will stand by, Be it known to you all who pretend to be ignorant of this matter, and not to you only, but to all the people of Israel, for they are all concerned to know it, that by the name of Jesus Christ, that precious, powerful, prevailing name, that name above every name, even by him whom you in contempt called Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, both rulers and people, and whom God hath raised from the dead, and advanced to the highest dignity and dominion, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole; a monument of the power of the Lord Jesus.*" Here,

[1.] He justifies what he and his colleague had done in curing the lame man; it was a good deed; it was a kindness to the man that had begged, but could not work for his living; a kindness to the temple, and to them that went in to worship, who were now freed from the noise and clamour of that common beggar. "Now if we be reckoned with for this good deed, we have no reason to be ashamed, 1 Pet. 2. 20. *ch. 4. 14, 16.* Let them be ashamed, who bring us into trouble for it." Note, It is no new thing for good men to suffer ill for doing well. *Bene agere & male pati vere christianum est—To do well and to suffer punishment is the christian's lot.*

[2.] He transfers all the praise and glory of that good deed to *Jesus Christ*. "It is by him, and not by any power of our's, that this man is cured." He seeks not to raise an interest for themselves, or to recommend themselves by it to the good opinion of the court; but, "Let the Lord alone be exalted, no matter what comes of us."

[3.] He charges it upon the judges themselves,

that they had been the murderers of this Jesus; "It is he *whom ye crucified*, look how you will answer it;" in order to the bringing of them to *believe in Christ*, (for he aims at no less than that,) he endeavours to convince them of sin, of that sin which, one would think, of all others, was most likely to startle conscience—their putting Christ to death. Let them take it how they will, Peter will miss no occasion to tell them of it.

[4.] He attests the resurrection of Christ as the strongest testimony for him, and against his persecutors; "*They crucified him*, but God *raised him from the dead*, they took away his life, but God gave it him again, and your further opposition to his interest will speed no better." He tells them that God *raised him from the dead*, and they could not for shame answer him with that foolish suggestion, that they palmed upon the people, that *his disciples came by night and stole him away*.

[5.] He preaches this to all the by-standers, to be by them repeated to all their neighbours, and commands all manner of persons, from the highest to the lowest, to take notice of it at their peril; "*Be it known to you all*, that are here present, and it shall be made known to all the people of Israel, wherever they are dispersed, in spite of all your endeavours to stifle and suppress the notice of it; as the Lord God of gods knows, so Israel shall know, all Israel shall know, that wonders are wrought in the name of Jesus, not by repeating it as a charm, but believing in it as a divine revelation of grace and good will to men.

(2.) That the name of this Jesus, by the authority of which they acted, is that name alone *by which men can be saved*. He passes from this particular instance to shew that it is not a particular sect, a party, that is designed to be set up by the doctrine they preached, and the miracle they wrought, which people might either join with, or keep off from, at their pleasure, as it was with the sects of the philosophers, and those among the Jews; but it is a sacred and divine institution that is hereby ratified and confirmed, and which all people are highly concerned to submit to, and come into the measures of. It is not an indifferent thing, but of an *absolute necessity*, that people *believe* in this name, and call upon it.

[1.] We are obliged to it, in *duty to God*, and in compliance with his designs; (v. 11.) "*This is the Stone which was set at nought of you builders*, you that are the *rulers of the people*, and the *elders of Israel*, that should be the builders of the church, that pretend to be so; for the church is *God's building*. Here was a Stone offered you, to be put in the chief place of the building, to be the main Pillar on which the fabric might entirely rest; but you *set it at nought*, rejected it, would not make use of it, but threw it by as good for nothing but to make a stepping-stone of; but this Stone is *now become the Head of the corner*; God has *raised up* this Jesus, whom you rejected, and, by setting him at his right hand, has made him both the *Corner-Stone* and the *Head-Stone*, the Centre of unity and the Fountain of power." Probably, St. Peter here chose to make use of this quotation, because Christ had himself made use of it in answer to the demand of the chief priests and the elders concerning his authority, not long before this, Matt. 21. 42. Scripture is a tried weapon in our spiritual conflicts; let us therefore stick to it.

[2.] We are obliged to it for our own interest. We are undone if we do not take shelter in this name, and make it our refuge and strong tower; for we cannot be saved but by Jesus Christ, and if we be not eternally saved, we are eternally undone; (v. 12.) *Neither is there salvation in any other*. As there is no other name by which diseased bodies can be

cured, so there is no other by which sinful souls can be saved. "By him, and him only, by receiving and embracing his doctrine, salvation must *now be hoped for by all*. For there is no other religion in the world, no not that delivered by Moses, by which salvation can be had for those that do not now come into this, at the preaching of it." So Dr. Hammond. Observe here, *First*, Our salvation is our chief concern, and that which ought to lie nearest our hearts; our rescue from wrath and the curse, and our restoration to God's favour and blessing. *Secondly*, Our salvation is not in ourselves, nor can be obtained by any merit or strength of our own; we can destroy ourselves, but we cannot save ourselves. *Thirdly*, There are among men many names that pretend to be saving names, but really are not so; many institutions in religion that pretend to settle a reconciliation and correspondence between God and man, but cannot do it. *Fourthly*, It is only by Christ and his name that those favours can be expected from God, which are necessary to our salvation, and that our services can be accepted with God. This is the honour of Christ's name, that it is the *only name whereby we must be saved*; the only name we have to plead in all our addresses to God. This name is given, God has appointed it, and it is an inestimable benefit freely conferred upon us. It is given *under heaven*; Christ has not only a great name *in heaven*, but a great name *under heaven*; for he has all power both in the upper and in the lower world. It is given *among men*, who need salvation, men who are ready to perish. We may be saved *by his name*, that name of his, *The Lord our Righteousness*; and we cannot be saved by any other. How far those who have not the knowledge of Christ, nor any actual faith in him, yet live up to the light they have, may find favour with God, it is not our business to determine. But this we know, that, whatever saving favour such may receive, it is upon the account of Christ, and for his sake only; so that still *there is no salvation in any other*. *I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me*, Isa. 45. 4.

IV. The stand that the court was put to, in the prosecution by this plea, v. 13, 14. Now was fulfilled that promise Christ made, that he would give them a *mouth and wisdom*, such as *all their adversaries should not be able to gainsay or resist*.

1. They could not deny the cure of the lame man to be both a *good deed* and a *miracle*; he was there standing with Peter and John, ready to attest the cure, if there was occasion, and they had *nothing to say against it*, (v. 14.) either to disprove it, or to disparage it. It was well that it was *not on the sabbath-day*, else they would have had that to say against it.

2. They could not, with all their pomp and power, face down Peter and John; this was a miracle not inferior to the cure of the lame man, considering both what cruel bloody enemies these priests had been to the name of Christ, (enough to make any one tremble that appeared for him,) and considering what cowardly faint-hearted advocates those disciples had lately been for him; Peter particularly, who denied him for fear of a silly maid; yet now they see the *boldness of Peter and John*, v. 13. Probably, there was something extraordinary and very surprising in their looks, they appeared not only undaunted by the rulers, but daring and daunting to them; they had something majestic in their foreheads, sparkling in their eyes, and commanding, if not terrifying, in their voice. They *set their faces like a flint*, as the prophet, Isa. 50. 7. Ezek. 3. 8. The courage of Christ's faithful confessors has often been the confusion of their cruel persecutors. Now,

(1.) We are here told what increased their wonder; *They perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men*: they inquired either of themselves

or others, and found that they were of mean extraction, born in Galilee, that they were bred fishermen, and had no learned education, had never been at any university, were not brought up at the feet of any of the Rabbins, had never been conversant in courts, camps, or colleges; nay, perhaps talk to them at this time upon any point in natural philosophy, mathematics, or politics, and you will find they know nothing of the matter; and yet speak to them of the Messiah and his kingdom, and they speak with so much clearness, evidence, and assurance, so pertinently, and so fluently, and are so ready in the scriptures of the Old Testament relating to it, that the learnedest judge upon the bench is not able to answer them, or to enter the lists with them. They were ignorant men—*idiotai*, private men, men that had not any public character or employment; and therefore they wondered they should have such high pretensions. They were *idiots*; (so the word signifies;) they looked upon them with as much contempt as if they had been mere naturals, and expected no more from them, which made them wonder to see what freedom they took.

(2.) We are told what made their wonder in a great measure to cease; they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus; they themselves, it is probable, had seen them with him in the temple, and now recollected that they had seen them, or some of their servants or those about them informed them of it, for they would not be thought themselves to have taken notice of such inferior people. But when they understood that they had been with Jesus, had been conversant with him, attendant on him, and trained up under him, they knew what to impute their boldness to; nay, their boldness in divine things was enough to shew with whom they had had their education. Note, Those that have been with Jesus, in converse and communion with him, have been attending on his word, praying in his name, and celebrating the memorials of his death and resurrection, should conduct themselves, in every thing, so that those who converse with them, may take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus. And that makes them so holy, and heavenly, and spiritual, and cheerful; that has raised them so much above this world, and filled them with another. One may know that they have been in the mount by the shining of their faces.

15. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16. Saying, What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. 17. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. 18. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 21. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for

that which was done. 22. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

We have here the issue of the trial of Peter and John before the council; they came off now with flying colours, because they must be trained up to sufferings by degrees; and by lesser trials be prepared for greater; they now but *run with the foot men*, hereafter we shall have them *contending with horses*, Jer. 12. 5.

I. Here is the consultation and resolution of the court about this matter, and their proceeding thereupon.

1. The prisoners were ordered to withdraw; (v. 15.) They commanded them to go aside out of the council; willing enough to get clear of them, (they spake so home to their consciences,) and not willing they should hear the acknowledgments that were extorted from them: but though they might not hear them, we have them here upon record. The designs of Christ's enemies are carried on in close cabals, and they dig deep, as if they would hide their counsils from the Lord.

2. A debate arose upon this matter; they conferred among themselves; every one is desired to speak his mind freely, and to give advice upon this important affair. Now the scripture was fulfilled, that the rulers would take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed, Ps. 2. 2. The question proposed, was, What shall we do to these men? v. 16. If they would have yielded to the convincing commanding power of truth, it had been easy to say what they should do to these men. They should have placed them at the head of their council, and receive their doctrine, and been baptized by them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and joined in fellowship with them. But when men will not be persuaded to do what they should do, it is no marvel that they are ever and anon at a loss what to do. The truths of Christ, if men would but entertain them as they should, would give them no manner of trouble or uneasiness; but if they hold them or imprison them in unrighteousness, (Rom. 1. 18.) they will find them a burthensome stone that they will not know what to do with, Zech. 12. 3.

3. They came at last to a resolution, in two things. (1.) That it was not safe to punish the apostles for what they had done; very willingly they would have done it, but they had not courage to do it, because the people espoused their cause, and cried up the miracle; and they stood now in as much awe of them as they had done formerly, when they durst not lay hands on Christ for fear of the people. By which it appears that the outcry of the mob against our Saviour, was a forced or managed thing, the stream soon returned to its former channel. Now they could not find how they might punish Peter and John, what colour they might have for it, because of the people. They knew it would be an unrighteous thing to punish them, and therefore should have been restrained from it by the fear of God; but they considered it only as a dangerous thing, and therefore were held in from it, only by the fear of the people. For,

[1.] The people were convinced of the truth of the miracle; it was a notable miracle, *γὰρ οὕτως*—a known miracle; it was known that they did it in Christ's name, and that Christ himself had often done the like before; this was a known instance of the power of Christ and a proof of his doctrine; that it was a great miracle, and wrought for the confirmation of the doctrine they preached, (for it was a sign,) was manifest to all that dwelt in Jerusalem; it was an opinion universally received, and the miracle being wrought at the gate of the temple, universal notice was taken of it; and they themselves, with

all the craft and all the front they had, *could not deny it to be a true miracle*; every body would have hooted at them if they had. They could easily deny it to their own consciences, but not to the world. The proofs of the gospel were undeniable.

[2.] They went further, and were not only convinced of the truth of the miracle, but all men *glorified God for that which was done*; even those that were not persuaded by it to believe in Christ, were yet so affected with it as a mercy to a poor man, and an honour to their country, that they could not but give praise to God for it; even natural religion taught them to do that. And if the priests had punished *Peter and John* for that for which all men glorified God, they would have lost all their interest in the people, and been abandoned as enemies both to God and man. Thus therefore their *wrath* shall be made to *praise God*, and the *remainder thereof* shall be *restrained*.

(2.) They yet resolve, that it is necessary to silence them for the future, *v. 17, 18*. They could not prove that they had said or done any thing amiss, and yet they must no more say or do what they have done. All their care is, that the doctrine of Christ *spread no further among the people*; as if that healing institution were a plague begun, the contagion of which must be stopped. See how the malice of hell fights against the counsels of heaven; God will have the knowledge of Christ to spread *all the world over*, but the chief priests would have it spread *no further*, which he *that sits in heaven laughs at*.

Now, to prevent the further spreading of this doctrine,

[1.] They charge the apostles never to preach it any more. *Be it enacted by their authority*, (which they think every Israelite is bound in conscience to submit to,) *That no man speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus, v. 18*. We do not find that they give them any reason why the doctrine of Christ must be suppressed; they cannot say it is either false or dangerous, or of any ill tendency, and they are ashamed to own the true reason, that it testifies against their hypocrisy and wickedness, and shocks their tyranny. But, *Stat pro ratione voluntas—They can assign no reason but their will*. “We straitly charge and command you, not only that you do not preach this doctrine publicly, but that ye *speak henceforth to no man*, not to any particular person privately, *in this name*,” *v. 17*. There is not a greater service done to the Devil’s kingdom than the silencing of faithful ministers, and the putting them under a bushel that are the lights of the world.

[2.] They threaten them if they do, straitly threaten them: it is at their peril. This court will reckon itself highly affronted if they do, and they shall fall under its displeasure. Christ had not only charged them to preach the gospel to every creature, but had promised to bear them out in it, and reward them for it. Now these priests not only forbid them to preach the gospel, but threaten to punish it as a heinous crime; but those who know how to put a *just value* upon Christ’s promises, know how to put a *just contempt* upon the world’s threatenings, though they be *threatenings of slaughter* that it *breathes out*, *ch. 9. 1*.

II. Here is the courageous resolution of the prisoners to go on in their work, notwithstanding the resolutions of this court, and their declaration of this resolution, *v. 19, 20*. *Peter and John* needed not *confer together*, to know one another’s minds, (for they were both actuated by one and the same Spirit,) but agree presently in the same sentiments, and jointly put in the answer, “*Whether it be right in the sight of God*, to whom both you and we are accountable, *to hearken unto you more than unto God*, we appeal to yourselves, *judge us*; for we cannot forbear speaking to every body the things which we

have seen and heard, and are ourselves full of, and are charged to publish.” The *prudence of the serpent* would have directed them to be silent, and though they could not with a good conscience promise that they would not preach the gospel any more, yet they needed not tell them that they would. But the *boldness of the lion* directed them thus to set both the authority and the malignity of their persecutors at defiance.

They do, in effect, tell them that they are resolved to go on in preaching, and justify themselves in it with two things.

1. The *command of God*; “You charge us not to preach the gospel, he has charged us to preach it, has committed it to us as a trust, requiring us upon our allegiance faithfully to dispense it; now whom must we obey; God or you?” There they appeal to one of the *communes notitie*—to a *settled and acknowledged maxim* in the law of nature, that if men’s commands and God’s interfere, God’s commands must take place. It is a rule in the *common-law of England*, that if any statute be made contrary to the law of God, it is null and void. Nothing can be more absurd than to hearken unto weak and fallible men that are fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects, more than unto a God that is infinitely wise and holy, our Creator and sovereign Lord, and the Judge to whom we are all accountable. The case is so plain, so uncontroverted and self-evident, that we will venture to leave it to yourselves to judge of it, though you are biassed and prejudiced. Can you think it *right in the sight of God* to break a divine command in obedience to a human injunction? That is right indeed, which is *right in the sight of God*; for his judgment, we are sure, is according to truth, and therefore by that we ought to govern ourselves.

2. The *convictions of their consciences*; though they had not had such an express command from heaven to preach the doctrine of Christ, yet they *could not but speak*, and speak publicly, those things *which they had seen and heard*. Like Elihu, they were *full of this matter*, and the *Spirit within them constrained them*, they must speak, that they might be refreshed, *Job 32. 18, 20*. (1.) They felt the influence of it upon themselves, what a blessed change it has wrought upon them, has brought them into a new world, and therefore they cannot but speak of it: and those speak the doctrine of Christ best, that have felt the power of it, and tasted the sweetness of it, and have themselves been deeply affected with it; it is as a *fire in their bones*, *Jer. 20. 9*. (2.) They know the importance of it to others; they look with concern upon perishing souls, and know they cannot escape eternal ruin but by Jesus Christ, and therefore will be faithful to them in giving them warning and shewing them the right way. They are things *which we have seen and heard*, and therefore are fully assured of ourselves; and things which we only have seen and heard; and therefore, if we do not publish them, who will? Who can? *Knowing the favour, as well as the terror, of the Lord, we persuade men; for the love of Christ and the love of souls constrain us*, *2 Cor. 5. 11, 14*.

III. There is the discharge of the prisoners; (*v. 21*.) *They further threatened them*, and thought that they frightened them, and then *let them go*. There were many whom they terrified into an obedience to their unrighteous decrees; they knew how to keep men in awe with their excommunications, (*John 9. 22*.) and thought they could have the same influence upon the apostles that they had upon other men; but they were deceived, for they had been with Jesus. They threatened them, and that was all they did now; when they had done that, they *let them go*.

1. Because they durst not contradict the people,

who glorified God for that which was done, and would have been ready (at least they thought so) to pull them out of their seats, if they had punished the apostles for doing it. As rulers by the ordinance of God are made a terror and restraint to wicked people, so people are sometimes by the providence of God made a terror and restraint to wicked rulers.

2. Because they could not contradict the miracle; For (v. 22.) *the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.* And therefore, (1.) The miracle was so much the greater; he having been lame from his mother's womb, ch. 3. 2. The older he grew, the more inveterate the disease was, and the more hardly cured. If those that are grown into years, and have been long accustomed to evil, are cured of their spiritual impotency to good, and thereby of their evil customs, the power of divine grace is therein so much the more magnified. (2.) The truth of it was so much the better attested; for the man being above forty years old, he was able, like the blind man whom Christ healed, when he was asked, to *speak for himself*, John 9. 21.

23. And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 24. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25. Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? 26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. 27. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. 29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, 30. By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. 31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

We hear no more at present of the chief priests, what they did when they had dismissed Peter and John, but are to attend those *two witnesses*. And here we have,

I. Their return to their brethren, the apostles and ministers, and perhaps some private christians; (v. 23.) *Being let go, they went to their own company*, who perhaps were at this time met together in pain for them, and praying for them; as ch. 12. 12. As soon as ever they were at liberty, they went to their old friends, and returned to their church-fellowship.

1. Though God had highly honoured them, in calling them out to be his witnesses, and enabling them to acquit themselves so well, yet they were not puffed up with the honour done them, nor thought themselves thereby exalted above their brethren,

but went to their own company. No advancement in gifts or usefulness should make us think ourselves above either the duties or the privileges of the communion of saints.

2. Though their enemies had severely threatened them, and endeavoured to break their knot, and frighten them from the work they were jointly engaged in, yet they went to their own company, and feared not the wrath of their rulers. They might have had comfort, if, being let go, they had retired to their closets, and spent some time in devotion there. But they were men in a public station, and must seek not so much their own personal satisfaction, as the public good. Christ's followers do best in company, provided it be in their own company.

II. The account they gave them of what had passed; they reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them, adding, no doubt, what they were enabled by the grace of God to reply to them, and how their trial issued. They related it to them,

1. That they might know what to expect both from men and from God in the progress of their work; from men they might expect every thing that was terrifying, but from God every thing that was encouraging; men would do their utmost to run them down, but God would take effectual care to bear them up. Thus the brethren in the Lord would wax confident through their bonds, and their experiences, as Phil. 1. 14.

2. That they might have it recorded in the history of the church, for the benefit of posterity, particularly for the confirmation of our faith touching the resurrection of Christ. The silence of an adversary, in some cases, is next door to the consent and testimony of an adversary. These apostles told the chief priests to their faces, that God had raised up Jesus from the dead, and though they were a body of them together, they had not the confidence to deny it, but in the silliest and most sneaking manner imaginable, bid the apostles not tell any body of it.

3. That they might now join with them in prayers and praises; and by such a concert as this God would be the more glorified, and the church the more edified. We should therefore communicate to our brethren the providences of God that relate to us, and our experience of his presence with us, that they may assist us in our acknowledgment of God therein.

III. Their address to God upon this occasion; When they heard of the impotent malice of the priests, and the potent courage of the sufferers, they called their company together, and went to prayer; they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, v.

24. Not that it can be supposed that they all said the same words at the same time, (though it was possible they might, being all inspired by one and the same Spirit,) but one in the name of the rest lifted up his voice to God, and the rest joined with him, *ὁμοθυμῶν*—with one mind; (so the word signifies;) their hearts went along with him, and so though but one spake, they all prayed; one lifted up his voice, and, in concurrence with him, they all lifted up their hearts, which was, in effect, lifting up their voice to God; for thoughts are words to God. Moses cried unto God, when we find not a word said.

Now in this solemn address to God, we have,

1. Their adoration of God as the Creator of the world; (v. 24.) With one mind, and so, in effect, with one mouth, they glorified God, Rom. 15. 6. They said, "O Lord, thou art God, God alone; *Διότι*, thou art our Master and sovereign Ruler," (so the word signifies,) "thou art God; God, and not man; God, and not the work of men's hands; the Creator of all, and not the creature of men's fancies. Thou art the God which hast made hea-

ven and earth, and the sea, the upper and lower world, and all the creatures that are in both." Thus we Christians distinguish ourselves from the heathen, that, while they worship gods which they have made, we are worshipping the God that made us and all the world. And it is very proper to begin our prayers, as well as our creed, with the acknowledgment of *this*, that God is the *Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible*. Though the apostles were at this time full of the mystery of the world's redemption, yet they do not forget or overlook the history of the world's creation; for the Christian religion was intended to confirm and improve, not to eclipse or justle out, the truths and dictates of natural religion. It is a great encouragement to God's servants, both in doing work, and suffering work, that they serve the God that made all things, and therefore has the disposal of their times, and all events concerning them, and is able to strengthen them under all their difficulties. And if we give him the glory of this, we may take the comfort of it.

2. Their reconciling themselves to the present dispensations of Providence, by reflecting upon those scriptures in the Old Testament which foretold that the kingdom of the Messiah would meet with such opposition as this at the first setting of it up in the world, *v. 25, 26*. God, who made heaven and earth, cannot meet with any [effectual] opposition to his designs, since none dare [at least, can prevailingly] dispute or contest with him. Yea, thus it was written, *Thus he spake by the mouth*, thus he wrote by the pen, *of his servant David*, who, as appears by this, was the penman of the second psalm, and therefore, most probably, of the first, and other psalms that are not ascribed to any other, though they have not his name in the title. Let it not therefore be a surprise to them, or any discouragement to any in embracing their doctrine, for the *scripture must be fulfilled*. It was foretold, *Ps. 2. 1, 2*. (1.) That the *heathen* would *rage* at Christ and his kingdom, and be angry at the attempts to set it up, because that would be the pulling down of the gods of the heathen, and giving check to the wickedness of the heathen. (2.) That the *people* would imagine all the things that could be against it, to silence the teachers of it, to discountenance the subjects of it, and to crush all the interests of it. If they prove *vain things* in the issue, no thanks to them who *imagined* them. (3.) That the *kings of the earth*, particularly, would *stand up* in opposition to the kingdom of Christ, as if they were jealous (though there is no occasion for their being so) that it would interfere with their powers, and intrench upon their prerogatives. The *kings of the earth*, that are most favoured and honoured by Divine Providence, and should do most for God, are strangers and enemies to divine grace, and do most against God. (4.) That the *rulers* would *gather together* against God and Christ; not only monarchs, that have the power in their single persons, but there where the power is in many *rulers*, councils, and senates, they *gather together*, to consult and decree *against the Lord*, and *against his Christ*—against both natural and revealed religion. What is done against Christ, God takes as done against himself. Christianity was not only destitute of the advantage of the countenance and support of kings and rulers, (it had neither their power nor their purses,) but it was opposed and fought against by them, and they combined to run it down, and yet it made its way.

3. Their representation of the present accomplishment of those predictions in the enmity and malice of the rulers against Christ. What was foretold we see fulfilled, *v. 27, 28*. It is of a *truth*, it is certainly so, it is too plain to be denied, and in it appears the *truth* of the prediction, that Herod and

Pilate, the two Roman governors, with the Gentiles, (the Roman soldiers under their command,) and with the *people of Israel*, (the rulers of the Jews and the mob that is under their influence,) were *gathered together* in a confederacy *against the Holy Child Jesus whom thou hast anointed*. Some copies add another circumstance, *ἐν τῇ πόλει σου ταύτῃ—in this thy holy city*, where, above any place, he should have been welcomed. But herein they do that *which thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*. See here, (1.) The *wise and holy designs* God had concerning Christ. He is here called the *Child Jesus*, as he was called (*Luke 2. 27, 43.*) in his infancy, to intimate that even in his exalted state he is not ashamed of his condescensions for us, and that he continues meek and lowly in heart. In the height of his glory he is the *Lamb of God*, and the *Child Jesus*. But he is the *Holy Child Jesus*, (so he was called, *Luke 1. 35. that Holy Thing*), and thy *holy Child*; the word signifies both a son and a servant, *παῖδας*; he was the *Son of God*; and yet in the work of redemption he acted as his Father's Servant, (*Isa. 42. 1.*) *My Servant whom I uphold*. It was he whom God anointed, both qualified for the undertaking, and called to it; and thence he was called the Lord's Christ, *v. 26*. And this comes in as a reason why they set themselves with so much rage and violence against him, because God had *anointed him*, and they were resolved not to resign, much less to submit to him. David was envied by Saul, because he was the Lord's anointed. And the Philistines came up to seek David when they heard he was anointed, *2 Sam. 5. 17*. Now the God that anointed Christ, determined what should be done to him, pursuant to that anointing; he was anointed to be a Saviour, and therefore it was determined he should be a Sacrifice, to make atonement for sin; he must die therefore, he must be slain, yet not by his own hands; therefore God wisely determined before by what hands it should be done, it must be by the hands of those who will treat him as a criminal and malefactor, and therefore it cannot be done by the hands either of angels or good men; he must therefore be *delivered into the hands of sinners*, as *Job* was, *ch. 16. 11*. And as David was delivered to Shimei to be *made a curse*; (*2 Sam. 16. 11.*) *The Lord has bidden him*. God's hand and his counsel determined it, his will, and his wisdom. God's hand, which properly denotes his executive power, is here put for his purpose and decree, because with him saying and doing are not two things, as they are with us. His hand and his counsel always agree; for *whatsoever the Lord pleased that did he*. Dr. Hammond makes this phrase of *God's hand determining it*, to be an allusion to the High-Priest's casting lots upon the *two goats* on the day of atonement, (*Lev. 16. 8.*) in which he lifted up the hand that he happened to have the *lot for the Lord* in, and that goat on which it fell was immediately sacrificed; and the disposal of this lot was from the Lord, *Prov. 16. 33*. Thus God's hand determined what should be done, that Christ should be the Sacrifice slain. Or, (if I may offer a conjecture,) when God's hand is here said to determine, it may be meant, not of God's acting hand, but his writing hand, as, (*Job 13. 26.*) *Thou writest bitter things against us*; and God's decree is said to be that *which is written in the scriptures of truth*, (*Dan. 10. 31.*) and in the volume of the book it was *written of Christ*, *Ps. 40. 7*. It was *God's hand* that wrote it, his hand according to his counsel. The commission was given under his hand. (2.) The wicked and unholy instruments that were employed in the executing of this design, though they *meant not so, neither did their hearts think so*. Herod and Pilate, Gentiles and Jews, who had been at variance with each other, united against Christ. And God's *serving his own purposes* by what they

did, was no excuse at all for their malice and wickedness in the doing of it, any more than God's making the blood of the martyrs the seed of the church extenuated the guilt of their bloody persecutors. Sin is not the less evil for God's bringing good out of it, but he is by that the more glorified, and will be so, when the mystery of God shall be finished.

4. Their petition with reference to the case at this time. The enemies were gathered together against Christ, and then no wonder that they were so against his ministers; *the disciple is not better than his Master*, nor must expect better treatment; but, being thus insulted, they pray,

(1.) That God would take cognizance of the malice of their enemies; *Now, Lord, behold their threatenings*, v. 29. Behold them, as thou art said to behold them in the psalm before quoted, (Ps. 2. 4.) when they thought to break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from them; he that sits in heaven, laughs at them, and has them in derision; and then the virgin, the daughter of Zion, may despise the impotent menaces even of the great king, the king of Assyria, Isa. 37. 22. And now, Lord; *τὰ νῦν*; there is an emphasis upon the *now*, to intimate that then is God's time to appear for his people, when the power of their enemies is most daring and threatening. They do not dictate to God what he shall do, but refer themselves to him, like Hezekiah; (Isa. 37. 17.) "*Open thine eyes, O Lord, and see; thou knowest what they say, thou beholdest mischief and spite*, (Ps. 10. 14.) to thee we appeal, *behold their threatenings*, and either tie their hands, or turn their hearts; make their wrath, as far as it is let loose, to praise thee, and the remainder thereof do thou restrain," Ps. 76. 10. It is a comfort to us, that if we are unjustly threatened, and bear it patiently, we may make ourselves easy by spreading the case before the Lord, and leaving it with him.

(2.) That God, by his grace, would keep up their spirits, and animate them to go on cheerfully with their work; *Grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word*, though the priests and rulers have enjoined them silence. Note, In threatening times, our care should not be so much that troubles may be prevented, as that we may be enabled to go on with cheerfulness and resolution in our work and duty, whatever troubles we may meet with. Their prayer is not, "*Lord, behold their threatenings*, and frighten them, and stop their mouths, and fill their faces with shame;" but, "*Behold their threatenings*, and animate us, open our mouths and fill our hearts with courage." They do not pray, "*Lord, give us a fair opportunity to retire from our work*, now that it is become dangerous;" but, "*Lord, give us grace to go on in our work, and not to be afraid of the face of man*." Observe, [1.] Those that are sent on God's errands, ought to deliver their message with boldness, with all boldness, with all liberty of speech, not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God, whoever is offended; not doubting of what they say, or of being borne out in saying it. [2.] God is to be sought unto for an ability to speak his word with boldness, and those that desire divine aids and encouragements, may depend upon them, and ought to go forth, and go on, in the strength of the Lord God. [3.] The threatenings of our enemies, that are designed to weaken our hands, and drive us off from our work, should rather stir us up to so much the more courage and resolution in our work. Are they daring, that fight against Christ? For shame, let not us be sneaking, that are for him.

(3.) That God would still give them power to work miracles for the confirmation of the doctrine they preached, which, by the cure of the lame man, they found to contribute very much to their success, and would contribute abundantly to their further

progress. *Lord, grant us boldness, by stretching forth thine hand to heal*. Note, Nothing emboldens faithful ministers more in their work, than the tokens of God's presence with them, and a divine power going along with them. They pray, [1.] That God would stretch forth his hand to heal, both the bodies and souls of men; else in vain do they stretch forth their hands, either in preaching, (Isa. 65. 2.) or in curing. [2.] That signs and wonders might be done by the name of the holy Child Jesus, which would be convincing to the people, and confounding to the enemies. Christ had promised them a power to work miracles, for the proof of their commission; (Mark 16. 17, 18.) yet they must pray for it; and, though they had it, must pray for the continuance of it. Christ himself must ask, and it shall be given him. Observe, It is the honour of Christ that they aim at in this request, that the wonder might be done by the name of Jesus, the holy Child Jesus, and his name shall have all the glory.

IV. The gracious answer God gave to this address, not in word, but in power.

1. God gave them a sign of the acceptance of their prayers; (v. 31.) *When they had prayed*, (perhaps many of them prayed successively, one by one, according to the rule, (1 Cor. 14. 31.) and when they had concluded the work of the day,) *the place was shaken where they were assembled together*, there was a strong mighty wind, such as that when the Spirit was poured out upon them, (ch. 2. 1, 2.) which shook the house, which was now their house of prayer. This shaking of the place was designed to strike awe upon them, and to awaken and raise their expectations, and to give them a sensible token that God was with them of a truth: and perhaps it was to put them in mind of that prophecy, (Hag. 2. 7.) *I will shake all nations, and will fill this house with glory*. This was to shew them what reason they had to fear God more, and then they would fear man less. He that shook this place, could make the hearts of those who threatened his servants thus, to tremble, for he cuts off the spirit of princes, and is terrible to the kings of the earth. The place was shaken, that their faith might be established and unshaken.

2. God gave them greater degrees of his Spirit, which was the thing they prayed for; their prayer, without doubt, was accepted, for it was answered, *they were all filled with the Holy Ghost*, more than ever; by which they were not only encouraged, but enabled, to speak the word of God with boldness, and not to be afraid of the proud and haughty looks of men. The Holy Ghost taught them not only what to speak, but how to speak. Those that were endowed habitually with the powers of the Holy Ghost, had yet occasion for fresh supplies of the Spirit, according as the various occurrences of their service were. They were filled with the Holy Ghost at the bar, (v. 8.) and now filled with the Holy Ghost in the pulpit; which teaches us to live in an actual dependence upon the grace of God, according as the duty of every day requires; we need to be anointed with fresh oil upon every fresh occasion. As in the providence of God, so in the grace of God, we not only in general live, and have our being, but move in every particular action, ch. 17. 28. We have here an instance of the performance of that promise, *that God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*; (Luke 11. 13.) for it was in answer to prayer that they were filled with the Holy Ghost; and we have also an example of the improvement of that gift, which is required of all on whom it is bestowed; have it and use it, use it, and have more of it. When they were filled with the Holy Ghost, they shake the word with all boldness; for the ministration of the Spirit is given to every man, to profit withal. Talents must be traded with, not buried. When they

find the Lord God help them by his Spirit, they know they shall not be confounded, Isa. 50. 7.

32. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. 33. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. 34. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, 35. And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. 36. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37. Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

We have a general idea given us in these verses, and it is a very beautiful one, of the spirit and state of this truly primitive church; it is *conspectus sæculi*—a view of that age of infancy and innocence.

I. The disciples loved one another dearly. Behold, how good and how pleasant it was to see how the multitude of them that believed, were of one heart, and of one soul, (v. 32.) and there was no such thing as discord or division among them. Observe here,

1. There were multitudes that believed; even in Jerusalem, where the malignant influence of the chief priests was most strong, there were three thousand converted on one day, and five thousand on another, and, beside those, there were added to the church daily; and, no doubt, they were all baptized, and made profession of the faith; for the same Spirit that endued the apostles with courage to preach the faith of Christ, endued them with courage to confess it. Note, The increase of the church is the glory of it, and the multitude of them that believe, more than their quality. Now the church shines, and her light is come, when souls thus fly like a cloud into her bosom, and like doves to their windows, Isa. 60. 1, 8.

2. They were all of one heart, and of one soul. Though there were many, very many, of different ages, tempers, and conditions, in the world, who, perhaps, before they believed, were perfect strangers to one another, yet, when they met in Christ, they were as intimately acquainted as if they had known one another many years. Perhaps, they had been of different sects among the Jews, before their conversion, or had had discords upon civil accounts; but now those were all forgotten, and laid aside, and they were unanimous in the faith of Christ, and, being all joined to the Lord, they were joined to one another in holy love. This was the blessed fruit of Christ's dying precept to his disciples, to love one another, and his dying prayer for them, that they all might be one. We have reason to think they divided themselves into several congregations, or worshipping assemblies, according as their dwellings were, under their respective ministers; and yet that occasioned no jealousy or uneasiness; for they were all of one heart, and one soul, notwithstanding; and loved those of other congregations, as truly as those

of their own. Thus it was then, and we may not despair of seeing it so again, when the Spirit shall be poured out upon us from on high.

II. The ministers went on in their work with great vigour and success; (v. 33.) With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The doctrine they preached, was, the resurrection of Christ: a matter of fact, which served not only for the confirmation of the truth of Christ's holy religion, but, being duly explained and illustrated, with the proper inferences from it, served for a summary of all the duties, privileges, and comforts, of christians. The resurrection of Christ, rightly understood and improved, will let us into the great mysteries of religion.

By the great power, wherewith the apostles attested the resurrection, may be meant,

1. The great vigour, spirit, and courage, with which they published and avowed this doctrine; they do it not softly and diffidently, but with liveliness and resolution, as those that were themselves abundantly satisfied of the truth of it, and earnestly desired that others should be so too. Or,

2. The miracles which they wrought to confirm their doctrine; With works of great power, they gave witness to the resurrection of Christ, God himself, in them, bearing witness too.

III. The beauty of the Lord our God shone upon them, and all their performances; Great grace was upon them all, not only all the apostles, but all the believers, χάρις μεγάλη; grace that had something great in it, (magnificent and very extraordinary,) was upon them all.

1. Christ poured out abundance of grace upon them, such as qualified them for great services, by enduing them with great power; it came upon them from on high, from above.

2. There were evident fruits of this grace in all they said and did, such as put an honour upon them, and recommended them to the favour of God, as being in his sight of great price.

3. Some think it includes the favour they were in with the people. Every one saw a beauty and excellency in them, and respected them.

IV. They were very liberal to the poor, and dead to this world. This was as great an evidence of the grace of God in them as any other, and recommended them as much to the esteem of the people.

1. They insisted not upon property, which even children seem to have a sense of, and a jealousy for, and which worldly people triumph in, as Laban, (Gen. 31. 43.) All that thou seest is mine; and Nabal, (1 Sam. 25. 11.) My bread and my water. These believers were so taken up with the hopes of an inheritance in the other world, that this was as nothing to them. No man said that aught of the things which he possessed, was his own, v. 32. They did not take away property, but they were indifferent to it. They did not call what they had, their own, in a way of pride and vain-glory, boasting of it, or trusting in it. They did not call it their own, because they had, in affection, forsaken all for Christ, and were continually expecting to be stripped of all for their adherence to him. They did not say, that aught was their own; for we can call nothing our own but sin; what we have in the world, is more God's than our own; we have it from him, must use it for him, and are accountable for it to him. No man said what he had was his own, idiosyncrasy—his peculiar; for he was ready to distribute, willing to communicate, and desired not to eat his morsel alone, but what he had to spare from himself and family, his poor neighbours were welcome to. They that had estates, were not solicitous to lay up, but very willing to lay out, and would straiten themselves to help their brethren. No marvel that they were of one heart and soul, when they

sat so loose to the wealth of this world; for *meum—mine and tuum—thine* are the great make-baits. Men's holding *their own*, and grasping at more than *their own*, are the *rise of wars and fightings*.

2. They abounded in charity, so that, in effect, *they had all things common*; for, (v. 34.) *there was not any among them that lacked*, but care was taken for their supply. Those that had been maintained upon the public charity, when they turned christians, probably were excluded, and therefore it was fit that the church should take care of them. As there were many *poor that received the gospel*, so there were some rich that were able to maintain them, and *the grace of God* made them willing. Therefore those that *gather much, have nothing over*, because what *they have over*, they have for them who *gather little*, that they may have *no lack*, 2 Cor. 8. 14, 15. The gospel hath laid *all things common*, not so that the poor are allowed to rob the rich, but so that the rich are appointed to relieve the poor.

3. They did many of them sell their estates, to raise a fund for charity; *As many as had possession of lands or houses, sold them*, v. 34. Dr. Lightfoot computes that this was the *year of jubilee* in the Jewish nation, the fiftieth year, (the twenty-eighth since they settled in Canaan fourteen hundred years ago,) so that what was sold that year being not to return till the *next jubilee*, lands then took a good price, and so the sale of those lands would raise the more money.

Now, (1.) We are here told what they did with the money that was so raised; *they laid it at the apostles' feet*, they left it to them to be disposed of as they thought fit; probably, they had their support from it; from whence else could they have it? Observe, *The apostles* would have it *laid at their feet*, in token of their holy contempt of the wealth of the world; they thought it fitter they should be *laid at their feet* than lodged in their hands or in their bosoms. Being laid there, it was not hoarded up, but *distribution was made*, by proper persons, *unto every man according as he had need*. Great care ought to be taken in the distribution of public charity, [1.] That it be given to such as *have need*, such as are not able to procure a competent maintenance for themselves, through age, infancy, sickness, or bodily disability, or incapacity of mind, want either of ingenuity or activity, cross providences, losses, oppressions, a numerous charge; those that upon any of these accounts, or any other, have real need, and have not relations of their own to help them; but, above all, those that are reduced to want for well doing, and for *the testimony of a good conscience*, ought to be taken care of, and provided for, and, with a prudent application of what is given, so as may be most for their benefit. [2.] That it be given to *every man*, for whom it is intended, *according as he had need*, without partiality or respect of persons. It is a rule, in dispensing charity, as well as in administering justice, *ut parium par sit ratio*—that those *who are equally needing and equally deserving*, should be *equally helped*, and that the charity should be suited and adapted to the necessity, as the word is.

(2.) Here is one particular person mentioned, that was remarkable for this generous charity; it was *Barnabas*, afterward Paul's colleague. Observe,

[1.] The account here given concerning him, v. 36. His name was *Joses*; he was of the *tribe of Levi*, for *there were Levites among the Jews of the dispersion*, who, it is probable, presided in their synagogue-worship, and, according to the duty of that *tribe*, taught them the *good knowledge of the Lord*. He was born in *Cyprus*, a great way off from Jerusalem, his parents, though Jews, having a settlement there. Notice is taken of the apostles' chang-

ing his name after he associated with them. It is probable that he was one of the seventy disciples, and, as he increased in gifts and graces, grew eminent, and was respected by *the apostles*, who, in token of their value for him, gave him a name, *Barnabas—the son of prophecy*, (so it properly signifies,) he being endued with extraordinary gifts of prophecy. But the Hellenist Jews (saith Grotius) called *praying*, *παράκλησις*, and therefore by that word it is rendered here; *A son of exhortation*; (so some;) one that had an excellent faculty of healing and persuading; we have an instance of it, ch. 11. 22, 24. *A son of consolation*; (so we read it;) one that did himself walk very much in *the comforts of the Holy Ghost*, a cheerful christian, and this enlarged his heart in *charity to the poor*; or one that was eminent for *comforting the Lord's people*, and speaking peace to wounded troubled consciences; he had an admirable felicity that way. There were two among *the apostles* that were called *Boanerges—Sons of thunder*; (Mark 3. 17.) but here was a *son of consolation* with them. Each had his several gift, neither must censure the other, but both ease one another; let the one search the wound, and then let the other heal it and bind it up.

[2.] Here is an account of his charity, and great generosity to the public fund. His is particularly taken notice of, because of the eminency of his services afterward in the church of God, especially in carrying the gospel to the Gentiles; that this might not appear to come from any ill will to his own nation, we have here his benevolence to the Jewish converts; or perhaps this is mentioned, because it was a leading card, and an example to others; *he having land*, whether in Cyprus, where he was born, or in Judea, where he now lived, or elsewhere, is not certain, but *he sold it*, not to buy elsewhere to advantage, but as a Levite indeed, who knew he had the *Lord God of Israel for his inheritance*, he despised earthly inheritances, would be cumbered no more with them, but *brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet*, to be given in charity. Thus, as one that was designed to be a *preacher of the gospel*, he disentangled himself from the affairs of this life; and he lost nothing upon the balance of the account, by laying the purchase-money at *the apostles' feet*, when he himself was, in effect, *numbered among the apostles*, by that word of the Holy Ghost, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*, ch. 13. 2. Thus, for the respect he shewed to *the apostles as apostles*, he had an *apostle's reward*.

CHAP. V.

In this chapter, we have, I. The sin and punishment of Ananias and Sapphira, who, for lying to the Holy Ghost, were struck dead at the word of Peter, v. 1. . 11. II. The flourishing state of the church, in the power that went along with the preaching of the gospel, v. 12. . 16. III. The imprisonment of the apostles, and their miraculous discharge out of prison, with fresh orders to go on to preach the gospel, which they did, to the great vexation of their persecutors, v. 17. . 26. IV. Their arraignment before the great Sanhedrim, and their justification of themselves in what they did, v. 27. . 33. V. Gamaliel's counsel concerning them, that they should not persecute them, but let them alone, and see what would come of it, and their concurrence, for the present, with this advice, in the dismissal of the apostles with no more than a scourging, v. 34. . 40. VI. The apostles' cheerful progress in their work, notwithstanding the prohibition laid upon them, and the indignity done them, v. 41, 42.

1. **B**UT a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2. And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the

apostles' feet. 3. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? 4. While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. 5. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 6. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried *him* out, and buried *him*. 7. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. 9. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband, *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out. 10. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband. 11. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

The chapter begins with a melancholy *but*, which puts a stop to the pleasant and agreeable prospect of things which we had in the foregoing chapters; as every man, so every church, in its best state, has its *but*. 1. The disciples were very holy, and heavenly, and seemed to be all exceeding good; *but* there were hypocrites among them, whose *hearts were not right in the sight of God*, who, when they were baptized, and took upon them *the form of godliness*, *denied the power of godliness*, and stopped short of that. There is a mixture of bad with good in the best societies on this side heaven; *tares* will grow among *the wheat until the harvest*. 2. It was the praise of the disciples, that they came up to that perfection which Christ recommended *to the rich young man*—they sold *what they had*, and *gave to the poor*; *but* even that proved a cloak and cover of hypocrisy, which was thought the greatest proof and evidence of sincerity. 3. The signs and wonders which the apostles wrought, were hitherto miracles of mercy; *but* now comes in a miracle of judgment, and here is an instance of severity, following the instances of goodness, that God may be both loved and feared. Observe here,

I. The sin of *Ananias, and Sapphira his wife*. It is good to see husband and wife joining together in that which is good, but to be confederate in evil, is to be like Adam and Eve, when they agreed to *eat the forbidden fruit*, and *were one in their disobedience*.

Now their sin was,

1. That they were ambitious of being thought eminent disciples, and of the first rank, when really they were not true disciples; they would pass for some of the most fruitful trees in Christ's vineyard, when really the root of the matter was not found in them. They *sold a possession, and brought the money* (as Barnabas did) *to the apostles' feet*, that

they might not seem to be behind *the very chief of believers*, but might be applauded and cried up, and stand so much the fairer for preferment in the church, which perhaps they thought would shortly shine in secular pomp and grandeur. Note, It is possible that hypocrites may deny themselves in one thing, but then it is to serve themselves in another; may forego their secular advantage in one instance, with a prospect of finding their account in something else. Ananias and Sapphira would take upon them a profession of christianity, *and make a fair shew in the flesh* with it, and so would mock God, and deceive others, when they knew they could not go through with the christian profession. It was commendable, and so far it was right, in that rich young man, that he would not pretend to follow Christ, when, if it should come to a pinch, he knew he could not come up to his terms, *but he went away sorrowful*. Ananias and Sapphira pretended they could come up to the terms, that they might have the credit of being disciples, when really they could not, and so were a discredit to discipleship. Note, It is often of fatal consequence for people to go a greater length in profession than their inward principle will admit of.

2. That they were covetous of the wealth of the world, and distrustful of God, and his providence; *They sold the land*, and, perhaps, then, in a pang of zeal, designed no other than to dedicate the whole of the purchase-money to pious uses, and made a vow, or at least conceived a full purpose, to do so; but when the money was received, their heart failed them, and *they kept back part of the price*, (*v. 2.*) because they loved the money, and thought it was too much to part with at once, and to trust in the apostles' hands, and because they knew not but they might want it themselves; and though now *all things were common*, yet it would not be so long; and what should they do in a time of need, if they should leave themselves nothing to take to? They could not take God's word that they should be provided for, but thought they would play a wiser part than the rest had done, and lay up for a rainy day. Thus they thought to *serve both God and mammon*—*God*, by bringing part of the money *to the apostles' feet*—and *mammon*, by keeping the other part in their own pockets; as if there were not an all-sufficiency in God to make up the whole to them, except they retained some in their own hands by way of caution-money. Their hearts *were divided*, so *were they found faulty*, Hos. 10. 2. They *halted between two*; if they had been thorough-paced worldlings, they would not have *sold their possession*; and if they had been thorough-paced christians, they would not have detained *part of the price*.

3. That they thought to deceive the apostles, and make them believe they brought the whole purchase money, when really it was but a *part*. They came with as good an assurance, and as great a shew of piety and devotion, as any of them, and *laid the money at the apostles' feet*, as if it were their all. They dissembled with God and his Spirit, with Christ and his church and ministers; and this was their sin.

II. The indictment of Ananias, which proved both his condemnation and execution for this sin. When he *brought the money*, and expected to be commended and encouraged, as others were, *Peter* took him to task about it. He, without any inquiry or examination of witnesses concerning it, charges him peremptorily with the crime, and aggravates it, and lays load upon him for it, shewing it him in its own colour, *v. 3, 4.* The Spirit of God in *Peter*, not only discovered the fact without any information, (when perhaps no man in the world knew it but the man and his wife themselves,) but likewise discern-

ed the principle of reigning infidelity in *the heart of Ananias*, which was at the bottom of it, and therefore proceeded against him so suddenly. Had it been a sin of infirmity, through the surprise of a temptation, *Peter* would have taken *Ananias* aside, and have bid him go home, and fetch the rest of the *money*, and repent of his folly in attempting to put this cheat upon them; but he knew *that his heart was fully set in him to do this evil*, and therefore allowed him *not space to repent*. He here shewed him,

1. The original of the sin. *Satan filled his heart*; he not only suggested it to him, and put it into his head, but hurried him on with resolution to do it. Whatever is contrary to the good Spirit, proceeds from the *evil spirit*; and *those hearts are filled by Satan*, in which worldliness reigns, and has the ascendant. Some think that *Ananias* was one of those that had received the *Holy Ghost*, and was filled with his gifts, but, having provoked the Spirit to withdraw from him, now *Satan filled his heart*; as *when the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, an evil spirit from God troubled him*. *Satan is a lying spirit*; he was so in the mouth of *Ahab's prophets*, and so he was in the mouth of *Ananias*, and by that made it appear that *he filled his heart*.

2. The sin itself. *He lied to the Holy Ghost*; a sin of such a heinous nature, that he could not have been guilty of it if *Satan had not filled his heart*. The phrase which we render *lying to the Holy Ghost*, is *ψευδοῦναι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον*, which some read, *to belie the Holy Ghost*; which may be taken two ways: (1.) *That he belied the Holy Ghost in himself*; so Dr. Lightfoot takes it, and supposes that *Ananias* was not an ordinary believer, but a minister, and one that had received the gift of the *Holy Ghost with the hundred and twenty*; (for mention is made of him immediately after *Barnabas*;) yet he durst thus, by dissembling, belie and shame that gift. Or thus, *They who had sold their estates, and laid the money at the apostles' feet*, did it by the special impulse of the *Holy Ghost*, enabling them to do an act so very great and generous; and *Ananias* pretended that he was moved by the *Holy Ghost* to do what he did, as others were; whereas it appeared by his baseness, that he was not under the influence of the good Spirit at all; for had it been *his work*, it would have been perfect. (2.) *That he belied the Holy Ghost in the apostles*, to whom he brought the money; he misrepresented the Spirit they were actuated by, either by a suspicion that they would not faithfully distribute what they were intrusted with, (which was a base suggestion, as if they were false to the trust reposed in them,) or by an assurance that they could not discover the fraud. *He belied the Holy Ghost*, when by what he did he would have it thought that those who are endued with the gifts of the *Holy Ghost*, might as easily be imposed upon as other men; like *Gehazi*, whom his master convicted of his error by that word, *Went not my heart with thee?* 2 Kings 5. 26. It is charged upon the house of *Israel and Judah*, when, like *Ananias* here, *they dealt very treacherously, that they belied the Lord, saying, It is not he*, Jer. 5. 11, 12. Thus *Ananias thought the apostles were altogether such as himself*, and this was *belying the Holy Ghost* in them, as if he were not in them a Discerner of spirits, whereas they had all the gifts of the Spirit in them, which to others were divided severally. See 1 Cor. 12. 8, 10. They that pretend to an inspiration of the Spirit, in imposing upon the church their own fancies, either in opinion or practice, that say, they are moved from above, when they are carried on by their pride, covetousness, or affectation of dominion, *belie the Holy Ghost*.

But we read it, *to lie unto the Holy Ghost*; which reading is countenanced by v. 4. *Thou hast not lied*

unto men, but unto God. [1.] *Ananias* told a lie a deliberate lie, and with a purpose to deceive; he told *Peter* that he had sold a possession, (house or lands,) and this was the purchase-money. Perhaps he expressed himself in words that were capable of a double meaning, used some equivocations about it, which he thought might palliate the matter a little, and save him from the guilt of a downright lie; or perhaps he said nothing; but it was all one, he did as the rest did, who brought the whole price, and would be thought to do so, and expected the praise they had, that did so, and the same privilege and access to the common stock as they had; and therefore it was an implicit protestation that he brought the whole price, as they did; and this was a lie, for he kept back part. Note, Many are brought to gross lying, by reigning pride, and affectation of the applause of men; particularly in works of charity to the poor. That therefore we may not be found boasting of a false gift given to us, or given by us, (Prov. 25. 14.) we must not boast even of a true gift; which is the meaning of our Saviours caution in works of charity, *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth*. Those that boast of good works they never did, or promise good works they never do, or make the good works they do, more or better than really they are, come under the guilt of *Ananias's lie*; which it concerns us all to dread the thought of. [2.] He told this lie to the *Holy Ghost*. It was not so much to the apostles, as to the *Holy Ghost* in them, that the money was brought, and that was said, which was said, v. 4. *Thou hast not lied unto men, not to men only, not to men chiefly, though the apostles be but men; but thou hast lied unto God*. From hence it is justly inferred, that the *Holy Ghost is God*; for he that lieth to the *Holy Ghost*, lieth to God. "They that lied to the apostles, acted and acting by the Spirit of God, are said to lie to God, because the apostles acted by the power and authority of God. From whence it follows, (as Dr. Whitby well observes,) that the power and authority of the Spirit must be the power and authority of God." And, as he further argues, "*Ananias is said to lie to God, because he lied to that Spirit in the apostles, which enabled them to discern the secrets of men's hearts and actions, which being the property of God alone, he that lies to him, must therefore lie to God, because he lies to one who has the incommunicable property of God, and consequently the divine essence.*"

3. The aggravations of the sin; (v. 4.) *While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?* Which may be understood two ways: (1.) "Thou wast under no temptation to keep back the price; before it was sold, it was thy own, and not mortgaged, nor encumbered, or any way engaged for debt; and when it was sold, it was in thy own power to dispose of the money at thy pleasure; so that thou mightest as well have brought the whole as a part. Thou hadst no debts to pay, perhaps no children to provide for; so that thou wast not under the influence of any particular inducement to keep back part of the price. Thou wast a transgressor without a cause." Or, (2.) "Thou wast under no necessity of selling thy land at all, or bringing any of the money to the apostles' feet. Thou mightest have kept the money, if thou hadst pleased, and the land too, and never have pretended to this piece of perfection." This rule of charity the apostle gives, that people be not pressed, and that it be not urged as of necessity, because God loves a cheerful giver, (2 Cor. 9. 7.) and *Philemon* must do a good work, not as it were of necessity, but willingly, Phil. 14. As it is better not to vow than to vow and not to pay; so better had it been for him not to have sold his land at all than thus to keep back part of the price not to have pre-

tended to do the good work than thus to do it by halves. "*When it was sold, it was in thine own power*; but it was not so when it was vowed, thou hadst then opened thy mouth to the Lord, and couldest not go back." Thus, in giving our hearts to God, we are not permitted to divide them. Satan, like the mother, whose own the child was not, would take up with a half; but God will have all or none.

4. All this guilt, thus aggravated, is charged upon him; *Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?* Observe, Though Satan filled his heart to do it, yet he is said to have conceived it in his own heart; which shews that we cannot extenuate our sins, by laying the fault of them upon the Devil; he tempts, but he cannot force; it is of our own lusts that we are drawn away and enticed. The evil thing, whatever it is, that is said or done, the sinner has conceived it in his own heart; and therefore, *if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it*. The close of the charge is very high, but very just; *Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God*. What emphasis does the prophet lay upon that of Ahaz; *not wearing men only, but wearing my God also!* Isa. 7. 13. And Moses upon that of Israel; *Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord!* Exod. 16. 8. So here, Thou mightest have imposed upon us, who are men like thyself; but, *be not deceived, God is not mocked*. If we think to put a cheat upon God, we shall prove in the end to have put a fatal cheat upon our own souls.

III. The death and burial of Ananias, v. 5, 6.

1. He died upon the spot; *Ananias, hearing these words, was speechless*, in the same sense that he was, who was charged with intruding into the wedding feast without a wedding garment, he had nothing to say for himself, but that was not all, he was struck speechless with a witness, for he was struck dead; *he fell down, and gave up the ghost*. It does not appear whether Peter designed and expected that this would follow upon what he said to him; it is probable that he did, for to Sapphira his wife, Peter particularly spake death, v. 9. Some think that an angel struck him, that he died, as Herod, ch. 12. 23. Or, his own conscience smote him with such horror and amazement at the sense of his guilt, that he sunk and died away under the load of it. And perhaps, when he was convinced of lying to the Holy Ghost, he remembered the unpardonableness of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which struck him like a dagger to the heart. See the power of the word of God in the mouth of the apostles! As it was to some a savour of life unto life, so it was to others a savour of death unto death. As there are those whom the gospel justifies, so there are those whom it condemns.

This punishment of Ananias may seem severe, but we are sure it was just. (1.) It was designed to maintain the honour of the Holy Ghost as now lately poured out upon the apostles, in order to the setting up of the gospel-kingdom. It was a great affront which Ananias put upon the Holy Ghost, as if he could be imposed upon: and it had a direct tendency to invalidate the apostles' testimony; for if they could not by the Spirit discover this fraud, how could they by the Spirit discover the deep things of God, which they were to reveal to the children of men? It was therefore necessary that the credit of the apostles' gifts and powers be supported, though it was at this expense. (2.) It was designed to deter others from the like presumptions, now at the beginning of this dispensation. Simon Magus afterward was not thus punished, nor Elymas; but Ananias was made an example now at first, that with the sensible proofs given what a comfortable thing it is to receive the Spirit, there might be also sensible proofs given what a dangerous thing it is to resist the Spirit, and do despite to him. How severely was

the worshipping of the golden calf punished, and the gathering of the sticks on the sabbath-day, when the laws of the second and fourth commandment were now newly given! So was the offering of strange fire by Nadab and Abihu, and the mutiny of Korah and his company, when the fire from heaven was now newly given, and the authority of Moses and Aaron now newly established.

The doing of this by the ministry of Peter, who himself with a lie denied his Master but a while ago, intimates that it was not the resentment of a wrong done to himself, for then he, who had himself been faulty, would have had charity for them that offended; and he, who himself had repented and been forgiven, would have forgiven this affront, and endeavoured to bring this offender to repentance; but it was the act of the Spirit of God in Peter, to him the indignity was done, and by him the punishment was inflicted.

2. He was buried immediately, for that was the manner of the Jews; (v. 6.) *The young men*, who, it is probable, were appointed to that office in the church of burying the dead, as among the Romans the *libitinarii* and *pollinctores*; or the young men that attended the apostles, and waited on them, they wound up the dead body in grave-clothes, carried it out of the city, and buried it decently, though he died in sin, and by an immediate stroke of divine vengeance.

IV. The reckoning with Sapphira, the wife of Ananias, who perhaps was first in the transgression, and tempted her husband to eat this forbidden fruit. She came in to the place where the apostles were, which, as it should seem, was Solomon's porch, for there we find them, (v. 12.) a part of the temple where Christ used to walk, John 10. 23. She came in about three hours after, expecting to share in the thanks of the house, for her coming in, and consenting to the sale of the land, of which perhaps she was entitled to her dower or thirds; for she knew not what was done. It was strange that nobody ran to tell her of the sudden death of her husband, that she might keep away; perhaps they did, and she was not at home; and so when she came to present herself before the apostles as a benefactor to the fund, she met with a breach instead of a blessing.

1. She was found guilty of sharing with her husband in his sin, by a question that Peter asked her; (v. 8.) *Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?* Naming the sum which Ananias had brought and laid at the apostles' feet. "Was that all you received for the sale of the land, and had you no more for it?" "No," saith she, "we had no more, but that was every farthing we received." Ananias and his wife agreed to tell the same story, and, the bargain being private, and by consent kept to themselves, nobody could disprove them, and therefore they thought they might safely stand in the lie, and should gain credit to it. It is sad to see those relations who should quicken one another to that which is good, harden one another in that which is evil.

2. Sentence is past upon her, that she should partake in her husband's doom, v. 9.

(1.) Her sin is opened; *How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?* Before he passes sentence, he makes her to know her abominations, and shews her the evil of her sin.

[1.] That they tempted the Spirit of the Lord; as Israel tempted God in the desert, when they said, *Is the Lord among us? Or is he not?* After they had seen so many miraculous proofs of his power, and not only his presence, but his presidency, when they said, *Can God furnish a table?* So here, "Can the Spirit in the apostles discover this fraud? Can they discern that this is but a part of the price, when we tell them it is the whole? Can he judge through this dark cloud?" Job 22. 13. They saw they had

the gift of tongues ; but had they the gift of *discerning spirits* ? Those that presume upon security and impunity in sin, tempt the Spirit of God ; they tempt God as if he were altogether such a one as themselves.

[2.] That they *agreed together* to do it ; making the bond of their relation to each other (which by the divine institution is a sacred tie) to become a bond of iniquity. It is hard to say which is worse between yoke-fellows and other relations—a discord in good, or concord in evil. It seems to intimate that their *agreeing together* to do it, was a further *tempting of the Spirit* ; as if when they had engaged to keep one another's counsel in this matter, even the Spirit of the Lord himself could not discover them. Thus they *digged deep to hide their counsel from the Lord*, but were made to know it is *vain*. "*How is it that you are thus infatuated ! What strange stupidity has seized you, that you would venture to make trial of that which is past dispute ? How is it that you, who are baptized christians, do not understand yourselves better ? How durst you run so great a risk ?*"

(2.) Her doom is read ; *Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband, are at the door ;* (perhaps he heard them coming, or knew that they could not be long ;) and they shall *carry thee out*. As Adam and Eve, who agreed to eat the forbidden fruit, were turned together out of paradise ; so Ananias and Sapphira, who agreed to *tempt the Spirit of the Lord*, were together *chased out of the world*.

The sentence *executed itself* ; there needed no executioner, a killing power went along with Peter's word, as sometimes a healing power did ; for the God in whose name he spake, *kills and makes alive ; and out of his mouth* (and Peter was now his mouth) *both evil and good proceed ;* (v. 10.) *Then fell she down straightway at his feet*. Some sinners God makes quick work with, while others he bears long with ; for which difference, doubtless, there are good reasons ; but he is not accountable to us for them. She heard not till now that her husband was dead, the notice of which, with the discovery of her sin, and the sentence of death passed upon her, struck her as a thunderbolt, and took her away *as with a whirlwind*. And many instances there are of sudden deaths, which are not to be looked upon as the punishment of some gross sin, like this ; we must not think that all who *die suddenly*, are sinners above others ; perhaps it is in favour to them, that they have a quick passage, however, it is forewarning to all to be always ready. But here it is plain that it was in judgment. Some put the question concerning the eternal state of Ananias and Sapphira, and incline to think that the *destruction of the flesh* was, that the *spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*. And I should go in with that charitable opinion, if there had been any space given them to repent, as there was to that incestuous Corinthian. But secret things belong not to us. It is said, *She fell down at Peter's feet* ; there where she should have laid the whole price, and did not, she was herself laid, as it were to make up the deficiency. The *young men* that had the care of funerals, coming in, *found her dead* ; and it is not said, *They wound her up*, as they did Ananias, but, *They carried her out as she was, and buried her by her husband* ; probably an inscription was set over their graves, intimating that they were joint-monuments of divine wrath against those that lie to the Holy Ghost. Some ask whether the apostles kept the money which they did bring, and concerning which they lied ? I am apt to think they did ; they had not the superstition of those who said, *It is not lawful for us to put it into the treasury : for unto the pure all things are pure*. What they brought,

was not polluted to them that they brought it to ; but what they kept back, was polluted to them that kept it back. Use was made of the censers of Korah's mutineers.

V. The impression that this made upon the people ; notice is taken of this in the midst of the story (v. 5.) *Great fear came upon all that heard these things ; that heard what Peter said, and saw what followed ; or upon all that heard the story of it ; for, no doubt, it was all the talk of the city*. And again, (v. 11.) *Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things*.

1. They that had joined themselves to the church, were hereby struck with an awe of God, and of his judgments, and with a greater veneration of this dispensation of the Spirit which they were now under. It was not a damp or check to their holy joy, but it taught them to be serious in it, and to rejoice with trembling. All that laid their money at the apostles' feet after this, were afraid of keeping back *any part of the price*.

2. All that heard it, were put into a consternation by it, and were ready to say, *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God*, and his Spirit in the apostles ? As 1 Sam. 6. 20.

12. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. 13. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them : but the people magnified them. 14. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) 15. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. 16. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits : and they were healed every one.

We have here an account of the progress of the gospel, notwithstanding this terrible judgment inflicted upon two hypocrites.

1. Here is a general account of the miracles which the apostles wrought ; (v. 12.) *By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ;* many miracles of mercy for one of judgment. Now the gospel-power returned to its proper channel, which is that of mercy and grace, God had come out of his place to punish, but now returns to his place, to his mercy-seat again. The miracles they wrought proved their divine mission ; they were not a few, but many, of divers kinds and often repeated ; they were signs and wonders, such wonders as were confessedly signs of a divine presence and power ; they were not done in a corner, but *among the people*, who were at liberty to inquire into them, and, if there had been any fraud or collusion in them, would have discovered it.

II. We are here told what were the effects of these miracles which the apostles wrought.

1. The church was hereby kept together, and confirmed in its adherence both to the apostles, and to one another ; *They of the church were all with one accord in Solomon's porch*.

(1.) They met in the temple, in the open place that was called *Solomon's porch*. It was strange that the rulers of the temple suffered them to keep

their meeting there. But God inclined their hearts to tolerate them there a while, for the more convenient spreading of the gospel; and they who permitted buyers and sellers, could not for shame prohibit such preachers and healers there. They all met in public-worship; so early is the institution of religious assemblies observed in the church, which must by no means be forsaken or let fall, for in them a profession of religion is kept up.

(2.) They were there *with one accord*, unanimous in their doctrine, worship, and discipline; and there was no discontent or murmuring about the death of Ananias and Sapphira, as there was against Moses and Aaron, about the death of Korah and his company; *Ye have killed the people of the Lord*, Numb. 16. 41. The separation of hypocrites by distinguishing judgments, should make the sincere cleave so much the closer to each other and to the gospel-ministry.

2. It gained the apostles very *great respect*, who were the prime ministers of state in Christ's kingdom.

(1.) The other ministers kept their distance; *Of the rest of their company durst no man join himself to them*, as their equal or an associate with them; though others of them were endued with the Holy Ghost, and *spoke with tongues*, yet none of them at this time did such *signs and wonders* as the apostles did; and therefore they acknowledged their superiority, and in every thing yielded to them.

(2.) All the people *magnified them*, and had them in great veneration; spake of them with respect, and represented them as the favourites of Heaven, and unspeakable blessings to this earth. Though the chief priests vilified them, and did all they could to make them contemptible, that did not hinder the people from magnifying them, who saw the thing in a true light. Observe, The apostles were far from *magnifying themselves*, they transmitted the glory of all they did very carefully and faithfully to Christ, and yet the people *magnified them*; for they that humble themselves shall be exalted, and those honoured, that honour God only.

3. The church increased in number; (v. 14.) *Believers were the more added to the Lord*, and, no doubt, joined themselves to the church, when they saw that God was in it of a truth, even *multitudes both of men and women*. They were so far from being deterred by the example that was made of Ananias and Sapphira, that they were rather *invited* by it into a society that kept such a strict discipline. Observe,

(1.) *Believers are added to the Lord Jesus*, joined to him, and so joined in his mystical body, from which nothing can separate us and cut us off, but that which separates us and cuts us off from Christ. Many have been brought *to the Lord*, and yet *there is room* for others to be *added to him*, added to the number of those that are united to him; and additions will still be making till the mystery of God shall be finished, and the number of the elect accomplished.

(2.) Notice is taken of the conversion of *women* as well as *men*; more notice than generally was in the Jewish church, in which they neither received the sign of circumcision, nor were obliged to attend the solemn feasts; and the *court of the women* was one of the *outer courts* of the temple. But, as among those that followed Christ while he was upon earth, so among those that believed on him after he went to heaven, great notice was taken of the good women.

4. The apostles had abundance of patients, and gained abundance of reputation both to them and their doctrine, by the cure of them all, v. 15, 16. So many *signs and wonders* were wrought by the *apostles*, that all manner of people put in for the

benefit of them, both in city and country, and had it.

(1.) In the city: They brought forth their sick into the streets, for it is probable that the priests would not suffer them to bring them into the temple to Solomon's porch, and the apostles had not leisure to come to the houses of them all. And they laid them on beds and couches, because they were so weak, that they could neither go nor stand, *that at the least the shadow of Peter, passing by, might overshadow some of them*, though it could not reach them all; and, it should seem, it had the desired effect, as the woman's touch of the hem of Christ's garment had; and in this, among other things, that word of Christ was fulfilled, *Greater works than these shall ye do*. God expresses his care of his people, by his being their *shade on their right hand*; and the benign influences of Christ as a King, are compared to the *shadow of a great rock*. Peter comes between them and the sun, and so heals them, cuts them off from a dependence upon creature sufficiency as insufficient, that they may expect help only from that Spirit of grace with whom he was filled. And if such miracles were wrought by Peter's shadow, we have reason to think they were so by the other apostles, as by the handkerchiefs from Paul's body; (ch. 19. 12.) no doubt, both being with an actual intention in the minds of the apostles thus to heal; so that it is absurd hence to infer a healing virtue in the relics of saints that are dead and gone; we read not of any cured by the relics of Christ himself, after he was gone, as certainly we should, if there had been any such thing.

(2.) In the country-towns; multitudes came to Jerusalem from the cities round about, bringing sick folks that were afflicted in body, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits, that were troubled in mind, and they were healed every one; distempered bodies and distempered minds were set to rights. Thus opportunity was given to the apostles, both to convince people's judgments by these miracles, of the heavenly original of the doctrine they preached; and also to engage people's affections both to them and it, by giving them a specimen of its beneficial tendency to the welfare of this lower world.

17. Then the High-Priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, 18. And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. 19. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison-doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20. Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people, all the words of this life. 21. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the High-Priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23. Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. 24. Now when the High-Priest, and the captain of the temple, and the

Chief Priests, heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. 25. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

Never did any good work go on with any hope of success, but it met with opposition; they that are bent to do mischief, cannot be reconciled to them who make it their business to do good. Satan, the destroyer of mankind, ever was, and will be, an adversary to those who are the benefactors of mankind; and it would have been strange, if the apostles had gone on thus teaching and healing, and had had no check. In these verses we have the malice of hell and the grace of heaven struggling about them; the one to drive them off from this good work, the other to animate them in it.

1. The priests were enraged at them, and clapt them up in prison, v. 17, 18. Observe,

1. Who their enemies and persecutors were. The High-Priest was the ringleader, *Annas* or *Caïaphas*, who saw their wealth and dignity, their power and tyranny, that is, their *all*, at stake, and inevitably lost, if the spiritual and heavenly doctrine of Christ get ground and prevail among the people. Those that were most forward to join with the High-Priest herein, were the *sect of the Sadducees*, who had a particular enmity to the gospel of Christ, because it confirmed and established the doctrine of the invisible world, the resurrection of the dead, and the future state, which they denied. It is not strange if men of *no religion* be bigoted in their opposition to true and pure religion.

2. How they were affected toward them; ill affected, and exasperated to the last degree; when they heard and saw what flocking there was to the apostles, and how considerable they were become, they *rose up* in a passion, as men that could no longer bear it, and were resolved to make head against it, being *filled with indignation* at the apostles for preaching the doctrine of Christ, and curing the sick; at the people for hearing them, and bringing the sick to them to be cured; and at themselves and their own party, for suffering this matter to go so far, and not knocking it on the head at first. Thus are the enemies of Christ and his gospel a torment to themselves. *Envy slays the silly one.*

3. How they proceeded against them; (v. 18.) *They laid their hands on them*, perhaps their own hands, (so low did their malice make them stoop,) or, rather, the hands of their officers, and *put them in the common prison*, among the worst of malefactors. Hereby they designed, (1.) *To put a restraint upon them*; though they could not lay any thing criminal to their charge, worthy of death or of bonds, yet while they had them in prison, they kept them from going on in their work, and that they reckoned a good point gained. Thus early were the ambassadors of Christ in bonds. (2.) *To put a terror upon them*, and so to drive them off from their work; the last time they had them before them, they had only threatened them; (ch. 4. 21.) but now, finding that did not do, they imprisoned them, to make them afraid of them. (3.) *To put a disgrace upon them*, and therefore they chose to clapt them up in the *common prison*, that, being thus *vilified*, the people might not, as they had done, *magnify them*. Satan has carried on his design against the gospel very much by making the preachers and professors of it despicable.

II. God sent his angel to *release* them out of prison, and to *renew their commission* to preach the gospel; the powers of darkness fight against them, but the Father of lights fights for them and sends

an angel of light to plead their cause. The Lord will never desert *his* witnesses, *his* advocates, but will certainly stand by them, and bear them out.

1. The apostles are discharged, legally discharged, from their imprisonment; (v. 19.) *The angel of the Lord by night*, in spite of all the locks and bars that were upon them, *opened the prison-doors*, and, in spite of all the vigilance and resolution of the keepers that *stood without before the doors, brought forth* the prisoners, (see v. 23.) gave them authority to go out without crime, and led them through all opposition. This deliverance is not so particularly related as that of Peter; (ch. 12. 7, &c.) but the miracle here was the very same. Note, There is no prison so dark, so strong, but God can both visit his people in it, and, if he pleases, fetch them out of it. The discharge of the apostles out of prison by an angel, was a resemblance of Christ's resurrection, and his discharge out of the prison of the grave, and would help to confirm the apostles' preaching of it.

2. They are charged, and legally charged, to go on with their work, so as thereby to be discharged from the prohibition which the High-Priest laid them under; the angel bid them, *Go, stand, and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life*, v. 20. When they were miraculously set at liberty, they must not think it was that they might save their lives by making their escape out of the hands of their enemies. No; it was that they might go on with their work with so much the more boldness. Recoveries from sickness, releases out of trouble, are granted us, and are to be looked upon by us as granted, not that we may enjoy the comforts of our life, but that God may be honoured with the services of our life. *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*, Ps. 119. 175. *Bring my soul out of prison*, (as the apostle here,) *that I may praise thy name*, Ps. 142. 7. See Isa. 38. 22.

Now in this charge given them, observe, (1.) Where they must preach; *Speak in the temple*. One would think, though they might not quit their work, yet it had been prudence to go on with it in a more private place, where it would give less offence to the priests than in the temple, and so would the less expose them. No; "*Speak in the temple*, for that is the place of concourse, that is your Father's house, and is not to be as yet quite *left desolate*." It is not for the preachers of Christ's gospel to retire into corners, as long as they can have any opportunity of preaching in the great congregation. (2.) To whom they must preach; "*Speak to the people*; not to the princes and rulers, for they will not hearken; but to the people, who are willing and desirous to be taught, and whose souls are as precious to Christ, and ought to be so to you, as the souls of the greatest. *Speak to the people*, to all in general, for all are concerned." (3.) How they must preach; *Go, stand, and speak*: which intimates, not only that they must speak publicly, *Stand up*, and speak, that all may hear; but that they must speak boldly and resolutely, *Stand, and speak*; that is, "*Speak it as those that resolve to stand to it, to live and die by it*." (4.) What they must speak; *all the words of this life*. This life which you have been speaking of among yourselves; referring perhaps to the conferences concerning heaven, which they had among themselves for their own and one another's encouragement in prison; "*Go, and preach the same to the world, that others may be comforted with the same comforts with which you yourselves are comforted of God*." Or, "*of this life which the Sadducees deny, and therefore persecute you: preach that, though you know that it is which they have indignation at*." Or, "*of this life emphatically; this heavenly, divine life, in comparison with which the present earthly life does not deserve the name*." Or, "*these words of life*, the very same you have

preached, these words which the Holy Ghost puts into your mouth." Note, The words of the gospel are the words of life; quickening words; they are spirit, and they are life; *words whereby we may be saved*; that is the same with this here, *ch. 11. 14.* The gospel is the word of this life; for it secures to us the privileges of our way as well as those of our home, and the promises of the life that now is as well as of that to come. And yet even spiritual and eternal life are brought so much to light in the gospel, that they may be called *this life*; for the word is nigh thee. Note, The gospel is concerning matters of *life and death*, and ministers must preach it, and people hear it accordingly. They must speak *all* the words of this life, and not conceal any for fear of offending, or in hope of ingratiating themselves with, their rulers. Christ's witnesses are sworn to speak *the whole truth*.

III. They went on with their work; (*v. 21.*) *When they heard that*; when they heard that it was the will of God that they should continue to preach in the temple, they *returned to Solomon's porch* there, *v. 12.*

1. It was a great satisfaction to them to have these fresh orders. Perhaps, they began to question whether, if they had their liberty, they should preach as publicly in the temple as they had done, because they had been bid, when they were *persecuted in one city, to flee to another*. But now that the angel ordered them to go preach in the temple, their way was plain, and they ventured without any difficulty, *entered into the temple*, and feared not the face of man. Note, If we may but be satisfied concerning our duty, our business is to keep close to that, and then we may cheerfully trust God with our safety.

2. They set themselves immediately to execute them, without dispute or delay. *They entered into the temple early in the morning*, (as soon as the gates were opened, and people began to come together there,) and taught them the gospel of the kingdom; and did not at all fear what man could do unto them. The case here was extraordinary, the whole treasure of the gospel is lodged in their hands; if they be silent now, the springs are shut up, and the whole work falls to the ground, and is made to cease; which is not the case of ordinary ministers, who therefore are not by this example bound to throw themselves into the mouth of danger; and yet when God gives opportunity of doing good, though we be under the restraint and terror of human powers, we should venture far, rather than let go such an opportunity.

IV. The High-Priest and his party went on with their prosecution, *v. 21.* They, supposing they had the apostles sure enough, *called the council together*, a great and extraordinary council, for they summoned *all the senate of the children of Israel*. See here,

1. How they were prepared, and how big with expectation, to crush the gospel of Christ and the preachers of it, for they raised the whole *posse*. The last time they had the apostles in custody, they conveyed them only before a committee of those that were *of the kindred of the High-Priest*, who were obliged to act cautiously; but now, that they might proceed further and with more assurance, they called together, *πᾶσαν τὴν γερουσίαν*—*all the eldership*, that is, (says Dr. Lightfoot,) *all the three courts or benches of judges in Jerusalem*, not only the great Sanhedrim, consisting of seventy elders, but the other two judicatories that were erected one in the outer court gate of the temple, the other in the inner or beautiful gate, consisting of twenty-three judges each. So that if there were a full appearance, here were one hundred and sixteen judges. Thus God ordered it, that the confusion of the enemies might be more public, and the apostles' testi-

mony against them, and that these might hear the gospel, who would not hear it otherwise than from the bar. Howbeit, the High-Priest meant *not so*, neither did his heart think so; but it was in his heart to rally all his forces against the apostles, and by a universal consent to cut them all off at once.

2. How they were disappointed, and had their faces filled with shame; *He that sits in heaven, laughs at them*, and so may we too, to see how gravely the court is set; and we may suppose the High-Priest makes a solemn speech to them, setting forth the occasion of their coming together; that a very dangerous faction was now lately raised at Jerusalem, by the preaching of the doctrine of Jesus, which it was needful, for the preservation of their church, (which never was in such danger as now,) speedily and effectually to suppress; that it was now in the power of their hands to do it, for he had the ringleaders of the faction now in the common prison, to be proceeded against, if they would but agree to it, with the utmost severity. An officer is, in order hereunto, dispatched immediately to fetch the prisoners to the bar. But see how they are baffled;

(1.) The officers come, and tell them that they are *not to be found in the prison*, *v. 22, 23.* The last time they were forthcoming, when they were called for, *ch. 4. 7.* But now they were gone, and the report which the officers make, is, *"The prison-doors truly found we shut with all safety;"* (nothing had been done to weaken them;) *"the keepers had not been wanting to their duty; we found them standing without before the doors, and knowing nothing to the contrary, but that the prisoners were all safe: but when we went in, we found no man therein, none of the men we were sent to fetch."* It is probable that they found the common prisoners there. Which way the angel fetched them, whether by some back way, or opening the door, and fastening it close again, (the keepers all the while asleep,) we are not told; however it was, they were gone. The Lord knows, though we do not, how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and how to loose those that are in bonds for his name's sake, and he will do it, as here, when he has occasion for them.

Now think how blank the court looked, when the officers made this return upon their order: (*v. 24.*) *When the High-Priest, and the captain of the temple, and the chief priests, heard those things*, they were all at a plunge, and looked upon one another, *doubting what this thing should be*. They were *extremely perplexed*, were at their *wit's-end*, having never been so disappointed in all their lives, of a thing they were so sure of. It occasioned *various speculations*; some suggesting that they were conjured out of the prison, and made their escape by magic arts; others, that the keepers had played tricks with them, not knowing how many friends these prisoners had, that were so much the darlings of the people. Some feared that, having made such a wonderful escape, they would be the more followed; others, that though perhaps they had frightened them from Jerusalem, they should hear of them again in some part or other of the country, where they would do yet more mischief, and it would be yet more out of their power to stop the spreading of the infection; and now they begin to fear that instead of curing the ill, they have made it worse. Note, Those often distress and embarrass themselves, that think to distress and embarrass the cause of Christ.

(2.) Their doubt is, in part, determined; and yet their vexation is increased by another messenger, who brings them word that *their prisoners are preaching in the temple*; (*v. 25.*) *"Behold, the men whom ye put in prison, and have sent for to your bar, are now hard by you here, standing in the temple,*

under your nose, and in defiance of you, *teaching the people.*" Prisoners, that have broken prison, abscond, for fear of being retaken : but these prisoners, that here made their escape, dare to shew their faces even there where their persecutors have the greatest influence. Now this confounded them more than any thing. Common malefactors may have art enough to break prison ; but they are uncommon ones, that have courage enough to avow it when they have done.

26. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence : for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. 27. And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council : and the High-Priest asked them, 28. Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name ? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29. Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. 30. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. 31. *Him* hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32. And we are his witnesses of these things ; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. 33. When they heard *that*, they were cut to the heart, and took council to slay them. 34. Then stood there one up in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space ; 35. And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do as touching these men. 36. For before these days stood up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody ; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves : who was slain ; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. 37. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him : he also perished ; and all, *even* as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. 38. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought : 39. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. 40. And to him they agreed : and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing

that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. 42. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

We are not told what it was that the apostles preached to the people ; no doubt, it was, according to the direction of the angel, *the words of this life* ; but what passed between them and the council, we have here an account of ; for in their sufferings there appeared more of a divine power and energy than even in their preaching. Now here we have,

I. The seizing of the apostles a second time. We may think, if God designed this, "Why were they rescued from their first imprisonment ?" But that was designed to humble the pride, and check the fury, of their persecutors ; and now he would shew that they were discharged ; not because they feared a trial, for they were ready to surrender themselves, and make their appearance before the greatest of their enemies.

1. They brought them without violence, with all the respect and tenderness that could be : did not pull them out of the pulpit, nor bind them, or drag them along, but accosted them respectfully. One would think they had reason to do so, in reverence to the temple, that holy place, and for fear of the apostles, lest they should strike them, as they did Ananias, or call for fire from heaven upon them, as Elias did ; but all that restrained their violence, was, their *fear of the people*, who had such a veneration for the apostles, that they would stone them if they offered them any abuse.

2. Yet they brought them to those who, they knew, were violent against them, and were resolved to take violent courses with them ; (v. 27.) They *brought them, to set them before the council*, as delinquents. Thus the powers that should have been a terror to evil works and workers, became so to the good.

II. Their examination ; being brought before this august assembly, the High-Priest, as the mouth of the court, told them what it was they had to lay to their charge, v. 28.

1. That they had *disobeyed the commands of authority*, and would not submit to the injunctions and prohibitions given them ; (v. 28.) " *Did not we*, by virtue of our authority, straitly charge and command you, upon pain of our highest displeasure, *that you should not teach in this name* ? But you have disobeyed our commands, and go on to preach not only without our licence, but against our express order." Thus they who make void the commandments of God, are commonly very strict in binding on their own commandments, and insisting upon their own power ; *Did not we command you* ? Yes, they did ; but did not Peter at the same time tell them, that God's authority was superior to their's, and his commands must take place of their's ? And they had forgotten that.

2. That they *spread false doctrine* among the people, or at least a singular doctrine, which was not allowed by the Jewish church, nor agreed with what was delivered from Moses's chair ; " *Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine*, and thereby have disturbed the public peace, and drawn people from the public establishment." Some take this for a haughty scornful word ; " This silly senseless doctrine of your's, that is not worth taking notice of, you have made such a noise with, that even Jerusalem, the great and holy city, is become *full of it*, and it is all the talk of the town." They are angry that men, whom they looked upon as despicable, should make themselves thus considerable.

3. That they had a *malicious design against the government*, and aimed to stir up the people against it, by representing it as wicked and tyrannical, and that had made itself justly odious both to God and

man; "Ye intend to bring this man's blood, the guilt of it before God, the shame of it before men, upon us." Thus they charge them not only with contumacy and contempt of the court, but with sedition and faction, and a plot to set not only the people against them, for having persecuted even to death not only so innocent but so good and great a man as this Jesus, but the Romans too, for having drawn them into it. See here how those that with a great deal of presumption will do an evil thing, yet cannot bear to hear of it afterward, or to have it charged upon them. When they were in the heart of the persecution, they could cry daringly enough, "*His blood be upon us, and upon our children*"; let us bear the blame for ever." But now that they have time for a cooler thought, they take it as a heinous affront to have his blood laid at their door. Thus are they convicted and condemned by their own consciences, and dread lying under that guilt which they were not afraid to involve themselves in.

III. Their answer to the charge exhibited against them; *Peter and the other apostles* all spake to the same purport; whether severally examined, or answering jointly, they spake as one and the same Spirit gave them utterance, depending upon the promise their Master had made them, that, when they were brought before councils, it should be given them in that same hour what they should speak, and courage to speak it.

1. They justified themselves in their disobedience to the commands of the great Sanhedrim, great as it was; (v. 29.) *We ought to obey God rather than men.* They do not plead the power they had to work miracles, (that spake sufficiently for them, and therefore they humbly decline mentioning it themselves,) but they appeal to a maxim universally owned, and which even natural conscience subscribes to, and which comes home to their case. God had commanded them to teach in the name of Christ, and therefore they ought to do it, though the chief priests forbade them. Those rulers set up in opposition to God, and have a great deal to answer for, who punish men for disobedience to them, in that which was their duty to God.

2. They justify themselves in doing what they could to fill Jerusalem with the doctrine of Christ, though, in preaching him up, they did indeed reflect upon those that maliciously ran him down; and if they thereby bring his blood upon them, they may thank themselves. It is charged upon them as a crime, that they preached Christ and his gospel; "Now," say they, "we will tell you who this Christ is, and what his gospel is, and then do you judge whether we ought not to preach it; nay, and we shall take this opportunity to preach it to you, whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear."

(1.) The chief priests are told to their faces the indignities they did to this Jesus; "*Ye slew him and hanged him on a tree, ye cannot deny it.*" The apostles, instead of making an excuse, or begging their pardon, for bringing the guilt of this man's blood upon them, repeat the charge, and stand to it; "*It was you that slew him; it was your act and deed.*" Note, People's being unwilling to hear of their faults, is no good reason why they should not be faithfully told of them. It is a common excuse made for not reproving sin, that the times will not bear it. But they whose office it is to reprove, must not be awed by that; the times must bear it, and shall bear it; *Cry aloud, and spare not*; cry aloud and fear not.

(2.) They are told also what honours God put upon this Jesus, and then let them judge who was in the right, the persecutors of his doctrine, or the preachers of it. He calls God the *God of our fathers*, not only ours, but yours, to shew that in preaching Christ they did not preach a new god, nor

entice people to come and worship other gods; nor did they set up an institution contrary to that of Moses and the prophets, but they adhered to the *God of the Jewish fathers*; and that name of Christ which they preached, answered the promises made to the fathers, and the covenant God entered into with them, and the types and figures of the law he gave them. The *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, is the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*; see what honour he did him.

[1.] He raised him up; that is, he qualified him for, and called him to, his great undertaking. It seems to refer to the promise God made by Moses, *A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you. God raised him up out of obscurity, and made him great.* Or, it may be meant of his raising him up from the grave; "*You put him to death*, but God has restored him to life, so that God and you are manifestly contesting about this Jesus; and which must we side with?"

[2.] He exalted him with his right hand, *where hath lifted him up.* You loaded him with disgrace, but God has crowned him with honour; and ought we not to honour him whom God honours?" God has exalted him, *ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ*—with his right hand, that is, by his power put forth; Christ is said to live by the power of God. Or, to his right hand, to sit there, to rest there, to rule there; "He has invested him with the highest dignity, and intrusted him with the highest authority, and therefore we must teach in his name, for God has given him a name above every name."

[3.] "He has appointed him to be a Prince and a Saviour, and therefore we ought to preach in his name, and to publish the laws of his government as he is a Prince, and the offers of his grace as he is a Saviour." Observe, there is no having Christ to be our Saviour, unless we be willing to take him for our Prince. We cannot expect to be redeemed and healed by him, unless we give up ourselves to be ruled by him. The judges of old were saviours. Christ's ruling is in order to his saving, and faith takes an entire Christ, that came, not to save us in our sins, but to save us from our sins.

[4.] He is appointed, as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. Therefore they must preach in his name to the people of Israel, for his favours were designed, primarily and principally for them; and none that truly loved their country, could be against that. Why should the rulers and elders of Israel oppose one who came with no less a blessing to Israel than repentance and pardon? Had he been exalted to give deliverance to Israel from the Roman yoke, and dominion over the neighbouring nations, the chief priests would have welcomed him with all their hearts. But repentance and remission of sins are blessings they neither value nor see their need of, and therefore they can by no means admit his doctrine. Observe here, *First*, Repentance and remission go together; wherever repentance is wrought, remission is without fail granted, and the favour given to all those to whom is given the qualification for it. On the other hand, no remission without repentance; none are freed from the guilt and punishment of sin but those that are freed from the power and dominion of sin; that are turned from it, and turned against it. *Secondly*, It is Jesus Christ that gives, and is authorized to give, both repentance and remission. Whatsoever is required in the gospel-covenant, is promised. Are we appointed to repent? Christ is appointed to give repentance, by his Spirit working with the word, to awaken the conscience, to work contrition for sin, and an effectual change in the heart and life. The new heart is his work, and the broken spirit a sacrifice of his providing; and when he has given repentance, if he should not give

remission, he would *forsake the work of his own hands*. See how necessary it is that we repent, and that we apply ourselves to Christ by faith for his grace to work repentance in us.

[5.] All this is well attested, *First*, By the *apostles themselves*; they are ready to testify upon oath, if required, that they saw him alive after his resurrection, and saw him ascend into heaven; and also that they experienced the power of his grace upon their hearts, raising them up to that which was far above their natural capacities. "*We are his witnesses*, appointed by him to publish this to the world, and if we should be silent, as you would have us, we should betray a trust, and be false to it." When a cause is trying, witnesses, of all men, ought not to be silenced, for the issue of the cause depends on their testimony. *Secondly*, By the *Spirit of God*; "*We are witnesses, competent ones, and whose testimony is sufficient before any human judicature.*" But that is not all, *The Holy Ghost is witness*, a witness from heaven; *for God hath given his gifts and graces to them that obey Christ*. Therefore we must preach in his name, because for this end the Holy Ghost is given us, whose operations we cannot stifle.

Note, The giving of the Holy Ghost to obedient believers, not only to bring them to the *obedience of faith*, but to make them eminently useful therein, is a very strong proof of the truth of christianity. God gave the Holy Ghost by *his Son and in his name*, (John 14. 26.) and in answer to his prayer; (John 14. 16.) nay, it was Christ that sent him from the Father; (John 15. 26.—16. 17.) and this proves the glory to which the Father has exalted him. The great work of the Spirit being not only to justify Christ, (1 Tim. 3. 16.) but to glorify him, and all his gifts having a direct tendency to exalt his name, proves that his doctrine is divine, else it would not be carried on thus by a divine power. And, Lastly, *The giving of the Holy Ghost to them that obey Christ*, both for their assistance in their obedience, and as a present recompense for their obedience, is a plain evidence that it is the will of God that Christ should be obeyed; "and then judge whether we ought to obey you in opposition to him."

IV. The impression which the apostles' defence of themselves made upon the court; it was contrary to what one would have expected from men that pretended to reason, learning, and sanctity; surely such fair reasoning could not but clear the prisoners, and convert the judges; no, instead of yielding to it, they raged against it, and were filled,

1. With indignation at what the apostles said; they were *cut to the heart*, angry to see their own sin set in order before them; stark mad to find that the gospel of Christ had so much to say for itself, and, consequently, was likely to get ground. When a sermon was preached to the people to this purport, they were *pricked to the heart*, in remorse and godly sorrow, ch. 2. 37. These here were *cut to the heart* with rage and indignation. Thus the same gospel is to some a savour of *life unto life*, to others of *death unto death*. The enemies of the gospel not only deprive themselves of its comforts, but fill themselves with terrors, and are their own tormentors.

2. With malice against the apostles themselves; since they see they cannot stop their mouths any other way than by stopping their breath, they *take counsel to slay them*, hoping that so they should *cause the work to cease*. While the apostles went on in the service of Christ, with a holy security and serenity of mind, perfectly composed, and in a sweet enjoyment of themselves, their persecutors went on in their opposition to Christ, with a continual perplexity and perturbation of mind, and vexation to themselves.

V. The grave advice which Gamaliel, a leading man in the council, gave upon this occasion, the

scope of which was to moderate the fury of these bigots, and check the violence of the prosecution. This Gamaliel is here said to be a *Pharisee* by his profession and sect, and by office a *doctor of the law*, one that studied the scriptures of the Old Testament, read lectures upon the sacred authors, and trained up pupils in the knowledge of them; Paul was brought up at his feet; (ch. 22. 3.) and tradition says, that so were Stephen and Barnabas. Some say that he was the son of that Simon that took up Christ in his arms, when he was presented in the temple; and grandson of the famous Hillel. He is here said to be *in reputation among all the people* for his wisdom and conduct; it appearing by this passage that he was a moderate man, and not apt to go in with furious measures. Men of temper and charity are justly had in reputation, for checking the incendiaries that otherwise would set the earth on fire. Now observe here,

1. The necessary caution he gives to the council, with reference to the case before them; *he commanded to put the apostles forth a little while*, that he might speak the more freely, and be the more freely answered; (it was fit that the prisoners should withdraw when their cause was to be debated;) and then put the house in mind of the importance of this matter, which in their heat they were not capable of considering as they ought; "*Ye men of Israel*, saith he, *take heed to yourselves*, consider what you do, or intend to do, as touching these men, v. 35. It is not a common ease, and therefore should not be hastily determined." He calls them *men of Israel*, to enforce this caution; "You are men, that should be governed by reason, be not then as *the horse and the mule that have no understanding*; you are men of Israel, that should be governed by revelation, be not then as strangers and heathens, that have no regard to God and his word. *Take heed to yourselves*, now that you are angry at these men, lest you *mettle to your own hurt*." Note, The persecutors of God's people had best *look to themselves*, lest they fall into the pit which they dig. We have need to be cautious whom we give trouble to, lest we be found making the hearts of the righteous sad.

2. The cases he cites, to pave the way to his opinion; two instances he gives of factious seditious men, (such as they would have the apostles thought to be,) whose attempts came to nothing of themselves; whence he infers, that if these men were indeed such as they represented them, their cause would sink with its own weight, and Providence would infatuate and defeat them, and then they needed not persecute them.

(1.) There was one *Theudas*, that made a mighty noise for a while, as one sent of God, *boasting him self to be somebody, some great one*, (so the word is,) either a teacher or a prince, with a divine commission to effect some great revolution either in the church or in the state; and he observes here, (v. 36.) concerning him, [1.] How far he prevailed; "*A number of men*, about four hundred in all, joined themselves to him, that knew not what to do with themselves, or hoped to mend themselves; and they seemed then a formidable body." [2.] How soon his pretensions were all dashed; "*When he was slain*," (probably in war,) "*there needed no more ado, all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and melted away like snow before the sun*. Now compare that case with this; you have slain Jesus, the ringleader of this faction, you have taken him off. Now if he was, as you say he was, an impostor and pretender, his death, like that of Theudas, will be the death of his cause, and the final dispersion of his followers." From what has been, we may infer what will be in a like case; the *smiting of the shepherd* will be the *scattering of the sheep*; and if the God of peace had not *brought again from the dead*

that great Shepherd, the dispersion of the sheep, at his death, had been total and final.

(2.) The case was the same with Judas of Galilee, *v. 37.* Observe, [1.] The attempt he made. It is said to be *after this*; which some read, *beside this*, or, Let me mention, *after this*; supposing that Judas's insurrection was long before that of Theudas; for it was *in the time of the taxation*, that at our Saviour's birth, (Luke 2. 1.) and that of Theudas, whom Josephus speaks of, that mutinied, in the time of Cuspius Fadus; but that was in the days of Claudius Cæsar, some years after Gamaliel spake this, and therefore could not be the same. It is not easy to determine particularly when these events happened, nor whether this taxing was the same with that at our Saviour's birth, or one of a later date. Some think this Judas of Galilee was the same with Judas Gaulonites, whom Josephus speaks of, others not. It is probable that they were cases which lately happened, and were fresh in memory; this Judas drew away much people after him, who gave credit to his pretensions. But, [2.] Here is the defeat of his attempt, and that without any interposal of the great Sanhedrim, or any decree of theirs against him; (it did not need it;) *he also perished, and all even as many as obeyed him*, or were persuaded by him, were dispersed. Many have foolishly thrown away their lives, and brought others into the same snare, by a jealousy for their liberties, *in the days of the taxing*, who had better have been content, when Providence had so determined, to *serve the king of Babylon*.

3. His opinion upon the whole matter.

(1.) That they should not persecute the apostles; (*v. 38.*) *Now I say unto you, τὰ νῦν—for the present*, as the matter now stands, my advice is, "*Refrain from these men*; neither punish them for what they have done, nor restrain them for the future. Connive at them, let them take their course; *let not our hand be upon them.*" It is uncertain whether he spake this out of policy, for fear of offending either the people or the Romans, and making further mischief. The apostles did not attempt any thing by outward force, the weapons of their warfare were not carnal; and therefore why should any outward force be used against them? Or, whether he was under some present convictions, at least of the probability of the truth of the christian doctrine, and thought it deserved better treatment, at least a fair trial; or, whether it was only the language of a mild quiet spirit, that was against persecution for conscience-sake; or, whether God put this word into his mouth beyond his own intention, for the deliverance of the apostles at this time; we are sure there was an over-ruling Providence in it, that the servants of Christ might not only come off, but come off honourably.

(2.) That they should refer this matter to Providence; "*Wait the issue, and see what it will come to. If it be of men, it will come to nought* of itself, *if of God, it will stand*, in spite of all your powers and policies." That which is apparently wicked and immoral must be suppressed, else the magistrate bears the sword in vain; but that which has a shew of good, and it is doubtful whether it be *of God or men*, it is best to *let it alone*, and let it take its fate, not to use any external force for the suppressing of it. Christ rules by the power of truth, not of the sword.

What Christ asked concerning John's baptism, *Was it from heaven, or of men?* was a question proper to be asked concerning the apostles' doctrine and baptism, which followed Christ, as John Baptist's went before him; now they, having owned concerning the former, that they *could not tell* whether it was *from heaven or of men*, ought not to be too confident concerning the latter; but take it

which way you will, it is a reason why they should not be persecuted.

[1.] "*If this counsel, and this work*, this forming of a society, and incorporating it in the name of Jesus, *be of men, it will come to nothing.* If it be the counsel and work of foolish men, that know not what they do, let them alone a while, and they will run themselves out of breath, and *their folly will be manifest before all men*, and they will make themselves ridiculous. If it be the counsel and work of politic and designing men, who, under colour of religion, are setting up a secular interest, let them alone a while, and they will throw off the mask, and their knavery *will be manifest to all men*, and they will make themselves odious; Providence will never countenance it; *it will come to nothing* in a little time; and, if so, your persecuting and opposing it is very needless; there is no occasion for giving yourselves so much trouble, and bringing such an odium upon yourselves, to kill that, which, if you give it a little time, will die of itself. The unnecessary use of power is an abuse of it. But,"

[2.] "*If it should prove, (and as wise men as you have been mistaken,) that this counsel and this work is of God*, that these preachers have their commissions and instructions from him, that they are as truly his messengers to the world as the Old Testament prophets were; then what do you think of persecuting them, of this attempt of your's (*v. 33.*) *to slay them?* You must conclude it to be," *First*, "*A fruitless attempt against them; if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it; for there is no wisdom nor counsel against the Lord; he that sits in heaven, laughs at you.*" It may be the comfort of all who are sincerely on God's side, who have a single eye to his will as their rule, and his glory as their end, that, whatsoever is of God, *cannot be overthrown* totally and finally, though it may be very vigorously opposed; it may be run upon, but cannot be run down. *Secondly*, "*A dangerous attempt to yourselves. Pray let it alone, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God; and I need not tell you who will come off by the worse in that contest.*" *Woe unto him that strives with his Maker*, for he will not only be overcome as an impotent enemy, but severely reckoned with as a rebel and traitor against his rightful Prince. They that hate and abuse God's faithful people, that restrain and silence his faithful ministers, *fight against God*; for he takes what is done against them as done against himself; *whoso touches them, touches the apple of his eye.*

Well, this was the advice of Gamaliel; we wish it were duly considered by those that persecute for conscience-sake, for it was a good thought, and natural enough, though we are uncertain what the man was. The tradition of the Jewish writers is, that, for all this, he lived and died an inveterate enemy to Christ and his gospel; and though (now at least) he was not for persecuting the followers of Christ, yet he was the man who composed that prayer which the Jews use to this day, for the extirpating of Christians and Christianity. On the contrary, the traditions of the Papists is, that he turned Christian, and became an eminent patron of Christianity, and a follower of Paul, who had *sat at his feet*. If that had been so, it is very probable that we should have heard of him somewhere in the *Acts or Epistles*.

VI. The determination of the council upon the whole matter, *v. 40.*

1. Thus far they agreed with Gamaliel, that they let fall the design of putting the apostles to death. They saw a great deal of reason in what Gamaliel said, and, for the present, it gave some check to their fury, and a remainder of their wrath was restrained by it.

2. Yet they could not forbear giving some vent to their rage, (so outrageous was it,) contrary to the convictions of their judgments and consciences; for, though they were advised *to let them alone*, yet, (1.) *They beat them*, scourged them as malefactors, stripped them, and whipped them, as they used to do in the synagogues, and notice is taken (v. 41.) of the ignomy of it; thus they thought to make them ashamed of preaching, and the people ashamed of hearing them; as Pilate scourged our Saviour, to expose him, when yet he declared he found *no fault in him*. (2.) *They commanded them that they should not speak any more in the name of Jesus*; that, if they could find no other fault with their preaching they might have this ground to reproach it, that it was against law, and not only without the permission, but against the express order of their superiors.

VII. The wonderful courage and constancy of the apostles in the midst of all these injuries and indignities done them; when they were dismissed, *they departed from the council*, and we do not find one word they said by way of reflection upon the court, and the unjust treatment given them; *when they were reviled, they reviled not again; and when they suffered, they threatened not, but committed their cause to him*, to whom Gamaliel had referred it, even to a God who judgeth righteously. All their business was to preserve the possession of their own souls, and to make full proof of their ministry, notwithstanding the opposition given them; and both these they did to admiration.

1. They bore their sufferings with an invincible cheerfulness; (v. 41.) When they *went out*, perhaps, with the marks of the lashes, given them on their arms and hands, appearing, hissed at by the servants and rabble, it may be, or public notice given of the infamous punishment they had undergone, instead of being ashamed of Christ, and their relation to him, *they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name*. They were men, and men in reputation, that had never done any thing to make themselves vile, and therefore could not but have a sense of the shame they suffered, which, it should seem, was more grievous to them than the smart, as it is to ingenuous minds; but they considered that *it was for the name of Christ* that they were thus abused, because they belonged to him, and served his interest, and their sufferings should be made to contribute to the further advancement of his name; and therefore, (1.) They reckoned it an honour, looked upon it *that they were counted worthy to suffer shame*, *καταξέσθαι ὀνειδισμῶν*—*that they were honoured, to be dishonoured for Christ*. Reproach for Christ is true preferment, as it makes us conformable to his pattern and serviceable to his interest. (2.) *They rejoiced in it*, remembering what their Master had said to them at their first setting out; (Matt. 5. 11, 12.) *When men shall revile you, and persecute you, rejoice and be exceeding glad*. They rejoiced, not only though they suffered shame, (their troubles did not diminish their joy,) but *that they suffered shame*; their troubles increased their joy, and added to it. If we suffer ill for doing well, provided we suffer it well, and as we should, we ought to rejoice in that grace which enabled us so to do.

2. They went on in their work with indefatigable diligence; (v. 42.) They were punished for preaching, and were commanded *not to preach*, and yet *they ceased not to teach and preach*; they omitted no opportunity, nor abated any thing of their zeal or forwardness. Observe, (1.) When they preached—*daily*; not only on sabbath-days, or on Lord's days, but every day, as duly as the day came, without intermitting any day, as their Master did, (Luke 19. 47. Matt. 26. 55.) not fearing that they should either kill themselves, or cloy their hearers. (2.) Where

they preached—both publicly *in the temple*, and privately *in every house*; in promiscuous assemblies, to which all resorted; and in the select assemblies of christians for special ordinances. They did not think that either one would excuse them from the other, for *the word must be preached in season and out of season*. Though *in the temple* they were more exposed, and under the eye of their enemies, yet they did not confine themselves to their little oratories in their own houses, but ventured into the post of danger; and though they had the liberty of *the temple*, a consecrated place, yet they made no difficulty of preaching in houses, *in every house*, even the poorest cottage. They visited the families of those that were under their charge, and gave particular instructions to them, according as their case required; even to the children and servants. (3.) What was the subject matter of their preaching; *They preached Jesus Christ*; they preached concerning him; that was not all, *they preached him up*, they proposed him to those who heard them, *to be their Prince and Saviour*. They did *not preach themselves, but Christ*, as faithful friends to the Bridegroom, making it their business to advance his interest. This was the preaching that gave most offence to the priests; they were willing that *they should preach any thing but Christ*; but they would not alter their subject to please them. It ought to be the constant business of gospel-ministers *to preach Christ*; *Christ, and him crucified*; *Christ, and him glorified*; nothing beside this, but what is reducible to it.

CHAP. VI.

In this chapter, we have, I. The discontent that was among the disciples about the distribution of the public charity, v. 1. II. The election and ordination of seven men, who should take care of that matter, and ease the apostles of the burthen, v. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. III. The increase of the church, by the addition of many to it, v. 7. IV. A particular account of Stephen, one of the seven. 1. His great activity for Christ, v. 8. 2. The opposition he met with from the enemies of Christianity, and his disputes with them, v. 9. 10. 3. The convening of him before the great Sanhedrim, and the crimes laid to his charge, v. 11. 14. 4. God's owning him upon his trial, v. 15.

1. **AND** in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. 2. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. 5. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: 6. Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their hands* on them. 7. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples

multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Having seen the church's struggles with its enemies, and triumphed with her in her victories, we now come to take a view of the administration of its affairs at home; and here we have,

I. An unhappy disagreement among some of the church members, which might have been of ill consequence, but was prudently accommodated and taken up in time; (v. 1.) *When the number of the disciples* (for so christians were at first called, learners of Christ) *was multiplied* to many thousands in Jerusalem, *then arose a murmuring*.

1. It does our hearts good to find *that the number of the disciples is multiplied*, as, no doubt, it vexed the *priests and Sadducees* to the heart to see it. The opposition that the preaching of the gospel met with, instead of checking its progress, contributed to the success of it; and this infant Christian church, like the infant Jewish church in Egypt, *the more it was afflicted, the more it multiplied*. The preachers were beaten, threatened, and abused, and yet the people received their doctrine, invited, no doubt, thereto, by their wonderful patience and cheerfulness under their trials, which convinced men that they were borne up and carried on by a better spirit than their own.

2. Yet it casts a damp upon us to find *that the multiplying of the disciples* proves an occasion of discord. *Hitherto they were all with one accord*; this had been often taken notice of to their honour; but now that *they were multiplied*, they began to murmur; as in the old world, *when men began to multiply, they corrupted themselves*. *Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased their joy*, Isa. 9. 3. When Abraham and Lot increased their families, *there was a strife between their herdmen*; so it was here; *there arose a murmuring*, not an open falling out, but a secret heart-burning.

(1.) The complainants were the *Grecians*, or Hellenists, *against the Hebrews*. The Jews that were scattered in Greece, and other parts, who ordinarily spake the Greek tongue, and read the Old Testament in the Greek version, and not the original Hebrew, many of which, being at Jerusalem at the feast, embraced the faith of Christ, and were added to the church, and so continued there; these complained against the Hebrews, the native Jews, that used the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. Some of each of these became christians, and, it seems, their joint-embracing of the faith of Christ did not prevail, as it ought to have done, to extinguish the little jealousies they had had one of another before their conversion, but they retained somewhat of that old leaven; not understanding, or not remembering, that in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew, no distinction of Hebrew and Hellenist, but all are alike welcome to Christ, and should be, for his sake, dear to one another.

(2.) The complaint of these Grecians, was, *that their widows were neglected in the daily administration*, that is, in the distribution of the public charity, and the Hebrew widows had more care taken of them. Observe, The first contention in the christian church was about a money-matter; but it is pity that the little things of this world should be make-baits among those that profess to be taken up with the great things of another world. A great deal of money was gathered for the relief of the poor, but, as often happens in such cases, it was impossible to please every body in the laying of it out. *The apostles, at whose feet it was laid*, did their best to dispose of it so as to answer the intentions of the donors, and, no doubt, designed to do it with the utmost impartiality, and were far from respecting the He-

brews more than the Grecians; and yet here they are complained to, and implicitly complained of, *that the Grecian widows were neglected*; though they were as real objects of charity, yet they had not so much allowed them, or not to so many, or not so duly paid them, as the Hebrews. Now, [1.] Perhaps this complaint was groundless and unjust, and there was no cause for it; but those who, upon any account, lie under disadvantages, (as the Grecian Jews did, in comparison with them that were Hebrews of the Hebrews,) are apt to be jealous that they are slighted, when really they are not so; and it is the common fault of poor people, that, instead of being thankful for what is given them, they are querulous and clamorous, and apt to find fault that more is not given them, or that more is given to others than to them; and there are envy and covetousness, those roots of bitterness, to be found among the poor as well as among the rich, notwithstanding the humbling providences they are under, and should accommodate themselves to. But, [2.] We will suppose there might be some occasion for their complaint. First, Some suggest, that though their other poor were well provided for, yet *their widows were neglected*, because the managers governed themselves by an ancient rule which the Hebrews observed, *that a widow was to be maintained by her husband's children*. See 1 Tim. 5. 4. But, Secondly, I take it, *that the widows* are here put for all the poor, because many of them that were in the church-book, and received alms, were widows, who were well provided for by the industry of their husbands while they lived, but were reduced to straits when they were gone. As those that have the administration of public justice, ought in a particular manner to protect widows from injury, (Isa. 1. 17. Luke 18. 3.) so those that have the administration of public charity ought in a particular manner to provide for widows what is necessary. See 1 Tim. 5. 3. And observe, *the widows* here, and the other poor, had a daily ministration; perhaps they wanted forecast, and could not save for hereafter, and therefore the managers of the fund, in kindness to them, gave them day by day their daily bread; they lived from hand to mouth. Now, it seems, *the Grecian widows were*, comparatively, neglected; perhaps those that disposed of the money considered that there was more brought into the fund by the rich Hebrews than was by the rich Grecians, who had not estates to sell, as the Hebrews had, and therefore the poor Grecians should have less out of the fund; this, though there was some tolerable reason for it, they thought hard and unfair. Note, In the best ordered church in the world there will be something amiss, some mal-administration or other, some grievances, or at least some complaints; they are the best, that have the least and fewest.

II. The happy accommodating of this matter, and the expedient pitched upon for the taking away of the cause of this murmuring. The apostles had hitherto the directing of the matter, applications were made to them, and appeals in case of grievances; they were obliged to employ persons under them, who did not take all the care they might have taken, nor were so well fortified as they should have been against temptations to partiality; and therefore some persons must be chosen to manage this matter, who have more leisure to attend it than the apostles had, and were better qualified for the trust than those whom the apostles employed were. Now observe,

1. How the method was proposed by the apostles; They called the multitude of the disciples unto them, the heads of the congregations of christians in Jerusalem, the principal leading men. The twelve themselves would not determine any thing without them, for in multitude of counsellors there is safety;

and in an affair of this nature they might be best able to advise, who were more conversant in the affairs of this life than the apostles were.

(1.) The apostles urge, that they could by no means admit so great a diversion, as this would be, from their great work; (v. 2.) *It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.* Receiving and paying money was *serving tables*, too like the *tables of the money-changers in the temple*; this was foreign to the business which the apostles were called to, they were to *preach the word of God*; and though they had not such occasion to study for what they preached as we have, (it being given in *that same hour what they should speak*), yet they thought that was work enough for a whole man, and to employ all their thoughts, and cares, and time, though one man of them was more than ten of us, *than ten thousand*. If they *serve tables*, they must, in some measure, *leave the word of God*; they could not attend their preaching work so closely as they ought. *Pectora nostra duas non admittunt curas—These minds of ours admit not of two distinct anxious employments.* Though this *serving tables* was for pious uses, and serving the charity of rich christians, and the necessity of poor christians, and in both serving Christ, yet the apostles would not take so much time from their preaching as this would require. They will no more be drawn from their preaching by the *money laid at their feet*, than they will be driven from it by the *stripes laid on their backs*. While the number of the disciples was few, the apostles might manage this matter without making it any considerable avocation from their main business; but now that their number was increased, they could not do it. *It is not reason, ἐκ ἀγίας ἐστὶ—it is not fit or commendable, that we should neglect the business of feeding souls with the bread of life, to attend the business of relieving the bodies of the poor.* Note, Preaching the gospel is the best work, and the most proper and needful that a minister can be employed in, and that which he must *give himself wholly to*, (1 Tim. 4. 15.) which that he may do, he must not entangle himself in the *affairs of this life*, (2 Tim. 2. 4.) no, *not in the outward business of the house of God*, Neh. 11. 16.

(2.) They therefore desire that *seven men* might be chosen, well qualified for the purpose, whose business it should be to *serve tables*, διακονίᾳ τραπέζης—to be deacons to the tables, v. 2. The business must be minded, must be better minded than it had been, and than the apostles could mind it; and therefore proper persons must be chosen, who, though they might be occasionally employed in the *word*, and *prayer*, were not so devoted entirely to it as the apostles were; and these must take care of the church's stock, must review, and pay, and keep accounts; must *buy those things which they had need of against the feast*, (John 13. 29.) and attend to all those things which are necessary, *in ordine ad spiritualia—in order to spiritual exercises, that every thing might be done decently and in order*, and no person or thing neglected. Now,

[1.] The persons must be duly qualified. The people are to choose, and the apostles to ordain; but the people have no authority to choose, nor the apostles to ordain men utterly unfit for the office; *Look out seven men*; so many they thought might suffice for the present, more might be added afterward if there were occasion; these must be, *First, Of honest report*, men free from scandal, that were looked upon by their neighbours as men of integrity and faithful men, well attested, as men that might be trusted; not under a blemish for any vice, but, on the contrary, well spoken of for every thing that is virtuous and praiseworthy; μαρτυρούμενοι—men that can produce good testimonials concerning their con-

version. Note, Those that are employed in any office in the church, ought to be men of *honest report*; of a blameless, nay, of a beautiful character, which is requisite not only to the credit of their office, but to the due discharge of it. *Secondly, They must be full of the Holy Ghost*, must be filled with those gifts and graces of the *Holy Ghost*, which were necessary to the right management of this trust; they must not only be honest men, but they must be men of parts and men of courage; such as were to be made judges in Israel, (Exod. 18. 21.) *able men, fearing God; men of truth, and hating covetousness*; and hereby appearing to be *full of the Holy Ghost*. *Thirdly, They must be full of wisdom*. It was not enough that they were honest, good men, but they must be discreet, judicious men, that could not be imposed upon, and would order things for the best, and with consideration: *full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom*, that is, of the *Holy Ghost* as a *Spirit of wisdom*. We find the *word of wisdom given by the Spirit*, as distinct from the *word of knowledge by the same Spirit*, 1 Cor. 12. 8. They must be *full of wisdom*, who are entrusted with public money, that it may be disposed of, not only with fidelity, but with frugality.

[2.] The people must nominate the persons; *“Look ye out among you seven men*, consider among yourselves who are the fittest for such a trust, and whom you can with the most satisfaction confide in.” They might be presumed to know better, or at least were fitter to inquire, what character men had, than the apostles; and therefore they are entrusted with the choice.

[3.] The apostles will ordain them to the service, will give them their charge, that they may know what they have to do, and make conscience of doing it; and give them their authority, that the persons concerned may know whom they are to apply to, and submit to, in affairs of that nature; *men, whom we may appoint*. In many editions of our English Bibles, there has been an error of the press here, for they have read it, *whom ye may appoint*; as if the power were in the people; whereas it was certainly in the apostles; *whom we may appoint over this business*; to take care of it, and to see that there be neither waste nor want.

(3.) The apostles engage to addict themselves wholly to their work as ministers, and the more closely, if they can but get fairly quit of this troublesome office; (v. 4.) *We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*. See here, [1.] What are the two great gospel-ordinances—the *word*, and *prayer*; by these two communion between God and his people is kept up and maintained; by the *word* he speaks to them, and by *prayer* they speak to him; and these have a mutual reference to each other. By these two the kingdom of Christ must be advanced, and additions made to it; we must *prophesy upon the dry bones*, and then *pray for a spirit of life from God to enter into them*. By the *word* and *prayer* other ordinances are sanctified to us, and sacraments have their efficacy. [2.] What is the great business of gospel-ministers; to *give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*; they must still be either fitting and furnishing themselves for these services, or employing themselves in them; either publicly or privately; in the stated times, or out of them. They must be God's mouth to the people in the *ministry of the word*, and the people's mouth to God in *prayer*. In order to the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the edification and consolation of saints, we must not only *offer up our prayers for them*, but we must *minister the word* to them, so concurring our prayers with our endeavours, in the use of appointed means; nor must we only *minister the word* to them, but we must *pray for them*, that it

may be effectual; for God's grace can do all without our preaching, but our preaching can do nothing without God's grace. The apostles were endued with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, tongues and miracles; and yet that which they gave themselves continually to, was, preaching and praying, by which they might edify the church: and those ministers, without doubt, are the successors of the apostles, (not in the plenitude of the apostolical power, those are daring usurpers who pretend to that, but in the best and most excellent of the apostolical works,) who give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word; and such Christ will always be with, even to the end of the world.

2. How this proposal was agreed to, and presently put in execution, by the disciples; it was not imposed upon them by an absolute power, though they might have been bold in Christ to do that, (Philem. 8.) but proposed, as that which was highly convenient, and then the saying pleased the whole multitude, v. 5. It pleased them to see the apostles so willing to discharge themselves from intermeddling in secular affairs, and so to transmit them to others; it pleased them to hear that they would give themselves to the word and prayer; and therefore they neither disputed the matter, nor deferred the execution of it.

(1.) They pitched upon the persons; it is not probable that they all cast their eye upon the same men; every one had his friend, whom he thought well of; but the majority of votes fell upon the persons here named; and the rest both of the candidates and electors acquiesced, and made no disturbance, as the members of societies in such cases ought to do. An apostle, who was an extraordinary officer, was chosen by lot, which is more immediately the act of God; but the overseers of the poor were chosen by the suffrage of the people; in which yet a regard is to be had to the providence of God, who has all men's hearts and tongues in his hand.

We have a list of the persons chosen; some think, that they were such as were before of the seventy disciples; but that is not likely; for they were ordained by Christ himself, long since, to preach the gospel; and there was no more reason that they should leave the word of God to serve tables than that the apostles should; it is therefore more probable that they were of those that were converted since the pouring out of the Spirit; for it was promised to all that would be baptized, that they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; and the gift, according to that promise, is that fulness of the Holy Ghost, which was required in those that were to be chosen to this service. We may further conjecture, concerning these seven, [1.] That they were such as had sold their estates, and brought the money into the common stock; for, *cæteris paribus—other things being equal*, those were fittest to be entrusted with the distribution of it, who had been most generous in the contribution to it. [2.] That these seven were all of the Grecian or Hellenist Jews, for they have all Greek names, and this would be most likely to silence the murmurings of the Grecians, (which occasioned this institution,) to have the trust lodged in those that were foreigners, like themselves, who would be sure not to neglect them. *Nicolas*, it is plain, was one of them, for he was a proselyte of Antioch; and some think that the manner of expression intimates, that they were all proselytes of Jerusalem, as he was of Antioch.

The first named is *Stephen*, the glory of these *septem-viri*; a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; he had a strong faith in the doctrine of Christ, and was full of it above most; full of fidelity, full of courage; (so come;) for he was full of the

Holy Ghost, of his gifts and graces; he was an extraordinary man, and excelled in every thing that was good; his name signifies a crown. *Philip* is put next, because he, having used this office of a deacon well, thereby obtained a good degree, and was afterward ordained to the office of an evangelist, a companion and assistant to the apostles, for so he is expressly called, ch. 21. 8. Compare Eph. 4. 11. And his preaching and baptizing (which we read of ch. 8. 12.) were certainly not as a deacon, (for it is plain that that office was serving tables, in opposition to the ministry of the word,) but as an evangelist; and when he was preferred to that office, we have reason to think he quitted this office, as incompatible with that. As for *Stephen*, nothing we find done by him proves him to be a preacher of the gospel; for he only disputes in the schools, and pleads for his life at the bar, v. 9. and ch. 7. 2.

The last named is *Nicolas*, who, some say, afterward degenerated, (as the Judas among these seven,) and was the founder of the sect of the *Nicolaitans*, which we read of, (Rev. 2. 6, 15.) and which Christ there says, once and again, was a thing he hated. But some of the ancients clear him from that charge, and tell us, that though that vile impure sect denominated themselves from him, yet it was unjustly, and because he only insisted much upon it, that they that had wives, should be as though they had none, thence they wickedly inferred, that they that had wives, should have them in common; which therefore Tertullian, when he speaks of the community of goods, particularly excepts, *Omnia indiscreta apud nos, præter uxores—All things are common among us, except our wives*. Apol. cap. 39.

(2.) The apostles appointed them to this work of serving tables for the present, v. 6. The people presented them to the apostles, who approved their choice, and ordained them. [1.] They prayed with them, and for them, that God would give them more and more of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom; that he would qualify them for the service to which they were called, and own them in it, and make them thereby a blessing to the church, and particularly to the poor of the flock. All that are employed in the service of the church, ought to be committed to the conduct of the divine grace by the prayers of the church. [2.] They laid their hands on them, that is, they blessed them in the name of the Lord, for laying on hands was used in blessing; so Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph; and, without controversy, the less is blessed of the greater; (Heb. 7. 7.) the deacons are blessed by the apostles, and the overseers of the poor by the pastors of the congregation. Having by prayer implored a blessing upon them, they did by the laying on of hands assure them that the blessing was conferred in answer to the prayer; and this was giving them authority to execute that office, and laying an obligation upon the people to be observant of them therein.

III. The advancement of the church hereupon; when things were thus put into good order in the church, (grievances were redressed and discontents silenced,) then religion got ground, v. 7.

1. The word of God increased; now that the apostles resolved to stick more closely than ever to their preaching, it spread the gospel further, and brought it home with the more power. Ministers, disentangling themselves from secular employments, and addicting themselves entirely and vigorously to their work, will contribute very much, as a means, to the success of the gospel. The word of God is said to increase, as the seed sown increases, when it comes up again thirty, sixty, a hundred fold.

2. Christians grew numerous; The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. When Christ was upon earth, his ministry had least success in Jerusalem; yet now that city affords most

converts. God has his remnant even in the worst of places.

3. *A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.* Then is the word and grace of God greatly magnified, when those are wrought upon by it, that were least likely, as the priests here, who either had opposed it, or at least were linked in with those that had. The priests, whose preferences arose from the law of Moses, were yet willing to let them go for the gospel of Christ; and, it should seem, they came in *in a body*; many of them *agreed together*, for the keeping up of one another's credit, and the strengthening of one another's hands, to join at once in giving up their names to Christ: *πλὴθος ἑλλῶν*—*a great crowd of priests* were by the grace of God helped over their prejudices, and *were obedient to the faith*, so their conversion is described. (1.) They embraced the doctrine of the gospel; their understandings were captivated to the power of the truths of Christ, and every opposing, objecting thought, *brought into obedience* to him, 2 Cor. 10. 4, 5. The gospel is said to be *made known for the obedience of faith*, Rom. 16. 26. Faith is an act of *obedience*, for this is God's commandment, *that we believe*, 1 John 3. 23. (2.) They evidenced the sincerity of their believing the gospel of Christ by a cheerful compliance with all the rules and precepts of the gospel. The design of the gospel is to refine and reform our hearts and lives; faith gives law to us, and we must be obedient to it.

8. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. 9. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called *the synagogue* of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. 10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. 11. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against God*. 12. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the Scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, 13. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: 14. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. 15. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Stephen, no doubt, was diligent and faithful in the discharge of his office as distributor of the church's charity, and laid out himself to put that affair in a good method, and did it to universal satisfaction; and though it appears here that he was a man of uncommon gifts, and fitted for a higher station, yet, being called to that office, he did not think it below him to do the duty of it. And being faithful in a little, he was intrusted with more; and though we do not find him propagating the gospel by preaching and baptizing, yet we find him here called out to very honourable services, and owned in them.

I. He *proved* the truth of the gospel, by *working miracles* in Christ's name, v. 8.

1. He was *full of faith and power*, that is, of a *strong faith*, by which he was enabled to do great things. They that are full of faith, are full of power, because by faith the power of God is engaged for us. His faith did so fill him, that it left no room for unbelief, and made room for the influences of divine grace, so that, as the prophet speaks, he was *full of power by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, Mic. 3. 8. By faith we are *emptied* of self, and so are *filled* with Christ, who is the *wisdom of God*, and the *power of God*.

2. Being so, he *did great wonders and miracles among the people*, openly, and in the sight of all; for Christ's miracles feared not the strictest scrutiny. It is not strange that Stephen, though he was not a preacher by office, did these great wonders, for we find that these were distinct gifts of the Spirit, and divided severally, for to one was *given the working of miracles*, and to another *prophecy*, 1 Cor. 12. 10, 11. And those signs followed not only them that preached, but them that believed, Mark 16. 17.

II. He *pleaded the cause* of christianity against those that opposed it, and argued against it; (v. 9, 10.) he served the interests of religion as a disputant, in the high places of the field, while others were serving them as vinedressers and husbandmen.

1. We are here told who were his opponents, v. 9. They were Jews, but Hellenist Jews, Jews of the dispersion, who seem to have been more zealous for their religion than the native Jews; it was with difficulty that they retained the practice and profession of it in the country where they lived, where they were as *speckled birds*, and not without great expense and toil that they kept up their attendance at Jerusalem, and this made them more active sticklers for Judaism than they were, whose profession of their religion was cheap and easy. They were *of the synagogue which is called the synagogue of the Libertines*; the Romans called those *Liberti* or *Libertini*, who, either being foreigners, were naturalized, or, being slaves by birth, were manumitted, or made freemen. Some think that these Libertines were such of the Jews as had obtained the Roman freedom, as Paul had; (ch. 22. 27, 28.) and it is probable that he was the most forward man of this synagogue of the Libertines in disputing with Stephen, and engaged others in the dispute; for we find him busy in the stoning of Stephen, and consenting to his death. There were others that belonged to the synagogue of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians, of which synagogue the Jewish writers speak; and others that belonged to their synagogue, who were *of Cilicia and Asia*; and if Paul, as a freeman of Rome, did not belong to the synagogue of the Libertines, he belonged to this, as a native of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia; it is probable that he might be a member of both. The Jews that were born in other countries, and had concerns in them, had frequent occasion, not only to resort to, but to reside in, Jerusalem. Each nation had its synagogue, as in London there are French, and Dutch, and Danish churches: and those synagogues were the schools to which the Jews of those nations sent their youth to be educated in the Jewish learning. Now those that were tutors and professors in these synagogues, seeing the gospel grow, and the rulers conniving at the growth of it, and fearing what would be the consequence of it to the Jewish religion, which they were jealous for, being confident of the goodness of their cause, and their own sufficiency to manage it, would undertake to run down christianity by force of argument; it was a fair and rational way of dealing with it, and what

religion is always ready to admit; *Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons*, Isa. 41. 21. But why did they dispute with Stephen? And why not with the apostles themselves? (1.) Some think, because they despised the apostles as *unlearned and ignorant men*, whom they thought it below them to engage with; but Stephen was bred a scholar, and they thought it their honour to meddle with their match. (2.) Others think, it was because they stood in awe of the apostles, and could not be so free and familiar with them, as they could be with Stephen, who was in an inferior office. (3.) Perhaps they having given a public challenge, Stephen was chosen and appointed by the disciples to be their champion; for it *was not meet* that the apostles should *leave the preaching of the word of God*, to engage in controversy. Stephen, who was only a deacon in the church, and a very sharp young man, and of bright parts, and better qualified to deal with wrangling disputants than the apostles themselves, is appointed to this service. Some historians say, that Stephen had been bred up at the feet of Gamaliel, and that Saul and the rest of them set upon him as a deserter, and with a particular fury made him their mark. (4.) It is probable that they disputed with Stephen, because he was zealous to argue with them, and convince them. And this was the service which God had called him to.

2. We are here told how he carried the point in this dispute; (v. 10.) *They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake*. They could not either support their own arguments, or answer his. He proved by such irresistible arguments, that Jesus is the Christ, and delivered himself with so much clearness and fullness, that they had nothing to object against what he said; though they were not convinced, yet they were confounded. It is not said, They were not able to resist him, but, They were not able to resist the *wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake*, that Spirit of wisdom which spake by him. Now was fulfilled that promise, *I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist*, Luke 21. 15. They thought they only disputed with Stephen, and could make their part good with him; but they were disputing with the Spirit of God in him, for whom they were an unequal match.

III. At length, he *sealed it with his blood*; so we shall find he did in the next chapter, here we have some steps taken by his enemies towards it. When they could not answer his arguments as a disputant, they prosecuted him as a criminal, and suborned witnesses against him, to swear blasphemy upon him. "On such terms (saith Mr. Baxter here) do we dispute with malignant men. And it is next to a miracle of providence, that no greater number of religious persons have been murdered in the world, by the way of perjury and pretence of law, when so many thousands hate them, who make no conscience of false oaths." They suborned men, instructed them what to say, and then hired them to swear it. They were the more enraged against him, because he had proved them to be in the wrong, and shewed them the right way; for which they ought to have given him their best thanks; *was he therefore become their enemy, because he told them the truth*, and proved it to be so? Now let us observe here,

1. How with all possible art and industry they incensed both the government and the mob against him, that, if they could not prevail by the one, they might by the other; (v. 12.) *They stirred up the people against him*, that, if the Sanhedrim should still think fit (according to Gamaliel's advice) to let him alone, yet they might run him down by a popular rage and tumult; they also find means to stir up the elders and the scribes against him, that, if the peo-

ple should countenance and protect him, they might prevail by authority. Thus they doubted not but to gain their point, when they had two strings to their bow.

2. How they got him to the bar; *They came upon him*, when he little thought of it, and *caught him, and brought him to the council*. They came upon him in a body, and flew upon him as a lion on his prey; so the word signifies. By their rude and violent treatment of him, they would represent him, both to the people and to the government, as a dangerous man, that would either flee from justice if he were not watched, or fight with it if he were not put under a force. Having caught him, they brought him triumphantly into the council, and, as it should seem, so hastily, that he had none of his friends with him. They had found, when they brought many together, that they emboldened one another, and strengthened one another's hands: and therefore they will try how to deal with them singly.

3. How they were prepared with evidence ready to produce against him; they were resolved that they would not be run aground, as they were when they brought our Saviour upon his trial, and then were to seek for witnesses. These were got ready beforehand, and were instructed to make oath, that they had heard him *speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God*, (v. 11.) against *this holy place and the law*; (v. 13.) for they heard him say, *what Jesus would do to their place and their customs*, v. 14. It is probable that he had said something to that purport; and yet they who swore it against him are called *false witnesses*, because, though there was something of truth in their testimony, yet they put a wrong and malicious construction upon what he had said, and perverted it. Observe,

(1.) What was the general charge exhibited against him—that he *spake blasphemous words*; and, to aggravate the matter, "*He ceases not to speak blasphemous words*"; it is his common talk, his discourse in all companies; wheresoever he comes, he makes it his business to instil his notions into all he converses with." It intimates likewise something of contumacy and contempt of admonition. "He has been warned against it, and yet ceases not to talk at this rate." Blasphemy is justly reckoned a heinous crime, (to speak contemptibly and reproachfully of God our Maker,) and therefore Stephen's persecutors would be thought to have a deep concern upon them for the honour of God's name, and to do this in a jealousy for that. As it was with the confessors and martyrs of the Old Testament, so it was with those of the New—their brethren that *hated them, and cast them out*, said, *Let the Lord be glorified*; and pretended they *did him service in it*.

He is said to have spoken blasphemous words *against Moses and against God*. Thus far they were right, that they who blaspheme Moses, (if they mean the writings of Moses, which were given by inspiration of God,) blaspheme God himself. They that speak reproachfully of the scriptures, and ridicule them, reflect upon God himself, and despite to him. His great intention is to *magnify the law, and make it honourable*; those therefore that vilify the law, and make it *contemptible*, blaspheme his name; for he has *magnified his word above all his name*.

But did Stephen blaspheme Moses? By no means, he was far from it. Christ, and the preachers of his gospel, never said any thing that looked like blaspheming Moses; they always quoted his writings with respect, appealed to them, and *said no other things* than what Moses said should *come*; very unjustly therefore is Stephen indicted for blaspheming Moses. But,

(2.) Let us see how this charge is supported and made out; why, truly, when the thing was to be proved, all they can charge him with, is, that he *hath spoken blasphemous words against the holy place and the law*; and this must be deemed and taken as blasphemy against *Moses and against God himself*. Thus does the charge dwindle when it comes to the evidence. [1.] He is charged with blaspheming *this holy place*. Some understand that of the city of Jerusalem, which was the *holy city*, and which they had a mighty jealousy for. But it is rather meant of the temple, that holy house. Christ was condemned as a blasphemer, for words which were thought to reflect upon the temple, which they seemed concerned for the honour of, *then* when they by their wickedness had profaned it. [2.] He is charged with blaspheming *the law*; of which they *made their boast*, and in which they put their trust, *then*, when *through breaking of the law they dishonoured God*, Rom. 2. 23.

Well, but how can they make this out? Why here the charge dwindles again; for all they can accuse him of, is, that *they had themselves heard him say* (but how it came in, or what explication he gave of it, they think not themselves bound to give account,) that this *Jesus of Nazareth*, who was so much talked of, *shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses delivered us*. He could not be charged with having said any thing to the disparagement either of the temple or of the law. The priests had themselves profaned the temple, by making it not only a *house of merchandise*, but a *den of thieves*; yet they would be thought zealous for the honour of it, against one that had never said any thing amiss of it, but had attended it more as a *house of prayer*, according to the true intention of it, than they had. Nor had he ever reproached the law, as they had.

But, *First*, He had said, *Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place*; destroy the temple, destroy Jerusalem, it is probable that he might say so; and what blasphemy is it against the holy place, to say, that it should not be perpetual any more than Shiloh was, and that the just and holy God would not continue the privileges of his sanctuary to those that abuse them? Had not the prophets given the same warning to their fathers, of the destruction of that holy place by the Chaldeans? Nay, when the temple was first built, had not God himself given the same warning; *This house, which is high, shall be an astonishment*, 2 Chron. 7. 21. And is he a blasphemer then, who tells them that Jesus of Nazareth, if they continue their opposition to him, will bring a just destruction upon their place and nation, and they may thank themselves? Those wickedly abuse their profession of religion, who, under colour of that, call the reproofs given them for their disagreeable conversations, blasphemous reflections upon their religion.

Secondly, He had said, *This Jesus shall change the customs which Moses delivered us*. And it was expected that in the days of the Messiah they should be changed, and that the shadows should be done away when the substance was come; yet this was no essential change of the law, but the perfecting of it; *Christ came, not to destroy*, but to fulfil, the law; and if he changed some customs that Moses delivered, it was to introduce and establish those that were much better; and if the Jewish church had not obstinately refused to come into this new establishment, and adhered to the ceremonial law, for aught I know, *their place* had not been destroyed; so that for putting them into a certain way to prevent their destruction, and for giving them certain notice of their destruction if they did not take that way, he is accused as a blasphemer.

Lastly, We are here told how God owned him

when he was brought before the council, and made it to appear that he stood by him; (v. 15.) *All that sat in the council*, the priests, scribes, and elders, *looking stedfastly on him*, being a stranger, and one they had not yet had before them, they *saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel*. It is usual for judges to observe the countenance of the prisoner, which sometimes is an indication either of guilt or innocence. Now Stephen appeared at the bar with the countenance *as of an angel*.

1. Perhaps it intimates no more than that he had an extraordinarily pleasant, cheerful countenance, and there was not in it the least sign either of fear for himself or anger at his persecutors; he looked as if he had never been better pleased in his life than he was now when he was called out to bear his testimony to the gospel of Christ thus publicly, and stood fair for the crown of martyrdom. Such an undisturbed serenity, such an undaunted courage, and such an unaccountable mixture of mildness and majesty, there was in his countenance, that every one said, he looked like an angel; enough surely to convince the Sadducees that *there are angels*, when they saw before their eyes an incarnate angel.

2. It should rather seem that there was a miraculous splendour and brightness upon his countenance, like that of our Saviour, when he was transfigured; or, at least, that of Moses, when he came down from the mount; God designing thereby to put honour upon his faithful witness, and confusion upon his persecutors and judges, whose sin would be highly aggravated, and would be indeed a rebellion against the light, if, notwithstanding this, they proceeded against him. Whether he himself wist that the skin of his face shone or no, we are not told; but *all that sat in the council saw it*, and, probably, took notice of it to one another, and an arrant shame it was, that, when they saw, and could not but see by it that he was owned of God, they did not call him from standing at the bar to sit in the chief seat upon the bench. Wisdom and holiness make a man's face to shine, and yet these will not secure men from the greatest indignities; and no wonder, when the shining of Stephen's face would not be his protection; though it had been easy to prove that if he had been guilty of putting any dishonour upon Moses, God would not thus have put Moses's honour upon him.

CHAP. VII.

When our Lord Jesus called his apostles out to be employed in services and sufferings for him, he told them, that yet the last shall be first, and the first last: which was remarkably fulfilled in St. Stephen and St. Paul, who were both of them late converts, in comparison of the apostles, and yet got the start of them, both in services and sufferings; for God, in conferring honours and favours, often crosses hands. In this chapter, we have the martyrdom of Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian church, who led the van in that noble army. And therefore his sufferings and death are more largely related than of any other, for direction and encouragement to all those who are called out to resist unto blood, as he did. Here is, I. His defence of himself before the council, in answer to the matters and things he stood charged with, the scope of which is to shew that it was no blasphemy against God, nor any injury at all to the glory of his name, to say, that the temple should be destroyed, and the customs of the ceremonial law changed. And, 1. He shews this by going over the history of the Old Testament, and observing, that God never intended to confine his favours to that place, or that ceremonial law; and that they had no reason to expect he should; for the people of the Jews had always been a provoking people, and had forfeited the privileges of their peculiarity: nay, that that holy place and that law were but figures of good things to come, and it was no disparagement at all to them to say that they must give place to better things, v. 1. . 50. And then, 2. He applies this to them that prosecuted him, and sat in judgment upon him, sharply reproving them for their wickedness by which they had brought upon themselves the ruin of their place and nation, and then could not

bear to hear of it, v. 51. . 53. II. The putting of him to death by stoning of him, and his patient, cheerful, pious submission to it, v. 54. . 60.

1. **THEN** said the High Priest, are these things so? 2. And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, 3. And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. 4. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. 5. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no not *so much as* to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when *as yet* he had no child. 6. And God spake on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat *them* evil four hundred years. 7. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. 8. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so *Abraham* begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. 9. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, 10. And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. 11. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. 12. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. 13. And at the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. 14. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to *him*, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. 15. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, 16. And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor *the father* of Sychem.

Stephen is now at the bar before the great council of the nation, indicted for blasphemy: what the witnesses swore against him we had an account of in the foregoing chapter, that he spake blasphemous words against Moses and God; for he spake against this *holy place* and *the law*. Now, here,

I. The High Priest calls upon him to answer for

himself, v. 1. He was president, and, as such, the mouth of the court, and therefore he saith, "You, the prisoner at the bar, you hear what is sworn against you; what do you say to it? *Are these things so?* Have you ever spoken any words to this purpose? If you have, will you recant them, or will you stand to them? *Guilty or not guilty?*" This carried a shew of fairness, and yet seems to have been spoken with an air of haughtiness; and thus far he seems to have prejudged the cause, that, if it were so, that he had spoken such and such words, he shall certainly be adjudged a blasphemer, whatever he may offer in justification or explanation of them.

II. He begins his defence, and it is long; but it should seem by his breaking off abruptly, just when he came to the main point, (v. 50.) that it would have been much longer, if his enemies would have given him leave to say all he had to say. In general we may observe,

1. That in this discourse he appears to be a man ready and mighty in the scriptures, and thereby thoroughly furnished for every good word and work. He can relate scripture-stories, and such as were very pertinent to his purpose, off hand, without looking in his Bible. He was *filled with the Holy Ghost*, not so much to reveal to him new things, or open to him the secret counsels and decrees of God concerning the Jewish nation, with them to convict these gainsayers; no, but to bring to his remembrance the scriptures of the Old Testament, and to teach him how to make use of them for their conviction. They that are full of the Holy Ghost, will be full of the scripture, as Stephen was.

2. That he quotes the scriptures, according to the Septuagint translation, by which it appears that he was one of the Hellenist Jews, who used that version in their synagogues. His following that, occasions divers variations from the Hebrew original in this discourse, which the judges of the court did not correct, because they knew how he was led into them; nor is it any derogation to the authority of that Spirit by which he spake, for the variations are not material. We have a maxim, *Apices juris non sunt jura—Mere points of law are not law itself*.

These verses carry on this his compendium of church-history to the end of the book of Genesis. Observe,

(1.) His preface; *Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken*. He gives them, though not flattering titles, yet civil and respectful ones, signifying his expectation of fair treatment with them; from *men* he hopes to be treated with humanity, and he hopes that *brethren* and *fathers* will use him in a fatherly brotherly way. They are ready to look upon him as an apostate from the Jewish church, and an enemy to them. But to make way for their conviction to the contrary, he addresses himself to them as *men, brethren, and fathers*; resolving to look on himself as one of them, though they would not so look on him. He craves their attention; *Hearken*; though he was about to tell them what they already knew, yet he begs them to hearken to it, because, though they knew it all, yet they would not without a very close application of mind know how to apply it to the case before them.

(2.) His entrance upon the discourse; which (however it may seem to those that read it carelessly) is far from being a long ramble only to amuse the hearers, and give them a diversion by telling them an old story. No; it is all pertinent and *ad rem—to the purpose*, to shew them that God had not his heart so much upon that *holy place* and *the law* as they had; but, as he had a church in the world many ages before that holy place was founded, and the ceremonial law given, so he would have, when they should both have had their period,

[1.] He begins with the call of *Abraham* out of

Ur of the Chaldees, by which he was set apart for God to be the trustee of the promise, and the father of the Old Testament church. This we had an account of, (Gen. 12. 1, &c.) and it is referred to, Neh. 9. 7, 8. His native country was an idolatrous country, it was Mesopotamia, (v. 2.) *the land of the Chaldeans*; (v. 4.) thence God brought him at two removes, not too far at once, dealing tenderly with him; he first brought him out of the land of the Chaldeans to Charan, or Haran, a place midway between that and Canaan, (Gen. 11. 31.) and from thence, five years after, when his father was dead, he removed him into the land of Canaan, wherein ye now dwell. It should seem, the first time that God spake to Abraham, he appeared in some visible display of the divine presence, as the *God of glory*, (v. 3.) to settle a correspondence with him: and then afterward he kept up that correspondence, and spake to him from time to time as there was occasion, without repeating his visible appearances as the *God of glory*.

From this call of Abraham we may observe, *First*, That in all our ways we must acknowledge God, and attend the conduct of his providence, as of the pillar of cloud and fire. It is not said, *Abraham removed*, but, *God removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell*, and he did but follow his Leader. *Secondly*, Those whom God takes into covenant with himself, he distinguishes from the children of this world; they are effectually called out of the state, out of the land, of their nativity; they must sit loose to the world, and live above it, and every thing in it, even that in it which is most dear to them, and must trust God to make it up to them in another and better country, that is the heavenly, which he will shew them. God's chosen must follow him with an implicit faith and obedience.

But let us see what this is to Stephen's case.

1. They had charged him as a blasphemer of God, and an apostate from the church; therefore he shews that he is a son of Abraham, and values himself upon his being able to say, *Our father Abraham*, and that he is a faithful worshipper of the God of Abraham, whom therefore he here calls the *God of glory*. He also shews that he owns divine revelation, and that particularly by which the Jewish church was founded and incorporated.

2. They were proud of their being circumcised; and therefore he shews that Abraham was taken under God's conduct, and into communion with him, before he was circumcised, for that was not till v. 8. With this argument Paul proves that Abraham was justified by faith, because he was justified when he was in uncircumcision: and so here,

3. They had a mighty jealousy for this *holy place*: which may be meant of the whole land of Canaan; for it was called the *holy land*, *Immanuel's land*; and the destruction of the *holy house*, inferred that of the *holy land*. "Now," says Stephen, "you need not be so proud of it; for," (1.) "You came originally out of *Ur of the Chaldees*, where your fathers served other gods," (Josh. 24. 2.) and you were not the first planters of this country. *Look therefore unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and the hole of the pit out of which ye were digged*; (that is, as it follows there;) "*look unto Abraham your father, for I called him alone*; (Isa. 51. 1, 2.) think of the meanness of your beginnings, and how you are entirely indebted to divine grace, and then you will see boasting to be for ever excluded. It was God that raised up the righteous man from the east, and called him to his foot, Isa. 41. 2. But if his seed degenerate, let them know, God can destroy this holy place, and raise up to himself another people, for he is not a Debtor to them." (2.) God appeared in his glory to Abraham a great way off in Mesopotamia, before he came near Canaan, nay, before he dwelt in Char-

ran; so that you must not think God's visits are to this land: no; he that brought the seed of the church from a country so far east, can, if he pleases, carry the fruit of it to another country as far west." (3.) "God made no haste to bring him into this land, but let him linger some years by the way: which shews that God has not his heart so much upon this land as you have, neither is his honour, nor the happiness of his people, bound up in it. It is therefore neither blasphemy nor treason to say, It shall be destroyed."

[2.] The unsettled state of Abraham and his seed for many ages after he was called out of *Ur of the Chaldees*. God did indeed promise that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, v. 5. But, *First*, As yet he had no child, nor any by Sarah for many years after. *Secondly*, He himself was but a stranger and a sojourner in that land, and God gave him no inheritance in it, no not so much as to set his foot on; but there he was as in a strange country, where he was always upon the remove, and could call nothing his own. *Thirdly*, His posterity did not come to the possession of it of a long time; *After four hundred years* they shall come and serve me in this place, and not till then, v. 7. *Nay*, *Fourthly*, They must undergo a great deal of hardship and difficulty before they shall be put into the possession of that land; they shall be brought into bondage, and ill treated in a strange land: and this, not as the punishment of any particular sin, as their wandering in the wilderness was, for we never find any such account given of their bondage in Egypt; but so God had appointed, and it must be. And at the end of four hundred years, reckoning from the birth of Isaac, that nation to whom they shall be in bondage, will I judge, said God. Now this teaches us, 1. That known unto God are all his works beforehand. When Abraham had neither inheritance nor heir, yet he was told he should have both, the one a land of promise, and the other a child of promise; and therefore both had, and received, by faith. 2. That God's promises, though they are slow, are sure, in the operation of them; they will be fulfilled in the season of them, though perhaps not so soon as we expect. 3. That though the people of God may be in distress and trouble for a time, yet God will at length both rescue them, and reckon with those that do oppress them: for, verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

But let us see how this serves Stephen's purpose.

(1.) The Jewish nation, which they were so jealous for the honour of, was very inconsiderable in its beginnings; as their common father Abraham was fetched out of obscurity in *Ur of the Chaldees*, so their tribes, and the heads of them, were fetched out of servitude in Egypt, when they were the fewest of all people, Deut. 7. 7. And what need is there of so much ado, as if their ruin, when they bring it upon themselves by sin, must be the ruin of the world, and of all God's interest in it? No; he that brought them out of Egypt, can bring them into it again, as he threatened, (Deut. 28. 68.) and yet be no loser, while he can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham.

(2.) The slow steps by which the promise made to Abraham advanced toward the performance, and the many seeming contradictions here taken notice of, plainly shew that it had a spiritual meaning, and that the land principally intended to be conveyed and secured by it, was, the better country, that is, the heavenly: as the apostle shews from this very argument, that the patriarchs sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country; thence inferring, that they looked for a city that had foundations, Heb. 11. 9, 10. It was therefore no blasphemy to say, *Jesus shall destroy this place, when*

at the same time we say, "He shall lead us to the heavenly Canaan, and put us in possession of that, of which the earthly Canaan was but a type and figure."

[3.] The building up of the family of Abraham, with the entail of divine grace upon it, and the disposals of Divine Providence concerning it, which take up the book of Genesis.

First, God engaged to be a God to Abraham and to his seed; and, in token of that, appointed that he and his male seed should be circumcised, Gen. 17. 9, 10. He gave him the covenant of circumcision, that covenant which circumcision was the seal of; and accordingly, when Abraham had a son born, he circumcised him the eighth day, (v. 8.) by which he was both obliged by the divine law, and interested in the divine promise; for circumcision had reference to both, being a seal of the covenant both on God's part, I will be to thee a God all-sufficient, and on man's part, Walk before me, and be thou perfect. And then when effectual care was thus taken for the securing of Abraham's seed, to be a seed to serve the Lord, they began to multiply; Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs, or roots of the respective tribes.

Secondly, Joseph, the darling and blessing of his father's house, was abused by his brethren, they envied him because of his dreams and sold him into Egypt; thus early did the children of Israel begin to grudge those among them that were eminent and outshone others; of which their enmity to Christ, who, like Joseph, was a Nazarite among his brethren, was a great instance.

Thirdly, God owned Joseph in his troubles, and was with him, (Gen. 39. 2, 21.) by the influence of his Spirit, both on his mind, giving him comfort, and on the minds of those he was concerned with, giving him favour in their eyes. And thus at length he delivered him out of his afflictions, and Pharaoh made him the second man in the kingdom, Ps. 105. 20—22. And thus he not only arrived at great preferment among the Egyptians, but became the shepherd and stone of Israel, Gen. 49. 24.

Fourthly, Jacob was compelled to go down into Egypt, by a famine which forced him out of Canaan, a dearth, (which was a great affliction,) to that degree, that our fathers found no sustenance, in Canaan, v. 11. That fruitful land was turned into barrenness. But, hearing that there was corn in Egypt, (treasured up by the wisdom of his own son,) he sent out our fathers first to fetch corn, v. 12. And the second time that they went, Joseph, who at first made himself strange to them, made himself known to them; and it was notified to Pharaoh that they were Joseph's kindred and had a dependence upon him; (v. 13.) whereupon, with Pharaoh's leave, Joseph sent for his father Jacob to him into Egypt, with all his kindred and family, to the number of seventy-five souls, to be subsisted there, v. 14. In Genesis they are said to be seventy souls, Gen. 46. 27. But the Septuagint there make them seventy-five, and Stephen or Luke follows that version, as Luke 3. 36. where Cainan is inserted, that is not in the Hebrew text, but in the Septuagint. Some, by excluding Joseph and his sons, who were in Egypt before, which reduces the number to sixty-four, and adding the sons of the eleven patriarchs, make the number seventy-five.

Fifthly, Jacob and his sons died in Egypt, (v. 16.) but were carried over to be buried in Canaan, v. 17. A very considerable difficulty occurs here: it is said, They were carried over into Sychem, whereas Jacob was buried not in Sychem, but near Hebron, in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Isaac were buried, Gen. 50. 13. Joseph's bones indeed were buried in Sychem; (Josh. 24. 32.) and it seems by this, (though it is not mentioned in the

story,) that the bones of all the other patriarchs were carried with his, each of them giving the same commandment concerning them that he had done; and of them this must be understood, not of Jacob himself. But then the sepulchre in Sychem was bought by Jacob, (Gen. 33. 19.) and by that it is described, Josh. 24. 32. How then is it here said to be bought by Abraham? Dr. Whitby's solution of this is very sufficient. He supplies it thus; *Jacob went down into Egypt and died, he and our fathers; and (our fathers) were carried over into Sychem; and he, that is, Jacob, was laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money, Gen. 23.* (Or, they were laid there, that is, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.) And they, namely, the other patriarchs, were buried in the sepulchre bought of the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem.

Let us now see what this is to Stephen's purpose.

1. He still reminds them of the mean beginning of the Jewish nation, as a check to their priding themselves in the glories of that nation; and that it was by a miracle of mercy, that they were raised up out of nothing to what they were, from so small a number to be so great a nation; but if they answer not the intention of their being so raised, they can expect no other than to be destroyed. The prophets frequently put them in mind of the bringing of them out of Egypt, as an aggravation of their contempt of the law of God; and here it is urged upon them as an aggravation of their contempt of the gospel of Christ.

2. He reminds them likewise of the wickedness of those that were the patriarchs of their tribes, in envying their brother Joseph, and selling him into Egypt; and the same spirit was still working in them toward Christ and his ministers.

3. Their holy land, which they doted so much upon, their fathers were long kept out of the possession of, and met with dearth and great affliction in it; and therefore let them not think it strange, if, after it has been so long polluted with sin, it be at length destroyed.

4. The faith of the patriarchs in desiring to be buried in the land of Canaan, plainly shewed that they had an eye to the heavenly country, which it was the design of this Jesus to lead them to.

17. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, 18. Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. 19. The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. 20. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: 21. And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. 22. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. 23. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. 24. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: 25. For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God

by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. 26. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? 27. But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? 28. Wilt thou kill me, as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday? 29. Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons.

Stephen here goes on to relate,

I. The wonderful increase of the people of Israel in Egypt; it was by a wonder of providence, that in a little time they advanced from a family into a nation.

1. It was *when the time of the promise drew nigh; the time* when they were to be formed into a people. During the first two hundred and fifteen years after the promise made to Abraham, the children of the covenant were increased but to seventy; but in the latter two hundred and fifteen years they increased to six hundred thousand fighting men; the motion of providence is sometimes quickest, when it comes nearest the centre. Let us not be discouraged at the slowness of the proceedings toward the accomplishment of God's promises; God knows how to redeem the time that seems to have been lost, and, *when the year of the redeemed is at hand*, can do double work in a single day.

2. It was *in Egypt, where they were oppressed, and ruled with rigour*; when their lives were made so bitter to them, that, one would think, they should have wished to be *written childless*, yet they married, in faith that God in due time would visit them; and God blessed them, who thus honoured him, saying, *Be fruitful, and multiply*. Suffering times have often been growing times with the church.

II. The extreme hardships which they underwent there, v. 18, 19. When the Egyptians observed them to increase in number, they increased their burthens; in which Stephen observes three things:

1. Their base ingratitude. They were oppressed by another king that knew not Joseph, that is, did not consider the good service that Joseph had done to that nation; for, if he had, he would not have made so ill a requital to his relations and family. Those that injure good people are very ungrateful, for they are the blessings of the age and place they live in.

2. Their hellish craft and policy. *They dealt subtly with our kindred*. Come on, said they, let us deal wisely, thinking thereby to secure themselves, but it proved dealing foolishly, for they did but treasure up wrath by it. Those are in a great mistake, who think they deal subtly for themselves, when they deal deceitfully or unmercifully with their brethren.

3. Their barbarous and inhuman cruelty. That they might effectually extirpate them, *they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live*. The killing of their infant-seed seemed a very likely way to crush an infant-nation.

Now Stephen seems to observe this to them, not only that they might further see how mean their beginnings were, fitly represented (perhaps with an eye to the exposing of the young children in Egypt) by the forlorn state of a helpless, out-cast infant, (Ezek. 15. 4.) and how much they were indebted to God for his care of them, which they had forfeited, and made themselves unworthy of; but also that

they might consider that what they were now doing against the christian church in its infancy, was as impious and unjust, and would be in the issue as fruitless and ineffectual, as that was which the Egyptians did against the Jewish church in its infancy. "You think you deal subtly in your evil entreating us, and in persecuting young converts, you do as they did in casting out the young children; but you will find it is to no purpose, in spite of your malice, Christ's disciples will increase and multiply."

III. The raising up of Moses to be their deliverer. Stephen was charged with having spoken blasphemous words against Moses, in answer to which charge, he here speaks very honourably of him.

1. Moses was born when the persecution of Israel was at the hottest, especially in that most cruel instance of it, the murdering of the new-born children; *At that time, Moses was born*, (v. 20.) and was himself in danger, as soon as he came into the world, (as our Saviour also was at Bethlehem,) of falling a sacrifice to that bloody edict. God is preparing for his people's deliverance, then when their day is darkest, and their distress deepest.

2. *He was exceeding fair*; his face began to shine as soon as he was born, as a happy presage of the honour God designed to put upon him; he was, *καλὸς ὡς θεὸς*—*fair toward God*; he was sanctified from the womb, and that made him beautiful in God's eyes; for *it is the beauty of holiness that is in God's sight of great price*.

3. He was wonderfully preserved in his infancy, first, by the care of his tender parents, who *nourished him three months in their own house*, as long as they durst; and then by a favourable providence that threw him into the arms of Pharaoh's daughter, who took him up, and nourished him for her own son; (v. 21.) for those whom God designs to make special use of, he will take special care of. And did he thus protect the child Moses? Much more will he secure the interests of his holy child Jesus (as he is called, ch. 4. 27.) from the enemies that are gathered together against him.

4. He became a great scholar; (v. 22.) *He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*, who were then famed for all manner of polite literature, particularly philosophy, astronomy, and (which perhaps helped to lead them to idolatry) hieroglyphics. Moses, having his education at court, had opportunity of improving himself by the best books, tutors, and conversation, in all the arts and sciences, and had a genius for them. Only we have reason to think, that he had not so far forgotten the God of his fathers, as to acquaint himself with the unlawful studies and practices of the magicians of Egypt, any further than was necessary to the confuting of them.

5. He became a prime minister of state in Egypt; that seems to be meant by his being *mighty in words and deeds*. Though he had not a ready way of expressing himself, but stammered, yet he spake admirable good sense, and every thing he said commanded assent, and carried its own evidence and force of reason along with it. And in business, none went on with such courage, and conduct, and success. Thus was he prepared, by human helps, for those services, which, after all, he could not be thoroughly furnished for without divine illumination. Now, by all this, Stephen will make it appear that notwithstanding the malicious insinuations of his persecutors, he had as high and honourable thoughts of Moses as they had.

IV. The attempts which Moses made to deliver Israel, which they spurned, and would not close in with. This Stephen insists much upon, and it serves for a key to this story, (Exod. 2. 11—15.) as does also that other construction which is put upon it by the apostle, Heb. 11. 24—26. There it is repre-

sented as an act of holy self-denial, here as a designed prelude to, or entrance upon, the public service he was to be called out to; (v. 23.) *When he was full forty years old, in the prime of his time for preferment in the court of Egypt, it came into his heart (for God put it there) to visit his brethren the children of Israel, and to see which way he might do them any service; and he shewed himself as a public person, with a public character:*

1. As Israel's saviour. This he gave a specimen of in *avenging an oppressed Israelite, and killing the Egyptian that abused him; (v. 24.) Seeing one of his brethren suffer wrong, he was moved with compassion toward the sufferer, and a just indignation at the wrong-doer, as men in public stations should be, and he avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian; which, if he had been only a private person, he could not lawfully have done; but he knew that his commission from heaven would bear him out; and he supposed that his brethren (who could not but have some knowledge of the promise made to Abraham, that the nation that should oppress them God would judge) would have understood that God by his hand would deliver them; for he could not have had, either presence of mind or strength of body, to do what he did, if he had not been clothed with such a divine power as evidenced a divine authority. If they had but understood the signs of the times, they might have taken this for the dawning of the day of their deliverance; but they understood not, they did not take this, as it was designed, for the setting up of a standard, and sounding of a trumpet, to proclaim Moses their deliverer.*

2. As Israel's judge. This he gave a specimen of, the very next day, in offering to accommodate matters between two contending Hebrews, wherein he plainly assumed a public character; (v. 26.) *He shewed himself to them as they strove, and, putting on an air of majesty and authority, he would have set them at one again, and as their prince have determined the controversy between them, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren, by birth and profession of religion; why do ye wrong one to another?* For he observed that (as in most strifes) there was a fault on both sides; and therefore, in order to peace and friendship, there must be a mutual remission and condescension. When Moses was to be Israel's deliverer out of Egypt, he slew the Egyptians, and so delivered Israel out of their hands; but when he was to be Israel's judge, and lawgiver, he ruled them with the golden sceptre, not the iron rod; he did not kill and slay them when they strove, but gave them excellent laws and statutes, and determined upon their complaints and appeals made to him, Exod. 18. 16.

But the contending Israelite, that was most in the wrong, thrust him away, (v. 27.) would not bear the reproof, though a just and gentle one, but was ready to fly in his face, with, *Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?* Proud and litigious spirits are impatient of check and control. Rather would these Israelites have their bodies ruled with rigour by their task-masters than be delivered, and have their minds ruled with reason, by their deliverer. The wrong-doer was so enraged at the reproof given him, that he upbraided Moses with the service he had done to their nation in killing the Egyptian, which, if they had pleased, would have been the earnest of further and greater service; *Wilt thou kill me as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday?* v. 28. Charging that upon him as his crime, and threatening to accuse him for it, which was the hanging out of the flag of defiance to the Egyptians, and the banner of love and deliverance to Israel. Hereupon Moses fled into the land of Midian, and made no more attempt to deliver Israel till forty years after; he set-

tled as a stranger in Midian, married, and had two sons, by Jethro's daughter, v. 29.

Now let us see how this serves Stephen's purpose,

(1.) They charged him with blaspheming Moses, in answer to which he retorts upon them the indignities which their fathers did to Moses, which they ought to be ashamed of, and humbled for, instead of picking quarrels thus, under pretence of zeal for the honour of Moses, with one that had as great a veneration for him as any of them had.

(2.) They persecuted him for disputing in defence of Christ, and his gospel, in opposition to which they set up Moses and his law; "But" (saith he) "you had best take heed," [1.] "Lest you hereby do as your fathers did, refuse and reject one whom God has raised up to be to you a Prince, and a Saviour; you may understand, if you will not wilfully shut your eyes against the light, that God will, by this Jesus, deliver you out of a worse slavery than that in Egypt; take heed then of thrusting him away, but receive him as a Ruler and a Judge over you." [2.] "Lest you hereby fare as your fathers fared, who for this were justly left to die in their slavery, for the deliverance came not till forty years after; this will come of it, you put away the gospel from you, and it will be sent to the Gentiles; you will not have Christ, and you shall not have him, so shall your doom be," Matt. 23. 38, 39.

30. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina, an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. 31. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, 32. Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. 33. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. 34. I have seen, I have seen, the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. 35. This Moses whom they refused, (saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge?) the same did God send to be a ruler, and a deliverer, by the hands of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. 36. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness, forty years. 37. This is that Moses which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear. 38. This is he that was in the church in the wilderness, with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us. 39. Whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

40. Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us : for *as for* this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 41. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Stephen here proceeds in his story of Moses ; and let any one judge, whether these be the words of one that was a blasphemer of Moses ; no ; nothing could be spoken more honourably of him. Here is,

I. The vision which he saw of the glory of God at the bush ; (*v. 30.*) *When forty years were expired*, during all which time Moses was buried alive in Midian, and was now grown old, and, one would think, past service, that it might appear that all his performances were products of a divine power and promise, as it appeared that Isaac was a child of promise, by his being born of parents stricken in years ; now, at eighty years old, he enters upon that post of honour to which he was born, in recompense for his self-denial at forty years old. Observe,

1. Where God appeared to him ; *In the wilderness of mount Sinai, v. 30.* And when he appeared to him there, that was *holy ground*, (*v. 33.*) which Stephen takes notice of, as a check to those who prided themselves *in the temple, that holy place*, as if there were no communion to be had with God but there ; whereas God met Moses, and *manifested himself to him*, in a remote obscure place *in the wilderness of Sinai*. They deceive themselves, if they think God is tied to places ; he can bring his people *into a wilderness*, and there speak comfortably to them.

2. How he appeared to him ; *In a flame of fire ; for our God is a consuming Fire ; and yet the bush, in which this fire was, though combustible matter, was not consumed ;* which, as it represented the state of Israel in Egypt, where, though they were *in the fire of affliction*, yet *they were not consumed*, so perhaps may be looked upon as a type of Christ's incarnation, and the union between the divine and human nature ; *God, manifested in the flesh*, was *as the flame of fire, manifested in the bush*.

3. How Moses was affected with this ; (*1.*) *He wondered at the sight, v. 31.* It was a phenomenon which all his Egyptian learning could not furnish him with the solution of. He had the curiosity at first to pry into it ; *I will turn aside now, and see this great sight ; but the nearer he drew*, the more he was struck with amazement ; and, (*2.*) *He trembled, and durst not behold, durst not look wistly upon it ;* for he was soon aware that it was not a fiery meteor, but *the angel of the Lord ;* and no other than *the Angel of the covenant*, the Son of God himself. This set him a trembling. Stephen was accused for blaspheming Moses and God, (*ch. 6. 11.*) as if Moses had been a little god ; but, by this it appears that he was *a man subject to like passions as we are ;* and particularly that of fear, upon any appearance of the divine Majesty and Glory.

II. The declaration which he heard of the covenant of God ; (*v. 32.*) *The voice of the Lord came to him ; for faith comes by hearing ;* and this was it ; *I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ;* and therefore, 1. "I am the same that I was." The covenant God made with Abraham some ages ago, was, *I will be to thee a God*, a God all-sufficient. "Now," saith God, "that covenant is still in full force ; it is not cancelled or forgotten, but I am, as I was, *the God of Abraham*, and now I will make it appear so ;" for all the favours, all the honours

God put upon Israel, were founded upon this covenant with Abraham, and flowed from it. 2. "I will be the same that I am." For if the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, cannot break the covenant-relation between God and them, (as by this it appears it could not,) then nothing else can : and then *he will be a God*,

(1.) To their souls, which are now separated from their bodies. Our Saviour by this proves the future state, Matt. 22. 31. *Abraham is dead*, and yet God is still his God, therefore Abraham is still alive. God never did that for him in this world, which would answer the true intent and full extent of that promise, that he would be *the God of Abraham ;* and therefore it must be done for him in the other world. Now this is that *life and immortality* which are *brought to light by the gospel*, for the full conviction of the Sadducees, who denied it. Those therefore who stood up in defence of the gospel, and endeavoured to propagate that, were so far from blaspheming Moses, that they did the greatest honour imaginable to Moses, and that glorious discovery which God made of himself to him at the bush.

(2.) To their seed. God, in declaring himself thus *the God of their fathers*, intimated his kindness to their seed, that they should be *loved for the fathers' sakes*, Rom. 11. 28. Deut. 7. 8. Now the preachers of the gospel preached up this covenant, *the promise made of God unto the fathers ; unto which promise*, those of the *twelve tribes*, that did continue *serving God, hoped to come*, ch. 26. 6, 7. And shall they, under colour of supporting *the holy place, and the law*, oppose the covenant which was made with *Abraham and his seed*, his spiritual seed, before *the law was given*, and long before *the holy place was built* ? Since God's glory must be for ever advanced, and our glorying for ever silenced, God will have our salvation *to be by promise*, and not by *the law* ; the Jews therefore who persecuted the Christians, under pretence that they blasphemed *the law*, did themselves blaspheme *the promise*, and forsook all their own mercies that were contained in it.

III. The commission which God gave him to deliver Israel out of Egypt. The Jews set up Moses in competition with Christ, and accused Stephen as a blasphemer, because he did not do so too. But Stephen here shews that Moses was an eminent type of Christ, as he was Israel's deliverer. When God had declared himself *the God of Abraham*, he proceeded,

1. To order Moses into a reverent posture ; "*Put off thy shoes from thy feet.* Enter not upon sacred things with low, and cold, and common thoughts. *Keep thy foot*, Eccl. 5. 1. Be not hasty and rash in thy approaches to God ; tread softly."

2. To order Moses into a very eminent service. When he is ready to receive commands, he shall have commission. He is commissioned to demand leave from Pharaoh for Israel to go out of his land, and to enforce that demand, *v. 34.* Observe, (1.) The notice God took both of their sufferings, and of their sense of their sufferings ; *I have seen, I have seen, their affliction, and have heard their groaning*. God has a compassionate regard to the troubles of his church, and the groans of his persecuted people ; and their deliverance takes rise from his pity. (2.) The determination he fixed to redeem them *by the hand of Moses ; I am come down to deliver them*. It should seem, though God is present in all places, yet he uses that expression here, of *coming down to deliver them*, because that deliverance was typical of what Christ did, when, *for us men, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven ; he that ascended, first descended*. Moses is the man that must be employed ; *Come, and I will send thee into Egypt ;* and if God send him, he will own him, and give him success.

IV. His acting in pursuance of this commission, wherein he was a figure of the Messiah. And Stephen takes notice here again of the slights they had put upon him, the affronts they had given him, and their refusal to have him to reign over them, as tending very much to magnify his agency in their deliverance.

1. God put honour upon him, whom they put contempt upon; (v. 35.) *This Moses whom they refused*, whose kind offers, and good offices they rejected with scorn, saying, *Who made thee a ruler and a judge? Thou takest too much upon thee, thou son of Levi*; (Numb. 16. 3.) that same *Moses did God send to be a ruler, and a deliverer, by the hands of the angel which appeared to him in the bush*. It may be understood, either that God sent to him by the hand of the angel; or, that by the hand of the angel going along with him, he became a complete deliverer. Now, by this example, Stephen would intimate to the council, *That this Jesus whom they now refused*, as their fathers did Moses, saying, *Who made thee a Prophet and a King? Who gave thee this authority?* Even this same has God advanced to be a *Prince and a Saviour, a Ruler and a Deliverer*; as the apostles had told them a while ago, (ch. 5. 30.) *that the Stone which the builders refused, was become the head-stone in the corner*, ch. 4. 11.

2. God shewed favour to them by him, and he was very forward to serve them, though they had thrust him away. God might justly have refused them his service, and he might justly have declined it; but it is all forgotten, they are not so much as upbraided with it, v. 36. *He brought them out, notwithstanding, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt*; which were afterward continued for the completing their deliverance, according as the case called for it, *in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years*. So far is he from blaspheming Moses, that he admires him as a glorious instrument in the hand of God, for the forming of the Old Testament church. But it does not at all derogate from his just honour to say, that he was but an instrument, and that he is outshone by this Jesus, whom he encourages these Jews yet to close with, and to come into his interest, not fearing but that then they should be received into his favour, and receive benefit by him, as the people of Israel were delivered by Moses, though they had once refused him.

V. His prophecy of Christ and his grace, v. 37. He not only was a type of Christ, (many were so, that perhaps had not an actual foresight of his day,) but Moses spake of him; (v. 37.) *This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren*. This is spoken of as one of the greatest honours God put upon him, (nay as that which exceeded all the rest,) that by him he gave notice to the children of Israel of the great Prophet that should come into the world, raised their expectation of him, and obliged them to receive him. When his bringing of them out of Egypt is spoken of, it is with an emphasis of honour, *This is that Moses!* (Exod. 6. 26.) And so it is here, *This is that Moses!* Now this is very full to Stephen's purpose; in asserting that Jesus should change the customs of the ceremonial law, he was so far from blaspheming Moses, that really he did him the greatest honour imaginable, by shewing how the prophecy of Moses was accomplished, which was so clear, that, as Christ told them himself, *If they had believed Moses, they would have believed him*, John 5. 46.

1. Moses, in God's name, told them, that, in the fullness of time, they should have a Prophet raised up among them, one of their own nation, that should be like unto him, (ch. 18. 15, 18.) a Ruler and a

Deliverer, a Judge and a Lawgiver, like him; who should therefore have authority to change the customs that he had delivered, and to bring in a better hope, as the Mediator of a better testament.

2. He charged them to hear that Prophet, to receive his dictates, to admit the change he would make in their customs, and to submit to him in every thing; and this will be the greatest honour you can do to Moses and to his law, who said, *Hear ye him*; and came to be a witness to the repetition of this charge by a voice from heaven, at the transfiguration of Christ, and by his silence he gave consent to it, Matt. 17. 5.

VI. The eminent services which Moses continued to do to the people of Israel, after he had been instrumental to bring them out of Egypt, v. 38. And herein also he was a type of Christ, who yet so far exceeds him, that it is no blasphemy to say, "He has authority to change the customs that Moses delivered." It was the honour of Moses,

1. That he was in the church in the wilderness; he presided in all the affairs of it for forty years; was king in Jeshurun, Deut. 33. 5. The camp of Israel is here called the church in the wilderness; for it was a sacred society, incorporated by a divine charter under a divine government, and blessed with divine revelation. The church in the wilderness was a church, though it was not yet perfectly formed, as it was to be when they came to Canaan, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes, Deut. 12. 8, 9. It was the honour of Moses, that he was in that church, and many a time it had been destroyed if Moses had not been in it to intercede for it. But Christ is the President and Guide of a more excellent and glorious church than that in the wilderness was, and is more in it, as the life and soul of it, than Moses could be in that.

2. That he was with the angel that spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers; was with him in the holy mount twice forty days, with the angel of the covenant, Michael, our Prince. Moses was immediately conversant with God, but never lay in his bosom as Christ did from eternity. Or, these words may be taken thus; *Moses was in the church in the wilderness*, but it was with the angel that spake to him in mount Sinai, that is, at the burning bush; for that was said to be at mount Sinai, (v. 30.) that angel went before him, and was guide to him, else he could not have been a guide to Israel; of this God speaks, (Exod. 23. 20.) *I send an angel before thee*, and Exod. 33. 2. And see Numb. 20. 16. He was in the church with the angel, without whom he could have done no service to the church; but Christ is himself that angel, which was with the church in the wilderness, and therefore has an authority above Moses.

3. That he received the lively oracles to give unto them; not only the ten commandments, but the other instructions which the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, *Speak them to the children of Israel*. (1.) The words of God are oracles, certain and infallible, and of unquestionable authority and obligation; they are to be consulted as oracles, and by them all controversies must be determined. (2.) They are lively oracles, for they are the oracles of the living God, not of the dumb and dead idols of the heathens; the word that God speaks, is spirit and life; not that the law of Moses could give life, but it shewed the way to life; *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*. (3.) Moses received them from God, and delivered nothing as an oracle to the people but what he had first received from God. (4.) The lively oracles which he received from God, he faithfully gave to the people, to be observed and preserved. It was the principal privilege of the Jews, that to them were committed the oracles of God; and it was by the hand of Moses

that they were committed. As Moses gave them not that bread, so neither did he give them that law from heaven, (John 6. 32.) but God gave it them; and he that gave them those customs by his servant Moses, might, no doubt, when he pleased, change the customs by his Son Jesus, who has received more lively oracles to give unto us, than Moses did.

VII. The contempt that was, after this, and notwithstanding this, put upon him by the people. They that charged Stephen with speaking against Moses, would do well to answer what their own ancestors had done, and they tread in their steps.

1. *They would not obey him, but thrust him from them, v. 35.* They murmured at him, mutinied against him, refused to obey his orders, and sometimes were ready to stone him. Moses did indeed give them an excellent law, but by this it appeared that it could not make the comers thereunto perfect, (Heb. 10. 1.) for in their hearts they turned back again into Egypt, and preferred their garlick and onions there, before the manna they had under the conduct of Moses, or the milk and honey they hoped for in Canaan. Observe, Their secret disaffection to Moses, and inclination to Egyptianism, (if I may so call it,) were, in effect, turning back to Egypt, it was doing it in heart; many that pretend to be going forwards toward Canaan, by keeping up a shew and profession of religion, are, at the same time, in their hearts turning back to Egypt, like Lot's wife to Sodom, and will be dealt with as deserters, for it is the heart that God looks at. Now if the customs that Moses delivered to them could not prevail to change them, wonder not that Christ comes to change the customs, and to introduce a more spiritual way of worship.

2. *They made a golden calf instead of him, which, beside the affront that was thereby done to God, was a great indignity to Moses:* for it was upon this consideration that they made the calf: because, as for this Moses, who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him; therefore make us gods of gold; as if a calf were sufficient to supply the want of Moses, and as capable of going before them into the promised land. So they made a calf in those days when the law was given them, and offered sacrifices unto the idol, and rejoiced in the work of their own hands. So proud were they of their new god, that when they had *sitten down to eat and drink, they rose up to play!* By all this it appears that there was a great deal which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh; it was therefore necessary that this law should be perfected by a better hand, and he was no blasphemer against Moses, who said Christ had done it.

42. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts, and sacrifices, by the space of forty years in the wilderness? 43. Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made, to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. 44. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. 45. Which also our fathers that came after, brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out be-

fore the face of our fathers, unto the days of David. 46. Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. 47. But Solomon built him a house. 48. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, 49. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? 50. Hath not my hand made all these things?

Two things we have in these verses:

I. Stephen upbraids them with the idolatry of their fathers, which God gave them up to, as a punishment for their early forsaking him in worshipping the golden calf; and this was the saddest punishment of all for that sin, as it was of the idolatry of the Gentile world, that God gave them up to a reprobate sense. When Israel was joined to idols, joined to the golden calf, and, not long after, to Baal-peor, God said, *Let them alone;* let them go on, v. 42. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven. He particularly cautioned them not to do it, at their peril, and gave them reasons why they should not; but when they were bent upon it he gave them up to their own hearts lust, withdrew his restraining grace, and then they walked in their own counsels, and were so scandalously mad upon their idols, as never any people were. Compare Deut. 4. 19. with Jer. 8. 2.

For this he quotes a passage out of Amos 5. 25. For it would be less invidious to tell them their own from an Old Testament prophet, who upbraids them,

1. For not sacrificing to their own God in the wilderness; (v. 42.) *Have ye offered to me slain beasts, and sacrifices, by the space of forty years in the wilderness?* No; during all that time it was intermitted; they did not so much as keep the passover after the second year. It was God's condescension to them, that he did not insist upon it during their unsettled state; but then let them consider how ill they requited him, in offering sacrifices to idols, when God dispensed with their offering to him. This is also a check to their zeal for the customs that Moses delivered to them, and their fear of having them changed by this Jesus, that immediately after they were delivered, they were for forty years together disused as needless things.

2. For sacrificing to other gods after they came to Canaan; (v. 43.) *Ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch.* Moloch was the idol of the children of Ammon, to which they barbarously offered their own children in sacrifice, which they could not do without great terror and grief to themselves and their families; yet this unnatural idolatry they arrived at, when God gave them up to worship the host of heaven. See 2 Chron. 28. 3. It was surely the strongest delusion that ever people were given up to, and the greatest instance of the power of Satan in the children of disobedience, and therefore it is here spoken of emphatically, *Yea, you took up the tabernacle of Moloch,* you submitted even to that, and to the worship of the star of your god Remphan; some think, it signifies the moon, as Moloch does the sun; others take it for Saturn, for that planet is called Remphan, in the Syriac and Persian languages. The Septuagint puts it for Chiun, as being a name more commonly known. They had images representing the star, like the silver shrines for Diana, here called the figures which they made to worship. Dr. Lightfoot thinks they had figures representing the whole starry firmament, with all the constellations, and the planets, and these are called Remphan, "the high representation," like the celestial

globe. A poor thing to make an idol of, and yet better than a golden calf!

Now for this it is threatened, *I will carry you away beyond Babylon*. In *Amos* it is *beyond Damascus*, meaning to *Babylon*, the land of the north. But Stephen changes it, with an eye to the captivity of the ten tribes, who were *carried away beyond Babylon, by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes*, 2 Kings 17. 6. Let it not therefore seem strange to them, to hear of the destruction of this place, for they had heard of it many a time from the prophets of the Old Testament, who were not therefore accused as blasphemers by any but the wicked rulers. It was observed, in the debate on Jeremiah's case, that Micah was not called to an account, though he prophesied, saying, *Zion shall be ploughed as a field*, Jer. 26. 18, 19.

II. He gives an answer particularly to the charge exhibited against him relating to the temple, that *he spake blasphemous words against that holy place*, v. 44—50. He was accused for saying that *Jesus would destroy this holy place*; "And what if I did say so?" (saith Stephen;) "the glory of the holy God is not bound up in the glory of this holy place, but that may be preserved untouched, though this be laid in the dust;" for,

1. It was not till our fathers came into the wilderness, in their way to Canaan, that they had any fixed place of worship; and yet the patriarchs, many ages before, worshipped God acceptably at the altars they had adjoining to their own tents in the open air—*sub dio*; and he that was worshipped without a holy place, in the first, and best, and purest ages of the Old Testament church, may and will be so when this holy place is destroyed, without any diminution to his glory.

2. The holy place was at first but a tabernacle, mean and moveable, speaking itself to be short-lived, and not designed to continue always. Why might not this holy place, though built of stones, be decently brought to its end, and give place to its betters, as well as that though framed of curtains? As it was no dishonour, but an honour, to God, that the tabernacle gave way to the temple, so it is now that the material temple gives way to the spiritual one, and so it will be when, at last, the spiritual temple shall give way to the eternal one.

3. That tabernacle was a *tabernacle of witness*, or of testimony, a *figure for the time then present*, (Heb. 9. 9.) a *figure of good things to come*, of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not men, Heb. 8. 2. This was the glory both of the tabernacle and temple, that they were erected for a testimony of that temple of God, which in the latter days should be opened in heaven, (Rev. 11. 19.) and of Christ's tabernacled on earth, (as the word is, John 1. 14.) and of the temple of his body.

4. That tabernacle was framed just as God appointed, and according to the fashion which Moses saw in the mount; which plainly intimates that it had reference to good things to come; its rise being heavenly, its meaning and tendency were so; and therefore it was no diminution at all to its glory, to say, that this temple made with hands should be destroyed, in order to the building of another made without hands; which was Christ's crime, (Mark 14. 58.) and Stephen's.

5. That tabernacle was pitched first in the wilderness; it was not a native of this land of yours, (to which you think it must for ever be confined,) but was brought in in the next age, by our fathers, who came after those who first erected it, into the possession of the Gentiles, into the land of Canaan, which had long been in the possession of the devoted nations, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers. And why may not God set up his spiritual temple, as he had done the material taber-

nacle, in those countries that were now the possession of the Gentiles? That tabernacle was brought in by those who came with Jesus, that is, Joshua. And I think, for distinction-sake, and to prevent mistakes, it ought to be so read, both here and Heb. 4. 8. Yet, in naming Joshua here, which, in Greek, is Jesus, there may be a tacit intimation, that as the Old Testament Joshua brought in that typical tabernacle, so the New Testament Joshua should bring in the true tabernacle into the possession of the Gentiles.

6. That tabernacle continued for many ages, even to the days of David, above four hundred years, before there was any thought of building a temple, v. 45. David, having found favour before God, did indeed desire this further favour, to have leave to build God a house, to be a constant, settled tabernacle or dwelling-place, for the Shechinah, or the tokens of the presence of the God of Jacob, v. 46. Those who have found favour with God, should shew themselves forward to advance the interests of his kingdom among men.

7. God had his heart so little upon a temple, or such a holy place as they were so jealous for, that, when David desired to build one, he was forbidden to do it; God was in no haste for one, as he told David; (2 Sam. 7. 7.) and therefore it was not he, but his son Solomon, some years after, that built him a house. David had all that sweet communion with God in public worship, which we read of in his psalms, before there was any temple built.

8. God often declared, that temples, made with hands, were not his delight, nor could add any thing to the perfection of his rest and joy. Solomon, when he dedicated the temple, acknowledged that God dwelleth not in temples made with hands; he has not need of them, is not benefited by them, cannot be confined to them. The whole world is his temple, in which he is every where present, and fills it with his glory; and what occasion has he for a temple then to manifest himself in? Indeed the pretended deities of the heathen needed temples made with hands, for they were gods made with hands, (v. 41.) and had no other place to manifest themselves in than in their own temples; but the one only true and living God needs no temple, for the heaven is his throne, in which he rests, and the earth is his footstool, over which he rules; (v. 49, 50.) and therefore, What house will ye build me, comparable to this which I have already? Or, what is the place of my rest? What need have I of a house, either to repose myself in, or to shew myself? Hath not my hand made all these things? And these shew his eternal power and Godhead; (Rom. 1. 20.) they shew themselves so to all mankind, that they are without excuse, who worship other gods. And as the world is thus God's temple, wherein he is manifested, so it is God's temple in which he will be worshipped. As the earth is full of his glory, and is therefore his temple, (Isa. 6. 3.) so the earth is, or shall be, full of his praise, (Hab. 2. 3.) and all the ends of the earth shall fear him; (Ps. 67. 7.) upon that account it is his temple. It was therefore no reflection at all upon this holy place, however they might take it, to say that Jesus shall destroy this temple and set up another, into which all nations shall be admitted, ch. 15. 16, 17. And it would not seem strange to them who considered that scripture which Stephen here quotes, (Isa. 66. 1—3.) which, as it spake God's comparative contempt of the external part of his service, so it plainly foretold the rejection of the unbelieving Jews, and the welcome of the Gentiles into the church, that were of a contrite spirit.

51. Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye

52. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: 53. Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Stephen was going on in his discourse, (as it should seem by the thread of it,) to shew that, as the temple, so the temple-service must come to an end, and it would be the glory of both to give way to that *worship of the Father in spirit and in truth*, which was to be established in *the kingdom of the Messiah*, stripped of the pompous ceremonies of the old law; and so he was going to apply all this which he had said, more closely to his present purpose; but he perceived they could not bear it; they could patiently hear the history of the Old Testament told; (it was a piece of learning which they themselves dealt much in;) but if Stephen go about to tell them that their power and tyranny must come down, and that the church must be governed by a spirit of holiness and love, and heavenly-mindedness, they will not so much as give him the hearing. It is probable that he perceived this, and that they were going to silence him; and therefore he breaks off abruptly in the midst of his discourse, and by that spirit of wisdom, courage and power where-with he was filled, he sharply rebuked his persecutors, and gave them their own; for if they will not admit the testimony of the gospel to them, it shall become a testimony against them.

I. They, like their fathers, were stubborn and wilful, and would not be wrought upon by the various methods God took to reclaim and reform them; they were like their fathers, inflexible both to the word of God and to his providences.

1. They were stiff-necked, (v. 51.) and would not submit their necks to the sweet and easy yoke of God's government, nor draw in it, but were like *a bullock, unaccustomed to the yoke*; or they would not bow their heads, no not to God himself, would not do obeisance to him, would not humble themselves before him; the stiff neck is the same with the hard heart, obstinate and contumacious, and that will not yield—the general character of the Jewish nation, Exod. 32. 9.—33. 3, 5.—34. 9. Deut. 9. 6, 13.—31. 27. Ezek. 2. 4.

2. They were *uncircumcised in heart and ears*; their hearts and ears were not devoted and given up to God, as the body of the people were in profession by the sign of circumcision; "In name and shew you are circumcised Jews, but in heart and ears you are still uncircumcised heathens, and pay no more deference to the authority of your God than they do, Jer. 9. 26. You are under the power of unmortified lusts and corruptions, which stop your ears to the voice of God, and harden your hearts to that which is both most commanding and most affecting." They had not that *circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh*, Col. 2. 11.

II. They, like their fathers, were not only not influenced by the methods God took to reform them; but they were enraged and incensed against them; *Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost*.

1. They resisted the Holy Ghost speaking to them by the prophets, whom they opposed and contradicted, hated and ridiculed; this seems especially meant here, by the following explication, *Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?* In persecuting and silencing them that spake by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they resisted the Holy Ghost. Their fathers resisted the Holy Ghost in the prophets that God raised up to them, and so did

they in Christ's apostles and ministers, who spake by the same Spirit, and had greater measures of his gifts than the prophets of the Old Testament had, and yet were more resisted.

2. They resisted the Holy Ghost striving with them by their own consciences, and would not comply with the convictions and dictates of them. God's Spirit strove with them as with the old world, but in vain; they resisted him, took part with their corruptions against their convictions, and rebelled against the light. There is that in our sinful hearts, that always resists the Holy Ghost, a flesh that lusts against the Spirit, and wars against his motions; but in the hearts of God's elect, when the fulness of time comes, this resistance is overcome and overpowered, and after a struggle the throne of Christ is set up in the soul, and every thought that had *exalted itself* against it, is *brought into captivity* to it, 2 Cor. 10. 4, 5. That grace therefore which effects this change, might more fitly be called *victorious grace*, than *irresistible*.

III. They, like their fathers, persecuted and slew those whom God sent unto them to call them to duty, and make them offers of mercy.

1. Their fathers had been the cruel and constant persecutors of the Old Testament prophets; (v. 57.) *Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?* More or less, one time or other, they had a blow at them all. With regard even to those that lived in the best reigns, when the princes did not persecute them, there was a malignant party in the nation that mocked at them and abused them, and most of them were at last, either by colour of law, or popular fury, put to death; and that which aggravated the sin of persecuting the prophets, was, that the business of the prophets they were so spiteful at, was, to *shew before of the coming of the Just One*; to give notice of God's kind intentions toward that people, to send the Messiah among them in the fulness of time. They that were the messengers of such glad tidings, should have been courted and caressed, and have had the preferments of the best of benefactors; but, instead of that, they had the treatment of the worst of malefactors.

2. They had been the *betrayers and murderers of the Just One* himself, as Peter had told them, ch. 3. 24.—5. 30. They had hired Judas to betray him, and had in a manner forced Pilate to condemn him; and therefore it is charged upon them, that they were his betrayers and murderers. Thus they were the genuine seed of those who slew them that foretold his coming, which by slaying him, they shewed they would have done if they had lived then; and thus, our Saviour had told them, they brought upon themselves the guilt of the blood of all the prophets. Which of the prophets would *they* have shewed any respect to, who had no regard to the Son of God himself?

IV. They, like their fathers, put contempt upon divine revelation, and would not be guided and governed by it; and this was the aggravation of their sin, that God had given, as to their fathers his law, so to them his gospel, in vain.

1. Their fathers *received the law, and have not kept it*, v. 53. God wrote to them the great things of his law, after he had first spoken to them; and yet they were counted by them as a strange or foreign thing, which they were no way concerned in. The law is said to be *received by the disposition of angels*, because angels were employed in the solemnity of giving the law; in the thunderings and lightnings, and the sound of the trumpet. It is said to be *ordained by angels*; (Gal. 3. 19.) God is said to come *with ten thousand* of his saints, to give the law; (Deut. 33. 2.) and it was a *word spoken by angels*, Heb. 2. 2. This put an honour both upon the law and the Lawgiver, and should increase our ve

neration for both. But they that thus received the law, yet kept it not, but by making the golden calf broke it immediately in a capital instance.

2. They received the gospel now, by the disposition, not of angels, but of the Holy Ghost; not with the sound of a trumpet, but, which was more strange, in the gift of tongues, and yet they did not embrace it. They would not yield to the plainest demonstrations, any more than their fathers before them did, for they were resolved not to comply with God either in his law or in his gospel.

We have reason to think Stephen had a great deal more to say, and would have said it, if they would have suffered him; but they were wicked and unreasonable men with whom he had to do, that could no more *hear* reason than they could *speak* it.

54. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with *their* teeth. 55. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. 56. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. 59. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

We have here the death of the first martyr of the christian church, and there is in this story a lively instance of the outrage and fury of the persecutors, (such as we may expect to meet with if we are called out to suffer for Christ,) and of the courage and comfort of the persecuted, that are thus called out. Here is hell in its fire and darkness, and heaven in its light and brightness; and these here serve as foils to set off each other. It is not here said, that the votes of the council were taken upon his case, and that by the majority he was found guilty, and then condemned and ordered to be stoned to death, according to the law, as a blasphemer; but, it is likely, so it was, and that it was not by the violence of the people, without order of the council, that he was put to death; for here is the usual ceremony of regular executions—he was *cast out of the city, and the hands of the witnesses were first upon him*.

Let us observe here the wonderful discomposure of the spirits of his enemies and persecutors, and the wonderful composure of his spirit.

1. See the strength of corruption in the persecutors of Stephen; malice in perfection, hell itself broken loose, men become incarnate devils, and the serpent's seed spitting their venom!

1. *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart,* (v. 54.) *διεσπινετο*, the same word that is used Heb. 11. 37. and translated, *they were sawn asunder*. They were put to as much torture in their minds as ever the martyrs were put to in their bodies. They were filled with indignation at the unanswerable arguments that Stephen urged for their

conviction, and that they could find nothing to say against them. They were not *pricked* to the heart with sorrow, as those were *ch. 2. 37.* but *cut* to the heart with rage and fury, as they themselves were, *ch. 5. 33.* Stephen rebuked them sharply, as Paul expresses it, (1st. 1. 13.) *ακαταπαύτως*—*cuttingly*, for they were cut to the heart by the reproof. Note, Rejecters of the gospel and opposers of it are really tormentors to themselves. Enmity to God is a heart-cutting thing; faith and love are heart-healing. When they heard how he that *looked like an angel* before he began his discourse, talked like an angel, like a messenger from heaven, before he had done it, they were like a *wild bull in a net, full of the fury of the Lord*, (Isa. 51. 20.) despairing to run down a cause so bravely pleaded, and yet resolved not to yield to it.

2. *They gnashed upon him with their teeth*; this speaks, (1.) Great malice and rage against him. Job complained of his enemy, that he *gnashed upon him with his teeth*, Job 16. 9. The language of this was, *O that we had of his flesh to eat!* Job 31. 31. They *grinned at him*, as dogs at those they are enraged at; and therefore Paul, cautioning against those of the circumcision, says, *Beware of dogs*, Phil. 3. 2. Enmity at the saints turns men into brute beasts. (2.) Great vexation within themselves; they fretted to see in him such manifest tokens of a divine power and presence, and it vexed them to the heart. *The wicked shall see it, and be grieved, he shall gnash with his teeth and melt away*, Ps. 112. 10. Gnashing with the teeth is often used to express the horror and torments of the damned. Those that have the malice of hell, cannot but have with it some of the pains of hell.

3. *They cried out with a loud voice*; (v. 50.) to irritate and excite one another, and to drown the noise of the clamours of their own and one another's consciences: when he said, *I see heaven opened*, they cried with a loud voice, that he might not be heard to speak. Note, It is very common for a righteous cause, particularly the righteous cause of Christ's religion, to be endeavoured to be run down by noise and clamour; what is wanting in reason is made up in tumult, and *the cry of him that ruleth among fools, while the words of the wise are heard in quiet*. They cried with a loud voice, as soldiers when they are going to engage in battle, mustering up all their spirit and vigour for this desperate encounter.

4. *They stopped their ears*, that they might not hear their own noisiness; or perhaps, under pretence that they could not bear to hear his blasphemies. As Caiaphas rent his clothes when Christ said, *Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man coming in glory*, (Matth. 26. 64, 65.) so these here *stopped their ears* when Stephen said, *I now see the Son of man standing in glory*; both pretending that what was spoken was not to be heard with patience. Their stopping their ears was, (1.) A manifest specimen of their wilful obstinacy; they were resolved they would not hear what had a tendency to convince them, which was what the prophets often complained of; they were *like the deaf adder, that will not hear the voice of the charmer*, Ps. 58. 4, 5. (2.) It was a fatal omen of that judicial hardness to which God would give them up. They stopped their ears, and then God, in a way of righteous judgment, stopped them. That was the work that was now in doing with the unbelieving Jews; *Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy*; thus was Stephen's character of them answered, *Ye uncircumcised in heart and ears*.

5. *They ran upon him with one accord*; the people and the elders of the people, judges, prosecutors, witnesses, and spectators, they all flew upon him, as beasts upon their prey. See how violent

they were, and in what haste; they *ran upon him*, though there was no danger of his out-running them: and see how unanimous they were in this evil thing; they ran upon him *with one accord*, one and all, hoping thereby to terrify him, and put him into confusion; envying him his composure and comfort in soul, with which he wonderfully enjoyed himself in the midst of this hurry; they did all they could to ruffle him.

6. They *cast him out of the city, and stoned him*; as if he were not worthy to live in Jerusalem; nay not worthy to live in this world; pretending herein to execute the law of Moses, (Lev. 24. 16.) *He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall surely be put to death, all the congregation shall certainly stone him.* And thus they had put Christ to death, when this same court had found him guilty of blasphemy, but that, for his greater ignominy, they were desirous that he should be crucified, and God over-ruled it for the fulfilling of the scripture. The fury with which they managed the execution, is intimated in that they cast him out of the city, as if they could not bear the sight of him; they treated him as an anathema, as the off-scouring of all things. The witnesses against him were the leaders in the execution, according to the law, (Deut. 17. 7.) *The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him, to put him to death*, and particularly in the case of blasphemy, Lev. 24. 14. Deut. 13. 9. Thus they were to confirm their testimony. Now the stoning of a man being a laborious piece of work, the witnesses put off their upper garments, that they might not hang in their way, *and they laid them down at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul*, now a pleased spectator of this tragedy; it is the first time we find mention of his name, we shall know it and love it better when we find it changed to *Paul*, and him changed from a persecutor into a preacher. This little instance of his agency in Stephen's death he afterward reflected upon with regret; (ch. 22. 20.) *I kept the raiment of them that slew him.*

II. See the strength of grace in Stephen, and the wonderful instances of God's favour to him, and working in him. As his persecutors were full of Satan, so was he *full of the Holy Ghost*, fuller than ordinary, anointed with fresh oil for the combat, that, *as the day*, so might the strength be. Upon this account they are *blessed, who are persecuted for righteousness-sake, that the Spirit of God and of glory rests upon them*, 2 Pet. 4. 14. When he was chosen to public service, he was described to be a man *full of the Holy Ghost*, (ch. 6. 5.) and now that he is called out to martyrdom, he has still the same character. Note, They that are full of the Holy Ghost are fit for any thing, either to do for Christ, or to suffer for him. And those whom God calls out to hard services for his name, he will qualify for those services, and carry comfortably through them, by filling them with the Holy Ghost; that as their afflictions for Christ do abound, their consolation in him may yet more abound, and then *none of these things move them*.

Now here we have a remarkable communion between this blessed martyr and the blessed Jesus in this critical moment. When the followers of Christ are for his sake *killed all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter*; does that separate them from the love of Christ? Does he love them the less? Do they love him the less? No, by no means; and so it appears by this story: in which we may observe,

1. Christ's gracious manifestation of himself to Stephen, both for his comfort and for his honour, in the midst of his sufferings; when they were cut to the heart, and gnashed upon him with their teeth, ready to eat him up, then he had a view of the glory of Christ, sufficient to fill him with joy unspeakable;

which was intended not only for his encouragement, but for the support and comfort of all God's suffering servants in all ages.

(1.) He, *being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven*, v. 55. [1.] Thus he looked above the power and fury of his persecutors, and did as it were *despise them, and laugh them to scorn*, as the *daughter of Zion*, Isa. 37. 22. They had their eyes fixed upon him, full of malice and cruelty; but he looked up to heaven, and never minded them; was so taken up with the eternal life now in prospect, that he seemed to have no manner of concern for the natural life now at stake. Instead of looking about him, to see either which way he was in danger, or which way he might make his escape, he looks up to heaven; thence only comes his help, and thitherward his way is still open: though they compass him about on every side, they cannot interrupt his intercourse with heaven. Note, A believing regard to God and the upper world, will be of great use to us, to set us above the fear of man; for as far as we are under the influence of that fear we *forget the Lord our Maker*, Isa. 51. 13. [2.] Thus he directed his sufferings to the glory of God, to the honour of Christ, and did as it were appeal to heaven concerning them; Lord, for thy sake I suffer this; and express his earnest expectation that Christ should be magnified in his body. Now that he was ready to be offered, he looks up steadfastly to heaven, as one willing to offer himself. [3.] Thus he lifted up his soul with his eyes to God in the heavens, in pious ejaculations, calling upon God for wisdom and grace to carry him through this trial in a right manner. God has promised that he will be with his servants whom he calls out to suffer for him; but *he will for this be sought unto*. He is *nigh unto them*, but it is *in that which they call upon him for*. *Is any afflicted? Let him pray*. [4.] Thus he breathed after the heavenly country, to which he saw the fury of his persecutors would presently send him. It is good for dying saints to look up steadfastly to heaven; "Yonder is the place whither death will carry my better part, and then, *O death, where is thy sting?*" [5.] Thus he made it to appear that he was full of the Holy Ghost; for, wherever the Spirit of grace dwells and works and reigns, he directs the eye of the soul upward. Those that are full of the Holy Ghost will look up steadfastly to heaven, for there their heart is. [6.] Thus he put himself into a posture to receive the following manifestation of the divine glory and grace. If we expect to hear from heaven, we must look up steadfastly to heaven.

(2.) He saw the glory of God; (v. 55.) for *he saw*, in order to that, *the heavens opened*, v. 50. Some think his eyes were strengthened and the sight of them so raised above its natural pitch, by a supernatural power, that he saw into the third heavens, though at so vast a distance; as Moses's sight was enlarged to see the whole land of Canaan. Others think it was a representation of the glory of God set before his eyes, as before Isaiah and Ezekiel; heaven did as it were come down to him, as Rev. 21. 2. The heavens were opened, to give him a view of the happiness he was going to, that he might, in prospect of that, go cheerfully through death, so great a death. Would we by faith look up steadfastly, we might see the heavens opened by the mediation of Christ, the veil being rent, and *a new and living way laid open for us into the holiest*. The heaven is opened for the settling of a correspondence between God and men, that his favours and blessings may come down to us, and our prayers and praises may go up to him. We may also see the glory of God, as far as he has revealed it in his word; and the sight of this will carry us through all the terrors of sufferings and death.

(3.) He saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God; (v. 55.) the Son of man, so it is, v. 56. Jesus, being the Son of man, having taken our nature with him to heaven, and being there clothed with a body, might be seen with bodily eyes, and so Stephen saw him. When the Old Testament prophets saw the glory of God, it was attended with angels. The Shechinah or divine presence in Isaiah's vision was attended with Seraphim; in Ezekiel's vision with Cherubim; both signifying the angels, the ministers of God's providence. But here no mention is made of the angels, though they surround the throne and the Lamb; instead of them Stephen sees Jesus at the right hand of God, the great Mediator of God's grace, from whom more glory redounds to God than from all the ministration of the holy angels. The glory of God shines brightest in the face of Jesus Christ; for there shines the glory of his grace, which is the most illustrious instance of his glory. God appears more glorious with Jesus standing at his right hand, than with millions of angels about him. Now, [1.] Here is a proof of the exaltation of Christ to the Father's right hand; the apostles saw him ascend, but they did not see him sit down, *a cloud received him out of their sight*. We are told that he sat down on the right hand of God; but was he ever seen there? Yes, Stephen saw him there, and was abundantly satisfied with the sight. He saw Jesus at the right hand of God, noting both his transcendent dignity, and his sovereign dominion, his uncontrollable ability, and his universal agency; whatever God's right hand either gives to us, or receives from us, or does concerning us, it is by him; for he is his right Hand. [2.] He is usually said to sit there; but Stephen sees him standing there, as one more than ordinarily concerned at present for his suffering servant; he stood up as a Judge to plead his cause against his persecutors; he is *raised up out of his holy habitation*, (Zech. 2. 13.) *comes out of his place to punish*, Isa. 26. 21. He stands ready to receive him and crown him, and in the mean time to give him a prospect of the joy set before him. [3.] This was intended for the encouragement of Stephen; he sees Christ is for him, and then no matter who is against him. When our Lord Jesus was in his agony, an angel appeared to him, strengthening him; but Stephen had Christ himself appearing to him. Note, Nothing so comfortable to dying saints, nor so animating to suffering saints, as to see Jesus at the right hand of God; and, blessed be God, by faith we may see him there.

(4.) He told those about him what he saw; (v. 56.) *Behold, I see the heavens opened*. That which was a cordial to him, ought to have been a conviction to them, and a caution to them to take heed of proceeding against one whom Heaven thus smiled upon; and therefore what he saw he declared, let them make what use they pleased of it. If some were exasperated by it, others perhaps might be wrought upon to consider this Jesus whom they persecuted, and to believe in him.

2. His pious addresses to Jesus Christ; the manifestation of God's glory to him did not set him above praying, but rather set him upon it; *They stoned Stephen, calling upon God*, v. 59. Though he called upon God, and by that shewed himself to be a true-born Israelite, yet they proceeded to stone him, not considering how dangerous it is to fight against those that have an interest in Heaven. Though they stoned him, yet he called upon God; nay, therefore he called upon him. Note, It is the comfort of those who are unjustly hated and persecuted by men, that they have a God to go to, a God all-sufficient to call upon. Men *stop their ears*, as they did here; (v. 57.) but God does not. Stephen was now *cast out of the city*; but he was not cast out from his God. He was now taking his leave of the

world, and therefore calls upon God; for we must do that as long as we live. Note, It is good to die praying; then we need help—strength we never had, to do a work we never did; and how must we fetch in that help and strength but by prayer?

Two short prayers Stephen offered up to God in his dying moments, and in them as it were breathed out his soul.

(1.) Here is a prayer for himself; *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*. Thus Christ had himself resigned his Spirit immediately into the hand of the Father. We are here taught to resign ours into the hands of Christ as Mediator, by him to be recommended to the Father. Stephen saw Jesus standing at the Father's right hand, and he thus calls to him, "Blessed Jesus, do that for me now, which thou standest there to do for all thine, receive my departing spirit into thy hand." Observe,

[1.] The soul is the man, and our great concern, living and dying, must be about our souls. Stephen's body was to be miserably broken, and shattered, and overwhelmed with a shower of stones, the earthly house of this tabernacle violently beaten down and abused; but, however it goes with that, "Lord," saith he, "let my spirit be safe; let it go well with my poor soul." Thus while we live, our care should be, that though the body be starved or stripped, the soul may be fed and clothed; though the body lie in pain, the soul may dwell at ease; and when we die, that though the body be thrown by as a despised broken vessel, and a vessel in which there is no pleasure, yet the soul may be presented a vessel of honour; that God may be the strength of the heart and its Portion, though the flesh fail.

[2.] Our Lord Jesus is God, to whom we are to seek, and in whom we are to confide and comfort ourselves living and dying. Stephen here prays to Christ, and so must we; for it is the will of God that all men should thus honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. It is Christ we are to commit ourselves to, who alone is able to keep what we commit to him against that day: it is necessary that we have an eye to Christ when we come to die, for there is no venturing into another world but under his conduct; no living comforts in dying moments, but what are fetched from him.

[3.] Christ's receiving our spirits at death, is the great thing we are to be careful about, and to comfort ourselves with. We ought to be in care about this while we live, that Christ may receive our spirits when we die; for if he reject and disown them, whither will they betake themselves? How can they escape being a prey to the roaring lion? To him therefore we must commit them daily, to be ruled and sanctified, and made meet for heaven, and then, and not otherwise, he will receive them. And if this has been our care while we live, it may be our comfort when we come to die, that we shall be received into everlasting habitations.

(2.) Here is a prayer for his persecutors, v. 60.

[1.] The circumstances of this prayer are observable, for it seems to have been offered up with something more of solemnity than the former. *First*, He *kneeled down*; which was an expression of his humility in prayer. *Secondly*, He *cried with a loud voice*; which was an expression of his importunity. But why should he thus shew more humility and importunity in this request than in the former? The answer is this, None could doubt of his being in good earnest in his prayers for himself, and therefore there he needed not to use such outward expressions of it; but in his prayer for his enemies, because that is so much against the grain of corrupt nature, it was requisite he should give proofs of his being in earnest.

[2.] The prayer itself; *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*; therein he followed the example of

his dying Master, who prayed thus for his persecutors, *Father, forgive them*; and set an example to all following sufferers in the cause of Christ, thus to pray for those that persecute them. Prayer may preach; this did so to those who stoned Stephen; and *therefore* he kneeled down, that they might take notice he was going to pray, and cried with a loud voice, that they might take notice of what he said, and might learn, *First*, That what they did was a sin, a great sin, which, if divine mercy and grace did not prevent, would be laid to their charge, to their everlasting confusion. *Secondly*, That, notwithstanding their malice and fury against him, he was in charity with them, and was so far from desiring that God would avenge his death upon them, that it was his hearty prayer to God, that it might not in any degree be laid to their charge. A sad reckoning there would be for it; if they did not repent, it would certainly be laid to their charge; but he, for his part, did not desire the woful day. Let them take notice of this, and when their thoughts were cool, surely they would not easily forgive themselves putting him to death, who could so easily forgive them. *The blood-thirsty hate the upright, but the just seek his soul*, Prov. 29. 10. *Thirdly*, That, though the sin was very heinous, yet they must not despair of the pardon of it, upon their repentance. If they would lay it to their hearts, God would not lay it to their charge. "Do you think, saith St. Austin, that Paul heard Stephen pray this prayer? It is likely he did, saith he, and ridiculed it then; (*audivit subsannans, sed irrisit—he heard with scorn*;) but afterward he had the benefit of it, and fared the better for it."

3. His expiring with this; *When he had said this, he fell asleep*; or, as he was saying this, the blow came, that was mortal. Note, Death is but a sleep to good people; not the sleep of the soul, (Stephen had given that up into Christ's hand,) but the sleep of the body; it is its rest from all its griefs and toils, it is perfect ease and indolence. Stephen died as much in a hurry as ever any man did, and yet, when he died, he fell asleep; he applied himself to his dying work with as much composure of mind as if he had been going to sleep; it was but closing his eyes, and dying. Observe, He fell asleep when he was praying for his persecutors; it is expressed as if he thought he could not die in peace till he had done that. It contributes very much to our dying comfortably, to die in charity with all men; we are then found of Christ in peace; let not the sun of life go down upon our wrath. He fell asleep; the vulgar Latin adds, *in the Lord*; in the embraces of his love. If he thus sleep, he shall do well; he shall awake again in the morning of the resurrection.

CHAP. VIII.

In this chapter, we have an account of the persecutions of the christians, and the propagating of christianity thereby. It was strange, but very true, that the disciples of Christ, the more they were afflicted the more they multiplied. I. Here is the church suffering; upon the occasion of putting Stephen to death, a very sharp storm arose, which forced many from Jerusalem, v. 1. . 3. II. Here is the church spreading by the ministry of Philip and others, that were dispersed upon that occasion. We have here, 1. The gospel brought to Samaria; preached there; (v. 4, 5.) embraced there, (v. 6. . 8.) even by Simon Magus; (v. 9. . 13.) the gift of the Holy Ghost conferred upon some of the believing Samaritans by the imposition of the hands of Peter and John; (v. 14. . 17.) and the severe rebuke given by Peter to Simon Magus for bidding money for a power to bestow that gift, v. 18. . 25. 2. The gospel sent to Ethiopia, by the Eunuch, a person of quality of that country; he is returning home in his chariot from Jerusalem, v. 26. . 28. Philip is sent to him, and in his chariot preaches Christ to him, (v. 29. . 35.) baptizes him upon his profession of the christian faith, (v. 36. . 38.) and then leaves him, v. 39, 40. Thus in different ways and methods the gospel was dispersed among the nations, and, one way or other, Have they not all heard?

1. **A**ND Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.

In these verses, we have,

1. Something more concerning Stephen and his death; how people stood affected to it; variously, as generally in such cases, according to men's different sentiments of things. Christ had told his disciples, when he was parting with them, (John 16. 20.) *Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice*. Accordingly here is,

1. Stephen's death rejoiced in by one; by many, no doubt, but by one in particular, and that was Saul, who was afterward called Paul; he was *consenting to his death*, *συνοφρονας—he consented to it with delight*; so the word signifies; he was pleased with it, he fed his eyes with this bloody spectacle, in hopes it would put a stop to the growth of christianity. We have reason to think that Paul ordered Luke to insert this, for shame to himself, and glory to free grace. Thus he owns himself guilty of the blood of Stephen, and aggravates it with this, that he did not do it with regret and reluctance, but with delight and a full satisfaction; like those who not only *do such things, but have pleasure in them that do them*.

2. Stephen's death bewailed by others; (v. 2.) *Devout men*, which some understand of those that were properly so called, *φροσelytes*, one of whom Stephen himself, probably, was. Or, it may be taken more largely; some of the church that were more devout and zealous than the rest, went, and gathered up the poor crushed and broken remains, to which they gave a decent interment; probably in the *field of blood*, which was bought some time ago to bury strangers in. They buried him solemnly, and made great lamentation over him. Though his death was of great advantage to himself, and great service to the church, yet they bewailed it as a general loss, so well qualified was he for the service, and so likely to be useful both as a deacon and as a disputant. It is an ill symptom, if, when such men are taken away, it is not laid to heart. Those devout men paid these their last respects to Stephen, (1.) To shew that they were not ashamed of the cause for which he suffered, nor ashamed of the wrath of those that were enemies to it; for, though they now triumph, the cause is a righteous cause, and will be at last a victorious one. (2.) To shew the great value and esteem they had for this faithful servant of Jesus Christ, this first martyr for the gospel, whose memory shall always be precious to them, notwithstanding the ignominy of his death. They study to do honour to him, whom God put honour upon. (3.) To testify their belief and hope of the *resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come*.

II. An account of this persecution of the church, which begins upon the martyrdom of Stephen. When the fury of the Jews ran with such violence, and to such a height, against Stephen, it could not quickly either stop itself, or spend itself. The bloody are often in scripture called *blood-thirsty*; for when they have tasted blood they thirst for

more. One would have thought Stephen's dying prayers and dying comforts should have overcome them, and melted them into a better opinion of christians and christianity; but it seems it did not, the persecution goes on; for, 1. They were more exasperated, when they saw they could prevail nothing; and, as if they hoped to be too hard for God himself, they resolve to follow their blow; and perhaps, because they were none of them struck dead upon the place for stoning Stephen, their hearts were the more fully set in them to do evil. 2. Perhaps the disciples were the more emboldened to dispute against them as Stephen did, seeing how triumphantly he finished his course, which would provoke them so much the more. Observe,

(1.) Against whom this persecution was raised; it was *against the church in Jerusalem*, which is no sooner planted than it is persecuted; as Christ often intimated that tribulation and persecution would arise *because of the word*. And Christ had particularly foretold that Jerusalem would soon be made too hot for his followers, for that city had been famous for killing the prophets, and stoning them that were sent to it, Matt. 23. 37. It should seem that in this persecution many were put to death, for Paul owns that at this time he persecuted this way *unto the death*, (ch. 22. 4.) and (ch. 26. 10.) that *when they were put to death he gave his voice against them*.

(2.) Who was an active man in it; none so zealous, so busy, as Saul, a young Pharisee, v. 3. As for Saul, (who had been twice mentioned before, and now again for a notorious persecutor,) *he made havoc of the church*; he did all he could to lay it waste and ruin it; he cared not what mischief he did to the disciples of Christ, nor knew when to take up. He aimed at no less than the cutting off the Gospel-Israel, that the *name of it should be no more in remembrance*, Ps. 83. 4. He was the fittest tool the chief priests could find out to serve their purposes; he was informer-general against the disciples, a messenger of the great council to be employed in searching for meetings, and seizing all that were suspected to favour that way. Saul was bred a scholar, a gentleman, and yet did not think it below him to be employed in the vilest work of that kind. [1.] *He entered into every house*, making no difficulty of breaking open doors, night or day, and having a force attending him for that purpose. He entered into every house where they used to keep their meetings, or every house that had any christians in it, or was thought to have. No man could be secure in his own house, though it is his castle. [2.] He hailed, with the utmost contempt and cruelty, both men and women, dragged them along the streets, without any regard to the tenderness of the weaker sex; he stooped so low as to take cognizance of the meanest that were leavened with the gospel, so extremely bigoted was he. [3.] He committed them to prison, in order to their being tried and put to death, unless they would renounce Christ; and some, we find, were compelled by him to blaspheme, ch. 26. 11.

(3.) What was the effect of this persecution.

They were *all scattered abroad*; (v. 1.) not all the believers, but all the preachers; who were principally struck at, and against whom warrants were issued out to take them up. They, remembering our Master's rule, (*When they persecute you in one city, flee to another*,) dispersed themselves by agreement throughout the regions of Judea, and of Samaria; not so much for fear of sufferings, (for Judea and Samaria were not so far off from Jerusalem but that, if they made a public appearance there, as they determined to do, their persecutors' power would soon reach them there,) but because they looked upon this as an intimation of Providence to

them to scatter; their work was pretty well done in Jerusalem, and now it was time to think of the necessities of other places: for their Master had told them that they must be his witnesses in Jerusalem first, and then in *all Judea and in Samaria*, and then to *the uttermost parts of the earth*, (ch. 1. 8.) and that method they observe. Though persecution may not drive us off from our work, yet it may send us, as a hint of Providence, to work elsewhere.

The preachers were all scattered *except the apostles*, who, probably, were directed by the Spirit to continue at Jerusalem yet for some time, they being, by the special providence of God, screened from the storm, and by the special grace of God enabled to face the storm. They tarried at Jerusalem, that they might be ready to go where their assistance was most needed by the other preachers that were sent to break the ice; as Christ ordered his disciples to go to those places where he himself designed to come, Luke 10. 1. The apostles continued longer together at Jerusalem than one would have thought, considering the command and commission given them, to *go into all the world*, and to *disciple all nations*; see ch. 15. 6. Gal. 1. 17. But what was done by the evangelists whom they sent forth, was reckoned as done by them.

4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word. 5. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them*: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8. And there was great joy in that city. 9. But there was a certain man called Simon, which before-time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one. 10. To whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. 11. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12. But when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. 13. Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Samson's riddle is here again unriddled; *Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness*. The persecution that was designed to extirpate the church, was by the overruling providence of God made an occasion of the enlargement of it. Christ had said, *I am come to send fire on the earth*; and they thought, by scattering those who were kindled with that fire, to have put it out, but instead of that they did but help to spread it.

I. Here is a general account of what was done by

them all ; (v. 4.) *They went every where, preaching the word.* They did not go to hide themselves for fear of suffering, no nor to shew themselves as proud of their sufferings ; but they went up and down, to scatter the knowledge of Christ in every place where they were scattered. They went every where, into the *way of the Gentiles*, and the *cities of the Samaritans*, which before they were forbidden to go into, *ch.* 10. 5. They did not keep together in a body, though that might have been a strength to them, but they scattered into all parts ; not to take their ease, but to find out work. They went *evangelizing* the world, preaching the word of the gospel ; that was it which filled them, and which they endeavoured to fill the country with, those of them that were preachers, in their preaching, and others in their common converse. They were now in a country where they were no strangers, for Christ and his disciples had conversed much in the regions of Judea ; so that they had a foundation laid there for them to build upon ; and it would be requisite to let the people there know what that doctrine which Jesus had preached there some time ago was come to, and that it was not lost and forgotten, as perhaps they were made to believe.

II. A particular account of what was done by Philip. We shall hear of the progress and success of others of them afterward, (*ch.* 11. 19.) but here must attend the motions of Philip, not Philip the apostle, but Philip the deacon, who was chosen and ordained to *serve tables*, but having *used the office of a deacon well, he purchased to himself a good degree, and great boldness in the faith*, 1 Tim. 3. 13. Stephen was advanced to the degree of a martyr, Philip to the degree of an evangelist, which when he entered upon, being obliged by it to *give himself to the word and prayer*, he was, no doubt, discharged from the office of a deacon ; for how could he serve tables at Jerusalem, which by that office he was obliged to do, when he was preaching in Samaria ? And it is probable that two others were chosen in the room of Stephen and Philip. Now observe,

1. What wonderful success Philip had in his preaching, and what reception he met with.

(1.) The place he chose, was, the city of Samaria ; the head-city of Samaria, the metropolis of that country, which stood there where the city of Samaria had formerly stood, which we read of the building of, 1 Kings 16. 24. now called *Sebaste*. Some think it was the same with Sychem or Sychar, that city of Samaria where Christ was, John 4. 5. Many of that city then believed in Christ, though he did no miracles among them ; (v. 39, 41.) and now Philip, three years after, carries on the work then begun. The Jews would have no dealings with the Samaritans ; but Christ sent his gospel to slay all enmities, and particularly that between the Jews and the Samaritans, by making them one in his church.

(2.) The doctrine he preached, was, *Christ* ; for he determined to know nothing else. He preached Christ to them, he proclaimed Christ to them, so the word signifies ; as a king, when he comes to the crown, is proclaimed throughout his dominions. The Samaritans had an expectation of the Messiah's coming, as appears by John 4. 25. Now Philip tells them that he is come, and that the Samaritans are welcome to him. Ministers' business is to preach Christ ; Christ, and him crucified ; Christ, and him glorified.

(3.) The proofs he produced for the confirmation of his doctrine, were, miracles, v. 6. To convince them that he had his commission from heaven, (and therefore not only they might venture upon what he said, but they were bound to yield to it,) he shews them this broad seal of heaven annexed to it, which the God of truth would never put to a lie. The mi-

racles were undeniable, they heard and saw the miracles which he did ; they heard the commanding words he spake, and saw the amazing effect of them immediately ; that he spake, and it was done. And the nature of the miracles was such as suited the intention of his commission, and gave light and lustre to it.

[1.] He was sent to break the power of Satan ; and, in token of that, unclean spirits, being charged in the name of the Lord Jesus to remove, *came out of many that were possessed with them*, v. 7. As far as the gospel prevails, Satan is forced to quit his hold of men and his interest in them, and then those are restored to themselves and to their right mind again, who, while he kept possession, were distracted. Wherever the gospel gains the *admission* and *submission* it ought to have, evil spirits are dislodged, and particularly *unclean spirits*, all inclinations to the lusts of the flesh, which war against the soul ; for God has called us from uncleanness to holiness, 1 Thess. 4. 7. This was signified by the casting of these unclean spirits out of the bodies of people, who, it is here said, came out *crying with a loud voice*, which signifies that they came out with great reluctance, and sore against their wills, but were forced to acknowledge themselves overcome by a superior power, Mark 1. 26.—3. 11.—9. 26.

[2.] He was sent to heal the minds of men, to cure a distempered world, and to put it into a good state of health ; in token of that, *many that were taken with falsies, and that were lame, were healed*. Those distempers are specified, that were most difficult to be cured by the course of nature, (that the miraculous cure might be the more illustrious,) and those that were most expressive of the disease of sin, and that moral impotency which the souls of men labour under as to the service of God. The grace of God in the gospel is designed for the healing of those that are spiritually lame and paralytic, and cannot help themselves, Rom. 5. 6.

(4.) The acceptance which Philip's doctrine, thus proved, met with in Samaria ; (v. 6.) *The people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spake* ; induced thereto by the miracles which served at first to gain attention, and so by degrees to gain assent. There then begins to be some hopes of people, when they begin to take notice of what is said to them concerning the things of their souls and eternity ; when they begin to give heed to the word of God, as those that are well pleased to hear it, desirous to understand and remember it, and that look upon themselves as concerned in it. The common people gave heed to Philip, *ἑξῆς*—*a multitude of them*, not here and there one, but with one accord, they were all of a mind, that the doctrine of the gospel was fit to be inquired into, and an impartial hearing given to it.

(5.) The satisfaction they had in attending on, and attending to, Philip's preaching, and the success it had with many of them ; (v. 8.) *There was great joy in that city*, for, (v. 12.) *They believed Philip, and were baptized*, into the faith of Christ, the generality of them, *both men and women*. Observe,

[1.] Philip preached the things concerning the *kingdom of God*, the constitution of that kingdom, the laws and ordinances of it, the liberties and privileges of it, and the obligations we are all under to be the loyal subjects of that kingdom ; and he preached the name of Jesus Christ, as King of that kingdom ; his name, which is above every name, he preached it up in its commanding power and influence ; all that by which he has made himself known. [2.] The people not only gave heed to what he said, but at length believed it ; were fully convinced that it was of God, and not of men, and gave up themselves to the conduct and government of it. As to this mountain, on which they had hitherto worshipped God,

and placed a great deal of religion in it, they were now as much weaned from it as ever they had been wedded to it, and become the true worshippers, who worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and in the name of Christ, the true Temple, John 4. 20, 23. [3.] When they believed, without scruple (though they were Samaritans) and without delay they were baptized, openly professed the christian faith, promised to adhere to it, and then, by washing them with water, were solemnly admitted into the communion of the christian church, and owned as brethren by the disciples. Men only were capable of being admitted into the Jewish church by circumcision; but, to shew that in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, (Gal. 3. 28.) but both are alike welcome to him, the initiating ordinance is such as women are capable of, for they are numbered with God's spiritual Israel, though not with Israel according to the flesh, Numb. 1. 2. And from hence it is easily gathered, that women are to be admitted to the Lord's supper, though it does not appear that there were any among those to whom it was first administered. [4.] This occasioned great joy; each one rejoiced for himself, as he in the parable, who found the treasure hid in the field; and they all rejoiced for the benefit hereby brought to their city, and that it came without opposition; which it would scarcely have done, if Samaria had been within the jurisdiction of the chief priests. Note, The bringing of the gospel to any place is just matter of joy, of great joy, to that place. Hence the spreading of the gospel in the world, is often prophesied of in the Old Testament, as the diffusing of joy among the nations; Ps. 67. 4. *Let the nations be glad, and sing for joy*, 1 Thess. 1. 6. The gospel of Christ does not make men melancholy, but fills them with joy, if it be received as it should be; for it is glad tidings of great joy to all people, Luke 2. 10.

2. What there was in particular at this city of Samaria, that made the success of the gospel there more than ordinary wonderful.

(1.) That Simon Magus had been busy there, and had gained a great interest among the people, and yet they believed the things that Philip spake. To unlearn that which is bad, proves many times a harder task than to learn that which is good. These Samaritans, though they were not idolaters as the Gentiles, nor prejudiced against the gospel by traditions received from their fathers, yet they had of late been drawn to follow Simon a conjurer, (for so Magus signifies,) who made a mighty noise among them, and had strangely bewitched them.

We are here told,

[1.] How strong the delusion of Satan was, by which they were brought into the interests of this great deceiver; he had been for some time, nay for a long time, in this city, using sorceries; perhaps he came thither by the instigation of the Devil, soon after our Saviour had been there, to undo what he had been doing there; for it was always Satan's way to crush a good work in its bud and infancy, 1 Cor. 11. 3. 1 Thess. 3. 5. Now,

First, Simon assumed to himself that which was considerable; he gave out that himself was some great one, and would have all people to believe so, and to pay him respect accordingly; and then, as to every thing else, they might do as they pleased; he had no design to reform their lives, or improve their worship and devotion, only to make them believe that he was, *τις μέγας*—some divine person. Justin Martin says that he would be worshipped as, *πρωτοθεός*—the chief god. He gave out himself to be the Son of God, the Messiah, so some think; or to be an angel, or a prophet; perhaps he was uncertain within himself what title of honour to pretend to; but he would be thought some great one. Pride, ambition, and an affectation of grandeur, have always been the

cause of abundance of mischief, both to the world and to the church.

Secondly, The people ascribed to him what he pleased. 1. They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest; both young and old, both poor and rich, both governors and governed; to him they had regard, (v. 10, 11.) and perhaps the more, because the time fixed for the coming of the Messiah was now expired; which had raised a general expectation of the appearing of some great one about this time. Probably, he was a native of their country, and therefore they embraced him the more cheerfully, that by giving honour to him they might reflect it upon themselves. 2. They said of him, *This man is the great power of God; the power of God, that great power*; (so it might be read;) that power which made the world. See how ignorant inconsiderate people mistake that which is done by the power of Satan, as if it were done by the power of God! Thus, in the Gentile world, devils pass for deities; and in the antichristian kingdom all the world wonders after a beast, to whom the dragon gives his power, and who opens his mouth in blasphemy against God, Rev. 13. 2, 3. 3. They were brought to it by his sorceries; he bewitched the people of Samaria, (v. 9.) bewitched them with sorceries, (v. 11.) that is, either, (1.) By his magic arts he bewitched the minds of the people, at least some of them, who drew in others. Satan, by God's permission, filled their hearts to follow Simon. O foolish Galatians, saith Paul, who hath bewitched you? Gal. 3. 1. These people are said to be bewitched by Simon, because they were so strangely infatuated to believe a lie. Or, (2.) By his magic arts he did many signs and lying wonders, which seemed to be miracles, but really were not so; like those of the magicians of Egypt, and those of the man of sin, 2 Thess. 2. 9. When they knew no better, they were influenced by his sorceries; but when they were acquainted with Philip's real miracles, they saw plainly that the one was real and the other a sham, and that there was as much difference as between Aaron's rod and those of the magicians: *What is the chaff to the wheat?* Jer. 23. 28.

Thus, notwithstanding the influence Simon Magus had had upon them, and the loathsomeness there generally is in people to own themselves in an error, and to retract it, yet, when they saw the difference between Simon and Philip, they quitted Simon, gave heed no longer to him, but to Philip: and thus you see,

[2.] How strong the power of divine grace is, by which they were brought to Christ, who is Truth itself, and was, as I may say, the great Undeceiver. By that grace working with the word, they that had been led captive by Satan, were brought into obedience to Christ. Where Satan, as a strong man armed, kept possession of the palace, and thought himself safe, Christ, as a stronger than he, dispossessed him, and divided the spoil; led captivity captive, and made those the trophies of his victory, whom the Devil had triumphed over. Let us not despair of the worst, when even those whom Simon Magus had bewitched were brought to believe.

(2.) Here is another thing yet more wonderful, that Simon Magus himself became a convert to the faith of Christ, in shew and profession, for a time. Is Saul also among the prophets? Yes, (v. 13.) Simon himself believed also; he was convinced that Philip preached a true doctrine, because he saw it confirmed by real miracles, which he was the better able to judge of, because he was conscious to himself of the trick of his own pretended ones. [1.] The present conviction went so far, that he was baptized, was admitted, as other believers were, into the church, by baptism; and we have no reason to think that Philip did amiss in baptizing him; no, nor

in baptizing him quickly. Though he had been a very wicked man, a sorcerer, a pretender to divine honours, yet, upon his solemn profession of repentance for his sin and faith in Jesus Christ, he was baptized. For, as great wickedness before conversion keeps not true penitents from the benefit of God's grace, so neither should it keep professing ones from church-fellowship. Prodigals, when they return, must be joyfully welcomed home, though we cannot be sure but that they will play the prodigal again. Nay, though he was now but a hypocrite, and really in the *gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity* all this while, and would soon have been found to be so if he had been tried a while, yet Philip baptized him; for it is God's prerogative to know the heart: the church and its ministers must go by a judgment of charity, as far as there is room for it. It is a maxim in the law, *Donec contrarium patet, semper præsimitur meliori parti*—We must hope the best as long as we can. And it is a maxim of the discipline of the church, *De secretis non judicat ecclesia*—The secrets of the heart God only judges. [2.] The present conviction lasted so long, that he continued with Philip; though afterward he apostatized from christianity, yet not quickly. He courted Philip's acquaintance; and now he that had *given out himself to be some great one*, is content to sit at the feet of a preacher of the gospel. Even bad men, very bad, may sometimes be in a good frame, very good; and they whose hearts still go after their covetousness, may possibly not only come before God as his people come, but continue with them. [3.] The present conviction was wrought and kept up by the miracles; he *wondered* to see himself so far outdone in *signs and miracles*. Many wonder at the proofs of divine truths, who never experience the power of them.

14. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. 15. Who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. 16. (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus:) 17. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. 18. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19. Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. 24. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. 25. And they, when they had testi-

fied and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

God had wonderfully owned Philip in his work as an evangelist at Samaria, but he could do no more than an evangelist; there were some peculiar powers reserved to the apostles, for the keeping up of the dignity of their office, and here we have an account of what was done by two of them there—*Peter and John*. The twelve kept together at Jerusalem, (v. 1.) and thither these good tidings were brought them, that Samaria had received the word of God, (v. 14.) that a great harvest of souls was gathered, and was likely to be gathered in to Christ there. The word of God was not only preached to them, but received by them; they bid it welcome, admitted the light of it, and submitted to the power of it. When they heard it, they sent unto them Peter and John. If Peter had been, as some say he was, the prince of the apostles, he would have sent some of them, or, if he had seen cause, would have gone himself of his own accord; but he was so far from that, that he submitted to an order of the house, and, as a servant to the body, went whither they sent him. Two apostles were sent, the two most eminent, to Samaria, 1. To encourage Philip, to assist him, and strengthen his hands. Ministers in a higher station, and that excel in gifts and graces, should contrive how they may be helpful to those in a lower sphere, and contribute to their comfort and usefulness. 2. To carry on the good work that was begun among the people, and, with those heavenly graces that had enriched them, to confer upon them spiritual gifts. Now observe,

I. How they advanced and improved these of them that were sincere; it is said, (v. 16.) *The Holy Ghost was as yet fallen upon none of them*, in these extraordinary powers which were conveyed by the descent of the Spirit upon the day of pentecost; they were none of them endued with the gift of tongues, which seems then to have been the most usual, immediate effect of the pouring out of the Spirit. See ch. 10. 45, 46. This was both an eminent sign to them which believed not, and of excellent service to them that did. This, and other such gifts, they had not, *only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and so engaged to him and interested in him, which was necessary to salvation, and in that they had joy and satisfaction, (v. 8.) though they could not speak with tongues. They that are indeed given up to Christ, and have experienced the sanctifying influences and operations of the Spirit of grace, have great reason to be thankful, and no reason to complain, though they have not those gifts that are for ornament, and would make them bright.

But it is intended that they should go on to the perfection of the present dispensation, for the greater honour of the gospel. We have reason to think that Philip had received these gifts of the Holy Ghost himself, but had not a power to confer them, the apostles must come to do that; and they did it not upon all that were baptized, but upon some of them, and it should seem, such as were designed for some office in the church, or at least to be eminent active members of it; and upon some of them, *one gift of the Holy Ghost*, and upon others, *another*. See 1 Cor. 12. 4, 8.—14. 26.

Now, in order to this,

1. The apostles prayed for them, v. 15. The Spirit is given, not to ourselves only; (Luke 11. 13.) but to others also, in answer to prayer; *I will put my Spirit within you*, (Ezek. 36. 27.) *but I will for this be inquired of*, v. 37. We may take encouragement from this example, in praying to God to give the renewing graces of the Holy Ghost to them whose

spiritual welfare we are concerned for; for our children, for our friends, for our ministers; we should pray, and pray earnestly, *that they may receive the Holy Ghost*; for that includes all blessings.

2. They laid their hands on them, to signify that their prayers were answered, and *that the gift of the Holy Ghost was conferred upon them*; for, upon the use of this sign, *they received the Holy Ghost, and spake with tongues*. The laying on of hands was anciently used in blessing, by those who blessed with authority. Thus the apostles blessed these new converts, ordained some to be ministers, and confirmed others in their christianity. We cannot now, nor can any thus give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands; but this may intimate to us, that those whom we pray for we should use our endeavours with.

II. How they discovered and discarded him that was a hypocrite among them, and that was Simon Magus; for they knew how to *separate between the precious and the vile*. Now observe here,

1. The wicked proposal that Simon made, by which his hypocrisy was discovered; (*v. 18, 19.*) *When he saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given*, (which should have confirmed his faith in the doctrine of Christ, and increased his veneration for the apostles,) it gave him a notion of christianity as no other than an exalted piece of sorcery, in which he thought himself capable of being equal to the apostles, and therefore *offered them money, saying, Give me also this power*. He does not desire them to lay their hands on him, that he might receive the Holy Ghost himself, (for he did not foresee that any thing was to be got by that,) but that they would convey to him a power to bestow the gift upon others. He was ambitious to have the honour of an apostle, but not at all solicitous to have the spirit and disposition of a christian. He was more desirous to gain honour to himself than to do good to others. Now, in making this motion, (1.) He put a great affront upon the apostles, as if they were mercenary men, would do any thing for money, and loved it as well as he did; whereas they had left what they had, for Christ, so far were they from aiming to make it more! (2.) He put a great affront upon christianity, as if the miracles that were wrought for the proof of it, were done by magic art, only of a different nature from what he himself had practised formerly. (3.) He shewed that, like Balaam, he aimed at the *rewards of divination*; for he would not have bid money for this power, if he had not hoped to get money by it. (4.) He shewed that he had a very high conceit of himself, and that he had never his heart truly humbled. Such a wretch as he had been before his baptism should have asked, like the prodigal, to be made *as one of the hired servants*. But as soon as he is admitted into the family, no less a place will serve him than to be one of the stewards of the household, and to be intrusted with a power which Philip himself had not, but the apostles only.

2. The just rejection of his proposal, and the cutting reproof Peter gave him for it, *v. 20—23.*

(1.) Peter shews him his crime; (*v. 20.*) *Thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money*; and thus, [1.] He had overvalued the wealth of this world, as if it were an equivalent for any thing, and as if, because, as Solomon saith, *it answers all things relating to the life that now is*, it would answer all things relating to the other life, and would purchase the *pardon of sin, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and eternal life*. [2.] He had undervalued the gift of the Holy Ghost, and put it upon a level with the common gifts of nature and providence. He thought the power of an apostle might as well be had for a good fee as the advice of a physician or a lawyer; which was the greatest *despite*

that could be *done to the Spirit of grace*. All the buying and selling of pardons and indulgences in the church of Rome is the product of this same wicked thought, *that the gift of God may be purchased with money*, when the offer of divine grace so expressly runs, *without money and without price*.

(2.) He shews him his character, which is inferred from his crime. From every thing that a man says or does amiss, we cannot infer that he is a hypocrite in the profession he makes of religion; but this of Simon's was such a fundamental error, as could by no means consist with a state of grace; his bidding money (and that got by sorcery too) was an incontestable evidence that he was yet under the power of a worldly and carnal mind, and was yet that *natural man which receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them*. And therefore Peter tells him plainly, [1.] That his heart was *not right in the sight of God*, *v. 21.* "Though thou professest to believe, and art baptized, yet thou art not sincere." We are as our hearts are; if they be not right, we are wrong; and *they are often in the sight of God*, who knows them, judges them, and judges of us by them. Our hearts are that which they are in the sight of God, who cannot be deceived; and if they be not right in his sight, whatever our pretensions be, our religion is vain, and will stand us in no stead: our great concern is to approve ourselves to him in our integrity, for otherwise we cheat ourselves into our own ruin. Some refer this particularly to the proposal he made; what he asked is denied him, because his heart is *not right in the sight of God* in asking it; he does not aim at the glory of God or the honour of Christ in it, but to make a hand of it for himself; *he asks, and has not, because he asks amiss, that he may consume it upon his lusts*, and be still thought *some great one*. [2.] That he is *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*; *I perceive that thou art so*, *v. 23.* This is plain dealing, and plain dealing is best when we are dealing about souls and eternity. Simon had got a great name among the people, and of late a good name too among God's people, and yet Peter here gives him a black character. Note, It is possible for a man to continue under the power of sin, and yet to put on a form of godliness. *I perceive it*, saith Peter. It was not so much by the Spirit of discerning, with which Peter was endued, that he perceived this, as by Simon's discovery of it in the proposal he made. Note, The disguises of hypocrites many times are soon seen through; the nature of the wolf shews itself notwithstanding the cover of the sheep's clothing. Now the character here given of Simon is really the character of all wicked people. *First*, They are *in the gall of bitterness*; odious to God, as that which is bitter as gall is to us. Sin is an abominable thing which the Lord hates, and sinners are by it made abominable to him; they are vicious in their own nature; indwelling sin is *a root of bitterness*, that *bears gall and wormwood*, Deut. 29. 18. The faculties are corrupted, and the mind imbittered against all good, Heb. 12. 15. It speaks likewise the pernicious consequences of sin; the *end is bitter as wormwood*. *Secondly*, They are *in the bond of iniquity*; bound over to the judgment of God by the guilt of sin, and bound under the dominion of Satan by the power of sin; led captive by him at his will, and it is a sore bondage, like that in Egypt, making the life bitter.

(3.) He reads him his doom in two things:

[1.] He shall sink with his worldly wealth which he overvalued; *Thy money perish with thee*. *First*, Hereby Peter rejects his offer with the utmost disdain and indignation: "Dost thou think thou canst bribe us to betray our trust, and to put the power we are intrusted with, into such unworthy hands?"

Any with thee and thy money too; we will have nothing to do with either. *Get thee behind me, Satan.*" When we are tempted with money to do an evil thing, we should see what a perishing thing money is, and scorn to be biassed with it. It is the character of the upright man, *that he shakes his hands from holding, from touching of bribes*, Isa. 33. 15. *Secondly*, He warns him of his danger of utter destruction if he continued in this mind; "Thy money will perish, and thou wilt lose it, and all that thou canst purchase with it. As *meats for the belly, and the belly for meats*, (1 Cor. 6. 13.) so goods for money, and money for goods, *but God shall destroy both it and them*, they perish in the using; but that is not the worst of it, *thou wilt perish with it, and it with thee*; and it will be an aggravation of thy ruin, and a heavy load upon thy perishing soul, that thou hadst money, which might have been made to turn to a good account, (Luke 16. 9.) which might have been laid at the apostles' feet, as a charity, and would have been accepted, but was thrust into their hands as a bribe, and was rejected. *Son, remember this.*"

[2.] He shall come short of the spiritual blessings which he undervalued; (v. 21.) "*Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter*; thou hast nothing to do with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, thou dost not understand them, thou art excluded from them, hast put a bar in thine own door, thou canst not receive the Holy Ghost thyself, nor power to confer the Holy Ghost upon others, *for thy heart is not right in the sight of God*, if thou thinkest that christianity is a trade to live by in this world, and therefore *thou hast no part nor lot in the eternal life in the other world which the gospel offers.*" Note, *First*, There are many who profess the christian religion, and yet have *no part nor lot in the matter; no part in Christ*, (John 13. 8.) *no lot in the heavenly Canaan.* *Secondly*, They are those whose *hearts are not right in the sight of God*, are not animated by a right spirit, nor guided by a right rule, nor directed to the right end.

(4.) He gives him good counsel, notwithstanding, v. 22. Though he was angry with him, yet he did not abandon him; and though he would have him see his case to be very bad, yet he would not have him think it desperate; *yet now there is hope in Israel.* Observe,

[1.] What it is that he advises him to; he must do his first works; *First*, He must *repent*; must see his error, and retract it; must change his mind and way; must be humbled and ashamed for what he has done; his repentance must be particular; "Repent of this, own thyself guilty in this, and be sorry for it." He must lay load upon himself for it, must not extenuate it, by calling it *a mistake*, or *misguided zeal*, but must aggravate it, by calling it *wickedness*, his wickedness, the fruit of his own corruption. Those that have said and done amiss, must, as far as they can, unsay it and undo it again by repentance. *Secondly*, He must *pray to God*, must pray that God would give him repentance, and pardon upon repentance. Penitents must pray, which implies a desire toward God, and a confidence in Christ. Simon Magus, great a man as he thinks himself, shall not be courted into the apostles' communion, (how much soever some would think it a reputation to them,) upon any other terms than those upon which other sinners are admitted—repentance and prayer.

[2.] What encouragement he gives him to do this; *if perhaps the thought of thy heart, this wicked thought of thine, may be forgiven thee.* Note, *First*, There may be a great deal of wickedness in the thought of the heart, its false notions, and corrupt affections, and wicked projects, which must be repented of, or we are undone. *Secondly*, The

thought of the heart, though ever so wicked, shall be forgiven, upon our repentance, and not laid to our charge. When Peter here puts a *perhaps* upon it, the doubt is of the sincerity of his repentance, not of his pardon, if his repentance be sincere. *If indeed the thought of thy heart may be forgiven*, so it may be read. Or it intimates, that the greatness of his sin might justly make the pardon doubtful, though the promise of the gospel had put the matter out of doubt, in case he did *truly* repent; like that, (Lam. 3. 29.) *If so be there may be hope.*

[3.] Simon's request to them to pray for him, v. 24. He was startled and put into confusion by that which Peter said, finding that resented thus, which he thought would have been embraced with both arms; and he cries out, *Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me.* Here was, *First*, Something well; that he was affected with the reproof given him, and terrified by the character given of him, enough to make the stoutest *heart to tremble*; and that being so, he begged the prayers of the apostles for him, wishing to have an interest in them, who, he believed, had a good interest in Heaven. *Secondly*, Something wanting; he begged of them to pray for him, but did not pray for himself, as he ought to have done; and, in desiring them to pray for him, his concern is more that the judgments he had made himself liable to might be prevented, than that his corruptions might be mortified, and his heart by divine grace, be made right in the sight of God: like Pharaoh, who would have Moses *entreat the Lord for him, that he would take away this death only, not that he would take away this sin, this hardness of heart*, Exod. 8. 8.—10. 17. Some think that Peter had denounced some particular judgments against him, as against Ananias and Sapphira, which, upon this submission of his, at the apostle's intercession, were prevented: or, from what is related, he might infer, that some token of God's wrath would fall upon him, which he thus dreaded and deprecated.

Lastly, Here is the return of the apostles to Jerusalem, when they had finished the business they came about; for as yet they were not to disperse: but though they came hither to do that work which was peculiar to them as apostles, yet, opportunity offering itself, they applied themselves to that which was common to all gospel-ministers. 1. There in the city of Samaria they were preachers, *they testified the word of the Lord*, solemnly attested the truth of the gospel, and confirmed what the other ministers preached: they did not pretend to bring them any thing new, though they were apostles, but bore their testimony *to the word of the Lord as they had received it.* 2. In their road home they were itinerant preachers; as they passed *through many villages of the Samaritans they preached the gospel.* Though the congregations there were nothing so considerable as in the cities, either for number or figure, yet their souls were as precious, and the apostles did not think it below them to preach the gospel to them. God has a regard to the inhabitants of his villages in Israel, (Judg. 5. 11.) and so should we.

26. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. 27. And he arose and went: and behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28. Was returning, and sitting in his chariot,

read Esaias the prophet. 29. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou redest? 31. And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 32. The place of the scripture which he read, was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. 34. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man? 35. Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 36. And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37. And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. 40. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Cæsarea.

We have here the story of the conversion of an Ethiopian eunuch to the faith of Christ; by whom, we have reason to think, the knowledge of Christ was sent into that country where he lived, and that scripture fulfilled, *Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands*, one of the first of the nations, unto God, Ps. 68. 31.

I. Philip the evangelist is directed into the road where he would meet with this Ethiopian, *v. 26*. When the churches in Samaria were settled, and had ministers appointed them, *the apostles went back to Jerusalem*; but Philip stays, expecting to be employed in breaking up fresh ground in the country. And here we have,

1. Direction given him by an *angel*, (probably, in a dream, or vision of the night,) what course to steer: *Arise and go toward the south*. Though angels were not employed to preach the gospel, they were often employed in carrying messages to ministers for advice and encouragement, as *ch. 5. 19*. We cannot now expect such guides in our way; but doubtless there is a special providence of God conversant about the removes and settlements of ministers, and one way or other he will direct those who sincerely desire to follow him, into that way in which he will own them; *he will guide them with his eye*.

He must go *southward, to the way that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza*, through the desert or wilderness of Judah. Philip would never have thought of going thither, into a desert, into a common road through the desert; small probability of finding work there! Yet thither he is sent, according to our Saviour's parable, foretelling the call of the Gentiles, *Go ye into the high-ways, and the hedges*, Matt. 22. 9. Sometimes God opens a door of opportunity to his ministers in places very unlikely.

2. His obedience to this direction; (*v. 27.*) *He arose and went*; without objecting, or so much as asking, "What business have I there?" Or, "What likelihood is there of doing good there?" *He went out, not knowing whither he went*, or whom he was to meet.

II. An account is given of *this eunuch*, (*v. 27.*) who, and what, he was, on whom this distinguishing favour was bestowed.

1. He was a foreigner, *a man of Ethiopia*; there were two Ethiopians, one in Arabia, but that lay east from Canaan; it should seem, this was of Ethiopia in Africa, which lay south, beyond Egypt, a great way off from Jerusalem; for in Christ, they that were afar off were made nigh, according to the promise, *that the ends of the earth should see the great salvation*. The Ethiopians were looked upon as the meanest and most despicable of the nations, black-moors, as if nature had stigmatized them; yet the gospel is sent to them, and divine grace looks upon them, *though they are black, though the sun has looked upon them*.

2. He was a person of quality, a great man in his own country, *an eunuch*; not in body, but in office; lord chamberlain or steward of the household; and, either by the dignity of his place or by his personal character, which commanded respect, he was of great authority, and bore a mighty sway under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who probably was successor to the queen of Sheba, who is called the queen of the south; that country being governed by queens, to whom Candace was a common name, as Pharaoh to the kings of Egypt; he had the charge of all her treasure; so great a trust did she repose in him! *Not many mighty, not many noble, are called*; but some are.

3. He was a proselyte to the Jewish religion, for he came to Jerusalem for to worship. Some think that he was a proselyte of righteousness, who was circumcised, and kept the feasts; others, that he was only a proselyte of the gate, a Gentile, but who had renounced idolatry, and worshipped the God of Israel occasionally in the court of the Gentiles; but, if so, then Peter was not the first that preached the gospel to the Gentiles, as he says he was. Some think that there were remains of the knowledge of the true God in this country, ever since the queen of Sheba's time; and probably the ancestor of this eunuch was one of her attendants, who transmitted to his posterity what he learned at Jerusalem.

III. Philip and the eunuch are brought together into a close conversation; and now Philip shall know the meaning of his being sent into a desert, for there he meets with a chariot, that shall serve for a synagogue, and one man, the conversion of whom shall be in effect, for aught he knows, the conversion of a whole nation.

1. Philip is ordered to fall into company with this traveller that is going home from Jerusalem toward Gaza, thinking he has done all the business of his journey, when the great business which the overruling providence of God designed in it, was yet undone. He had been at Jerusalem, where the apostles were preaching the christian faith, and multitudes professing it, and yet there he had taken no notice of it, and made no inquiries after it; nay, it should seem, had slighted it, and turned his back

upon it; yet the grace of God pursues him, overtakes him in the desert, and there overcomes him. Thus God is often *found of those that sought him not*, Isa. 65. 1. Philip has this order, not by an angel, as before, but by the *Spirit* whispering it in his ear, (v. 29.) "*Go near, and join thyself to this chariot*"; go so near as that the gentleman may take notice of thee." We should study to do good to those we light in company with upon the road: thus *the lips of the righteous may feed many*. We should not be so shy of all strangers as some affect to be. Those we know nothing else, we know this of, that they have souls.

2. He finds him reading in his Bible, as he sat in his chariot; (v. 28.) *He ran to him, and heard him read*; he read out, for the benefit of those that were with him, v. 30. He not only relieved the tediousness of the journey, but *redeemed time* by reading, not philosophy, history, or politics, much less a romance, or a play, but the scriptures, *the book of Isaiah*; that book Christ read in, (Luke 4. 17.) and the eunuch here, which should recommend it particularly to our reading. Perhaps the eunuch was now reading over again those portions of scripture which he had heard read and expounded at Jerusalem, that he might recollect what he had heard. Note, (1.) It is the duty of every one of us to converse much with the holy scriptures. (2.) Persons of quality should abound more than others in the exercises of piety, because their example will influence many, and they have their time more at command. (3.) It is wisdom for men of business to redeem time for holy duties; time is precious, and it is the best husbandry in the world to *gather up the fragments of time, that none be lost*; to fill up every minute with something that will turn to a good account. (4.) When we are returning from public worship, we should use means in private for the keeping up of the good affections there kindled, and the preserving of the good impressions there made, 1 Chron. 29. 18. (5.) Those that are diligent in searching the scriptures, are in a fair way to improve in knowledge; for *to him that hath shall be given*.

3. He puts a fair question to him; *Understandest thou what thou readest?* Not by way of reproach, but with design to offer him his service. Note, What we read and hear of the word of God, it highly concerns us to understand, especially what we read and hear concerning Christ; and therefore we should often ask ourselves, whether we understand it or no? *Have ye understood all these things?* Matt. 13. 51. And have ye understood them aright? We cannot profit by the scriptures unless we do in some measure understand them, 1 Cor. 14. 16, 17. And, blessed be God, what is necessary to salvation, is easy to be understood.

4. He, in a sense of his need of assistance, desires Philip's company; (v. 31.) "*How can I understand, said he, except some one guide me?*" Therefore pray come up, and sit with me." (1.) He speaks as one that had very low thoughts of himself and his own capacity and attainments. He was so far from taking it as an affront, to be asked, whether he understood what he read, though Philip was a stranger, on foot, and probably looked mean, (which many a less man would have done, and have called him an impertinent fellow, and bid him go about his business, what was it to him?) that he takes the question kindly; makes a very modest reply, *How can I?* We have reason to think he was an intelligent man, and as well acquainted with the meaning of scripture as most were, and yet he modestly confesses his weakness. Note, Those that would learn, must see their need to be taught. The prophet must first own that he *knows not what these are*, and then the angel will tell him, Zech. 4. 13. (2.) He speaks as one very desirous to be taught, to have *some one*

to guide him. Observe, He read the scripture, though there were many things in it which he did not understand; though there are many things in the scriptures, which are *dark and hard to be understood*, nay, which are often misunderstood, yet we must not therefore throw them by, but study them for the sake of those things that are easy, which is the likeliest way to come by degrees to the understanding of those things that are difficult; for knowledge and grace grow gradually. (3.) He invited Philip to *come up and sit with him*; not as Jehu took Jonadab into his chariot, to *come see his zeal for the Lord of hosts*, (2 Kings 10. 16.) but rather, "Come, see my ignorance, and instruct me." He will gladly do Philip the honour to take him into the coach with him, if Philip will do him the favour to expound a portion of scripture to him. Note, In order to our right understanding of the scripture, it is requisite we should have some one to guide us; some good books, and some good men, but above all, the Spirit of grace, to lead us into all truth.

IV. The portion of scripture which the eunuch recited, with some hints of Philip's discourse upon it. The preachers of the gospel had a very good handle to take hold of those by, who were conversant with the scriptures of the Old Testament, and received them, especially when they found them actually engaged in the study of them, as the eunuch was here.

1. The chapter he was reading, was, the fifty-third of Isaiah, two verses of which are here quoted, (v. 52, 53.) part of the seventh and eighth verses; they are set down according to the Septuagint version, which in some things differs from the original Hebrew. Grotius thinks the eunuch read it in the Hebrew, but Luke takes the Septuagint translation, as readier to the language in which he wrote; and he supposes that the eunuch had learned from the many Jews that were in Ethiopia, both their religion and language. But, considering that the Septuagint version was made in Egypt, which was the next country adjoining to Ethiopia, and lay betwixt them and Jerusalem, I rather think that translation was most familiar to him. It appears by Isa. 20. 4. that there was much communication between those two nations—Egypt and Ethiopia. The greatest variation from the Hebrew, is, that what in the original is, *He was taken from prison and from judgment*, (hurried with the utmost violence and precipitation from one judgment-seat to another; or *From force and from judgment he was taken away*; that is, It was from the fury of the people, and their continual clamours, and the judgment of Pilate thereupon, that he was taken away,) is here read, *In his humiliation his judgment was taken away*. He appeared so mean and despicable in their eyes, that they denied him common justice, and, against all the rules of equity, which every man is entitled to the benefit of, they declared him innocent, and yet condemned him to die; nothing criminal can be proved upon him, but he is down, and down with him. Thus in *his humiliation his judgment was taken away*; so, the sense is much the same with that of the Hebrew.

So that these verses foretold concerning the Messiah,

(1.) That he should die; should be *led to the slaughter, as sheep* that were offered in sacrifice; that his life should be taken from among men, taken from the earth. With what little reason then was the death of Christ a stumbling-block to the unbelieving Jews, when it was so plainly foretold by their own prophets, and was so necessary to the accomplishment of his undertaking! Then is the offence of the cross ceased.

(2.) That he should die wrongfully; should die by violence, should be *carried out of his life, and his*

judgment shall be taken away; no justice done him; for he must be cut off, but not for himself.

(3.) That he should die patiently; like a *lamb dumb before the shearer*, nay, and before the butcher too, so *he opened not his mouth*; never was such an example of patience as our Lord Jesus was in his sufferings; when he was accused, when he was abused, he was silent, *reviled not again, threatened not.*

(4.) That yet he should live for ever, to ages which cannot be numbered; for so I understand those words, *Who shall declare his generation?* The Hebrew word properly signifies, *the duration of one life*, Eccl. 1. 4. Now who can conceive or express how long he shall continue, notwithstanding this; *for his life is only taken from the earth?* in heaven he shall live to endless and innumerable ages, as it follows in Isa. 53. 10. *He shall prolong his days.*

2. The eunuch's question upon this, is, *Of whom speaketh the prophet this?* v. 34. He does not desire Philip to give some critical remarks upon the words and phrases, and the idioms of the language, but to acquaint him with the general scope and design of the prophecy, to furnish him with a key, in the use of which he might, by comparing one thing with another, be let into the meaning of the particular passages. Prophecies had usually in them something of obscurity, till they were explained by the accomplishment of them, as this now was. It is a material question he asks, and a very sensible one; "Does the prophet speak this of himself, in expectation of being used, being *misused*, as the other prophets were; or does he speak it *of some other man*, in his own age, or in some age to come?" Though the modern Jews will not allow it to be spoken of the Messiah, yet their ancient doctors did so interpret it; and perhaps the eunuch knew it, and did partly understand it so himself, only he proposed this question, to draw on discourse with Philip; for the way to improve in learning, is, to consult the learned; as *they must inquire the law at the mouth of the priests*, (Mal. 2. 7.) so they must inquire the gospel, especially that part of the treasure which is hid in the field of the Old Testament, at the mouth of the ministers of Christ. The way to receive good instructions, is, to ask good questions.

3. Philip takes this fair occasion given him, to open to him the great mystery of the gospel concerning *Jesus Christ and him crucified*. He began *at this scripture*, took that for his text, (as Christ did another passage of the same prophecy, Luke 4. 21.) and *preached unto him Jesus*, v. 35. That is all the account given us of Philip's sermon, because it was the same in effect with Peter's sermons, which we have had before. The business of gospel-ministers is to preach Jesus, and that is the preaching that is likely to do good. It is probable that Philip had now occasion for his gift of tongues, that he might preach Christ to this Ethiopian in the language of his own country. And here we have an instance of speaking of the things of God, and speaking of them to good purpose, not only as *we sit in the house*, but as *we walk by the way*, according to that rule, Deut. 6. 7.

V. The eunuch is baptized in the name of Christ, v. 36—38. It is probable that the eunuch had heard at Jerusalem of the doctrine of Christ, so that it was not altogether new to him. But, if he had, what could that do toward this speedy conquest that was made of his heart for Christ? It was a powerful working of the Spirit with and by Philip's preaching that gained the point. Now here we have,

1. The modest proposal which the eunuch made of himself to baptism; (v. 36.) *As they went on their way*, discoursing of Christ, 'he eunuch asking more questions, and Philip answering them to his satisfaction, they came unto a certain water, a well,

river, or pond, the sight of which made the eunuch think of being baptized. Thus God, by hints of providence which seem casual, sometimes puts his people in mind of their duty, which otherwise perhaps they would not have thought of. The eunuch knew not how little a while Philip might be with him, nor where he might afterwards inquire for him; he could not expect his travelling with him to his next stage, and therefore if Philip think fit, he will take the present convenience which offers itself, of being baptized; "*See, here is water*, which perhaps we may not meet with a great while again; *what doth hinder me to be baptized?* Canst thou shew any cause why I should not be admitted a disciple and follower of Christ by baptism?" Observe, (1.) He does not demand baptism, does not say, "*Here is water, and here I am resolved I will be baptized;*" for if Philip have any thing to offer to the contrary, he is willing to wave it for the present. If he think him not fit to be baptized, or if there be any thing in the institution of the ordinance, which will not admit such a speedy administration of it, he will not insist upon it. The most forward zeal must submit to order and rule. But, (2.) He does desire it, and unless Philip can shew cause why not, he desires it now, and is not willing to defer it. Note, In the solemn dedicating and devoting of ourselves to God, it is good to *make haste, and not to delay*; for the present time is the best time, Ps. 119. 60. They who have received the thing signified by baptism, should not put off receiving the sign. The eunuch feared lest the good affections now working in him should cool and abate, and therefore was willing immediately to bind his soul with the baptismal bonds unto the Lord, that he might bring the matter to an issue.

2. The fair declaration which Philip made him of the terms upon which he might have the privilege of baptism; (v. 37.) *If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*; that is, "If thou believest this doctrine which I have preached to thee concerning Jesus, if thou receivest the record God has given concerning him, and set to thy seal that it is true." He must believe with all his heart, for with the heart man believeth, not with the head only, by an assent to gospel-truths, in the understanding; but with the heart, by a consent of the will to gospel-terms. "If thou do indeed believe with all thy heart, thou art by that united to Christ, and if thou give proofs and evidences that thou dost so, thou mayest by baptism be joined to the church."

3. The confession of faith which the eunuch made in order to his being baptized; it is very short, but it is comprehensive and much to the purpose, and what was sufficient; *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*. He was before a worshipper of the true God, so that all he had to do now, was, to *receive Christ Jesus the Lord*. (1.) He believes that Jesus is the Christ, the true Messiah promised, the Anointed One. (2.) That Christ is Jesus—a Saviour, the only Saviour of his people from their sins. And, (3.) That this Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he has a divine nature, as the Son is of the same nature with the Father; and that, being the Son of God, he is the *Heir of all things*. This is the principal, peculiar doctrine of christianity, and whosoever believe this with all their heart, and confess it, they and their seed are to be baptized.

4. The baptizing of him hereupon. The eunuch ordered his coachman to stop, *commanding the chariot to stand still*; it was the best bating place he ever met with in any of his journeys; *they went down both into the water*, for they had no convenient vessels with them, being upon a journey, wherewith to take up water, and must therefore go down into it; not that they stript off their clothes, and went naked into the water, but, going barefoot, ac-

cording to the custom, they went perhaps up to the ancles or mid-leg into the water, and Philip sprinkled water upon him, according to the prophecy which this eunuch had probably but just now read, for it was but a few verses before those which Philip found him upon, and was very apposite to his case; (Isa. 52. 15.) *So shall he sprinkle many nations, kings and great men shall shut their mouths at him, shall submit to him, and acquiesce in him, for that which had not before been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider.* Observe, Though Philip had very lately been deceived in Simon Magus, and had admitted him to baptism, though he afterward appeared to be no true convert, yet he did not therefore scruple to baptize the eunuch upon his profession of faith immediately, without putting him upon a longer trial than usual. If some hypocrites crowd into the church, that afterward prove a grief and scandal to us, yet we must not therefore make the door of admission any straiter than Christ has made it; they shall answer for their apostacy, and not we.

VI. Philip and the eunuch are parted presently; and this is as surprising as the other parts of the story. One would have expected that the eunuch should either have stayed with Philip, or have taken him along with him into his own country, and, there being so many ministers in those parts, he might be spared, and it would be worth while: but God ordered otherwise; as soon as they were *come up out of the water*, before the eunuch went into his chariot again, *the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip*, (v. 39.) and did not give him time to make an exhortation to the eunuch, as usual after baptism, which it is probable the one intended, and the other expected; but his sudden departure was sufficient to make up the want of that exhortation, for it seems to have been miraculous, and that he was *caught up* in the air in the eunuch's sight, and so carried out of his sight; and the working of this miracle upon Philip, was a confirmation of his doctrine, as much as the working of a miracle *by him* would have been. He was *caught away*, and the *eunuch saw him no more*, but, having lost his minister, returned to the use of his Bible again. Now here we are told,

1. How the eunuch was disposed; he *went on his way rejoicing*; he pursued his journey, business called him home, and he must hasten to it; for it was no way inconsistent with his christianity, which places no sanctity or perfection in men's being hermits or recluses, but is a religion which men may and ought to carry about with them into the affairs of this life. But he went on, rejoicing; so far was he from reflecting upon this sudden resolution and change, or advancement rather in his religion, with any regret, that his second thoughts confirmed him abundantly in it, and he went on, *rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory*; he was never better pleased in all his life. (1.) He rejoiced that he himself was joined to Christ, and had an interest in him. And, (2.) That he had these good tidings to bring to his countrymen, and a prospect of bringing them also, by virtue of his interest among them, into fellowship with Christ; for he returned, not only a christian, but a minister. Some copies read this verse thus: *And when they were come up out of the water, the Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch*, (without the ceremony of the apostle's imposition of hands,) *but the angel of the Lord caught away Philip*.

2. How Philip was disposed of; (v. 40.) *He was found at Azotus or Ashdod*, formerly a city of the Philistines; there the angel or Spirit of the Lord dropped him, which was above thirty miles from Gaza, whither the eunuch was going, and where Dr. Lightfoot thinks he took ship, and went by sea

into his own country. But Philip, wherever he was, would not be idle; *passing through, he preached in all the cities* till he came to Cæsarea, and there he settled, and, for aught that appears, had his principal residence ever after; for at Cæsarea we find him in a house of his own, *ch. 21. 8.* He that had been faithful in working for Christ as an itinerant, at length gains a settlement.

CHAP. IX.

In this chapter, we have, I. The famous story of St. Paul's conversion from being an outrageous persecutor of the gospel of Christ, to be an illustrious professor and preacher of it. 1. How he was first awakened and wrought upon by an appearance of Christ himself to him as he was going upon an errand of persecution to Damascus: and what a condition he was in while he lay under the power of those convictions and terrors, v. 1. . 9. 2. How he was baptized by Ananias, by immediate direction from heaven, v. 10. . 19. 3. How he immediately commenced doctor, and preached the faith of Christ, and proved what he preached, v. 20. . 22. 4. How he was persecuted, and narrowly escaped with his life, v. 23. . 25. 5. How he was admitted among the brethren at Jerusalem: how he preached, and was persecuted there, v. 26. . 30. 6. The rest and quietness which the churches enjoyed for some time after this, v. 31. II. The cure wrought by Peter on Æneas, who had long been laid up of a palsy, v. 32. . 35. III. The raising of Tabitha from death to life, at the prayer of Peter, v. 36. . 44.

1. **A**ND Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the High-Priest, 2. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. 3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 5. And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* 6. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. 7. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. 8. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus. 9. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

We found mention made of Saul twice or thrice in the story of Stephen, for the sacred penman even longed to come to his story; and now we are come to it, not quite taking leave of Peter; but from henceforward being mostly taken up with Paul the apostle of the Gentiles, as Peter was of the circumcision. His name in Hebrew, was, *Saul—desired*, though as remarkably little in stature as his namesake king Saul was tall and stately; one of the ancients calls him, *Homo tricubitalis—but four foot and a half in height*; his Roman name which he went by among the citizens of Rome, was, *Paul—little*. He was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a free city of the Romans, and himself a freeman of

that city. His father and mother were both native Jews; therefore he calls himself a *Hebrew of the Hebrews*; he was of the tribe of Benjamin, which adhered to Judah. His education was in the schools of Tarsus first, which was a little Athens for learning; there he acquainted himself with the philosophy and poetry of the Greeks. Thence he was sent to the university at Jerusalem, to study divinity and the Jewish law; his tutor was Gamaliel an eminent Pharisee; he had extraordinary natural parts, and improved mightily in learning; he had likewise a handicraft trade, was bred to tent-making; which was common with those among the Jews that were bred scholars, (as Dr. Lightfoot saith,) for the earning of their maintenance, and the avoiding of idleness.

This is the young man on whom the grace of God wrought this mighty change here recorded, about a year after the ascension of Christ, or little more. We are here told,

I. How bad he was, how very bad, before his conversion; just before he was an inveterate enemy to christianity, did his utmost to root it out, by persecuting all that embraced it. In other respects he was well enough, as *touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless*, a man of no ill morals, but a blasphemer of Christ, a persecutor of christians, and injurious to both, 1 Tim. 1. 13. And so ill informed was his conscience, that he thought he ought to do what he did against the name of Christ, (ch. 26. 9.) and that he *did God service* in it, as was foretold, John 16. 2. Here we have,

1. His general enmity and rage against the christian religion; (*v. 1.*) He yet *breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*. The persons persecuted were the disciples of the Lord; because they were so, under that character he hated and persecuted them; the matter of the persecution, was, threatenings and slaughter. There is persecution in threatenings; (*ch. 4. 17, 21.*) they terrify and break the spirit: and though we say, Threatened folks live long; yet those whom Saul threatened, if he prevailed not thereby to frighten them from Christ, he slew them, he persecuted them to death, *ch. 22. 4.* His breathing out threatenings and slaughter intimates that it was natural to him, and his constant business; he even breathed in this as in his element; he breathed it out with heat and vehemence; his very breath, like that of some venomous creature, was pestilential, he breathed death to the christians, wherever he came; he puffed at them in his pride, (Ps. 12. 4, 5.) spit his venom at them in his rage. Saul yet breathing thus; it intimates, (1.) That he still persisted in it; not satisfied with the blood of those he had slain, he still cries, *Give, give.* (2.) That he shall shortly be of another mind; as yet he breathes out threatenings and slaughter, but he has not long to live such a life as this, that breath will be stopped shortly.

2. His particular design upon the christians at Damascus; thither was the gospel now lately carried by those that fled from the persecution of Stephen's death, and thought to be safe and quiet there, and were connived at by those in power there: but Saul cannot be easy if he knows a christian is quiet; and therefore hearing that the christians in Damascus were so, he resolves to give them disturbance. In order to this, he applies himself to the High-Priest for a commission (*v. 1.*) to go to Damascus, *v. 2.* The High-Priest needed not to be stirred up to persecute the christians, he was forward enough of himself to do it; but it seems the young persecutor drove more furiously than the old one. Leaders in sin are the worst of sinners: and the proselytes which the Scribes and Pharisees make, often prove seven times more the children of hell than themselves. He saith (*ch. 22. 5.*) that this commission

was had from the whole estate of the elders: and proud enough this furious bigot was, to have a commission to him directed, with the seal of the great Sanhedrim affixed to it.

Now the commission was to empower him to inquire among the synagogues, or congregations, of the Jews that were at Damascus, whether there were any that belonged to them, that inclined to favour this new sect or heresy, that believed in Christ; and if he found any such, whether men or women, to bring them up prisoners to Jerusalem, to be proceeded against according to law by the great council there. Observe, (1.) The christians are here said to be *those of this way; those of the way*: so it is in the original. Perhaps the christians sometimes called themselves so, from Christ *the Way*; or, because they looked on themselves as but in the way, and not yet at home; or, the enemies thus represented it as a way by itself, a by-way, a party, a faction. (2.) The High-Priest and Sanhedrim claimed a power over the Jews in all countries, and had a deference paid to their authority in matters of religion, by all their synagogues, even those that were not of the jurisdiction of the civil government of the Jewish nation.—And such a sovereignty the Roman pontiff now claims, as the Jewish pontiff then did, though he has not so much to shew for it. (2.) By this commission, all that worshipped God in the way that they called *heresy*, though agreeing exactly with the original institutes, even of the Jewish church, whether they were men or women, were to be persecuted. Even the weaker sex, who in a case of this nature might deserve excuse, or at least compassion, shall find neither with Saul, any more than they do with the Popish persecutors. (4.) He was ordered to bring them all bound to Jerusalem, as criminals of the first magnitude; which, as it would be the more likely to terrify them, so it would be to magnify Saul, as having the command of the forces that were to carry them up, and opportunity of breathing out threatenings and slaughter. Thus was Saul employed when the grace of God wrought that great change in him. Let not us then despair of renewing grace for the conversion of the greatest sinners, nor let such despair of the pardoning mercy of God for the greatest sin; for Paul himself obtained mercy, that he might be a monument, 1 Tim. 1. 15.

II. How suddenly and strangely a blessed change was wrought in him, not in the use of any ordinary means, but by miracles. The conversion of Paul is one of the wonders of the church.

Here is, 1. The place and time of it; *as he journeyed, he came near to Damascus*; and there Christ met with him.

(1.) He was in the way, travelling upon his journey; not in the temple, or in the synagogue, or in the meeting of christians, but by the way. The work of conversion is not tied to the church, though ordinarily public administrations are made use of. Some are reclaimed in slumberings on the bed, (Job 33. 15, 17.) and some in travelling upon the road alone; thoughts are as free, and there is as good an opportunity of communing with our own hearts there, as upon the bed; and there the Spirit may set in with us; for that wind blows where it listeth. Some observe, that Saul was spoken to abroad in the open air, that there might be no suspicion of imposture, or a trick put upon him in it.

(2.) He was near Damascus, almost at his journey's end, ready to enter the city, the chief city of Syria. Some observe, that he who was to be the apostle of the Gentiles, was converted to the faith of Christ in a Gentile country. Damascus had been infamous for persecuting God's people formerly, they threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron, (Amos 1. 3.) and now it was likely to be so again.

(3.) He was in a wicked way; pursuing his design against the christians at Damascus, and pleasing himself with the thought that he should devour this new-born child of christianity there. Note, Sometimes the grace of God works upon sinners, when they are at the worst, and hotly engaged in the most desperate sinful pursuits; which is much for the glory both of God's pity, and of his power.

(4.) The cruel edict and decree he had with him drew near to be put in execution; and now it was happily prevented.—Which may be considered, [1.] As a great kindness to the poor saints at Damascus, who had notice of his coming, as appears by what Ananias said, (v. 13, 14.) and were apprehensive of their danger from him, and trembled as poor lambs at the approach of a ravening wolf; Saul's conversion was their security for the present. Christ has many ways of delivering the godly out of temptation, and sometimes does it by a change wrought in their persecutors, either restraining their wrathful spirits, (Ps. 76. 10.) and mollifying them for a time, as the Old Testament Saul, who relented toward David more than once; (1 Sam. 24. 16.—26. 21.) or, renewing their spirits, and fixing upon them durable impressions, as upon the New Testament Saul here. [2.] It was also a very great mercy to Saul himself to be hindered from executing his wicked design, in which if he had now proceeded, perhaps it had been the filling up of the measure of his iniquity. Note, It is to be valued as a signal token of the divine favour, if God, either by the inward operations of his grace, or the outward occurrences of his providence, prevent us from prosecuting and executing a sinful purpose, 1 Sam. 25. 32.

2. The appearance of Christ to him in his glory; here it is only said, that there *shined round about him a light from heaven*; but it appears by what follows, (v. 17.) that the Lord Jesus was in this light, and appeared to him by the way. He saw that Just One, (ch. 22. 14.) and see ch. 26. 13. Whether he saw him at a distance, as Stephen saw him, in the heavens, or nearer in the air, is not certain. It is not inconsistent with what is said of the heavens receiving Christ till the end of time, (ch. 3. 21.) to suppose that he did, upon such an extraordinary occasion as this, make a personal visit, but a very short one, to this lower world; it was necessary to Paul's being an apostle, that he should have seen the Lord, and so he did, 1 Cor. 9. 1.—15. 8.

(1.) This light shined upon him *suddenly*—*ξαίφνης*, when Paul never thought of any such thing, and without any previous warning. Christ's manifestations of himself to poor souls, are many times sudden and very surprising, and he prevents them with the blessings of his goodness. This the disciples that Christ called to himself, found. *Or ever I was aware*, Cant. 6. 12.

(2.) It was a light from heaven, the fountain of light, from the God of heaven, the Father of lights. It was a light above the brightness of the sun, (ch. 26. 13.) for it was visible at mid-day, and outshone the sun in his meridian strength and lustre, Isa. 24. 23.

(3.) It shone round about him, not in his face only, but on every side of him; let him turn which way he will, he finds himself surrounded with the discoveries of it. And this was designed not only to startle him, and awaken his attention, for well may he expect to hear, when he is thus made to see something very extraordinary, but to signify the enlightening of his understanding with the knowledge of Christ. The devil comes to the soul in darkness, by it he gets and keeps possession of it. But Christ comes to the soul in light, for he is himself the light of the world, bright and glorious in himself, beneficial and gracious to us, as light. The first thing in this new creation, as in that of the world, is, light,

2 Cor. 4. 6. Hence all christians are said to be *children of the light and of the day*, Eph. 5. 8.

3. The arresting of Saul, and his detachment; *He fell to the earth*, v. 4. Some think that he was on foot, and that this light, which perhaps was accompanied with a thunder-clap, so terrified him, that he could not keep his feet, but fell upon his face, usually a posture of adoration, but here of astonishment. It is probable that he was mounted, as Balaam, when he went to curse Israel, and perhaps better mounted than he; for Saul was now in a public post, was in haste, and the journey was long, so that it is not likely he should travel on foot. The sudden light would frighten the beast, he rode on, and make it throw him: and it was God's good providence that his body got no hurt by the fall: but angels had a particular charge concerning him to keep all his bones, so that not one of them was broken. It appears, (ch. 26. 14.) that all that were with him fell to the earth as well as he, but the design was upon him. This may be considered,

(1.) As the effect of Christ's appearing to him, and of the light which shone round about him. Note, Christ's manifestations of himself to poor souls are humbling; they lay them very low, in mean thoughts of themselves, and an humble submission to the will of God. Now *mine eyes see thee*, saith Job, *I abhor myself. I saw the Lord*, saith Isaiah, *sitting upon a throne, and I said, Woe is me, for I am undone*.

(2.) As a step toward his intended advancement. He is designed not only to be a christian, but to be a minister, an apostle, a great apostle, and therefore he must thus be cast down. Note, Those whom Christ designs for the greatest honours, are commonly first laid low. Those who are designed to excel in knowledge and grace, are commonly laid low first, in a sense of their own ignorance and sinfulness. These whom God will employ, are first struck with a sense of their unworthiness to be employed.

(4.) The arraignment of Saul. Being by the fall taken into custody, and as it were set to the bar, he heard a voice saying to him, (and it was distinguishing to him only, for though they that were with him heard a sound, (v. 7.) yet they knew not the words, ch. 22. 9,) *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Observe here,

(1.) *Saul* not only saw a light from heaven, but heard a voice from heaven; wherever the glory of God was seen, the word of God was heard; God's manifestations of himself were never dumb shews, for he magnifies his word above all his name, and what was seen was always designed to make way for what was said; Saul heard a voice. Note, Faith comes by hearing; hence the Spirit is said to be received by the hearing of faith, Gal. 3. 2. The voice he heard was the voice of Christ: when he *saw that just One*; he *heard the voice of his mouth*, ch. 22. 14. Note, Then the word we hear is likely to profit us, when we hear it as the voice of Christ, 1 Thess. 2. 13. *It is the voice of my beloved*; no voice but his can reach the heart. Seeing and hearing are the two learning senses; Christ here, by both those doors, entered into Saul's heart.

(2.) What he heard was very awakening.

[1.] He was called by his name, and that doubled; *Saul, Saul*. Some think, in calling him *Saul*, he hints at that great persecutor of David, whose name he bore. He was indeed a second Saul, and such an enemy to the Son of David as he was to David. Calling him by his name intimates the particular regard that Christ had to him; *I have sur-named thee, though thou hast not known me*, Isa. 45. 4. See Exod. 33. 12. His calling him by name brought the conviction home to his conscience, and put it past dispute to whom the voice spake this.

Note, What God speaks in general, is *then* likely to do us good, when we apply it to ourselves, and insert our own names into the precepts and promises which are expressed generally; as if God spake to us by name, and when he saith, *Ho, every one*, he had said, *Ho, such a one*: Samuel, Samuel; Saul, Saul.

The doubling of it, *Saul, Saul*, intimates, *First*, The deep sleep that Saul was in; he needed to be called again and again, as Jer. 22. 29. *O earth, earth, earth. Secondly*, The tender concern that the blessed Jesus had for him, and for his recovery; he speaks as one in earnest; it is like *Martha, Martha*, (Luke 10. 41.) or *Simon, Simon*, (Luke 22. 31.) or *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, Matt. 23. 37. He speaks to him as to one in imminent danger, at the pit's brink, and just ready to drop in; "*Saul, Saul, dost thou know whither thou art going, and what thou art doing?*"

[2.] The charge exhibited against him, is, *Why persecutest thou me?* Observe here, *First*, Before Saul was made a saint, he is made to see himself a sinner, a great sinner, a sinner against Christ. Now he was made to see that evil by himself which he never saw before; sin revived and he died. Note, A humbling conviction of sin is the first step towards a saving conversion from sin. *Secondly*, He is convinced of one particular sin, which he was most notoriously guilty of, and had justified himself in, and thereby way is made for his conviction of all the rest. *Thirdly*, The sin he is convinced of, is, persecution; *Why persecutest thou me?* It is a very affectionate expostulation, enough to melt a heart of stone. Observe, 1. The person sinning; "It is thou; thou, that art not one of the ignorant, rude, unthinking crowd, that will run down any thing they hear put into an ill name, but thou that hast had a liberal, learned education, hast good parts and accomplishments, hast the knowledge of the scriptures, which, if duly considered, would shew thee the folly of it. It is worse in thee than in another." 2. The person sinned against; "It is I, who never did thee any harm, who came from heaven to earth to do thee good; who was not long since crucified for thee; and was that not enough, but must I afresh be crucified by thee?" 3. The kind and continuance of the sin. It was persecution, and he was at this time engaged in it; "Not only thou hast persecuted, but thou persecutest, thou persistest in it." He was not at this time halting any to prison, or killing them: but that was the errand he came upon to Damascus; he was now projecting it, and pleasing himself with the thought of it. Note, They that are designing mischief, are, in God's account, doing mischief. 4. The question put to him upon it; "Why dost thou do it?" (1.) It is complaining language. "Why dealest thou unjustly, thus unkindly, with my disciples?" Christ never complained so much of those who persecuted him in his own person as he did here of those who persecuted him in his followers. He complains of it as it was Saul's sin; "Why art thou such an enemy to thyself, to thy God?" Note, The sins of sinners are a very grievous burthen to the Lord Jesus. He is grieved for them, (Mark 3. 5.) he is pressed under them, Amos 2. 13. (2.) It is convincing language, "Why dost thou thus? Canst thou give any good reason for it?" Note, It is good for us often to ask ourselves why we do so and so, that we may discern what an unreasonable thing sin is: and of all sins none so unreasonable, so unaccountable, as the sin of persecuting the disciples of Christ, especially when it is discovered to be, as certainly it is, persecuting Christ. Those have no knowledge, who eat up God's people, Ps. 14. 4. *Why persecutest thou me?* He thought he was persecuting only a company of poor, weak, silly people, that were an offence and eye-sore to the Pharisees, little imagining

that it was one in heaven that he was all this while insulting; for surely if he had known, he would not have persecuted the Lord of glory. Note, Those who persecute the saints, persecute Christ himself, and he takes what is done against them as done against himself, and accordingly will be the judgment in the great day, Matt. 25. 45.

5. Saul's question upon his indictment, and the reply to it, v. 5.

(1.) He makes inquiry concerning Christ; *Who art thou, Lord?* He gives no direct answer to the charge preferred against him, being convicted by his own conscience, and self-condemned. If God contend with us for our sins, we are not able to answer for one of a thousand, especially such a one as the sin of persecution. Convictions of sin, when they are set home with power upon the conscience, will silence all excuses and self-justifications. *Though I were righteous, yet would I not answer.* But he desires to know who is his judge; the compellation is respectful; *Lord*. He who had been a blasphemer of Christ's name, now speaks to him as his Lord. The question is proper, *Who art thou?* This implies his present unacquaintedness with Christ; he knew not his voice as his own sheep do, but he desires to be acquainted with him; he is convinced by this light which incloses him, that it is one from heaven that speaks to him, and he has a veneration for every thing that appears to him to come from heaven; and therefore, *Lord, who art thou? What is thy name?* Judg. 13. 17. Gen. 32. 29. Note, There is then some hope of people, when they begin to inquire after Jesus Christ.

(2.) He has an answer immediately, in which we have,

[1.] Christ's gracious revelation of himself to him. He is always ready to answer the serious inquiries of those who covet an acquaintance with him. *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*. The name of Jesus was not unknown to him, his heart had risen against it many a time, and gladly would he bury it in oblivion; he knew it was the name that he persecuted, but little did he think to hear it from heaven, or from the midst of such a glory as now shone round about him. Note, Christ brings souls into fellowship with himself, by manifesting himself to them. He said, *First, I am Jesus, a Saviour, I am Jesus of Nazareth*, so it is, ch. 22. 8. Saul used to call him so when he blasphemed him; "I am that very Jesus whom thou seddest to call in scorn *Jesus of Nazareth*." And he would shew that now that he is in glory, he is not ashamed of his humiliation. *Secondly, "I am that Jesus whom thou persecutest"*, and therefore it is at thy peril if thou persist in this wicked course." There is nothing more effectual to awaken and humble the soul than to see sin to be against Christ, an affront to him, and a contradiction to his designs.

[2.] His gentle reproof of him; *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks, or goads*; to spurn at the spur. It is hard, it is in itself an absurd and evil thing, and will be of fatal consequence to him that does it. Those kick at the goad, that stifle and smother the convictions of conscience, that rebel against God's truths and laws, that quarrel with his providences, and that persecute and oppose his ministers, because they reprove them, and their words are as goads and as nails. They that revolt more and more, when they are stricken by the word or rod of God, that are enraged at reproofs, and fly in the face of their reprovers, they kick against the pricks, and will have a deal to answer for.

6. His surrender of himself to the Lord Jesus at length, v. 6. See here,

(1.) The frame and temper he was in, when Christ had been dealing with him. [1.] He trembled, as one in a great fright. Note, Strong convic-

tions, set home by the blessed Spirit, will make an awakened soul to tremble. How can those choose but tremble, that are made to see the eternal God provoked against them, the whole creation at war with them, and their own souls upon the brink of ruin ! [2.] He was astonished, was filled with amazement, as one brought into a new world, that knew not where he was. Note, The convincing, converting, work of Christ is astonishing to the awakened soul, and fills it with admiration. "What is this that God has done with me, and what will he do ?"

(2.) His address to Jesus Christ, when he was in this frame ; *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?* Which may be taken, [1.] As a serious request for Christ's teachings ; "Lord, I see I have hitherto been out of the way ; thou that hast shewed me my error, set me to rights ; thou hast discovered sin to me, discover to me the way to pardon and peace." It is like that, *Men and brethren, what must we do ?* Note, A serious desire to be instructed by Christ in the way of salvation is an evidence of a good work began in the soul. Or, [2.] As a sincere resignation of himself to the conduct and government of the Lord Jesus. This was the first word that grace spake in Paul, and with this began a spiritual life ; Lord Jesus, *What wilt thou have me to do ?* Did not he know what he had to do ? Had he not his commission in his pocket ? And what had he to do but to execute it ? No, he had done enough of this work already, and resolves now to change his master, and employ himself better. Now it is not, *What will the High-Priest and the elders have me to do ?* *What will my own wicked appetites and passions have me to do ?* But, *What wilt thou have me to do ?* The great change in conversion is wrought upon the will, and consists in the resignation of that to the will of Christ.

(3.) The general direction Christ gave him, in answer to this ; *Arise, go into the city of Damascus, which thou art now near to, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* It is encouragement enough to have further instruction promised him ; but, [1.] He must not have it yet ; it shall be told him shortly what he must do, but, for the present, he must pause upon what has been said to him, and improve that. Let him consider a while what he has done in persecuting Christ, and be deeply humbled for that, and then he shall be told what he has further to do. [2.] He must not have it in this way, by a voice from heaven, for it is plain he cannot bear it ; he trembles, and is astonished ; he shall be told therefore what he must do, by a man like himself, whose terror shall not make him afraid, nor his hand be heavy upon him ; which Israel desired at mount Sinai. Or, it is an intimation that Christ would take some other time to manifest himself further to him, when he was more composed, and this fright pretty well over. Christ manifests himself to his people by degrees ; and both what he does, and would have them to do, though they know not now, they shall know hereafter.

7. How far his fellow-travellers were affected with this, and what impression it made upon them. They fell to the earth, as he did, but rose without being bidden, which he did not, but lay still till it was said to him, *Arise* ; for he lay under a heavier load than any of them did ; but when they were up,

(1.) *They stood speechless*, as men in confusion, and that was all, v. 7. They were going on the same wicked errand that Paul was, and perhaps, to the best of their power, were as spiteful as he ; yet we do not find that any of them were converted, though they saw the light, and were struck down, and struck dumb by it. No external means will, of themselves, work a change in the soul, without the Spirit and grace of God, which distinguishes

between some and others : among these that journeyed together, one is taken, and the others left. *They stood speechless* ; none of them said, *What art thou, Lord ?* or, *What wilt thou have me to do ?* as Paul did : but none of God's children are born dumb.

(2.) *They heard a voice, but saw no man* ; they heard Paul speak, but saw not him to whom he spake, nor heard distinctly what was said to him ; which reconciles it with what is said of this matter, (ch. 22. 9.) where it is said, *They saw the light and were afraid* ; which they might do, and yet see no man in the light, as Paul did ; and *that they heard not the voice of him that spake to Paul*, so as to understand what he said, though they did hear a confused noise. Thus they who came hither to be the instruments of Paul's rage against the church, serve for witnesses of the power of God over him.

8. What condition Saul was in after this, v. 8, 9.

(1.) *He arose from the earth*, when Christ bid him, but, probably, not without help, the vision had made him so faint and weak, I will not say like Belshazzar, when the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another, but like Daniel, when upon the sight of a vision, no strength remained in him, Dan. 10. 16, 17.

(2.) *When his eyes were opened*, he found that his sight was gone, and *he saw no man*, none of the men that were with him, and began now to be busy about him. It was not so much this glaring light, that, *by dazzling his eyes, had dimmed them*—*Nimium sensibile lœdit sensum* ; for then these with him would have lost their sight too ; but it was a sight of Christ, whom the rest saw not, that had this effect upon him. Thus a believing sight of the glory of God in the face of Christ, dazzles the eyes to all things here below. Christ, in order to further the discovery of himself and his gospel to Paul, took him off from the sight of other things, which he must look off, that he may look unto Jesus, and to him only.

(3.) *They led him by the hand into Damascus* ; whether to a public house, or to some friend's house, is not certain : but thus he who thought to have led the disciples of Christ prisoners and captives to Jerusalem, was himself led a prisoner and a captive to Christ into Damascus. He was thus taught what need he had of the grace of Christ to lead his soul (being naturally blind and apt to mistake) into all truth.

(4.) *He lay without sight, and without food, neither did eat nor drink for three days*, v. 9. I do not think, as some do, that now he had his rapture into the third heavens, which he speaks of, 2 Cor. 12. So far from that, that we have reason to think he was all this time rather in the belly of hell, suffering God's terrors for his sins, which were now set in order before him : he was in the dark concerning his own spiritual state, and was so wounded in spirit for sin, that he could relish neither meat nor drink.

10. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias ; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. 11. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus : for, behold he prayeth, 12. And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. 13. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have

heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: 14. And here he hath authority from the Chief Priests to bind all that call on thy name. 15. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: 16. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. 17. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou earnest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. 19. And when he had received meat he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. 20. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. 21. But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the Chief Priests? 22. But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

As for God, his work is perfect; if he begin, he will make an end; a good work was begun in Saul, when he was brought to Christ's feet, in that word, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* And never did Christ leave any that were brought to that. Though Saul was sadly mortified when he lay three days blind, yet he was not abandoned; Christ here takes care of the work of his own hands; he that hath torn, will heal; that hath smitten, will bind up; that hath convinced, will comfort.

I. Ananias is here ordered to go and look after him, to heal and help him; for he that causeth grief, will have compassion.

1. The person employed is *Ananias, a certain disciple at Damascus*, not lately driven thither from Jerusalem, but a native of Damascus; for it is said, (*ch. 22. 12.*) *that he had a good report of all the Jews which dwell there, as a devout man according to the law*; he had lately embraced the gospel, and given up his name to Christ, and, as it should seem, officiated as a minister, at least *pro hac vice*—on this occasion, though it does not appear he was apostolically ordained. But why were not some of the apostles from Jerusalem sent for upon this great occasion, or Philip the evangelist, who had lately baptized the eunuch, and might have been fetched hither by the Spirit in a little time? Surely, because Christ would employ variety of hands in eminent services, that the honours might not be monopolized, or engrossed by a few; because he would put work into the hands, and thereby put honour upon the heads, of those that were mean and obscure, to encourage them; and because he would direct us to make much of the ministers that are where our lot is cast, if they have

obtained mercy to be faithful, though they are not of the most eminent.

2. The direction given him, is, to go and inquire at such a house, probably an inn, for *one Saul of Tarsus*. Christ, in a vision, called to Ananias by name, *v. 10*. It is likely, it was not the first time that he had heard the words of God, and seen the visions of the Almighty; for, without terror or confusion, he readily answers, "*Behold, I am here, Lord, ready to go wherever thou sendest me, and to do whatever thou biddest me.*" Go then, saith Christ, *into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas*, where strangers used to lodge, for *one called Saul of Tarsus*. Note, Christ very well knows where to find out those that are his, in their distresses: when their relations, it may be, know not what is become of them, they have a friend in heaven, that knows in what street, in what house, nay, and which is more, in what frame, they are: he knows their souls in adversity.

3. Two reasons are given him why he must go and inquire for this stranger, and offer him his service:

(1.) Because he prays, and his coming to him must answer his prayer. This is a reason, [1.] Why Ananias needed not to be afraid of him, as we find he was, *v. 13, 14*. There is no question, saith Christ, but he is a true convert, *for behold, he prayeth*. *Behold*, notes the certainty of it; "Assure thyself it is so; go, and see." Christ was so pleased to find Paul praying, that he must have others to take notice of it? *Rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep which I had lost*. It notes also the strangeness of it; "Behold, and wonder, that he who but the other day breathed nothing but threatnings and slaughter, now breathes nothing but prayer." But was it such a strange thing for Saul to pray? Was he not a Pharisee, and have we not reason to think he did, as the rest of them did, make long prayers in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets? Yes; but now he began to pray after another manner than he had done; then he *said* his prayers, now he *prayed* them. Note, Regenerating grace evermore sets people on praying; you may as well find a living man without breath as a living christian without prayer; if breathless, lifeless; and so if prayerless, graceless. [2.] As a reason why Ananias must go to him with all speed; it is no time to linger, *for behold, he prayeth*: if the child cry, the tender nurse hastens to it with the breast. Saul here, like Ephraim, is bemoaning himself, reproaching himself, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and kicking against the goad. "Oh! go to him quickly, and tell him he is a dear son, a pleasant child, and since I shake against him, for persecuting me, I do earnestly remember him still," Jer. 31. 18—20. Observe what condition Saul was now in. He was under conviction of sin, trembling, and astonished; the setting of sin in order before us should drive us to prayer. He was under a bodily affliction, blind and sick; and, *Is any afflicted?* Let him pray. Christ had promised him, that it should be further told him what he should do, (*v. 6.*) and he prays that one may be sent to him to instruct him. Note, What God has promised, we must pray for; he will for this be inquired of, and particularly for divine instruction.

(2.) Because he hath seen in a vision such a man coming to him, to restore him to his sight; and Ananias's coming to him must answer his dream, for it was of God, *v. 12*. *He hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias*, and just such a man as thou art, coming in seasonably for his relief, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Now this vision which Paul had, may be considered, [1.] As an immediate answer to his prayer, and the keeping up of that communion with God, which he

had entered into by prayer. He had, in prayer, spread the misery of his own case before God; and God presently manifests himself, and the kind intentions of his grace to him; and it is very encouraging to know God's thoughts to usward. [2.] As designed to raise his expectations, and to make Ananias's coming more welcome to him. He would readily receive him as a messenger from God, when he was told beforehand, in vision, that one of that name would come to him. See what a great thing it is to bring a spiritual physician and his patient together: here are two visions in order to it! When God, in his providence, does it without visions, brings a messenger to the afflicted soul, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness, it must be acknowledged with thankfulness to his praise.

II. Ananias objects against going to him, and the Lord answers the objection. See how condescendingly the Lord admits his servant to reason with him.

1. Ananias pleads, that this Saul was a notorious persecutor of the disciples of Christ, *v. 13, 14.* (1.) He had been so at Jerusalem; "*Lord, I have heard by many of this man, what a malicious enemy he is to the gospel of Christ: all those that were scattered upon the late persecution, many of whom are come to Damascus, tell how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem; that he was the most virulent, violent persecutor of all the rest, and a ringleader in the mischief; what havoc he has made of the church: there was no man they were more afraid of, no, not the High-Priest himself, than of Saul; nay,*" (2.) "*His errand to Damascus at this time is to persecute us christians; here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name; to treat the worshippers of Christ as the worst of criminals.*" Now, why does Ananias object this? Not, "Therefore I do not owe him so much service. Why should I do him a kindness, who has done and designed us so much unkindness?" No, Christ has taught us another lesson, to render good for evil, and pray for our persecutors; but, if he be such a persecutor of christians, [1.] Will it be safe for Ananias to go to him? Will he not throw himself like a lamb into the mouth of a lion? And if he thus bring himself into trouble, he will be blamed for his indiscretion. [2.] Will it be to any purpose to go to him? Can such a hard heart ever be softened, or such an Ethiopian ever change his skin?

2. Christ over-rules the objection; (*v. 15, 16.*) "Do not tell me how bad he has been, I know it very well; but go thy way with all speed, and give him all the help thou canst, for he is a chosen vessel, or instrument, unto me; I design to put confidence in him, and then thou needest not fear him." He was a vessel in which the gospel-treasure should be lodged, in order to the conveyance of it to many; an earthen vessel, (2 Cor. 4. 7.) but a chosen vessel. The vessel God uses, he himself chooses; and it is fit he should himself have the choosing of the instruments he employs; (John 15. 16.) *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.* He is a vessel of honour, and must not be neglected in his present forlorn condition, or thrown away as a despised broken vessel, or a vessel in which there is no pleasure: he is designed, (1.) For eminent services: *He is to bear my name before the Gentiles,* is to be the apostle of the Gentiles, and to carry the gospel to heathen nations. Christ's name is the standard to which souls must be gathered, and under which they must be listed, and Saul must be a standard-bearer, he must bear Christ's name, must bear witness to it before kings, king Agrippa and Cæsar himself; nay, he must bear it before the children of Israel, though there were so many hands already at work about them. (2.) For eminent sufferings; (*v. 16.*) *I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my*

name's sake. He that has been a persecutor, shall be himself persecuted. Christ's shewing him this, intimates either his bringing him to these trials, (as Ps. 60. 3.) *Thou hast shewed thy people hard things,* or his giving notice of them beforehand, that they might be no surprise to him. Note, Those that bear Christ's name, must expect to bear the cross for his name; and those that do most for Christ, are often called out to suffer most for him. Saul must suffer great things. This, one would think, was cold comfort for a young convert; but is only like telling a soldier of a bold and brave spirit, when he is enlisted, that he shall take the field, and enter upon action, shortly. Saul's sufferings for Christ shall redound so much to the honour of Christ and the service of the church, shall be so balanced with spiritual comforts, and recompensed with eternal glories, that it is no discouragement to him to be told how great things he must suffer for Christ's name's sake.

III. Ananias presently goes on Christ's errand to Saul, and with good effect; he had started an objection against going to him, but when an answer was given to it, he dropped it, and did not insist upon it. When difficulties are removed, what have we to do, but to go on with our work, and not hang upon an objection?

1. Ananias delivered his message to Saul, *v. 17.* Probably, he found him in bed, and applied to him as a patient. (1.) *He put his hands on him.* It was promised, as one of the signs that shall follow them that believe, that they should lay hands on the sick, and they should recover, (Mark 16. 18.) and it was for that intent that he put his hands on him. Saul came to lay violent hands upon the disciples at Damascus, but here a disciple lays a helping, healing hand upon him. *The blood-thirsty hate the upright, but the just seek his soul.* (2.) He called him brother, because he was made a partaker of the grace of God, though not yet baptized; and his readiness to own him as a brother, intimated to him God's readiness to own him as a son, though he had been a blasphemer of God, and a persecutor of his children. (3.) He produces his commission from the same hand that had laid hold on him by the way, and now had him in custody. "*That same Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, and convinced thee of thy sin in persecuting him, has now sent me to thee to comfort thee.*" *Una eademque manus vulnus operemque tulit—The hand that wounded, heals.* "His light struck thee blind, but he hath sent me to thee that thou mightest receive thy sight; for the design was not to blind thine eyes, but to dazzle them, that thou mightest see things by another light: he that then put clay upon thine eyes, hath sent me to wash them that they may be cured." Ananias might deliver his message to Saul very appositely in the prophet's words; (Hos. 6. 1, 2.) *Come and turn to the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal thee; he hath smitten, and he will bind thee up; now after two days he will revive thee, and the third day he will raise thee up, and thou shalt live in his sight.* Corrosives shall be no more applied, but lenitives. (4.) He assures him that he shall not only have his sight restored, but be filled with the Holy Ghost: he must himself be an apostle, and must in nothing come behind the chief of the apostles, and therefore must receive the Holy Ghost immediately, and not, as others did, by the interposition of the apostles; and Ananias's putting his hands upon him before he was baptized, was for the conferring of the Holy Ghost.

2. Ananias saw the good issue of his mission,

(1.) In Christ's favour to Saul. At the word of Ananias, Saul was discharged from his confinement by the restoring of his sight; for Christ's commission to open the prison to them that were bound, (Isa. 61. 1.) is explained by the giving of sight to

the blind, Luke 4. 18. Christ's commission is to open the blind eyes, and to bring out the prisoners from the prison. Saul is delivered from the spirit of bondage, by his receiving sight, (v. 18.) which was signified by the falling of scales from his eyes; and this immediately, and forthwith: the cure was sudden, to shew that it was miraculous. This signified the recovering of him, [1.] From the darkness of his unconverted state: when he persecuted the church of God, and walked in the spirit and way of the Pharisees, he was blind, he saw not the meaning either of the law, or of the gospel, Rom. 7. 9. Christ often told the Pharisees that they were blind, and could not make them sensible of it; they said, *We see*, John 9. 41. Saul is saved from his Pharisaical blindness, by being made sensible of it. Note, Converting grace opens the eyes of the soul, and makes the scales to fall from them, (ch. 26. 18.) to open men's eyes, and turn them from darkness to light: this was it that Saul was sent among the Gentiles to do, by the preaching of the gospel, and therefore must first experience it in himself. [2.] From the darkness of his present terrors, under the apprehension of guilt upon his conscience, and the wrath of God against him; this filled him with confusion, during those three days he sat in darkness, like Jonah for three days in the belly of hell; but now the scales fell from his eyes, the cloud was scattered, and the Sun of righteousness rose upon his soul, with healing under his wings.

(2.) In Saul's subjection to Christ; he was baptized, and thereby submitted himself to the government of Christ, and cast himself upon the grace of Christ. Thus he was entered into Christ's school, hired into his family, listed under his banner, and joined himself to him for better for worse. The point was gained, it is settled; Saul is now a disciple of Christ, not only ceases to oppose him, but devotes himself entirely to his service and honour.

IV. The good work that was begun in Saul, is carried on wonderfully; this new-born christian, though he seemed *as one born out of due time*, yet presently comes to maturity.

1. He received his bodily strength, v. 19. He had continued three days fasting, which with the mighty weight that was all that time upon his spirits, had made him very weak; but *when he had received meat, he was strengthened*, v. 19. The Lord is for the body, and therefore care must be taken of that, to keep it in good plight, that it may be fit to serve the soul in God's service, and that Christ may be magnified in it, Phil. 1. 20.

2. He associated with the disciples that were at Damascus, fell in with them, conversed with them, went to their meetings, and joined in communion with them. He had lately *breathed out threatenings and slaughter against them*, but now breathes love and affection to them. *Now the wolf dwells with the lamb, and the leopard lies down with the kid*, Isa. 11. 6. Note, Those that take God for their God, take his people for their people. Saul associated with the disciples, because now he saw an amiableness and excellency in them, because he loved them, and found that he improved in knowledge and grace by conversing with them; and thus he made profession of his christian faith, and openly declared himself a disciple of Christ, by herding with those that were his disciples.

3. *He preached Christ in the synagogues*, v. 20. To this he had an extraordinary call, and for it an extraordinary qualification, God having immediately revealed his Son to him and in him, that he might preach him, Gal. 1. 15, 16. He was so full of Christ himself, that the Spirit within him constrained him to preach him to others, and, like Elihu, to speak that he might be refreshed, Job 32. 20. Observe, (1.) Where he preached; in the synagogues of the

Jews; for they were to have the first offer made them; the synagogues were their places of concourse, there he met with them together, and there they used to preach against Christ, and to punish his disciples; by the same token that Paul himself *had punished them oft in every synagogue*, (ch. 26. 11.) and therefore there he would face the enemies of Christ, where they were most daring; and openly profess christianity there, where he had most opposed it. (2.) What he preached; *He preached Christ*. When he began to be a preacher, he fixed that for his principle, which he stuck to ever after; *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord; nothing but Christ, and him crucified*. He preached concerning Christ, *that he is the Son of God, his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased*, and with us in him, and not otherwise. (3.) How people were affected with it; (v. 21.) *All that heard him were amazed, and said, "Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and now does he call on this name himself, and persuade others to call upon it, and strengthen the hands of those that do!"* *Quantum mutatus ab illo—Oh how changed!* *"Is Saul also among the prophets?"* Nay, did he not come hither for that intent, to seize all the christians he could find, and *bring them bound to the chief priests?* Yes, he did. Who would have thought then, that he should preach Christ as he does?" Doubtless, this was looked upon by many as a great confirmation of the truth of christianity, that one who had been such a notorious persecutor of it, came, on a sudden, to be such an intelligent, strenuous, and capacious preacher of it. This miracle upon the mind of such a man, outshone the miracles upon men's bodies; and giving a man such another heart was more than giving men to speak with other tongues.

4. He confuted and confounded those that opposed the doctrine of Christ, v. 22. He signalized himself, not only in the pulpit, but in the schools, and shewed himself supernaturally enabled, not only to preach the truth, but to maintain and defend it when he had preached it. (1.) *He increased in strength*; he became more intimately acquainted with the gospel of Christ, and his pious affections grew more strong; he grew more bold and daring and resolute in the defence of the gospel; *he increased the more*, for the reflections that were cast upon him, (v. 21.) in which his new friends upbraided him as having been a persecutor, and his old friends upbraided him as being now a turncoat; but Saul, instead of being discouraged by the various remarks made upon his conversion, was thereby so much the more emboldened, finding he had enough at hand wherewith to answer the worst they could say of him. (2.) He ran down his antagonists, and *confounded the Jews which dwell in Damascus*; he silenced them, and shamed them; answered their objections to the satisfaction of all indifferent persons, and pressed them with arguments which they could make no reply to. In all his discourses with the Jews, he was still *proving that this Jesus is very Christ, is the Christ, the Anointed of God, the true Messiah promised to the fathers*. He was proving it, *συμβεβαιάζων*—affirming it and confirming it; teaching with persuasion. And we have reason to think he was instrumental to convert many to the faith of Christ, and to build up the church at Damascus, which he came thither to make havoc of. Thus, *out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness*.

23. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: 24. But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day

and night, to kill him. 25. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall, in a basket. 26. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. 27. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. 29. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. 30. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. 31. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Luke here makes no mention of Paul's journey into Arabia, which he tells us himself was immediately after his conversion, Gal. 1. 16, 17. As soon as God had revealed his Son in him, that he might preach him, he went not up to Jerusalem, to receive instructions from the apostles, (as any other convert would have done, that was designed for the ministry,) but he went to Arabia, where there was new ground to break up, and where he would have opportunity of teaching, but not of learning; thence he returned to Damascus, and there, three years after his conversion, this happened, which is here recorded.

I. He met with difficulties at Damascus, and had a narrow escape of being killed there. Observe,

1. What his danger was; (v. 23.) *The Jews took counsel to kill him*, being more enraged at him than at any other of the preachers of the gospel; not only because he was more lively and zealous in his preaching than any of them, and more successful, but because he had been such a remarkable deserter, and his being a christian was a testimony against them. It is said, (v. 24.) *The Jews watched the gates day and night to kill him*; they incensed the governor against him, as a dangerous man, who therefore kept the city with a guard to apprehend him, at his going out or coming in, 2 Cor. 11. 32. Now Christ shewed Paul what great things he must suffer for his name, (v. 16.) when here is presently the government in arms against him, which was a great thing, and, as all his other sufferings afterward, helped to make him considerable. Saul was no sooner a christian than a preacher; no sooner a preacher than a sufferer; so quick did he rise to the top of his prement! Note, Where God gives great grace, he commonly exercises it with great trials.

2. How he was delivered. (1.) The design against him was discovered. *Their lying in wait was known of Saul*, by some intelligence, whether from heaven or from men, we are not told. (2.) The disciples contrived to help him away, hid him, it is likely, by day, and in the night, the gates being watched, that he could not get away through them, they let him down by the wall, in a basket, as he himself

relates it; (2 Cor. 11. 33.) *so he escaped out of their hands*. This story, as it shews us that when we enter into the way of God we must look for temptation, and prepare accordingly; so it shews us, that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may not be by it deterred or driven from the way of God.

II. He met with difficulties at Jerusalem the first time he went thither, v. 26. He came to Jerusalem. This is thought to be that journey to Jerusalem, which he himself speaks of; (Gal. 1. 18.) *After three years I went up to Jerusalem*, saith he, *to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days*. But I rather incline to think that this was a journey before that, because his coming in and going out, his preaching and disputing, (v. 28, 29.) seem to be more than would consist with his fifteen days' stay, (for that was no more,) and to require a longer time; and besides, now he came a stranger, but then he came, *ἰσχυρῶς Πέτρον*—to confer with Peter, as one he was intimate with; however, it might possibly be the same. Now observe,

1. How shy his friends were of him; (v. 26.) *When he came to Jerusalem*, he did not go to the chief priests and the Pharisees, (he had taken his leave of them long since,) but he assayed to join himself to the disciples; wherever he came, he owned himself one of that despised persecuted people, and associated with them; they were now in his eyes the excellent ones of the earth, in whom was all his delight; he desired to be acquainted with them, and to be admitted into communion with them; but they looked strange upon him, shut the door against him, and would not go about any of their religious exercises if he were by; for they were afraid of him. Now might Paul be tempted to think himself in an ill case, when the Jews had abandoned and persecuted him, and the christians would not receive and entertain him. Thus does he fall into divers temptations, and needs the armour of righteousness, as we all do, both on the right hand and on the left, that we may not be discouraged, either by the unjust treatment of our enemies, or the unkind treatment of our friends.

(1.) See what was the cause of their jealousy of him; *They believed not that he was a disciple*, but that he only pretended to be so, and came among them as a spy or an informer. They knew what a bitter persecutor he had been, with what fury he went to Damascus some time ago; they had heard nothing of him since, and therefore thought he was but a wolf in sheep's clothing. The disciples of Christ need to be cautious whom they admit into communion with them. *Believe not every spirit*. There is need of the wisdom of the serpent, to keep the mean between the extremes of suspicion on the one hand and credulity on the other; yet methinks it is safer to err on the charitable side, because it is an adjudged case, that it is better the tares should be found among the wheat than that the wheat should any of it be rooted up, and thrown out of the field.

(2.) See how it was removed; (v. 27.) *Barnabas took him to the apostles* themselves, who were not so scrupulous as the inferior disciples, to whom he first assayed to join himself, and he declared to them. [1.] What Christ had done for him—he had shewed himself to him in the way, and spoken to him; and what he said. [2.] What he had since done for Christ; he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. How Barnabas came to know this, more than the rest of them, we are not told; whether he had himself been at Damascus, or had had letters from thence, or discoursed with some of that city, by which he came to the knowledge of this; or whether he had formerly been acquainted with Paul

in the Grecian synagogues, or at the feet of Gamaliel, and had such an account of his conversion from himself as he saw cause enough to give credit to; so it was, that, being satisfied himself, he gave satisfaction to the apostles concerning him, he having brought no testimonials from the disciples at Damascus, thinking *he needed not*, as some others, *epistles of commendation*, 2 Cor. 3. 1. Note, The introducing of a young convert into the communion of the faithful, is a very good work, and which, as we have opportunity, we should be ready to.

2. How sharp his enemies were upon him:

(1.) He was admitted into the communion of the disciples, which was no little provocation to his enemies. It vexed the unbelieving Jews, to see Saul a trophy of Christ's victory, and a captive to his grace, who had been such a champion for their cause; to see him *coming in, and going out, with the apostles*, (v. 28.) and to hear them glorying in him, or rather glorifying God in him.

(2.) He appeared vigorous in the cause of Christ, and this was yet more provoking to them; (v. 29.) *He spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus*. Note, Those that speak for Christ, have reason to speak boldly; for they have a good cause, and speak for one who will at least speak for himself and them too. The Grecians, or Hellenist Jews, were most offended at him, because he had been one of them; and they drew him into a dispute, in which, no doubt, he was too hard for them, as he had been for the Jews at Damascus. One of the martyrs said, Though she could not *dispute* for Christ, she could *die* for Christ; but Paul could do both. Now the Lord Jesus *divided the spoils of the strong man armed* in Saul. For that same natural quickness and fervour of spirit, which, while he was in ignorance and unbelief, made him a furious bigoted persecutor of the faith, made him a most zealous courageous defender of the faith.

(3.) This brought him into peril of his life, with which he narrowly escaped; *The Grecians*, when they found they could not deal with him in disputation, contrived to silence him another way; *they went about to slay him*, as they did Stephen, when *they could not resist the Spirit by which he spake*, ch. 6. 10. That is a bad cause, that has recourse to persecution for its last argument. But notice was given of this conspiracy too, and effectual care taken to secure this young champion; (v. 30.) *When the brethren knew what was designed against him, they brought him down to Cesarea*. They remembered how the putting of Stephen to death, upon his disputing with the Grecians, had been the beginning of a sore persecution; and therefore were afraid of having such a vein opened again, and hastened Paul out of the way. He that flies, may fight again; he that fled from Jerusalem, might do service at Tarsus, the place of his nativity; and thither they desired him by all means to go, in hopes he might go on in his work with more safety than at Jerusalem. Yet it was also by direction from heaven that he left Jerusalem at this time, as he tells us himself, (ch. 22. 17, 18.) that Christ now appeared to him, and ordered him to *go quickly out of Jerusalem*, for he must be sent *to the Gentiles*, v. 21. Those by whom God has work to do, shall be protected from all the designs of their enemies against them till it is done. *Christ's witnesses* cannot be slain till they have *finished their testimony*.

III. The churches had now a comfortable gleam of liberty and peace; (v. 31.) *Then had the churches rest*. Then, when Saul was converted, so some; when that persecutor was taken off, those were quiet, whom he used to irritate; and then those were quiet whom he used to molest. Or, then, when he was gone from Jerusalem, the fury of the Grecian Jews was a little abated, and they were the

more willing to bear with the other preachers now that Saul was gone out of the way. Observe,

1. *The churches had rest*. After a storm comes a calm. Though we are always to expect troublesome times, yet we may expect that they shall not last always. This was a breathing-time allowed them, to prepare them for the next encounter. The churches that were already planted, were mostly in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, within the limits of the Holy Land. There were the first christian churches, where Christ had himself laid the foundation.

2. They made a good use of this lucid interval. Instead of growing secure and wanton in the day of their prosperity, they abounded more in their duty, and made a good use of their tranquillity. (1.) *They were edified, were built up in their most holy faith*; the more free and constant enjoyment they had of the means of knowledge and grace, the more they increased in knowledge and grace. (2.) *They walked in the fear of the Lord*; were more exemplary themselves for a holy heavenly conversation. They lived so as that all who conversed with them might say, *Surely the fear of God reigns in those people*. (3.) *They walked in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*; they were not only faithful, but cheerful, in religion; they stuck to the ways of the Lord, and sang in those ways. *The comfort of the Holy Ghost* was their consolation, and that which they made their chief joy. They had recourse to the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and lived upon that, not only in days of trouble and affliction, but in days of rest and prosperity. The comforts of the earth, when they had the most free and full enjoyment of them, could not content them without the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Observe the connection of these two; when *they walked in the fear of the Lord*, then *they walked in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*. Those are most likely to walk cheerfully, that walk circumspectly.

3. God blessed it to them for their increase in number; *They were multiplied*. Sometimes the church multiplies the more for its being afflicted, as Israel in Egypt; yet if it were always so, the saints of the Most High would be worn out; at other times its rest contributes to its growth, as it enlarges the opportunity of ministers, and invites those in, who at first are afraid of suffering. Or, then, when *they walked in the fear of God and his comforts*, then *they were multiplied*. Thus they that will not be won by the word, may be won by the conversation of professors.

32. And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all *quarters*, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. 33. And there he found a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. 34. And Peter said unto him, Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. 35. And all that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

Here we have,

I. The visit Peter made to the churches that were newly planted by the dispersed preachers, v. 32.

1. He *passed through all quarters*; as an apostle, he was not to be the resident pastor of any one church, but the itinerant visitor of many churches; to confirm the doctrine of inferior preachers, to confer the *Holy Ghost* on them that believed, and to ordain ministers. He passed *δια παντος*—among them all, who pertained to the churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, mentioned in the foregoing chap-

ter. He was, like his Master, always upon the remove, and *went about doing good*; but still his headquarters were at Jerusalem, for there we shall find him imprisoned, *ch. 12*.

2. *He came to the saints at Lydda*; this seems to be the same with *Lod*, a city in the tribe of Benjamin, mentioned 1 Chron. 8. 12. Ezra 2. 33. The christians are called *saints*, not only some particular eminent ones, as saint Peter, and saint Paul, but every sincere professor of the faith of Christ. These *are the saints on the earth*, Ps. 16. 3.

11. The cure Peter wrought on *Eneas, a man that had been bedrid eight years*, v. 33.

1. His case was very deplorable; *he was sick of the palsy*, a dumb palsy, perhaps a dead palsy; the disease was extreme, for *he kept his bed*; it was inveterate, for he kept his bed *eight years*; and we may suppose that both he himself and all about him despaired of relief for him, and concluded upon no other than that he must still keep his bed till he removed to his grave. Christ chose such patients as those, whose diseases were incurable in a course of nature, to shew how desperate the case of fallen mankind was when he undertook their cure. When we were *without strength*, as this poor man, *he sent his word to heal us*.

2. His cure was very admirable, v. 34. (1.) Peter interested Christ in his case, and engaged him for his relief; *Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole*. Peter does not pretend to do it himself by any power of his own, but declares it to be Christ's act and deed, and directs him to look up to Christ for help, and assures him of an *immediate* cure; not, "*He will make thee*," but, "*He does make thee, whole*:" he assures him also of a *perfect* cure; not, "*He makes thee easy*," but, "*He makes thee whole*." He does not express himself by way of prayer to Christ that he would make him whole, but as one having authority from Christ, and that knew his mind, he declares him made whole. (2.) He ordered him to bestir himself, to exert himself, "*Arise and make thy bed*, that all may see thou art thoroughly cured." Let none say, that because it is Christ that by the power of his grace works all our works in us, therefore we have no work, no duty, to do; for though *Jesus Christ makes thee whole*, yet thou must *arise*, and make use of the power he gives thee. *Arise, and make thy bed*, for another use than it has been, to be a bed of rest to thee, no longer a bed of sickness. (3.) Power went along with this word: he arose immediately, and, no doubt, very willingly made his own bed.

111. The good influence this had upon many; (v. 35.) *All that dwell at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord*. We can scarcely think that every individual person in those countries took cognizance of the miracle, and was wrought upon by it, but many, the generality of the people in the town of Lydda and in the country of Saron, or Sharon, a fruitful plain or valley, of which it was foretold, *Sharon shall be a fold of flocks*, Isa. 65. 10.

1. They all made inquiry into the truth of the miracle, did not overlook it, but saw him that was healed, and saw that it was a miraculous cure that was wrought upon him by the power of Christ, in his name, and with a design to confirm and ratify that doctrine of Christ which was now preached to the world.

2. They all submitted to the convincing proof and evidence there was in this of the divine original of the christian doctrine, and *turned to the Lord*, to the Lord Jesus; they turned from Judaism to Christianity; they embraced the doctrine of Christ, and submitted to his ordinances; and turned themselves over to him to be ruled and taught and saved by him.

36. Now there was at Joppa a certain

disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did. 37. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid *her* in an upper chamber. 38. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring *him* that he would not delay to come to them. 39. Then Peter arose, and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. 40. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning *him* to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. 41. And he gave her *his* hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. 43. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

Here we have a greater miracle wrought by Peter, for the confirming of the gospel, and which exceeded the former—the raising of Tabitha to life when she had been for some time dead. Here is,

I. The life and death and character of Tabitha, on whom this miracle was wrought, v. 36, 37.

1. She lived at Joppa, a sea-port town in the tribe of Dan, where Jonah took shipping to go to Tarsish, now called *Jaffa*.

2. Her name was *Tabitha*, a Hebrew name, the Greek for which is *Dorcas*, both signifying a *doe*, or *hind*, or *deer*, a pleasant creature. *Naphthalis* is compared to a *hind let loose, giving goodly words*; and the wife to the kind and tender husband, is as the loving *hind*, and as the pleasant *roe*, Prov. 5. 19.

3. She was a disciple, one that had embraced the faith of Christ and was baptized; and not only so, but was eminent above many for works of charity; she shewed her faith by her works, her good works, which she was full of, that is, which she abounded in; her head was full of cares and contrivances which way she could do good. *She devised liberal things*, Isa. 32. 8. Her hands were full of good employment, she made a business of doing good, was never idle, having learned to *maintain good works*, (Tit. 3. 8.) to keep up a constant course and method of them. She was *full of good works*, as a tree that is full of fruit. Many are full of good words, who are empty and barren in good works; but Tabitha was a great deer, no great talker; *Non magna loquimur, sed vivimus*—*We do not talk great things, we live them*. Among other good works, she was remarkable for her *alms-deeds which she did*, not only her works of piety, which are good works and the fruits of faith, but works of charity and beneficence, flowing from love to our neighbour and a holy contempt of this world. Observe, She is praised not only for the alms which she gave, but for the alms-deeds which she did. Those that have not estates wherewith to give in charity, may yet be

able to do in *charity, working with their hands, or walking with their feet, for the benefit of the poor.* And they who will not do a charitable deed, whatever they may pretend, if they were rich would not bestow a charitable gift. She was full of alms-deeds, *οὐκ ἴσμεν—*which she made; there is an emphasis upon her *doing* them, because what her hand found to do of this kind she did *with all her might*, and persevered in. They were alms-deeds, not which she proposed and designed and said she would do, but which *she did*; not which she *began* to do, but which *she did*, which she went through with, which she *performed the doing of*, 2 Cor. 8. 11.—9. 7. This is the life and character of a certain disciple, and should agree to all the disciples of Christ; for if thus *we bear much fruit, then are we his disciples indeed*, John 15. 8.

4. She was removed in the midst of her usefulness; (*v. 37.*) *In those days she fell sick, and died.* It is promised to those who consider the poor, not that they shall never be sick, but that the Lord will *strengthen them upon the bed of languishing*, at least with strength in their soul, and so will *make all their bed in their sickness*, will make it easy, Ps. 41. 1, 3. They cannot hope that they shall never die, (*merciful men are taken away*, and merciful women too, witness Tabitha,) but they may hope that they shall *find mercy of the Lord in that day*, 2 Tim. 1. 18.

5. Her friends and those about her did not presently bury her, as usual, because they were in hopes Peter would come and raise her to life again; but they *washed the dead body*, according to the custom, which, they say, was with warm water, which, if there were any life remaining in the body, would recover it; so that this was done to shew that she was really and truly dead; they tried all the usual methods to bring her to life, and could not. *Conclamatum est—the last cry was uttered.* They laid her out in her grave-clothes in an upper chamber; which Dr. Lightfoot thinks was, probably, the public meeting-room for the believers of that town; and they laid the body there, that Peter, if he would come, might raise her to life the more solemnly in that place.

II. The request which her christian friends sent to Peter to come to them with all speed, not to attend the funeral, but, if it might be, to prevent it, *v. 38.* Lydda, where Peter now was, was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples at Joppa had heard that Peter was there, and that he had raised Eneas from a bed of languishing; and therefore they *sent to him two men*, to make the message the more solemn and respectful, *desiring him that he would not delay to come to them*; not telling him the occasion, lest he should modestly decline coming upon so great an errand as to raise the dead; if they can but get him to them, they will leave it to him. Their friend was dead, and it was too late to send for a physician, but not too late to send for Peter. *Post mortem medicus—a physician after death* is an absurdity, but not *Post mortem apostolus—an apostle after death*.

III. The posture in which he found the surviving, when he came to them; (*v. 39.*) *Peter arose, and went with them.* Though they did not tell him what they wanted him for, yet he was willing to go along with them, believing it was upon some good account or other that he was sent for. Let not faithful ministers grudge to be at every body's beck, as far as they have ability, when the great apostle *made himself the servant of all*, 1 Cor. 9. 19. He found the corpse laid in the upper chamber, and attended by widows; probably such as were in the communion of the church, poor widows; there they were,

1. Commending the deceased; a good work,

when there was that in them which was truly commendable, and recommendable to imitation, and it is done modestly and soberly, and without flattery of the survivors or any sinister intention, but purely for the glory of God, and the exciting of others to that which is virtuous and praise-worthy. The commendation of Tabitha was like her own virtues, not in word, but in deed. Here were no encomiums of her in orations, or poems inscribed to her memory; but *the widows shewed the coats and garments which she made* for them, and bestowed upon them *while she was with them*. It was the comfort of Job, while he lived, that *the loins of the poor blessed him*, because they were *warmed with the fleece of his sheep*, Job 31. 20. And here it was the credit of Tabitha, when she was dead, that the backs of the widows praised her for the garments which she made them. And those are certainly best praised, *whose own works praise them in the gates*, whether the words of others do or no. And it is much more honourable to clothe a company of decrepit widows with needful clothing for night and day, who will pray for their benefactors when they do not see them, than to clothe a company of lazy footmen with rich liveries, who perhaps behind their backs will curse them that clothe them; (Eccl. 7. 21.) and it is what all that are wise and good will take a greater pleasure in; for goodness is true greatness, and will pass better in the account shortly. Observe, (1.) Into what channel Tabitha turned much of her charity; doubtless there were other instances of her alms-deeds which she did, but this was now produced; she did, as it should seem, with her own hands, *make coats and garments* for poor widows, who perhaps with their own labour could make a shift to get their bread, but could not earn enough to buy clothes. And this is an excellent piece of charity, *If thou seest the naked, that thou cover him*, (Isa. 58. 7.) and not to think it enough to say, *Be ye warmed*, James 2. 15, 16. (2.) What a grateful sense the poor had of her kindness; *They shewed the coats*, not ashamed to own that they were indebted to her for the clothes on their backs. Those are horribly ungrateful indeed, who have kindness shewn them, and will not make at least an acknowledgment of it, by shewing the kindness that is done them, as these widows here did. Those who receive alms, are not obliged so industriously to conceal it, as those are who give alms. When the poor reflect upon the rich as uncharitable and unmerciful, they ought to reflect upon themselves, and consider whether they are not unthankful and ungrateful. Their shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, tended to the praise not only of her *charity*, but of her *industry*, according to the character of the virtuous woman, that she *lays her hands to the spindle*, or at least to the *needle*, and then *stretches out her hand to the poor*, and *reaches forth her hands to the needy*, of what she has worked; and when God and the poor have thus had their due *she makes herself coverings of tapestry*, and her own clothing is silk and purple, Prov. 31. 19—22.

2. They were here lamenting the loss of her; the widows stood by Peter, weeping. When the *merciful are taken away*, it should be laid to heart, especially by those to whom they have been in a particular manner merciful. They needed not to weep for her; she was taken from the evil to come, *she rests from her labours, and her works follow her*, beside those she leaves behind her: but they weep for themselves and for their children, who will soon find the want of such a good woman, that had not left her fellow. Observe, They take notice of what good Dorcas did *while she was with them*; but now she is *gone from them*, and that is the grief. Those that are charitable will find that the *poor they have*

always with them; but it is well if those that are poor find that the charitable they have always with them. We must make a good use of the lights that yet a little while are with us, because they will not be always with us, will not be long with us: and when they are gone, we shall think what they did when they were with us. It should seem, the widows wept before Peter, as an inducement to him, if he could do any thing, to *have compassion on them and help them*, and restore one to them that used to have compassion on them. When charitable people are dead, there is no praying them to life again; but when they are sick, that piece of gratitude is owing them, to pray for their recovery, that, if it be the will of God, those may be spared to live, who can ill be spared to die.

IV. The manner how she was raised to life.

1. Privately; she was laid in the upper room, where they used to have their public meetings, and, it should seem, there was great crowding about the dead body, in expectation of what would be done; but Peter put them all forth, all the weeping widows, all but some few relations of the family, or perhaps the heads of the church, to join with him in prayer; as Christ did, Matt. 9. 25. Thus Peter declined every thing that looked like vainglory and ostentation; they came to see, but he did not come to be seen. He put them all forth, that he might with the more freedom pour out his soul before God in prayer upon this occasion, and not be disturbed with their noisy and clamorous lamentations.

2. By prayer; in his healing Eneas there was an implicit prayer, but in this greater work he addressed himself to God by solemn prayer, as Christ when he raised Lazarus: but Christ's prayer was with the authority of a Son, who *quickens whom he will*; Peter's, with the submission of a servant, who is under direction, and therefore he *kneeled down and prayed*.

3. By the word, a quickening word, a word which is spirit and life; *he turned to the body*, which intimates that when he prayed he turned from it; lest the sight of it should discourage his faith, he looked another way, to teach us, like Abraham, *against hope, to believe in hope*, and overlook the difficulties that lie in the way, *not considering the body as now dead*, lest he should stagger at the promise, Rom. 4. 19, 20. But when he had prayed, he *turned to the body*, and spake in his Master's name, and according to his example, "*Tabitha, arise*"; return to life again." Power went along with this word, and she came to life, *opened her eyes* which death had closed. Thus in the raising of dead souls to spiritual life, the first sign of life is the opening of the eyes of the mind, ch. 26. 18. When she saw Peter, she sat up, to shew that she was really and truly alive; and (v. 41.) *he gave her his hand and lift her up*; not as if she laboured under any remaining weakness; but thus he would as it were welcome her to life again, and give her the right hand of fellowship among the living, from whom she had been cut off. And lastly, he *called the saints and widows*, who were all in sorrow for her death, and *presented her alive* to them, to their great comfort; particularly of the widows, who laid her death much to heart, (v. 41.) to them he presented her, as Elijah, (1 Kings 17. 23.) and Elisha, (2 Kings 4. 36.) and Christ, (Luke 7. 15.) presented the dead sons alive to their mothers. The greatest joy and satisfaction are expressed by life from the dead.

V. The good effect of this miracle.

1. Many were by it convinced of the truth of the gospel, that *it was from heaven, and not of men*, and believed in the Lord, v. 42. The thing was *known throughout all Joppa*; it would be in every body's mouth quickly, and it being a town of seafaring men, the notice of it would be the sooner carried

from thence to other countries; and though some never minded it, many were wrought upon by it. This was the end of miracles, to confirm a divine revelation.

2. Peter was hereby induced to continue some time in this city, v. 43. Finding that a door of opportunity was opened for him there, he tarried there many days, till he was sent thence, and sent for from thence upon business to another place. He tarried not in the house of Tabitha, though she was rich, lest he should seem to seek his own glory; but he took up his lodgings with one Simon a tanner, an ordinary tradesman, which is an instance of his condescension and humility: and hereby he has taught us not to *mind high things*, but to *condescend to them of low estate*, Rom. 12. 16. And though Peter might seem to be buried in obscurity here in the house of a poor tanner by the sea-side, yet hence God fetched him to a noble piece of service in the next chapter; for *those that humble themselves shall be exalted*.

CHAP. X.

It is a turn very new and remarkable, which the story of this chapter gives to the Acts of the apostles; hitherto, both at Jerusalem and every where else where the ministers of Christ came, they preached the gospel only to the Jews, or those Greeks that were circumcised and proselyted to the Jews' religion; but now, Lo, we turn to the Gentiles; and to them the door of faith is here opened: good news indeed to us sinners of the Gentiles. The apostle Peter is the man that is first employed to admit uncircumcised Gentiles into the christian church; and Cornelius, a Roman centurion or colonel, is the first that with his family and friends is so admitted. Now here we are told, I. How Cornelius was directed by a vision to send for Peter, and did send for him accordingly, v. 1. .8. II. How Peter was directed by a vision to go to Cornelius, though he was a Gentile, without making any scruple of it; and did go accordingly, v. 9. .23. III. The happy interview between Peter and Cornelius at Cesarea, v. 24. .33. IV. The sermon Peter preached in the house of Cornelius to him and to his friends, v. 34. .43. V. The baptizing of Cornelius and his friends with the Holy Ghost first, and then with water, v. 44. .48.

1. **T**HERE was a certain man in Cesarea, called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. 3. He saw in a vision evidently, about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. 5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. 7. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

The bringing of the gospel to the Gentiles, and the bringing of them who had been strangers and

foreigners to be fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, were such a mystery to the apostles themselves, and such a surprise, (Eph. 3. 3, 6.) that it concerns us carefully to observe all the circumstances of the beginning of this great work, this part of the *mystery of Godliness—Christ preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world*, 1 Tim. 3. 16. It is not unlikely that some Gentiles might before now have stepped into a synagogue of the Jews, and heard the gospel preached; but the gospel was never yet designedly preached to the Gentiles, nor any of them baptized, Cornelius was the first. And here we have,

I. An account given us of this Cornelius, who and what he was, that was the first-born of the Gentiles to Christ. We are here told that he was a great man and a good man; two characters that seldom meet, but here they did: and where they do meet, they put a lustre upon each other; goodness makes greatness truly valuable, and greatness makes goodness much more serviceable.

1. Cornelius was an officer of the army, *v. 1.* He was at present quartered in Cesarea, a strong city, lately re-edified and fortified by Herod the Great, and called *Cesarea* in honour of Augustus Cæsar. It lay upon the sea-shore, very convenient for the keeping up of a correspondence between Rome and its conquests in those parts. The Roman governor or proconsul ordinarily resided here, *ch. 23. 23, 24.* —25. 6. Here was a band, or cohort, or regiment, of the Roman army, which probably was the governor's life-guard, and is here called the *Italian band*; because, that they might be the more sure of their fidelity, they were all native Romans, or Italians; Cornelius had a command in this part of the army. His name, *Cornelius*, was much used among the Romans, among some of the most ancient and noble families. He was an officer of considerable rank and figure, a centurion. We read of one in our Saviour's time of that rank, whom he gave a great commendation of, *Matt. 8. 10.* When a Gentile must be pitched upon to receive the gospel first, it is not a Gentile philosopher, much less a Gentile priest, (who are bigoted to their notions and worship, and prejudiced against the gospel of Christ,) but a Gentile soldier, who is a man of more free thought; and he that truly is so, when the christian doctrine is fairly set before him, cannot but receive it, and bid it welcome. Fishermen, unlearned and ignorant men, were the first of the Jewish converts, but not so of the Gentiles; for the world shall know that the gospel has that in it which may recommend it to men of polite learning and a liberal education, as we have reason to think this centurion was. Let not soldiers and officers of the army plead that their employment frees them from the restraints which some others are under, and giving them an opportunity of living more at large, may excuse them if they be not religious; for here was an officer of the army that embraced christianity, and yet was neither turned out of his place, nor turned himself out. And lastly, it was a mortification to the Jews, that not only the Gentiles were taken into the church, but that the first who was taken in, was an officer of the Roman army, which was to them *the abomination of desolation*.

2. He was, according to the measure of the light he had, a religious man; it is a very good character that is given of him, *v. 2.* He was no idolater, no worshipper of false gods or images, nor allowed himself in any of those immoralities which the greater part of the Gentile world were given up to, to punish them for their idolatry. (1.) He was possessed with a principle of regard to the true and living God; he was a *devout man, and one that feared God*; he believed in one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and had a reverence for his glory and

authority, and a dread of offending him by sin; and though he was a soldier, it was no diminution to the credit of his valour to tremble before God. (2.) He kept up religion in his family; he *feared God with all his house*. He would not admit any idolaters under his roof; but took care that not himself only, but all his, should serve the Lord. Every good man will do what he can that those about him may be good too. (3.) He was a very charitable man; he *gave much alms to the people*, the people of the Jews, notwithstanding the singularities of their religion. Though he was a Gentile, he was willing to contribute to the relief of one that was a real object of charity, without asking what religion he was of. (4.) He was much in prayer; he *prayed to God always*. He kept up stated times for prayer, and was constant to them. Note, Wherever the fear of God rules in the heart, it will appear both in works of charity and of piety, and neither will excuse us from the other.

II. The orders given him from heaven by the ministry of an angel, to send for Peter to come to him; which he would never have done, if he had not been thus directed to do it. Observe,

1. How, and in what way, these orders were given him; he had a vision, in which an angel delivered them to him. It was about the *ninth hour of the day*, at three of the clock in the afternoon, which is with us an hour of business and conversation; but then, because it was in the temple the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, it was made by devout people an *hour of prayer*, to intimate that all our prayers are to be offered up in the virtue of the great Sacrifice. Cornelius was now at prayer; so he tells us himself, *v. 30.* Now here we are told, (1.) That an angel of God came in to him. By the brightness of his countenance, and the manner of his coming in, he knew him to be something more than man, and therefore nothing less than an angel, an express from heaven. (2.) That he *saw him evidently* with his bodily eyes, not in a dream presented to his imagination, but in a vision, presented to his sight; for his greater satisfaction, it carried its own evidence along with it. (3.) That he called him by his name, *Cornelius*, to intimate the particular notice God took of him. (4.) That this put Cornelius for the present into some confusion; (*v. 4.*) *When he looked on him, he was afraid*; the wisest and best men have been struck with fear upon the appearance of any extraordinary messenger from heaven; and justly, for sinful man knows he has no reason to expect any good tidings from thence. And therefore Cornelius cries, "*What is it, Lord? What is the matter?*" This he speaks as one afraid of something amiss, and longing to be eased of that fear, by knowing the truth; or as one desirous to know the mind of God, and ready to comply with it, as Joshua; *What saith my Lord unto his servant?* And Samuel, *Speak, for thy servant heareth*.

2. What the message was, that was delivered him.

(1.) He is assured that God accepts of him in walking according to the light he had; (*v. 4.*) *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God*. Observe, Prayers and alms must go together. We must follow our prayers with alms; for the *fast that God hath chosen, is to draw out the soul to the hungry*, Isa. 58. 6, 7. It is not enough to pray that what we have may be sanctified to us, but we must *give alms of such things as we have*; and then, *behold, all things are clean to us*, Luke 11. 41. And we must follow our alms with our prayers that God would graciously accept them, and that they may be blessed to those to whom they are given. Cornelius prayed, and gave alms, not as the Pharisees, *to be seen of men*, but in sincerity, as unto God; and he is here told, that they were *come up*

for a memorial before God; they were upon record in heaven, in the book of remembrance that is written there for all that fear God, and shall be remembered to his advantage; "Thy prayers shall be answered, and thine alms recompensed." The sacrifices under the law are said to be for a memorial. See Lev. 2. 9, 16.—5. 12.—6. 15. And prayers and alms are our spiritual offerings, which God is pleased to take cognizance of, and have regard to. The divine revelation communicated to the Jews, as far as the Gentiles were concerned in it, not only as it directed and improved the light and law of nature, but as it promised a Messiah to come, Cornelius believed and submitted to; what he did he did in that faith, and was accepted of God in it; for the Gentiles, to whom the law of Moses came, were not obliged to become circumcised Jews, as those to whom the gospel of Christ comes, are to become baptized Christians.

(2.) He is appointed to inquire after a further discovery of divine grace, now lately made to the world, *v. 5, 6.* He must send forthwith to Joppa, and inquire for one Simon Peter; he lodgeth at the house of one Simon a tanner; his house is by the sea-side, and if he be sent for, he will come; and when he comes, he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do, in answer to thy question, *What is it, Lord?* Now here are two things very surprising, and worthy our consideration.

[1.] Cornelius prays and gives alms in the fear of God; is religious himself, and keeps up religion in his family, and all this so as to be accepted of God in it; and yet there is something further, that he ought to do; he ought to embrace the christian religion, now that God has established it among men. Not, He may do it if he pleases, it will be an improvement and entertainment to him; but, He must do it, it is indispensably necessary to his acceptance with God for the future, though he has been accepted in his services hitherto. He that believed the promise of the Messiah, must now believe the performance of that promise. Now that God had given a further record concerning his Son than what had been given in the Old Testament prophecies, he requires that we receive that when it is brought to us. And now neither our prayers nor our alms come up for a memorial before God unless we believe in Jesus Christ; for it is that further which we ought to do. *This is his commandment, that we believe;* prayers and alms are accepted from those that believe that the Lord is God, and have not opportunity of knowing more. But from those to whom it is preached, that Jesus is Christ, it is necessary to the acceptance of their persons, prayers, and alms, that they believe that, and rest upon him alone for acceptance.

[2.] Cornelius has now an angel from heaven talking to him, and yet he must not receive the gospel of Christ from this angel, nor be told by him what he ought to do, but all that the angel has to say, is, "Send for Peter, and he shall tell thee." As the former observation puts a mighty honour upon the gospel, so does this upon the gospel-ministry: it was not to the highest of angels, but to them who were less than the least of all saints, that this grace was given, to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, (*Eph. 3. 8.*) that the excellency of the power might be of God, and the dignity of an institution of Christ supported; for unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, (*Heb. 2. 5.*) but to the Son of man as the Sovereign, and the sons of men as his agents and ministers of state, whose terror shall not make us afraid, nor their hand be heavy upon us, as this angel's now was to Cornelius. And as it was an honour to the apostle, that he must preach that which an angel might not, so it was a further honour, that an angel

was dispatched on purpose from heaven to order him to be sent for. To bring a faithful minister and a willing people together, is a work worthy of an angel, and what therefore the greatest of men should be glad to be employed in.

III. His immediate obedience to these orders, *v. 7, 8.* He sent with all speed to Joppa, to fetch Peter to him. Had he himself only been concerned, he would have gone to Joppa to him. But he had a family, and kinsmen, and friends, (*v. 24.*) a little congregation of them, that could not go with him to Joppa, and therefore he sends for Peter. Observe,

1. When he sent; as soon as ever the angel which spake unto him, was departed. Without dispute or delay he was obedient to the heavenly vision. He perceived, by what the angel said, he was to have some further work prescribed him, and he longed to have it told him. *He made haste, and delayed not, to do this commandment.* In any affair wherein our souls are concerned, it is good for us not to lose time.

2. Whom he sent; two of his household servants, who all feared God, and a devout soldier, one of them that waited on him continually. Observe, A devout centurion had devout soldiers; a little devotion commonly goes a great way with soldiers, but there would be more of it in the soldiers, if there were but more of it in the commanders. Officers in an army, that have such a great power over the soldiers, as we find the centurion had, (*Matt. 8. 9.*) have a great opportunity of promoting religion, at least of restraining vice and profaneness, in those under their command, if they would but improve it. Observe, When this centurion was to choose some of his soldiers to attend his person, and to be always about him, he pitched upon such of them as were devout; they shall be preferred and countenanced, to encourage others to be so; he went by David's rule, (*Ps. 101. 6.*) *Mine eye shall be upon the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me.*

3. What instructions he gave them; (*v. 8.*) he declared all these things unto them, told them of the vision he had, and the orders given him to send for Peter, because Peter's coming was a thing in which they were concerned, for they had souls to save as well as he. Therefore he does not only tell them where to find Peter, (which he might have thought it enough to do, the servant knows not what his Lord doeth,) but he tells them on what errand he was to come, that they might importune him.

9. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the house-top to pray about the sixth hour: 10. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12. Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16. This was done thrice: and the

vessel was received up again into heaven. 17. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

Cornelius had received positive orders from heaven to send for Peter, whom otherwise he had not heard of, or at least not heeded; but here is another difficulty that lies in the way of bringing them together—the question is, whether Peter will come to Cornelius when he is sent for; not as if he thinks it below him to come at a beck, or as if he is afraid to preach his doctrine to a polite man as Cornelius was: but it sticks at a point of conscience. Cornelius is a very worthy man, and has many good qualities, but he is a Gentile, he is not circumcised; and because God in his law had forbidden his people to associate with idolatrous nations, they would not keep company with any but those of their own religion, though they were ever so deserving; and they carried the matter so far, that they made even the involuntary touch of a Gentile to contract a ceremonial pollution, John 18. 28. Peter had not got over this stingy bigoted notion of his countrymen, and therefore will be shy of coming to Cornelius. Now, to remove this difficulty he has a vision here, to prepare him to receive the message sent him by Cornelius, as Ananias had to prepare him to go to Paul. The scriptures of the Old Testament had spoken plainly of the bringing in of the Gentiles into the church; Christ had given plain intimations of it, when he ordered them to *teach all nations*; and yet even Peter himself, who knew so much of his Master's mind, cannot understand it, till it was here revealed by vision, *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs*, Eph. 3. 6. Now here observe,

I. The circumstances of this vision.

1. It was when the messengers sent from Cornelius were now *nigh the city*, v. 9. Peter knew nothing of their approach, and they knew nothing of his praying; but he that knew both him and them, was preparing things for the interview, and facilitating the end of their negotiation. To all God's purposes *there is a time*, a proper time; and he is pleased often to bring things to the minds of his ministers, which they had not thought of, just then when they have occasion to use them.

2. It was when *Peter went up upon the house-top to pray*, about noon. (1.) Peter was much in prayer, much in secret prayer, though he had a great deal of public work upon his hands. (2.) He prayed *about the sixth hour*, according to David's example, who, not only *morning and evening*, but *at noon*, addressed himself to God by prayer, Ps. 55. 17. From morning to night we should think to be too long to be without meat; yet who thinks it is too long to be without prayer? (3.) He prayed *upon the house-top*; thither he retired for privacy, where he could neither hear nor be heard, and so might avoid both distraction and ostentation. There, upon the roof of the house, he had a full view of the heavens, which might assist his pious adoration of the God he prayed to; and there he had also a full view of the city and country, which might assist his pious compassion of the people he prayed for. (4.) He had this vision immediately after he had prayed, as an answer to his prayer for the spreading of the gospel; and because the ascent of the heart to God in prayer is an excellent preparative to receive the discoveries of the divine grace and favour.

3. It was when he became *very hungry*, and was waiting for his dinner; (v. 10.) probably, he had not eaten before that day, though doubtless he had prayed before; and now he *would have eaten*, *ἤθελε γαστρεσθαι*—*he would have tasted*, which intimates his great moderation and temperance in eating; when he was very hungry, yet he would be content with a little, with a taste, and would not *fly upon the spoil*. Now this hunger was a proper inlet to the vision about meats, as Christ's hunger in the wilderness was to Satan's temptation to turn stones into bread.

II. The vision itself, which was not so plain as that to Cornelius, but more figurative and enigmatical, to make the deeper impression.

1. He *fell into a trance or ecstasy*, not of terror, but of contemplation, with which he was so entirely swallowed up as not only not to be regardful, but not to be sensible, of external things; he quite lost himself to this world, and so had his mind entirely free for converse with divine things; as Adam in innocence, when the deep sleep fell upon him. The more clear we get of the world, the more near we get to heaven: whether Peter was now *in the body or out of the body*, he could not himself tell, much less can we, 2 Cor. 12. 2, 3. See Gen. 15. 12. Acts 22. 17.

2. He saw *heaven opened*; that he might be sure that his authority to go to *Cornelius was indeed from heaven*; that it was a divine light which altered his sentiments, and a divine power which gave him his commission. The opening of the heavens signified the opening of a mystery that had been hid, Rom. 16. 25.

3. He saw *a great sheet full of all manner of living creatures, which descended from heaven*, and was *let down to him, to the earth*, that is, to the roof of the house where he now was. Here were not only *beasts of the earth*, but fowls of the air, which might have flown away, laid at his feet; and not only tame beasts, but wild. Here were no *fishes of the sea*, because there were none of them in particular unclean, but whatever had fins and scales were allowed to be eaten. Some make this sheet, thus filled, to represent the church of Christ. It comes down from heaven, from heaven opened, not only to send it down, (Rev. 21. 2.) but to receive souls sent up from it; it is *knit at the four corners*, to receive those from all parts of the world, that are willing to be added to it; and to retain and keep those safe, that are taken into it, that they may not fall out; and in this we find some of all countries, nations, and languages, without any distinction of Greek or Jew, or any disadvantage put upon Barbarian or Scythian, Col. 3. 11. The net of the gospel incloses all, both bad and good; those that before were clean, and unclean. Or, it may be applied to the bounty of the Divine Providence, which, antecedently to the prohibitions of the ceremonial law, had given to man a liberty to use all the creatures, to which by the cancelling of that law we are now restored. By this vision we are taught to see all the benefit and service we have from the inferior creatures coming down to us from heaven: it is the gift of God who made them, made them fit for us, and then gave to man a right to them, and dominion over them. Lord, what is man that he should be thus magnified! Ps. 8. 4—8. How should it double our comfort in the creatures, and our obligations to serve God in the use of them, to see them thus *let down to us out of heaven*!

4. Peter was ordered by a voice from heaven to make use of this plenty and variety which God had sent him; (v. 13.) "*Rise, Peter, kill, and eat*; without putting any difference between clean and unclean, take which thou hast most mind to." The distinction of meats which the law made, was in

tended to put a difference between Jew and Gentile, that it might be difficult to them to dine and sup with a Gentile, because they would have that set before them, which they were not allowed to eat; and now the taking off of that prohibition was a plain allowance to converse with the Gentiles, and to be free and familiar with them; now they might fare as they fared, and therefore might eat with them, and be fellow-commoners with them.

5. Peter stuck to his principles, and would by no means hearken to the motion, though he was hungry; (v. 14.) *Not so, Lord.* Though hunger will break through stone-walls, God's laws should be to us a stronger fence than stone-walls, and not so easily broken through. And he will adhere to God's laws, though he had a countermand by a voice from heaven, not knowing at first but that *Kill, and eat*, was a command of trial whether he would adhere to the more sure word, the written law; and if so his answer had been very good, *Not so, Lord.* Temptations to eat forbidden fruit must not be parleyed with, but peremptorily rejected; we must startle at the thought of it, *Not so, Lord.* The reason he gives, is, "*For I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean; hitherto I have kept my integrity in this matter, and will still keep it.*" If God, by his grace, has preserved us from gross sin unto this day, we should use that as an argument with ourselves to abstain from all appearance of evil. So strict were the pious Jews in this matter, that the seven brethren, those glorious martyrs under Antiochus, chose rather to be tortured to death in the most cruel manner that ever was, than to eat swine's flesh, because it was forbidden by the law. No wonder then that Peter says it with so much pleasure, that his conscience could witness for him, that he had never gratified his appetite with any forbidden food.

6. God, by a second voice from heaven, proclaimed the repeal of the law in this case; (v. 16.) *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* He that made the law, might alter it when he pleased, and reduce the matter to its first state. God had, for reasons suited to the Old Testament dispensation, restrained the Jews from eating such and such meats, which, while that dispensation lasted, they were obliged in conscience to submit to; but he has now, for reasons suited to the New Testament dispensation, taken off that restraint, and set the matter at large, *has cleansed* that which was before polluted to us, and we ought to make use of, and stand fast in, the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and not call that common or unclean, which God has now declared clean. Note, We ought to welcome it as a great mercy, that by the gospel of Christ we are freed from the distinction of meats, which was made by the law of Moses, and that now every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused; not so much because hereby we gain the use of swine's flesh, hares, rabbits, and other pleasant and wholesome food for our bodies, but chiefly because conscience is hereby freed from a yoke in things of this nature, that we might serve God without fear. Though the gospel has made duties which were not so by the law of nature, yet it has not, like the law of Moses, made sins that were not so. Those who command to abstain from some kinds of meat, at some times of the year, and place religion in it, call that common which God hath cleansed, and, in that error, more than in any truth, are the successors of Peter.

7. This was done thrice, v. 16. The sheet was drawn up a little way, and let down again the second time, and so the third time, with the same call to him, to kill, and eat, and the same reason, that what God hath cleansed, we must not call common; but, whether Peter's refusal was repeated the se-

cond and third time, is not certain; surely it was not, when his objection had the first time received such a satisfactory answer. The doubling of Pharaoh's dream, and so the trebling of Peter's vision, were to shew that the thing was certain, and engage him to take so much the more notice of it. The instructions given us in the things of God, whether by the ear in the preaching of the word, or by the eye in sacraments, need to be often repeated; *precept must be upon precept, and line upon line.* But at last the vessel was received up into heaven. Those who make this vessel to represent the church, including both Jews and Gentiles, as this did both clean and unclean creatures, make this very aptly to signify the admission of the believing Gentiles into the church, and into heaven too, into the Jerusalem above. Christ has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and there we shall find, beside those that are sealed out of all the tribes of Israel, an innumerable company out of every nation; (Rev. 7. 9.) but they are such as God has cleansed.

III. The providence which very opportunely explained this vision, and gave Peter to understand the intention of it, v. 17, 18.

1. What Christ did, Peter knew not just then; (John 13. 7.) he doubted within himself what this vision which he had seen should mean; he had no reason to doubt the truth of it, that it was a heavenly vision, all his doubt was concerning the meaning of it. Note, Christ reveals himself to his people by degrees, and not all at once; and leaves them to doubt a while, to ruminate upon a thing, and debate it to and fro in their own minds, before he clears it up to them.

2. Yet he was made to know presently, for the men which were sent from Cornelius were just now come to the house, and were at the gate inquiring whether Peter lodged there; and by their errand it will appear what was the meaning of this vision. Note, God knows what services are before us, and therefore how to prepare us; and we then better know the meaning of what he has taught us, when we find what occasion we have to make use of it.

19. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. 21. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherfore ye are come? 22. And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. 23. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24. And the morrow after they entered into Cesarea: and Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. 25. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. 26. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. 27. And as he

talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. 28. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? 30. And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31. And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of *one* Simon a tanner by the sea-side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. 33. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

We have here the meeting between Peter the apostle, and Cornelius the centurion. Though Paul was designed to be the apostle of the Gentiles, and to gather in the harvest among them, and Peter to be the apostle of the circumcision, yet it is ordered that Peter shall break the ice, and reap the first-fruits of the Gentiles, that the believing Jews, who retained too much of the old leaven of ill-will to the Gentiles, might be the better reconciled to their admission into the church, when they were first brought in by their own apostle, which Peter urgeth against those that would have imposed circumcision upon the Gentile converts, *ch. 15. 7.* *Ye know that God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel.* Now here,

I. Peter is directed by the Spirit to go along with Cornelius's messengers, (*v. 19, 20.*) and this is the exposition of the vision; now the riddle is unriddled. While Peter thought on the vision; he was musing upon it, and then it was opened to him. Note, Those that would be taught the things of God, must think on those things; those that would understand the scriptures, must meditate in them day and night. He was at a loss about it, and then had it explained; which encourages us, when we know not what to do, to have our eyes up unto God for direction. Observe,

1. Whence he had the direction. The Spirit said to him what he should do. It was not spoken to him by an angel, but spoken in him by the Spirit, secretly whispering it in his ear as it were, as God spake to Samuel, (*1 Sam. 9. 15.*) or impressing it powerfully upon his mind, so that he knew it to be a divine *afflatus* or inspiration, according to the promise, *John 16. 13.*

2. What the direction was. (1.) He is told, before any of the servants could come up to tell him, that *three men* below wanted to speak with him, (*v. 19.*) and he must arise from his musings, leave off thinking of the vision, and go down to them, *v. 20.* Those that are searching into the meaning of the

words of God, and the visions of the Almighty, should not be always poring, no, nor always praying, but should sometimes look abroad, look about them, and they may meet with that which will be of use to them in their inquiries; for the scripture is in the fulfilling every day.

(2.) He is ordered to go along with the messengers to Cornelius, though he was a Gentile, doubting nothing. He must not only go, but go cheerfully, without reluctance or hesitation, or any scruple concerning the lawfulness of it; not doubting whether he might go, no, nor whether he ought to go; for it was his duty; "Go with them, for I have sent them; and I will bear thee out in going along with them, however thou mayest be censured for it." Note, When we see our call clear to any service, we should not suffer ourselves to be perplexed with doubts and scruples concerning it, arising from former prejudices or prepossessions, or a fear of men's censure. *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind, and prove his own work.*

II. He receives both them and their message; *he went down to them, v. 21.* So far was he from going out of the way, or refusing to be spoken with, as one that was shy of them, or making them tarry, as one that took state upon him, that he went to them himself, told them he was the person they were inquiring for! And,

1. He favourably receives their message; with abundance of openness and condescension he asks, what their business is, what they have to say to him, *What is the cause wherefore ye are come?* and they tell him their errand; (*v. 22.*) "Cornelius, an officer of the Roman army, a very honest gentleman, and one who has more religion than most of his neighbours, who fears God above many, (*Neh. 7. 2.*) who, though he is not a Jew himself, has carried it so well, that he is of good report among all the people of the Jews, they will all give him a good word, for a conscientious, sober, charitable man, so that it will be no discredit to thee to be seen in his company; he was warned from God," *ἐξ ἐντολῆς Θεοῦ*—"he had an oracle from God, sent him by an angel," (*and the lively oracles of the law of Moses were given by the disposition of angels.*) "by which he was ordered to send for thee to his house, (where he is expecting thee, and ready to bid thee welcome,) and to hear words of thee: they know not what words, but they are such as he may hear from thee, and not from any one else so well." *Faith comes by hearing.* When Peter repeats this, he tells us more fully, they are words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved, *ch. 11. 14.* "Come to him, for an angel bid him send for thee: come to him, for he is ready to hear and receive the saving words thou hast to bring him."

2. He kindly entertained the messengers; (*v. 23.*) *He called them in, and lodged them.* He did not bid them go and refresh, and repose themselves in an inn at their own charge, but was himself at the charge of entertaining them in his own quarters. What was getting ready for him, (*v. 10.*) they should be welcome to share in; he little thought what company he should have when he bespoke his dinner, but God foresaw it. Note, It becomes christians and ministers to be hospitable, and ready, according as their ability is, and there is occasion for it, to entertain strangers. Peter lodged them, though they were Gentiles, to shew how readily he complied with the design of the vision in eating with Gentiles; for he immediately took them to eat with him. Though they were two of them servants, and the other a common soldier, yet Peter thought it not below him to take them into his house. Probably, he did it, that he might have some talk with them about Cornelius and his family; for the apostles, though they had instructions from the Spirit, yet

made use of other informations, as they had occasion for them.

III. He went with them to Cornelius, whom he found ready to receive and entertain him.

1. Peter, when he went with them, was accompanied by certain brethren from Joppa, where he now was, *v. 23.* Six of them went along with him, as we find, *ch. 11. 12.* Either Peter desired their company, that they might be witnesses of his proceeding cautiously with reference to the Gentiles, and of the good ground on which he went, and therefore he vouches them; (*ch. 11. 12.*) or they offered their service to attend him, and desired they might have the honour and happiness of being his fellow-travellers. This was one way in which the primitive christians very much shewed their respect to their ministers, they accompanied them in their journeys, to keep them in countenance, to be their guard, and, as there was occasion, to minister to them; with a further prospect not only of doing them service, but of being edified by their converse. It is pity that those who have skill and will to do good to others by their discourse, should want an opportunity for it by travelling alone.

2. Cornelius, when he was ready to receive him, had got some friends together of Cesarea. It seems, it was above a day's journey, near two, from Joppa to Cesarea; for it was the day after they set out that they entered into Cesarea, (*v. 24.*) and the afternoon of that day, *v. 30.* It is probable that they travelled on foot; the apostles generally did so. Now when they came into the house of Cornelius, Peter found, (1.) That he was expected, and that was an encouragement to him. *Cornelius waited for them,* and such a guest was worth waiting for; nor can I blame him if he waited with some impatience, longing to know what that mighty thing was, which an angel bid him expect to hear from Peter. (2.) That he was expected by many, and that was a further encouragement to him. As Peter brought some with him to partake of the spiritual gift he had now to dispense, so *Cornelius had called together*, not only his own family, but his kinsmen, and near friends, to partake with him of the heavenly instructions he expected from Peter, which would give Peter a larger opportunity of doing good. Note, We should not covet to eat our spiritual morsels alone, *Job 31. 17.* It ought to be both given and taken as a piece of kindness and respect to our kindred and friends, to invite them to join with us in religious exercises, to go with us to hear a good sermon. What Cornelius ought to do, he thought his kinsmen and friends ought to do too; and therefore let them come and hear it at the first hand, that it may be no surprise to them to see him change upon it.

IV. Here is the first interview between Peter and Cornelius; in which we have,

1. The profound, and indeed undue respect and honour which Cornelius paid to Peter; (*v. 25.*) *He met him as he was coming in,* and, instead of taking him in his arms, and embracing him as a friend, which would have been very acceptable to Peter, *he fell down at his feet, and worshipped him;* some think, as a prince and a great man, according to the usage of the eastern countries; others think, as an incarnate deity, or as if he took him to be the Messiah himself. His worshipping a man was indeed culpable; but, considering his present ignorance, it was excusable, nay, and it was an evidence of something in him that was very commendable—and that was a great veneration for divine and heavenly things: no wonder if, till he was better informed, he took him to be the Messiah, and therefore worshipped him, whom he was ordered to send for by an angel from heaven. But the worshipping of his pretended successor, who is not only a man, but a

sinful man, the man of sin himself, is altogether in excusable, and such an absurdity as would be incredible, if we were not told before, that all the world would worship the beast, *Rev. 13. 4.*

2. Peter's modest, and indeed just and pious refusal of this honour that was done him; (*v. 26.*) *He took him up* into his arms, with his own hands, (though time was when he little thought he should ever either receive so much respect from, or shew so much affection to, an uncircumcised Gentile,) saying, "*Stand up, I myself also am a man,* and therefore not to be worshipped thus." The good angels of the churches, like the good angels of heaven, cannot bear to have the least of that honour shewn to them, which is due to God only. See thou do it not, saith the angel to John, (*Rev. 19. 10.—22. 9.*) and in like manner the apostle to Cornelius. How careful was Paul that no man should think of him above what he saw in him! *2 Cor. 12. 6.* Christ's faithful servants could better bear to be vilified than to be deified. Peter did not entertain a surmise that his great respect for him, though excessive, might contribute to the success of his preaching, and therefore, if he will be deceived let him be deceived; no, let him know that Peter is a man, that the treasure is in earthen vessels, that he may value the treasure for its own sake.

V. The account which Peter and Cornelius give to each other, and to the company, of the hand of Heaven in bringing them together; *As he talked with him—συνομιλῶν αὐτῷ, he went in, v. 27.* Peter went in, talking familiarly with Cornelius; endeavouring, by the freedom of his converse with him, to take off something of that dread which he seemed to have of him; and when he came in he found many that were come together, more than he expected; which added solemnity, as well as opportunity of doing good to this service. Now,

1. Peter declares the direction God gave to him to come to those Gentiles, *v. 28, 29.* They knew it had never been allowed by the Jews, but always looked upon as an unlawful thing—ἀνόμιον—"an abomination," for a man that is a Jew, a native Jew as I am, to keep company; or come unto one of another nation, a stranger, an uncircumcised Gentile. It was not made so by the law of God, but by the decree of their wise men, which they looked upon to be no less obliging. They did not forbid them to converse or traffic with Gentiles in the street or shop, or upon the exchange, but to eat with them. Even in Joseph's time, the Egyptians and Hebrews could not eat together, *Gen. 43. 32.* The three children would not defile themselves with the king's meat, *Dan. 1. 8.* They might not come into the house of a Gentile, for they looked upon it to be ceremonially polluted. Thus scornfully did the Jews look upon the Gentiles, who were not behindhand with them in contempt, as appears by many passages in the Latin poets. "*But now,*" saith Peter, "*God hath shewed me,* by a vision, that I should not call any man common or unclean, nor refuse to converse with any man for the sake of his country." Peter, who had taught his new converts to save themselves from the untoward generation of wicked men, (*ch. 2. 40.*) is now himself taught to join himself with the towardly generation of devout Gentiles. Ceremonial characters were abolished, that more regard might be had to moral ones. Peter thought it necessary to let them know how he came to change his mind in this matter, and that it was by a divine revelation, lest he should be upbraided with it as having used lightness.

God having thus taken down the partition-wall,

(1.) He assures them of his readiness to do them all the good offices he could; that, when he kept at a distance, it was not out of any personal disgust to them, but only because he wanted leave from Hea

ven, which now that he had received, he was at their service ; “ *Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for ; ready to preach the same gospel to you that I have preached to the Jews.* ” The disciples of Christ could not but have some notion of the *preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles*, but they imagined it must be only to those Gentiles that were first proselyted to the Jewish religion ; which mistake Peter acknowledges was now rectified.

(2.) He inquires wherein he might be serviceable to them ; “ *I ask therefore, for what intent ye have sent for me ? What do ye expect from me, or what business have ye with me ?* ” Note, Those that desire the help of God’s ministers, ought to look well to it that they propose right ends to themselves in it, and do it with a good intent.

2. Cornelius declares the directions God gave to him to send for Peter, and that it was purely in obedience to those directions that he had sent for him. *Then we are right in our aims in sending for, and attending on a gospel-ministry, when we do it with a regard to the divine appointment instituting that ordinance, and requiring us to make use of it.* Now,

(1.) Cornelius gives an account of the angel’s appearing to him, and ordering him to send for Peter ; not as glorying in it, but as that which warranted his expectation of a message from heaven by Peter.

[1.] He tells how this vision found him employed ; (v. 30.) *Four days ago I was fasting until this hour*, this hour of the day that it is now when Peter came, about the middle of the afternoon. By this it appears that religious fasting, in order to the greater seriousness and solemnity of praying, was used by devout people that were not Jews ; the king of Nineveh proclaimed a fast, Jonah 3. 5. Some give these words another sense. *From four days ago I have been fasting until this hour ;* as if he had eaten no meat, or at least no meal, from that time to this. But it comes in as an introduction to the story of the vision ; and therefore the former must be the meaning. *He was at the ninth hour praying in his house*, not in the synagogue, but at home. *I will that men pray*, wherever they dwell. His praying in his house intimates that it was not a secret prayer in his closet, but in a more public room of his house, with his family about him ; and perhaps after prayer he retired, and had this vision. Observe, *At the ninth hour of the day*, three of the clock in the afternoon, most people were travelling or trading, working in the fields, visiting their friends, taking their pleasure, or taking a nap after dinner ; yet then Cornelius was at his devotions ; which shews how much he made religion his business ; and then it was that he had this message from heaven. Those that would hear comfortably from God, must be much in speaking to him.

[2.] He describes the messenger that brought him this message from heaven ; *There stood a man before me in bright clothing ;* such as Christ’s was when he was transfigured, and that of the two angels who appeared at Christ’s resurrection, (Luke 24. 4.) and at his ascension, (ch. 1. 10.) shewing their relation to the world of light.

[3.] He repeats the message that was sent him, (v. 31, 32.) just as we had it, v. 4—6. Only here it is said, *Thy prayer is heard.* We are not told what his prayer was ; but if this message was an answer to it, and it should seem it was, we may suppose that finding the deficiency of natural light, and that it left him at a loss how to obtain the pardon of his sin, and the favour of God, he prayed that God would make some further discoveries of himself to him, and of the way of salvation. “ *Well,* ” saith the angel, “ *send for Peter*, and he shall give thee such a discovery.”

(2.) He declares his own and his friends’ readi-

ness to receive the message he had to deliver ; (v. 33.) *Immediately therefore I sent to thee*, as I was directed, and thou hast well done that thou hast come to us, though we are Gentiles. Note, Faithful ministers do well to come to people that are willing and desirous to receive instruction from them ; to come when they are sent for ; it is as good a deed as they can do.

Well, Peter is come to do his part ; but will they do theirs ? Yes. Thou art here prepared to speak, and we are here prepared to hear, 1 Sam. 3: 9, 10. Observe,

[1.] Their religious attendance upon the word ; “ *We are all here present before God ;* we are here in a religious manner, are here as worshippers ; ” (they thus compose themselves into a serious, awful frame of spirit ;) “ *therefore*, because thou art come to us by such a warrant, on such an errand, because we have such a price in our hand as we never had before, and perhaps may never have again, we are ready now at this time of worship, here in this place of worship ; ” (though it was in a private house ;) “ *we are present*, *παρουσμεν*—we are at the business, and are ready to come at a call.” If we would have God’s special presence at an ordinance, we must be there with a special presence, an ordinance presence ; *Here I am.* “ *We are all present*, all that were invited ; we, and all that belong to us ; we, and all that is within us.” The whole of the man must be present ; not the body here, and the heart, with the fool’s eyes, in the ends of the earth. But that which makes it indeed a religious attendance, is, *We are present before God.* In holy ordinances we present ourselves unto the Lord, and we must be as before him, as those that see his eye upon us.

[2.] The intention of this attendance ; “ *We are present to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*, and given thee in charge to be delivered to us.” Observe, *First*, Peter was there to preach *all things that were commanded him of God* ; for as he had an ample commission to preach the gospel, so he had full instructions what to preach. *Secondly*, They were ready to hear, not whatever he pleased to say, but what he was commanded of God to say. The truths of Christ were not communicated to the apostles to be published or stifled as they thought fit, but intrusted with them to be published to the world. “ *We are ready to hear all*, to come at the beginning of the service, and stay to the end, and be attentive all the while, else how can we hear all ? We are desirous to hear *all* that thou art commissioned to preach, though it be ever so displeasing to flesh and blood, and ever so contrary to our former notions or present secular interests. We are ready to hear all, and therefore let nothing be kept back, that is profitable for us.”

34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons : 35. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. 36. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ : (he is Lord of all :) 37. That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ; 38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power : who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him. 39. And we are witnesses of

all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: 40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; 41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. 42. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead. 43. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

We have here Peter's sermon preached to Cornelius and his friends: that is, an abstract or summary of it; for we have reason to think that *he did with many other words testify and exhort* to this purport. It is intimated, that he delivered himself with a great deal of solemnity and gravity, but with freedom and copiousness, in that phrase, *that he opened his mouth and spake*, v. 34. *O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open to you*, saith Paul, 2 Cor. 6. 11. "You shall find us communicative, if we but find you inquisitive." Hitherto the mouths of the apostles had been shut to the uncircumcised Gentiles, they had nothing to say to them; but now God gave unto them, as he did to Ezekiel, *the opening of the mouth*.

This excellent sermon of Peter's is admirably suited to the circumstances of those to whom he preached it; for it was a new sermon.

I. Because they were Gentiles to whom he preached; he shews that, notwithstanding that, they were interested in the gospel of Christ, which he had to preach, and entitled to the benefit of it, upon an equal foot with the Jews. It was necessary that this should be cleared, or else with what comfort could either he preach or they hear? He therefore lays down this as an undoubted principle, *that God is no respecter of persons; doth not know favour in judgment*, as the Hebrew phrase is; which magistrates are forbidden to do, (Deut. 1. 17.—16. 19. Prov. 24. 23.) and are blamed for doing, Ps. 82. 2. And it is often said of God, *that he doth not respect persons*, Deut. 10. 17. 2 Chron. 19. 7. Job 34. 19. Rom. 2. 11. Col. 3. 25. 1 Pet. 1. 17. He doth not give judgment in favour of a man, for the sake of any external advantage foreign to the merits of the cause. God never perverts judgment upon personal regards and considerations, nor countenances a wicked man in a wicked thing, for the sake of his beauty, or stature, his country, parentage, relations, wealth or honour in the world. God, as a Benefactor, gives favours arbitrarily and by sovereignty, (Deut. 7. 7, 8.—9. 5, 6. Matt. 20. 10.) but he does not, as a Judge, so give sentence; *but in every nation*, and under every denomination, *he that fears God, and works righteousness is accepted of him*, v. 35.

The case is plainly thus:

1. God never did, nor ever will, justify and save a wicked Jew that lived and died impenitent, though he was of the seed of Abraham, and a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and had all the honour and advantages ~~as~~ attended circumcision. He does and will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; and of the Jew first; whose privileges and professions, instead of screening him from the judgment of God, will but aggravate his guilt and condemnation. See Rom. 2. 3, 8, 9, 17. Though God has favoured the Jews, above other nations, with the dignities of visible

church-membership, yet he will not therefore accept of any particular persons of that dignity, if they allow themselves in immoralities contradictory to their profession; and particularly in persecution, which was now, more than any other, the national sin of the Jews.

2. He never did, nor ever will, reject or refuse an honest Gentile, who, though he has not the privileges and advantages that the Jews have, yet, like Cornelius, fears God, and worships him, and *works righteousness*, is just and charitable towards all men, who lives up to the light he has, both in a sincere devotion, and in a regular conversation, whatever nation he is of, though ever so far remote from kindred to the seed of Abraham; though ever so despicable, nay though in ever so ill a name, that shall be no prejudice to him. God judges of men by their hearts, not by their country or parentage; and wherever he finds an upright man, he will be found an *upright God*, Ps. 18. 25. Observe, *Fearing God, and working righteousness*, must go together; for as *righteousness* toward men is a branch of true religion, so religion toward God is a branch of universal *righteousness*. Godliness and honesty must go together, and neither will excuse for the want of the other. But where these are predominant, no doubt is to be made of acceptance with God. Not that any man, since the fall, can obtain the favour of God, otherwise than through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and by the grace of God in him; but those that have not the knowledge of him, and therefore cannot have an explicit regard to him, may yet receive grace from God for his sake, *to fear God, and to work righteousness*; and wherever God gives grace to do so, as he did to Cornelius, he will, through Christ *accept the work of his own hands*.

Now, (1.) This was always a truth, before Peter perceived it, *that God respecteth no man's person*; it was the fixed rule of judgment from the beginning; *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if not well, sin, and the punishment of it, lies at the door*, Gen. 4. 7. God will not ask in the great day what country men were of, but what they were, what they did, and how they stood affected toward him and toward their neighbours; and if men's personal characters received neither advantage nor disadvantage from the great difference that was between Jews and Gentiles, much less from any lesser difference of sentiments and practices that may happen to be among Christians themselves, as those *about meats and days*, Rom. 14. It is certain, *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*; and he that in these things serveth Christ, is accepted of God, and ought to be approved of men; for dare we reject those whom God doth not?

(2.) Yet now it was made more clear than it had been; this great truth had been darkened by the covenant of peculiarity made with Israel, and the badges of distinction put upon them; the ceremonial law was a wall of partition between them and other nations; in it, it was true *that God favoured that nation*, (Rom. 3. 1, 2.—9. 4.) and from thence particular persons among them were ready to infer, that they were sure of God's acceptance, though they lived as they listed; and that no Gentile could possibly be *accepted of God*. God had said a great deal by the prophets to prevent and rectify this mistake, but now at length he doth it effectually, by abolishing the covenant of peculiarity, and repealing the ceremonial law, and so setting the matter at large, and both Jew and Gentile upon the same level before God; and Peter is here made to perceive it, by comparing the vision which he had with that which Cornelius had. Now in *Christ Jesus*, it is plain, *neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision*, Gal. 5. 6. Col. 3. 11.

II. Because they were Gentiles inhabiting a place within the confines of the land of Israel, he refers them to what they themselves could not but know concerning the life and doctrine, the preaching and miracles, the death and sufferings of our Lord Jesus; for these were things the report of which spread into every corner of the nation, *v. 37, &c.* It facilitates the work of ministers, when they deal with such as have some knowledge of the things of God, to which they may appeal, and on which they may build.

1. They knew in general *the word*, that is, the gospel, *which God sent to the children of Israel.* That word, *I say, ye know, v. 37.* Though the Gentiles were not admitted to hear it, (Christ and his disciples were *not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,*) yet they could not but hear of it, it was all the talk both of city and country. We are often told in the gospels, how *the fame of Christ went into all parts of Canaan*, when he was on earth, as afterward *the fame of his gospel went into all parts of the world*, Rom. 10. 18. That word, that divine word, that word of power and grace, *you know.* (1.) What the purport of this word was. God by it *published the good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ*, so it should be read; *ἡ ἀγαθήν τιναν τιναν τιναν*. It is God himself that proclaims peace, who justly might have proclaimed war; he lets the world of mankind know that he is willing to be at peace with them through Jesus Christ; in him he was *reconciling the world to himself.* (2.) To whom it was sent; to the children of Israel, in the first place, the prime offer is made to them; this all their neighbours heard of, and were ready to envy them those advantages of the gospel, more than they ever envied them those of their law. *Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them*, Ps. 126. 3.

2. They knew the several matters of fact relating to this word of the gospel sent to Israel.

(1.) They knew the baptism of repentance which John preached by way of introduction to it, and in which the gospel first began, Mark 1. 1. They knew what an extraordinary man John was, and what a direct tendency his preaching had to *fireproof the way of the Lord.* They knew what great flocking there was to his baptism, what an interest he had, and what he did.

(2.) They knew that immediately after John's baptism the gospel of Christ, that word of peace, *was published throughout all Judea*, and that it took rise from Galilee. The twelve apostles, and seventy disciples, and our Master himself, published these glad tidings in all parts of the land; so that we may suppose there was not a town or village in all the *land of Canaan*, but had had the gospel preached in it.

(3.) They knew that *Jesus of Nazareth*, when he was here upon earth, *went about doing good.* They knew what a Benefactor he was to that nation, both to the souls and the bodies of men; how he made it his business to do good to all, and never did hurt to any. He was not idle, but still doing; not selfish, but doing good; did not confine himself to one place; nor wait till people came to him to seek his help; but he went to them, went about from place to place, and wherever he came he was doing good. Hereby he shewed *that he was sent of God, who is good and doeth good; and therefore doeth good*, because he is good; and who hereby *left not himself without witness to the world, in that he did good, ch. 14. 17.* And in this he hath set us an example of indefatigable industry in serving God and our generation; for *therefore we came into the world, that we may do all the good we can in it; and therein, like Christ, we must always abide and abound.*

(4.) They knew more particularly that he *healed*

all that were oppressed of the devil, and helped them from under his oppressing power: by this it appeared not only that he was sent of God, as it was a kindness to men; but that he was sent to *destroy the works of the devil*; for thus he obtained many a victory over him.

(3.) They knew that the Jews put him to death; they *slew him by hanging him on a tree.* When Peter preached to the Jews, he said, *whom ye slew*; but now that he preached to the Gentiles, it is whom *they slew*; they to whom he had done and designed so much good.

All this they knew; but lest they should think it was only a report, and was magnified, as reports usually are, more than the truth; Peter, for himself and the rest of the apostles, attests it; (*v. 39.*) *We are witnesses, eye-witnesses, of all things which he did*; and ear-witnesses of the doctrine which he preached, *both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, in city and country.*

3. They did know, or might know, by all this, that he had a commission from heaven to preach and act as he did. This he still harps upon in his discourse, and takes all occasions to hint it to them. Let them know,

(1.) That this Jesus is *Lord of all*; it comes in in a parenthesis, but is the principal proposition intended to be proved, that Jesus Christ, by whom peace is made between God and man, is *Lord of all*; not only as *God over all blessed for evermore*, but as Mediator, *all power both in heaven and in earth* is put into his hand, and all judgment committed to him. He is Lord of angels, they are all his humble servants. He is Lord of the powers of darkness, for he hath triumphed over them. He is King of nations, has a power over all flesh; he is King of saints, all the children of God are his scholars, his subjects, his soldiers.

(2.) That *God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power*, he was both authorized and enabled to do what he did by a divine anointing; whence he was called *Christ—the Messiah—the Anointed One.* The Holy Ghost descended upon him at his baptism, and he was full of power both in preaching and working miracles, which was the seal of a divine mission.

(3.) That *God was with him, v. 38.* His works were wrought in God; God not only sent him, but was present with him all along, owned him, stood by him, and carried him on in all his services and sufferings. Note, Those whom God anoints he will accompany; he will himself be with those to whom he has given his Spirit.

III. Because they had heard no more for certain concerning this Jesus, Peter declares to them his resurrection from the dead, and the proofs of it, that they might not think that when he was slain there was an end of him.

Probably, they had heard at Cesarea some talk of his being risen from the dead; but the talk of it was soon silenced by that vile suggestion of the Jews, that *his disciples came by night and stole him away.* And therefore Peter insists upon this as the main support of that word which preacheth peace by Jesus Christ.

1. The power by which he rose, is incontestably divine, (*v. 40.*) *Him God raised up the third day*; which not only disproved all the calumnies and accusations he was laid under by men, but effectually proved God's acceptance of the satisfaction he made for the sin of man by the blood of his cross. He did not break prison, but had a legal discharge. *God raised him up.*

2. The proofs of his resurrection were incontestably clear; for *God shewed him openly.* He gave him to be made manifest—*ἵνακεν ὁυτον ἐμσαφηνῇ τοῖς ἄλλοις*, to be visible, evidently so; so he appears, as that it

appears beyond contradiction to be He, and not another. It was such a shewing of him as amounted to a demonstration of the truth of his resurrection. He shewed him not publicly indeed, (it was not open in that sense,) but evidently; *not to all the people*, who had been the witnesses of his death; by resisting all the evidences he had given them of his divine mission in his miracles, they had forfeited the favour of being eye-witnesses of this great proof of it; they who immediately forged and promoted that lie of his being stolen away, were justly *given up to strong delusions* to believe it, and not suffered to be undeceived by his being shewn to all the people; and so much the greater shall be the blessedness of those who *have not seen, and yet have believed*. *Nec ille se in vulgus edixit, ne inquit errore, liberarentur; ut et fides non præmio mediocri destituta difficultate constaret—He shewed not himself to the people at large, lest the iniquity among them should have been forthwith loosed from their error, and that faith, the reward of which is so ample, might be exercised with a degree of difficulty.* Tertulliani Apologia, cap. 11. But though all the people did not see him, a sufficient number saw him, to attest the truth of his resurrection; the testator's declaring his last will and testament needs not to be before all the people, it is enough that it be done before a competent number of credible witnesses; so the resurrection of Christ was proved before sufficient witnesses. (1.) They were not so by *chance*, but they were *chosen before of God to be witnesses* of it, and, in order to that, had their education under the Lord Jesus, and intimate converse with him; that, having known him so intimately before, they might the better be assured it was he. (2.) They had not a sudden and transient view of him, but a great deal of free conversation with him; they did *eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead*. This implies that they saw him eat and drink, witness their dining with him at the sea of Tiberias, and the two disciples supping with him at Emmaus; and this proved that he had a true and real body. But this was not all, they saw him without any terror or consternation, which might have rendered them incompetent witnesses, for they saw him so frequently, and he conversed with them so familiarly, that *they did eat and drink with him*. It is brought as a proof of the clear view which the nobles of Israel had of the glory of God, (Exod. 24. 11.) that *they saw God, and did eat and drink*.

IV. He concludes with an inference from all this, that therefore that which they all ought to do, was, to believe in this Jesus: he was sent to tell Cornelius what he must do, and this is it; his praying and his giving alms were very well, but one thing he lacked, he must *believe in Christ*. Observe,

1. Why he must believe in him; faith has reference to a testimony, and the christian faith is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, it is built upon the testimony given by them.

(1.) By the apostles. Peter as foreman speaks for the rest, that *God commanded them, and gave them in charge to preach to the people, and to testify concerning Christ*; so that their testimony was not only credible, but authentic, and what we may venture upon. Their testimony is God's testimony; and they are his witnesses to the world; they do not only say it as matter of news, but testify it as matter of record, by which men must be judged.

(2.) By the prophets of the Old Testament; whose testimony beforehand, not only concerning his sufferings, but concerning the design and intention of them, very much corroborates the apostles' testimony concerning them; (v. 43.) *To him give all the prophets witness*. We have reason to think that Cornelius and his friends were no strangers to the writings of the prophets. Out of the mouth of

these two clouds of witnesses, so exactly agreeing, *this word is established*.

2. What they must believe concerning him.

(1.) That we are all accountable to Christ as our Judge; this the apostles were commanded to testify to the world; that this Jesus is *ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and dead*, v. 42. He is empowered to prescribe the terms of salvation, that rule by which we must be judged; to give laws both to *quick and dead*, both to Jew and Gentile; and he is appointed to determine the everlasting condition of all the children of men at the great day; of those that shall be found alive, and of those that shall be raised from the dead. He hath assured us of this, *in that he hath raised him from the dead*, (ch. 17. 31.) so that it is the great concern of every one of us, in the belief of this, to seek his favour, and to make him our Friend.

(2.) That if we believe in him, we shall all be justified by him as our Righteousness, v. 43. The prophets, when they spake of the death of Christ, did witness this, *that through his name, for his sake, and upon the account of his merit, whosoever believeth in him, Jew or Gentile, shall receive remission of sins*. That is the great thing we need, without which we are undone, and which the convinced conscience is most inquisitive after, which the carnal Jews promised themselves from their ceremonial sacrifices and purifications, yea, and the heathen too from their atonements, but all in vain; it is to be had only *through the name of Christ*, and only by those that *believe* in his name; and they that do so, may be assured of it; their sins shall be pardoned, and there shall be no condemnation to them. And the remission of sins lays a foundation for all other favours and blessings, by taking that out of the way, that hinders them. If sin be pardoned, all is well, and shall end everlastingly well.

44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47. Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

We have here the issue and effect of Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his friends. He did not labour in vain among them, but they were all brought home to Christ. Here we have,

I. God's owning of Peter's word, by conferring the Holy Ghost upon the hearers of it, and immediately upon the hearing of it; (v. 44.) *While Peter was yet speaking these words, and perhaps designed to say more, he was happily superseded by visible indications that the Holy Ghost, even in his miraculous gifts and powers, fell on all them which heard the word*, even as he did on the apostles at first; so Peter saith, ch. 11. 15. Therefore some think it was with a *rushing mighty wind, and in cloven tongues*, as that was. Observe,

1. When the Holy Ghost fell upon them; while Peter was preaching. Thus God bare witness to what he said, and accompanied it with a divine power. Thus were the *signs of an apostle wrought*

among them, 2 Cor. 12. 12. Though Peter could not give the Holy Ghost, yet the Holy Ghost being given along with the word of Peter, by that it appeared he was sent of God. The Holy Ghost fell upon others after they were baptized, for their confirmation; but upon these Gentiles before they were baptized: as Abraham was justified by faith, being yet in uncircumcision; to shew that God is not tied to a method, nor confines himself to external signs. The Holy Ghost fell upon those that were neither circumcised nor baptized; for *it is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.*

2. How it appeared that the Holy Ghost was fallen upon them; (*v. 46.*) *They spake with tongues* which they never learned, perhaps the Hebrew, the holy tongue; as the preachers were enabled to speak the vulgar tongues, that they might communicate the doctrine of Christ to the hearers, so, probably, the hearers were immediately taught the sacred tongue, that they might examine the proofs which the preachers produced out of the Old Testament in the original. Or, their being enabled to speak with tongues, intimated that they were all designed for ministers, and by this first descent of the Spirit upon them were qualified to preach the gospel to others, which they did but now receive themselves. But observe, when they spake with tongues, they *magnified God*, they spake of Christ and the benefits of redemption, which Peter had been preaching of to the glory of God. Thus did they on whom the Holy Ghost first descended, *ch. 2. 11.* Note, Whatever gift we are endued with, we ought to honour God with it, and particularly the gift of speaking, and all the improvements of it.

3. What impression it made upon the believing Jews that were present; (*v. 45.*) *They of the circumcision which believed, were astonished*; those six that came along with Peter; it surprised them exceedingly, and perhaps gave them some uneasiness, because that *upon the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost*, which they thought had been appropriated to their own nation. Had they understood the scriptures of the Old Testament, which pointed at this, it would not have been such an astonishment to them; but by our mistaken notions of things, we create difficulties to ourselves in the methods of divine providence and grace.

II. Peter's owning God's work in baptizing those on whom the Holy Ghost fell. Observe,

1. Though they had received the Holy Ghost, yet it was requisite they should be baptized; though God is not tied to instituted ordinances, we are; and no extraordinary gifts set us above them, but rather oblige us so much the more to conform to them. Some in our days would have argued, "These are baptized with the *Holy Ghost*, and therefore what need have they to be baptized with *water*? It is below them." No; it is not below them, while water-baptism is an ordinance of Christ, and the door of admission into the visible church, and a seal of the new covenant.

2. Though they were Gentiles, yet, having received the Holy Ghost, they might be admitted to baptism; (*v. 47.*) *Can any man, though ever so rigid a Jew, forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?* The argument is conclusive; can we deny the sign to those who have received the thing signified? Are not those on whom God has bestowed the grace of the covenant, plainly entitled to the seals of the covenant? Surely, they that have *received the Spirit as well as we*, ought to receive baptism as well as we; for it becomes us to follow God's indications, and to take those into communion with us, whom he hath taken into communion with himself. God hath promised to pour his Spirit upon the seed of the faithful, upon their offspring; and who

then can forbid water, that they should not be baptized, who have received the promise of the *Holy Ghost as well as we?* Now it appears why the Spirit was given them before they were baptized—because otherwise Peter could not have persuaded himself to baptize them, any more than to have preached to them, if he had not been ordered to do it by a vision; at least, he could not have avoided the censure of *those of the circumcision that believed.* Thus is there one unusual step of divine grace taken after another to bring the Gentiles into the church. How well is it for us that the grace of a good God is so much more extensive than the charity even of some good men!

3. Peter did not baptize them himself, but *commanded them to be baptized*, *v. 48.* It is probable that some of the brethren who came with him, did it by his order, and that he declined it for the same reason that Paul did—lest those that were baptized by him should think the better of themselves for it; or he should seem to *have baptized in his own name*, 1 Cor. 1. 15. The apostles received the commission to *go and disciple all nations by baptism.* But it was prayer and the ministry of the word that they were to *give* themselves to. And Paul says, that he was sent, not to *baptize*, but to *preach*; which was the more noble and excellent work. The business of baptizing was therefore ordinarily devolved upon the inferior ministers; these acted by the orders of the apostles, who might therefore be said to do it. *Qui per alterum facit, per seipsum facere dicitur—What a man does by another, he may be said to do by himself.*

Lastly, Their owning both Peter's word and God's work in their desire of further advantage by Peter's ministry; *They prayed him to tarry certain days.* They could not press him to reside constantly among them, they knew that he had work to do in other places, and that for the present he was expected at Jerusalem; yet they were not willing he should go away immediately, but earnestly begged he would stay for some time among them, that they might be further instructed by him in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Note, 1. Those who have some acquaintance with Christ, cannot but covet more. 2. Even those that have received the Holy Ghost, must see their need of the ministry of the word.

CHAP. XI.

In this chapter, we have, I. Peter's necessary vindication of what he did in receiving Cornelius and his friends into the church, from the censure he lay under for it among the brethren, and their acquiescence in it, *v. 1. . 18.* II. The good success of the gospel at Antioch, and the parts adjacent, *v. 19. . 21.* III. The carrying on of the good work that was begun at Antioch, by the ministry of Barnabas first, and afterward of Paul in conjunction with him, and the lasting name of Christian first given to the disciples there, *v. 22. . 26.* IV. A prediction of an approaching famine, and the contribution that was made among the Gentile converts for the relief of the poor saints in Judea, upon that occasion, *v. 27. . 30.*

1. **A**ND the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3. Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. 4. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, 5. I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel

descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6. Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 7. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. 8. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 9. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, *that call not thou common*. 10. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cesarea unto me. 12. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: 13. And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14. Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. 15. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

The preaching of the gospel to Cornelius, was a thing which we poor sinners of the Gentiles have reason to reflect upon with a great deal of joy and thankfulness; for it was the bringing of *light* to us who *sat in darkness*. Now it being so great a surprise to the believing as well as the unbelieving Jews, it is worth while to inquire how it took; and what comments were made upon it? And here we find,

I. Intelligence was presently brought of it to the church in Jerusalem, and thereabouts; for Cesarea was not so far from Jerusalem but that they might presently hear of it. Some for good-will, and some for ill-will, would spread the report of it; so that before he was himself returned to Jerusalem, *the apostles and the brethren there, and in Judea, heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God*, that is, the gospel of Christ; which is not only a word of God, but the word of God; for it is the summary and centre of all divine revelation. They received Christ; *for his name is called, the Word of God*, Rev. 19. 13. Not only that the Jews who were dispersed into the Gentile countries, and the Gentiles who were proselyted to the Jewish religion, but that

the Gentiles also themselves, with whom it had hitherto been thought unlawful to hold common conversation, were taken into church-communion, that they had *received the word of God*. That is,

1. That the word of God was preached to them; which was a greater honour put upon them than they expected. Yet I wonder this should seem strange to those who were themselves commissioned to *preach the gospel to every creature*. But thus often are the prejudices of pride and bigotry held fast against the clearest discoveries of divine truth.

2. That it was entertained and submitted to by them, which was a better work wrought upon them than they expected. It is likely they had got a notion, that if the gospel were preached to the Gentiles, it would be to no purpose, because the proofs of the gospel were fetched so much out of the Old Testament, which the Gentiles did not receive; they looked upon them as not inclined to religion, nor likely to receive the impressions of it; and therefore were surprised to hear that they had received the word of the Lord. Note, We are too apt to despair of doing good to those who yet, when they are tried, prove very tractable.

II. That offence was taken at it by the believing Jews; (v. 2, 3.) *When Peter was himself come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision, those Jewish converts that still retained a veneration for circumcision, contended with him, they charged it upon him as a crime, that he went in to men uncircumcised, and did eat with them*; and thereby they think he has stained, if not forfeited, the honour of his apostleship, and ought to come under the censure of the church: so far were they from looking upon him as infallible, or as the supreme head of the church that all were accountable to, and he to none. See here,

1. How much it is the bane and damage of the church, to monopolize it, and to exclude those from it, and from the benefit of the means of grace, that are not in every thing as we are. There are narrow souls that are for engrossing the riches of the church, as there are that would engross the riches of the world, and would be *placed alone in the midst of the earth*. These men were of Jonah's mind, who, in a jealousy for his people, was *angry that the Ninevites received the word of God*, and justified himself in it.

2. Christ's ministers must not think it strange if they be censured and quarrelled with, not only by their professed enemies, but by their professing friends; and not only for their follies and infirmities, but for their good actions seasonably and well done; but if we have proved our own work, we may have rejoicing in ourselves, as Peter had, whatever reflections we may have from our brethren. Those that are zealous and courageous in the service of Christ, must expect to be censured by those who, under pretence of being cautious, are cold and indifferent. Those who are of catholic, generous, charitable principles, must expect to be censured by such as are conceited and strait-laced; who say, *Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou*.

III. Peter gave such a full and fair account of the matter of fact, as was sufficient, without any further argument or apology, both to justify him, and to satisfy them: (v. 4.) *He rehearsed the matter from the beginning*, and laid it before them in order; and then could appeal to themselves whether he had done amiss: for it appeared all along God's own work, and not his.

1. He takes it for granted, that if they had rightly understood how the matter was, they would not have *contended with him*, but rather have concurred with him, and commended him. And it is a good reason why we should be moderate in our censures, and sparing of them, because if we rightly under-

stood that which we are so forward to run down, perhaps we should see cause to run in with it. When we see others do that which looks suspicious, instead of contending with them, we should inquire of them what ground they went upon; and if we have not an opportunity to do that, should ourselves put the best construction upon it that it will bear, *and judge nothing before the time.*

2. He is very willing to stand right in their opinion, and takes pains to give them satisfaction; he does not insist upon his being the chief of the apostles, for he was far from the thought of that supremacy which his pretended successors claim. Nor did he think it enough to tell them that he was satisfied himself in the grounds he went upon, and then they needed not trouble themselves about it; but he is ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him concerning the Gentiles, and why he had receded from his former sentiments, which were the same with their's. It is a debt we owe both to ourselves and to our brethren, to set those actions of ours in a true light, which at first looked ill, and gave offence; that we may remove stumbling-blocks out of our brethren's way.

Let us now see what Peter pleads in his own defence.

(1.) That he was instructed by a vision no longer to keep up the distinctions which were made by the ceremonial law; he relates the vision, (v. 5, 6.) as we had it before, *ch. 10. 9, &c.* The sheet which was there said to be *let down to the earth*, he here says, *came even to him*, which circumstance intimates that it was particularly designed for instruction to him. We should thus see all God's discoveries of himself, which he has made to the children of men, coming even to us, applying them by faith to ourselves. Another circumstance here added, is, that when the sheet came to him, *he fastened his eyes upon it, and considered it, v. 6.* If we would be led into the knowledge of divine things, we must fix our minds upon them, and consider them. He tells them what orders he had to eat of all sorts of meat, without distinction, *asking no questions for conscience-sake, v. 7.* It was not till after the flood, (as it should seem,) that man was allowed to eat flesh at all, *Gen. 9. 3.* That allowance was afterward limited by the ceremonial law; but now the restrictions were taken off, and the matter set at large again. It was not the design of Christ to abridge us in the use of our creature-comforts by any other law than that of sobriety and temperance, and preferring the meat that endures to eternal life before that which perishes.

He pleads, that he was as averse to the thoughts of conversing with Gentiles, or *eating of their dainties*, as they could be, and therefore refused the liberty given him; *Not so, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has at any time entered into my mouth, v. 8.* But he was told from heaven, that the case was now altered; that God had cleansed those persons and things which were before polluted; and therefore that he must no longer call them *common*, nor look upon them as unfit to be meddled with by the peculiar people: (v. 9.) so that he was not to be blamed for changing his thoughts, when God had changed the thing. In things of this nature, we must act according to our present light; yet must not be so wedded to our opinion concerning them, as to be prejudiced against further discoveries, when the matter may either be otherwise, or *appear* otherwise; and God may *reveal even this unto us*, *Phil. 3. 15.*

And that they might be sure he was not deceived in it, he tells them, it was done three times; (v. 10.) the same command given, *to kill and eat*, and the same reason, because that which God hath *cleansed* is not to be called *common*, repeated a second and

third time. And further to confirm him that it was a divine vision, the things he saw did not vanish away into the air, but *were drawn up again into heaven*, whence they were let down.

(2.) That he was particularly directed by the Spirit to go along with the messengers that Cornelius sent. And that it might appear that that vision was designed to satisfy him in that matter, he observes to them the time when the messengers came—immediately after he had that vision; yet lest that should not be sufficient to clear his way, the Spirit bid him *go with the men* that were then sent from Cesarea to him, *nothing doubting*; (v. 11, 12.) though they were Gentiles he went to, and went with, yet he must make no scruple of going along with them.

(3.) That he took some of his brethren along with him, who were of *the circumcision*, that they might be satisfied as well as he; and these he had brought up from Joppa, to witness for him with what caution he proceeded, foreseeing the offence that would be taken at it. He did not act separately, but with advice; not rashly, but upon due deliberation.

(4.) That Cornelius had a vision too, by which he was directed to send for Peter; (v. 13.) *He shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house*, that bade him *send to Joppa for one Simon, whose surname is Peter.* See how good it is for those that have communion with God, and keep up a correspondence with heaven, to compare notes, and communicate their experiences to each other; for hereby they may strengthen one another's faith: Peter is the more confirmed in the truth of his vision by Cornelius's, and Cornelius by Peter's. Here is something added in what the angel said to Cornelius; before it was, *Send for Peter, and he shall speak to thee, he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do*; (*ch. 10. 6, 32.*) but here it is, *“He shall tell thee words whereby thou and thy house shall be saved,”* (v. 14.) and therefore it is of vast concern to thee, and will be of unspeakable advantage, to send for him.” Note, [1.] The words of the gospel are words whereby we may be saved, eternally saved; not merely by hearing them and reading them, but by believing and obeying them. They set the salvation before us, and shew us what it is; they open the way of salvation to us, and if we follow the method prescribed us by them, we shall certainly be saved from wrath and the curse, and be for ever happy. [2.] They that embrace the gospel of Christ, will have salvation brought by it to their families: *“Thou and all thy house shall be saved*; thou and thy children shall be taken into covenant, and have the means of salvation; thy house shall be as welcome to the benefit of the salvation, upon their believing, as thou thyself, even the meanest servant thou hast. *This day is salvation come to this house,”* *Luke 19. 9.* Hitherto *salvation was of the Jews*, (*John 4. 22.*) but now salvation is brought to the Gentiles as much as ever it was with the Jews; the promises, privileges, and means of it are conveyed to all nations as amply and fully to all intents and purposes, as ever it had been appropriated to the Jewish nation.

(5.) That which put the matter past all dispute, was, the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Gentile hearers; this completed the evidence, that it was the will of God that he should take the Gentiles into communion.

[1.] The fact was plain and undeniable; (v. 15.) *“As I began to speak,”* (and perhaps he felt some secret reluctance in his own breast, doubting whether he was in the right to preach to the uncircumcised,) *“presently the Holy Ghost fell on them in as visible signs as on us at the beginning, in which there could be no fallacy.”* Thus God attested what was done, and declared his approbation of it.

that preaching is certainly right, with which the Holy Ghost is given. The apostle supposes that, when he thus argues with the Galatians, *Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* Gal. 3. 2.

[2.] Peter was hereby put in mind of a saying of his Master's, when he was leaving them; (*ch. 1. 5.*) *John baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, v. 16.* This plainly intimated, *First*, That the Holy Ghost was the gift of Christ, and the Product and Performance of his promise, that great promise which he left with them when he went to heaven. It was therefore without doubt from him that this gift came; and the filling of them with the Holy Ghost was his act and deed. As it was promised by his mouth, so it was performed by his hand, and was a token of his favour. *Secondly*, That the gift of the Holy Ghost was a kind of baptism. They that received it were baptized with it in a more excellent manner, than any of those that even the Baptist himself baptized with water.

[3.] Comparing that promise, so worded, with this gift just now conferred, when the question was started, whether these persons should be baptized or no, he concluded, that the question was determined by Christ himself; (*v. 17.*) "*Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did to us; gave it to us as believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to them upon their believing in him, What was I, that I could withstand God?* Could I refuse to baptize them with water, whom God had baptized with the Holy Ghost? Could I deny the sign to those on whom he had conferred the thing signified? *But as for me, who was I?* What, able to forbid God? Did it become me to control the divine will, or to oppose the counsels of Heaven?" Note, Those who hinder the conversion of souls, withstand God; and those take too much upon them, who contrive how to exclude those from their communion, whom God has taken into communion with himself.

IV. This account which Peter gave of the matter satisfied them; and all was well. Thus when the two tribes and a half gave an account to Phinehas and the princes of Israel of the true intent and meaning of their building them an altar on the banks of Jordan, the controversy was dropped, and it pleased them that it was so, Josh. 22. 30. Some people, when they have fastened a censure upon a person, will stick to it, though afterward it appear ever so plainly to be unjust and groundless. It was not so here; for these brethren, though they were of the circumcision, and their bias went the other way, yet, when they heard this,

1. They let fall their censures: they held their peace, and said no more against what Peter had done; they laid their hand upon their mouth, because now they perceived that God did it. Now they who prided themselves in their dignities as Jews, began to see that God was staining that pride, by letting in the Gentiles to share, and to share alike, with them. And now that prophecy is fulfilled, *Thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain*, Zeph. 3. 11.

2. They turned them into praises; they not only held their peace from quarrelling with Peter, but opened their mouths to glorify God for what he had done by and with Peter's ministry; they were thankful that their mistake was rectified, and that God had shewed more mercy to the poor Gentiles than they were inclined to shew them, saying, *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!* He hath granted them not only the means of repentance, in opening a door of entrance for his ministers among them, but the grace of repentance, in having given them his Holy Spirit, who, wherever he comes to be a Comforter, first convinces, and gives a sight of sin, and sorrow for it; and then a

sight of Christ, and joy in him. Note, (1.) Repentance, if it be true, is unto life; it is to spiritual life; all that truly repent of their sins, evidence it by living a new life, a holy, heavenly, and divine life. Those that by repentance die unto sin, from thenceforward live unto God; and then, and not till then, we begin to live indeed; and it shall be to eternal life. All true penitents shall live, that is, they shall be restored to the favour of God, which is life, which is better than life; they shall be comforted with the assurance of the pardon of their sins, and shall have the earnest of eternal life; and at length the fruition of it. (2.) Repentance is God's gift; it is not only his free grace that accepts it, but his mighty grace that works it in us; that *takes away the heart of stone, and gives us a heart of flesh. The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit*; it is he that provides himself that lamb. (3.) Wherever God designs to give life, he gives repentance; for that is a necessary preparative for the comforts of a sealed pardon and a settled peace in this world, and for the seeing and enjoying of God in the other world. (4.) It is a great comfort to us, that God hath exalted his Son Jesus, not only to *give repentance to Israel, and the remission of sins, (ch. 5. 31.)* but to the *Gentiles also*.

19. Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. 20. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. 22. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. 23. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. 24. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. 25. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 26. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

We have here an account of the planting and watering of a church at Antioch, the chief city of Syria, reckoned afterward the third most considerable city of the empire, only Rome and Alexandria being preferred before it; next to whose patriarch that of Antioch took place. It stood where Hamath or Riblah did, which we read of in the Old Testament. It is suggested that Luke, the penman of this history, and Theophilus, to whom he dedicates it, were of Antioch; which might be the reason why he takes more particular notice of the success of the gospel at Antioch; as also because there it was that

Paul began to be famous, toward the story of whom he is hastening.

Now concerning the church at Antioch, observe,

1. The first preachers of the gospel there, were such as were dispersed from Jerusalem by persecution, that persecution which arose five or six years ago, (as some compute,) at the time of Stephen's death; (v. 19.) *They travelled as far as Phenice and other places, preaching the word. Therefore God suffered them to be persecuted, that thereby they might be dispersed in the world, sown as seed to God, in order to their bringing forth much fruit.* Thus what was intended for the hurt of the church, was made to work for its good; as Jacob's curse of the tribe of Levi, (*I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel,*) was turned into a blessing. The enemies designed to scatter and lose them, Christ designed to scatter and use them. Thus the wrath of man is made to praise God. Observe,

1. Those that *fled from persecution*, did not flee from their work; though for the time they declined suffering, yet they did not decline service; nay, they threw themselves into a larger field of opportunity than before. Those that persecuted the preachers of the gospel, hoped thereby to prevent their carrying it to the Gentile world; but it proved that they did but hasten it the sooner. *Howbeit, they meant not so, neither did their heart think so.* They that were persecuted in one city, fled to another; but they carried their religion along with them, not only that they might take the comfort of it themselves, but that they might communicate it to others; thus shewing that when they got out of the way, it was not because they were afraid of suffering, but because they were willing to reserve themselves for further service.

2. They pressed forward in their work, finding that *the good pleasure of the Lord prospered in their hands.* When they had preached successfully in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, they got out of the borders of the land of Canaan, and travelled into Phenicia, into the island of Cyprus, and into Syria. Though the further they travelled, the more they exposed themselves, yet they travelled on; *plus ultra*, was their motto, *further still*; grudging no pains, and dreading no perils, in carrying on so good a work, and serving so good a Master.

3. They *preached the word to none but the Jews only*, who were dispersed in all those parts, and had synagogues of their own, in which they met with them by themselves, and preached to them. They did not yet understand that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs, and of the same body; but left the Gentiles either to turn Jews, and so come into the church, or else remain as they were.

4. They particularly applied themselves to the Hellenist Jews, here called the Grecians, that were at Antioch. Many of the preachers were natives of Judea and Jerusalem; some of them were by birth of Cyprus and Cyrene, as Barnabas himself, (ch. 4. 36.) and Simon, (Mark 15. 21.) but they had had their education in Jerusalem; and these being themselves Grecian Jews, had a particular concern for those of their own denomination and distinction, and applied themselves closely to them at Antioch. Dr. Lightfoot says that they were there called *Hellenists, or Grecians*, because they were Jews of the corporation or enfranchisement of the city; for Antioch was a Syro-grecian city. To them they *preached the Lord Jesus*. That was the constant subject of their preaching; what else should the ministers of Christ preach, but Christ, Christ and him crucified; Christ, and him glorified?

5. They had wonderful success in their preaching, v. 21.

(1.) Their preaching was accompanied with a divine power; *The hand of the Lord was with them*;

which some understand of the power they were endowed with to work miracles for the confirming of their doctrine; in those the Lord was *working with them, he confirmed the word with signs following*; (Mark 16. 20.) in these God *bare them witness*, Heb. 2. 4. But I rather understand it of the power of divine grace working on the hearts of the hearers, and opening them, as Lydia's heart was opened, because many saw the miracles, who were not converted; but when by the Spirit the understanding was enlightened, and the will bowed to the gospel of Christ, that was a day of power, in which volunteers were enlisted under the banner of the Lord Jesus, Ps. 110. 3. *The hand of the Lord was with them*, to bring that home to the hearts and consciences of men, which they could but speak to the outward ear. *Then the word of the Lord gains its end*, when the *hand* of the Lord goes along with it, to write it in their heart. *Then people are brought to believe the report of the gospel*, when with it the *arm of the Lord is revealed*, (Isa. 53. 1.) when *God teaches with a strong hand*, Isa. 8. 11. These were not apostles, but ordinary ministers, yet they had the *hand of the Lord with them*, and did wonders.

(2.) Abundance of good was done; *A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord*; many more than could have been expected, considering the outward disadvantages they laboured under: some of all sorts of people were wrought upon, and brought into obedience to Christ. Observe, What the change was. [1.] They believed; they were convinced of the truth of the gospel, and subscribed to the record God had given in it concerning his Son. [2.] The effect and evidence of this was, that they *turned unto the Lord*; they could not be said to turn from the service of idols, for they were Jews, worshippers of the true God only; but they turned from a confidence in the righteousness of the law, to rely only upon the righteousness of Christ; the righteousness which is by faith: they turned from a loose, careless, carnal way of living, to live a holy, heavenly, spiritual, and divine life; they turned from worshipping God in shew and ceremony, to worship him *in the spirit, and in truth*. They turned to the Lord Jesus, and he became all in all with them. This was the work of conversion wrought upon them, and it must be wrought upon every one of us. It was the fruit of their faith; all that sincerely *believe*, will turn to the Lord; for whatever we profess or pretend, we do not really believe the gospel, if we do not cordially embrace Christ offered to us in the gospel.

II. The good work thus begun at Antioch, was carried on to a great perfection; and this church, thus founded, grew to be a flourishing one, by the ministry of Barnabas and Saul; who built upon the foundation which the other preachers had laid, and *entered into their labours*, John 4. 37, 38.

1. The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas thither, to nurse this new-born church, and to strengthen the hands both of preachers and people, and put a reputation upon the cause of Christ there.

(1.) They heard the good news, that the gospel was received at Antioch, v. 22. The apostles there were inquisitive how the word went on in the countries about; and, it is likely, kept up a correspondence with all parts where preachers were, so that *tidings of these things*, of the great numbers that were converted at Antioch, soon *came to the ears of the church that was in Jerusalem*. Those that are in the most eminent stations in the church, ought to concern themselves for those in a lower sphere.

(2.) They dispatched Barnabas to them with all speed; they desired him to go, and assist and encourage these hopeful beginnings. They *sent him forth* as an envoy from them, and a representative

of their whole body, to congratulate them upon the success of the gospel among them, as matter of rejoicing both to preachers and hearers, and with both they rejoiced. He must go *as far as Antioch*. It was a great way, but, far as it was, he was willing to undertake the journey for a public service. It is probable that Barnabas had a particular genius for work of this kind, was active and conversable, and loved to be in motion, delighted in doing good abroad as much as others in doing good at home, was as much of Zebulun's spirit, who rejoiced in *his going out*, as others are of Issachar's, who rejoiced in *his tent*; and his talent lying this way, he was fittest to be employed in this work. God gives various gifts for various services.

(3.) Barnabas was wonderfully pleased to find that the gospel got ground, and that some of his countrymen, men of Cyprus, (of which country he was, *ch. 4. 36.*) were instrumental in it; (*v. 23.*) *When he came, and had seen the grace of God*, the tokens of God's good-will to the people of Antioch, and the evidences of his good work among them, *he was glad*. He took time to make his observations, and both in their public worship, in their common conversations, and in their families, he saw the grace of God among them; where the grace of God is, it will be *seen*, as the *tree is known by its fruits*: and where it is seen, it ought to be owned; what we see which is good in any, we must call God's grace in them, and give that grace the glory of it; and we ought ourselves to take the comfort of it, and make it the matter of our rejoicing. We must be *glad to see the grace of God* in others, and the more when we see it there where we did not expect it.

(4.) He did what he could to fix them; to confirm them in the faith, who were converted to the faith. He *exhorted them*—*παρηγορεύει*. It is the same word with that by which the name of Barnabas is interpreted, (*ch. 4. 36.*) *ὁὖς παρηγορίσας*—*a son of exhortation*; his talent lay that way, and he traded with it; let him that *exhorteth, attend to exhortation*, *Rom. 12. 8*. Or, being a *son of consolation*, (for so we render the word,) he *comforted, or encouraged them with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord*. The more he rejoiced in the beginning of the good work among them, the more earnest he was with them to proceed according to these good beginnings. Those we have comfort in we should exhort. Barnabas was glad for what he saw of the grace of God among them, and therefore was the more earnest with them to persevere. [1.] *To cleave to the Lord*. Note, Those that have *turned to the Lord*, are concerned to *cleave unto the Lord*, not to fall off from following him, not to flag and tire in following him. To cleave to the Lord Jesus, is to live a life of dependence upon him, and devotedness to him; not only to hold him fast, but to hold fast by him, to be *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*. [2.] *To cleave to him with purpose of heart, with an intelligent, firm, and deliberate resolution, founded upon good grounds, and fixed upon that foundation*, *Ps. 108. 1*. It is to bind our souls with a bond to be the Lord's, and to say as Ruth, *Entreat me not to leave him, or to return from following after him*.

(5.) Herein he gave a proof of his good character; (*v. 24.*) *He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith*, and approved himself so upon this occasion. [1.] He shewed himself to be a man of a very sweet, affable, courteous disposition, that had himself, and could teach others, the art of obliging. *He was not only a righteous man, but a good man, a good-tempered man*. Ministers that are so, recommend themselves and their doctrine very much to the good opinion of those that are without. He was a good man, that is, a charitable man; so he had approved himself, when he sold an estate, and gave the money to the poor, *ch. 4. 37.*

[2.] By this it appeared that he was richly endued with the gifts and graces of the Spirit. The goodness of his natural disposition would not have qualified him for this service, if he had not been *full of the Holy Ghost, and so full of power, by the Spirit of the Lord*. [3.] He was full of faith, full of the christian faith himself, and therefore desirous to propagate it among others; full of the grace of faith, and full of the fruits of that faith that works by love. He was *sound in the faith*, and therefore pressed them to be so.

(6.) He was instrumental to do good, by bringing in those that were without, as well as by building up those that were within; *much people were added to the Lord*, and thereby added to the church, *many were turned to the Lord* before, yet more are to be turned; it is *done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room*.

2. Barnabas went to fetch Saul, to join with him in the work of the gospel at Antioch. The last news we heard of him, was, that when his life was sought at Jerusalem, he was sent away to Tarsus, the city where he was born, and, it should seem, he continued there ever since, doing good, no doubt. But now Barnabas takes a journey on purpose to Tarsus, to see what was become of him, to tell him what a door of opportunity was opened at Antioch, and to desire him to come and spend some time with him there, *v. 25, 26*. And here also it appears, that Barnabas was a good sort of a man, in two things:

(1.) That he would take so much pains to bring an active useful man out of obscurity; it was he that introduced Saul to the disciples at Jerusalem, when they were shy of him; and it was he that brought him out of the corner into which he was driven, into a more public station. It is a very good work to fetch a candle from under a bushel, and to set it in a candlestick.

(2.) That he would bring in Saul at Antioch, who, being a *chief speaker*, (*ch. 14. 12.*) and, probably, a more *popular preacher*, would be likely to eclipse him there, by outshining him; but Barnabas is very willing to be so when it is for the public service. If God by his grace enables us to do what good we can, according to the ability we have, we ought to rejoice if others that have also larger capacities, have larger opportunities, and do more good than we can do. Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, though it might be the lessening of himself, to teach us to seek the things of Christ more than our own things.

Now here we are further told,

[1.] What service was now done to the church at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas continued there a whole year, presiding in their religious assemblies, and preaching the gospel, *v. 26*. Observe, *First*, The church frequently assembled. The religious assemblies of christians are appointed by Christ for his honour, and the comfort and benefit of his disciples. God's people of old frequently came together, *at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation*; places of meeting are now multiplied, but they must *come together*, though it be with difficulty and peril. *Secondly*, Ministers were the masters of those assemblies, and held those courts in Christ's name, to which all that *hold by, from, and under, him*, owe suit and service. *Thirdly*, *Teaching the people* is one part of the work of ministers, when they preside in religious assemblies. They are not only to be the people's mouth to God in prayer and praise, but God's mouth to the people in opening the scriptures, and teaching out of them the good knowledge of the Lord. *Fourthly*, It is a great encouragement to ministers, when they have opportunity of teaching much people, of casting the net of the gospel where there is a large shoal of fish, in hopes that the more may be inclosed. *Fifthly*, Preaching is not only for

the conviction and conversion of those that are without, but for the instruction and edification of those that are within. A constituted church must have its teachers.

[2.] What honour was now put upon the church at Antioch; *There the disciples were first called Christians*; it is probable that they called themselves so, incorporated themselves by that title, whether by some solemn act of the church or ministers, or whether this name insensibly obtained there by its being frequently used in their praying and preaching, we are not told; but it should seem that two such great men as Paul and Barnabas continuing there so long, being exceedingly followed, and meeting with no opposition, christian assemblies made a greater figure there than any where, and became more considerable, which was the reason of their being called *Christians* first there; which, if there were to be a mother-church to rule over all other churches, would give Antioch a better title to the honour than Rome can pretend to. Hitherto they who gave up their names to Christ, were called *disciples, learners, scholars*, trained up under him, in order to their being employed by him; but from henceforward they were called *Christians*. First, Thus the reproachful names which their enemies had hitherto branded them with, would, perhaps, be wiped away, and disused. They called them *Nazarenes*, (ch. 24. 5.) *the men of that way, that by-way*, which had no name; and thus they prejudiced people against them; to remove which prejudices they gave themselves a name, which their enemies could not but say was proper. Secondly, Thus they, who before their conversion had been distinguished by the names of *Jews and Gentiles*, might after their conversion be called by one and the same name; which would help them to forget their former dividing names, and prevent their bringing their former marks of distinction, and with them the seeds of contention, into the church. Let not one say, "I was a Jew;" nor the other, "I was a Gentile;" when both the one and the other must now say, "I am a Christian." Thirdly, Thus they studied to do honour to their Master, and shewed that they were not ashamed to own their relation to him, but gloried in it; as the scholars of Plato called themselves *Platonists*, and so the scholars of other great men. They took their denomination not from the name of his person, *Jesus*, but of his office, *Christ*—Anointed; so putting their creed into their name, *that Jesus is the Christ*; and they are willing all the world should know that this is the truth they will live and die by. Their enemies will turn this name to their reproach, and impute it to them as their crime, but they will glory in it; *If this be to be vile, I will yet be more vile*. Fourthly, Thus they now owned their dependance upon Christ, and their receivings from him; not only that they believed in him who is *the Anointed*, but that through him they themselves had *the anointing*, 1 John 2. 20, 27. And God is said to have *anointed us in Christ*, 2 Cor. 1. 21. Fifthly, Thus they laid upon themselves, and all that should ever profess that name, a strong and lasting obligation to submit to the laws of Christ, to follow the example of Christ, and to devote themselves entirely to the honour of Christ; *to be to him for a name, and a praise*. Are we christians? Then we ought to think, and speak, and act, in every thing as becomes christians, and to do nothing to the reproach of that worthy name by which we are called; that that may not be said to us, which Alexander said to a soldier of his own name that was noted for a coward, *Aut nomen, aut mores muta*—*Either change thy name, or mend thy manners*. And as we must look upon ourselves as christians, and carry ourselves accordingly, so we must look upon others as christians, and carry ourselves to-

ward them accordingly. A christian, though not in every thing of our mind, should be loved and respected for his sake whose name he bears, because he belongs to Christ. Sixthly, Thus the scripture was fulfilled, for so it was written (Isa. 62. 2.) concerning the gospel-church, *Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name*. And (Isa. 65. 15.) it is said to the corrupt and degenerate church of the Jews, *The Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name*.

27. And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. 28. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit, that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar. 29. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: 30. Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

When our Lord Jesus *ascended on high, he gave gifts unto men*, not only *apostles and evangelists*, but *prophets*, who were enabled by the Spirit to foresee and foretell things to come; which not only served for a confirmation of the truth of christianity, (for all that these prophets foretold came to pass; which proved that *they were sent of God*, Deut. 18. 22. Jer. 28. 9.) but was also of great use to the church, and served very much for its conduct. Now here we have,

I. A visit which some of these prophets made to Antioch; (v. 27.) *In these days*, during that year that Barnabas and Saul lived at Antioch, there came *prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch*; we are not told how many, nor is it certain whether these were any of those prophets that we afterward find in the church at Antioch, ch. 13. 1.

1. They came from Jerusalem, probably because they were not now so much regarded there as they had been; they saw their work in a manner done there, and therefore thought it time to be gone. Jerusalem had been infamous for *killing the prophets* and abusing them, and therefore is now justly deprived of these prophets.

2. They came to Antioch, because they heard of the flourishing state of that church, and there they hoped they might be of some service. Thus should every one, as he hath received the gift, minister the same. Barnabas came to exhort them, and they, having received the exhortation well, now have prophets sent them to *shew them things to come*, as Christ had promised, John 16. 13. They that are faithful in their little, shall be intrusted with more. The best understanding of scripture-predictions is to be got in the way of obedience to scripture-instructions.

II. A particular prediction of a famine approaching, delivered by one of these prophets, his name *Agabus*; we read of him again, prophesying Paul's imprisonment, ch. 21. 10. Here he stood up, probably in one of their public assemblies, and prophesied, v. 28. Observe,

1. Whence he had his prophecy. What he said was not of himself, nor a fancy of his own, nor an astronomical prediction, or a conjecture upon the present workings of second causes, but he signified it by the Spirit, the Spirit of prophecy, that there should be a famine; as Joseph, by the Spirit enabling him, understood Pharaoh's dreams, foretold the famine in Egypt, and Elijah the famine in Israel in

Ahab's time. Thus God revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets.

2. What the prophecy was; *There should be great dearth throughout all the world*, by unseasonable weather, that corn should be scarce and dear, so that many of the poor should perish for want of bread. This should be not in one particular country, but *through all the world*, all the Roman empire, which they in their pride, like Alexander before them, called *the world*. Christ had foretold in general, *that there should be famines*, (Matt. 24. 7. Mark 13. 8. Luke 21. 11.) but Agabus foretels one very remarkable famine now at hand.

3. The accomplishment of it; *It came to pass in the days of Claudius Cesar*; it began in the second year of his reign, and continued to the fourth, if not longer; several of the Roman historians make mention of it, as does also Josephus. God *sent them the bread of life*, and they rejected it, loathed the plenty of that manna; and therefore God justly broke the staff of bread, and punished them with famine; and herein he was righteous. They were barren, and did not bring forth to God, and therefore God made the earth barren to them.

III. The good use they made of this prediction. When they were told of a famine at hand, they did not do as the Egyptians, hoard up corn for themselves; but, as became christians, laid by for charity to relieve others, which is the best preparative for our own sufferings and want. It is promised to those that *consider the poor, that God will preserve them, and keep them alive, and they shall be blessed upon the earth*, Ps. 41. 1, 2. *And those who shew mercy, and give to the poor, shall not be ashamed in the evil time, but in the days of famine they shall be satisfied*, Ps. 37. 19, 21. The best provision we can lay up against a dear time, is to lay up an interest in those promises, *by doing good, and communicating*, Luke 12. 33. Many give it for a reason why they should be sparing, but the scripture gives it as a reason why we should be liberal, *to seven, and also to eight, because we know not what evil shall be upon the earth*, Eccl. 11. 2. Observe,

1. What they determined; that *every man, according to his ability, should send relief to the brethren that dwell in Judea*, v. 29. (1.) The persons that were recommended to them as objects of charity, were, *the brethren that dwell in Judea*. Though we must, as we have opportunity, *do good to all men*, yet we must have a special regard *to the household of faith*. Gal. 6. 10. No poor must be neglected, but God's poor must be most particularly regarded. The care which every particular church ought to take of their own poor, we were taught by the early instance of that in the church at Jerusalem, where the ministration was so constant, *that none lacked*, ch. 4. 34. But the communion of saints, in that instance, is here extended farther, and provision is made by the church at Antioch for the relief of the poor in Judea, whom they call their *brethren*. It seems it was the custom of the Jews of the dispersion, to send money to those Jews which dwelt in Judea, for the relief of the poor that were among them, and to make collections for that purpose. Tully speaks of such a thing in his time (*Orat. pro Flacco*) which supposes there were many poor in Judea, more than in other countries, so that the rich among them were not able to bear the charge of keeping them from starving; either, because their land was grown barren, though it had been a fruitful land, *for the iniquity of them that dwell therein*, or because they had no traffic with other nations. Now we may suppose that the greatest part of those who turned christians in that country, *were the poor* (Matt. 11. 5. *The poor are evangelized*) and also that when the poor turned christians, they were put out of the poor's book, and cut off from their shares in the public

charity; and it were easy to foresee that if there came a famine, it would go very hard with them; and if any of them should perish for want, it would be a great reproach to the christian profession; and therefore this early care was taken, upon notice of this famine coming, to send them a stock beforehand, lest, if it should be deferred till the famine came, it should be too late. (2.) The agreement that was among *the disciples* about it; that *every man* should contribute, *according to his ability*, to this good work. The Jews abroad, in other countries, grew rich by trade, and many of the rich Jews became christians, whose abundance ought to be *a supply to the want of their poor brethren* that were at a great distance; for the case of such ought to be considered, and not only theirs that live among us. Charitable people are traders with what God has given them, and the merchants find their account in sending effects to countries that lie very remote; and so should we in giving alms to those afar off, that need them, which therefore we should be forward to do when we are called to it. *Every man determined to send something, more or less, according to his ability*, what he could spare from the support of himself and his family, and *according as God had prospered him*. What may be said to be *according to our ability* we must judge for ourselves, but must be careful *that we judge righteous judgment*.

2. What they did; *they did as they determined*; (v. 30.) *Which also they did*. They not only talked of it, but they did it. Many a good motion of that kind is made and commended, but is not prosecuted, and so comes to nothing. But this was pursued, the collection was made, and was so considerable, that they thought it worth while *to send Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem*, to carry it *to the elders* there, though they should want their labours in the mean time at Antioch. They sent it, (1.) *To the elders*, the presbyters, the ministers or pastors of the churches in Judea, to be by them distributed according to the necessity of the receivers, as it had been contributed according to the ability of the givers. (2.) It was sent *by Barnabas and Saul*, who perhaps wanted an occasion to go to Jerusalem, and therefore were willing to take this. Josephus tells us, that at this time King Iriates sent his charity to the chief men of Jerusalem, for the poor of that country; and Helena, queen of the Adiabeni, being now at Jerusalem, and hearing of many that died of famine there, and in the country about, sent for provisions from Cyprus and Alexandria, and distributed them among the people; so says Dr. Lightfoot, who also computes, by the date of Paul's rapture, "fourteen years before he wrote the second Epistle to the Corinthians," (2 Cor. 12. 1, 2.) that it was in this journey of his *to Jerusalem, with these alms and offerings*, that he had his *trance* in the temple, (which he speaks of, ch. 22. 17.) and in that *trance was rapt up into the third heaven*; and then it was that Christ told him he would send him from thence *unto the Gentiles*; which accordingly he did as soon as ever he came back to Antioch. It is no disparagement, in an extraordinary case, for ministers of the gospel to be messengers of the church's charity; though, to undertake the constant care of that matter, would ordinarily be too great a diversion from more needful work *to those who have given themselves to prayer, and the ministry of the word*.

CHAP. XII.

In this chapter, we have the story, I. Of the martyrdom of James the apostle, and the imprisonment of Peter, by Herod Agrippa, who now reigned as king in Judea, v. 1. - 4. II. The miraculous deliverance of Peter out of prison by the ministry of an angel, in answer to the prayers of the church for him, v. 5. - 19. III. The cutting off of Herod in the height of his pride by the stroke of an angel, the mi-

nister of God's justice, (v. 20..23.) and this was done while Barnabas and Saul were at Jerusalem, upon the errand that the church of Antioch sent them on, to carry their charity; and therefore in the close we have an account of their return to Antioch, v. 24, 25.

1. **N**OW about that time, Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. 2. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 4. And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers, to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

Ever since the conversion of Paul, we have heard no more of the agency of the priests in persecuting the saints at Jerusalem; perhaps that wonderful change wrought upon him, and the disappointment it gave to their design upon the christians at Damascus, had somewhat mollified them, and brought them under the check of Gamaliel's advice—to let those men alone, and see what would be the issue; but here the storm arises from another point; the civil power, not now, as usual, (for aught that appears,) stirred up by the ecclesiastics, acts by itself in the persecution. But Herod, though originally of an Edomite family, yet seems to have been a proselyte to the Jewish religion; for Josephus says, he was zealous for the Mosaic rites, a bigot for the ceremonies. He was not only (as Herod Antipas was) tetrarch of Galilee, but had also the government of Judea committed to him by Claudius the emperor, and resided most at Jerusalem, where he was at this time.

Three things we are here told he did:

I. He stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church, v. 1. His stretching forth his hands to it, intimates that his hands had been tied up by the restraints which perhaps his own conscience held him under in this matter; but now he broke through them, and stretched forth his hands deliberately and of malice prepense. Herod laid hands upon some of the church to afflict them, so some read it; he employed his officers to seize them, and take them into custody, in order to their being prosecuted. See how he advances gradually!

1. He began with some of the members of the church, certain of them that were of less note and figure; played first at small game, but afterward flew at the apostles themselves. His spite was at the church, and with regard to those he gave trouble to, it was not upon any other account, but because they belonged to the church, and so belonged to Christ.

2. He began with vexing them only, or afflicting them, imprisoning them, fining them, spoiling their houses and goods, and other ways molesting them; but afterward he proceeded to greater instances of cruelty. Christ's suffering servants are thus trained up by lesser troubles for greater, that tribulation may work patience, and patience experience.

II. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, v. 2. We are here to consider,

1. Who the martyr was; it was James the brother of John; so called, to distinguish him from the other James, the brother of Joseph. This was called *Jacobus major*—James the greater; that, *minor*—the less. This that was here crowned with martyrdom, was one of the first three of Christ's disciples, one of those that were the witnesses of his transfigu-

ration and agony, whereby he was prepared for martyrdom; he was one of these whom Christ called *Bod-nerges*—*Sons of thunder*; and perhaps by his powerful awakening preaching he had provoked Herod, or those about him, as John Baptist did the other Herod, and that was the occasion of his coming into this trouble. He was one of these sons of Zebedee, whom Christ told, *that they should drink of the cup that he was to drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that he was to be baptized with*, Matt. 20. 23. And now those words of Christ were made good in him; but it was in order to his sitting at Christ's right hand; for, *if we suffer with him, we shall reign with him*. He was one of the twelve, who were commissioned to *disciple all nations*; and to take him off now, before he was removed from Jerusalem, was like Cain's killing Abel then when the world was to be peopled; and one man was then more than many at another time. To kill an apostle now, was killing he knew not how many. But why would God permit it? *If the blood of his saints*, much more the blood of apostles, *is precious in his eyes*, and therefore, we may be sure, is not shed but upon a valuable consideration. Perhaps, God intended hereby to awaken the rest of the apostles to disperse themselves among the nations, and not to nestle any longer at Jerusalem. Or it was to shew, that though the apostles were appointed to plant the gospel in the world, yet if they were taken off, God could do his work without them, and would do it. This apostle died a martyr, to shew the rest of them what they must expect, that they might prepare accordingly. The tradition that they have in the Romish church, that this James had been before this in Spain, and had planted the gospel there, is altogether groundless; nor is there any certainty of it, or good authority for it.

2. What kind of death he suffered; he was slain with the sword, his head was cut off with a sword, which was looked upon by the Romans to be a more disgraceful way of being beheaded than with an axe; so Lorinus. Beheading was not ordinarily used among the Jews; but when kings gave verbal orders for private and sudden executions, this manner of death was used, as most expeditious; and it is probable that this Herod killed James, as the other Herod killed John Baptist, privately in the prison. It is strange that we have not a more full and particular account of the martyrdom of this great apostle, as we had of Stephen. But even this short mention of the thing is sufficient to let us know, that the first preachers of the gospel were so well assured of the truth of it, that they sealed it with their blood, and thereby have encouraged us, if at any time we are called to it, to resist unto blood too. The Old Testament martyrs were slain with the sword, (Heb. 11. 37.) and Christ came not to send peace, but a sword; (Matt. 10. 34.) in preparation for which we must arm ourselves with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and then we need not fear what the sword of men can do unto us.

III. He imprisoned Peter, whom he had heard most of, as making the greatest figure among the apostles, and whom therefore he would be proud of the honour of taking off. Observe here,

1. When he had beheaded James, he proceeded further, he added, to take Peter also. Note, Blood to the blood-thirsty does but make them more so; and the way of persecution, as of other sins, is downhill; when men are in it, they cannot easily stop themselves; when they are in, they find they must on; *Male facta male factis tegere ne perfluant*—One evil deed is covered with another, so that there is no passage through them. They that take one bold step in a sinful way, give Satan advantage against them to tempt them to take another, and provoke God to leave them to themselves, to go

from bad to worse. It is therefore our wisdom to take heed of the beginnings of sin.

2. He did this *because he saw it pleased the Jews*. Observe, The Jews made themselves guilty of the blood of James by shewing themselves well pleased with it afterward, though they had not excited Herod to it. There are accessaries *ex post facto*—*after the fact*; and they will be reckoned with as persecutors, who take pleasure in others' persecuting, who delight to see good men ill used, and cry, *Aha, so would we have it*; or at least secretly approve of it. For, bloody persecutors, when they perceive themselves applauded for that which every one ought to cry shame upon them for, are encouraged to go on, and have their hands strengthened and their hearts hardened, and the checks of their own consciences smothered; nay, it is as strong a temptation to them to do the like as it was here to Herod, because he saw it pleased the Jews. Though he had no reason to fear displeasing them if he did not, as Pilate condemned Christ, yet he hoped to please them by doing it, and so to make an interest among them, and make amends for displeasing them in something else. Note, Those make themselves an easy prey to Satan, who make it their business to please men.

3. Notice is taken of the *time* when Herod laid hold on Peter; *Then were the days of unleavened bread*. It was at the *feast of the passover*, when their celebrating the memorial of their typical deliverance should have led them to the acceptance of their spiritual deliverance; instead of that, they, under pretence of zeal for the law, were most violently fighting against it, and, in the *days of unleavened bread*, were most soured and embittered with the old leaven of malice and wickedness. At the passover, when the Jews came from all parts to Jerusalem to keep the feast, they irritated one another against the christians and christianity, and were then more violent than at other times.

4. Here is an account of Peter's imprisonment; (v. 4.) *When he had laid hands on him*, and, it is likely, examined him, *he put him in prison*, into the inner prison; some say, into the same prison into which he and the other apostles were cast some years before, and were then rescued out of it by an angel, ch. 5. 18. He was delivered to four *quaternions of soldiers*, that is, to sixteen, who were to be a guard upon him, four at a time, that he should not make his escape, or be rescued by his friends. Thus they thought they had him fast.

5. Herod's design was, *after Easter, to bring him forth unto the people*. (1.) He would make a spectacle of him. Probably, he had put James to death privately; which the people had complained of, not because it was an unjust thing to put a man to death, without giving him a public hearing, but because it deprived them of the satisfaction of seeing him executed; and therefore Herod, now that he knows their minds, will gratify them with the sight of Peter in bonds, of Peter upon the block, that they may feed their eyes with such a pleasing spectacle. And very ambitious surely he was to please the people, who was willing thus to please them! (2.) He would do this *after Easter*, *μετὰ τὸ πάσχα*—*after the passover*, certainly so it ought to be read, for it is the same word that is always so rendered; and to insinuate the introducing of a gospel-feast, instead of the passover, when we have nothing in the New Testament of such a thing, is to mingle Judaism with our Christianity. Herod would not condemn him till the passover was over, some think, for fear lest he should have such an interest among the people, that they should demand the release of him, according to the custom of the feast: or, after the hurry of the feast was over, and the town was empty, he would entertain them with Peter's public

trial and execution. Thus was the plot laid, and both Herod and the people long to have the feast over, that they may gratify themselves with this barbarous entertainment.

5. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. 6. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. 7. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. 8. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. 9. And he went out, and followed him, and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. 10. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. 11. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. 12. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. 13. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. 14. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. 15. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. 16. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. 17. But he beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. 18. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. 19. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined

the keepers, and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Cesarea, and *there* abode.

We have here an account of Peter's deliverance out of prison, by which the design of Herod against him: was defeated, and his life preserved for further service, and a stop given to this bloody torrent. Now,

1. One thing that magnified his deliverance, was, that it was a signal answer to prayer; (v. 5.) *Peter was kept in prison with a great deal of care, so that it was altogether impossible, either by force or by stealth, to get him out; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him; for prayers and tears are the church's arms; therewith she fights, not only against her enemies, but for her friends: and to those means they have recourse.*

1. The delay of Peter's trial gave them time for prayer. It is probable that James was hurried off, so suddenly, and so privately, that they had not time to pray for him; God so ordering it, that they should not have space to pray, when he designed they should not have the thing they prayed for. James must be offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith, and therefore prayer for him is restrained and prevented; but Peter must be continued to them, and therefore prayer for him is stirred up, and time is given them for it, by Herod's putting off the prosecution. *Howbeit, he meant not so, neither did they hear think so.*

2. They were very particular in their prayers for him, that it would please God, some way or other, to defeat Herod's purpose, and to snatch the lamb out of the jaws of the lion. The death of James alarmed them to a greater fervency in their prayers for Peter; for if they be broken thus *with breach upon breach*, they fear that *the enemy will make a full end*. *Stephen is not, and James is not, and will they take Peter also? All these things are against them; this will be sorrow upon sorrow*, Phil. 2. 27. Note, Though the death and sufferings of Christ's ministers may be made greatly to serve the interests of Christ's kingdom, yet it is the duty and concern of the church, earnestly to pray for their life, liberty, and tranquillity; and sometimes Providence orders it, that they are brought into imminent danger, to stir up prayer for them.

3. *Prayer was made without ceasing*; it was, *ἀποστολὴν ἐκτείνων*— *fervent prayer*; it is the word that is used concerning Christ's praying in his agony more earnestly; it is the *fervent prayer of the righteous man that is effectual, and availeth much*. Some think, it denotes the constancy and continuance of their prayers; so we take it; *they prayed without ceasing*: it was an extended prayer; they prayed for his release in their public assemblies, private ones, perhaps, *for fear of the Jews*; then they went home, and prayed for it in their families; then retired into their closets, and prayed for it there; *so they prayed without ceasing*: or first one knot of them, and then another, and then a third, kept a day of prayer, or rather a night of prayer, for him, v. 12. Note, Times of public distress and danger should be praying times with the church; we must *pray always*, but then especially.

11. Another thing that magnified his deliverance, was, that *when the king's commandment and decree drew near to be put in execution*, then his deliverance was wrought, as Esth. 9. 1, 2. Let us observe when his deliverance came.

1. It was the *very night* before Herod designed to bring him forth, which made it to be so much the greater consolation to his friends, and confusion to

his enemies. It is probable that some who had an interest in Herod, or those about him, had been improving it to get a discharge for Peter, but in vain; Herod resolves he shall die; and now they despair of prevailing that way, for to-morrow is *the day set for the bringing him forth*; and, it is likely, they will make as quick work with him as with his Master; and now God *opened a door of escape for him*. Note, God's time to help is when things are brought to the last extremity, when there is none shut up or left; (Deut. 32. 36.) and for that reason it has been said, "The worse the better." When Isaac is bound upon the altar, and the knife in the hand, and the hand stretched out to slay him, then *Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide*.

2. It was when he was *fast bound with two chains, between two soldiers*; so that if he offer to stir, he wakes them; and beside this, though the prison-doors, no doubt, were locked and bolted, yet, to make sure work, the keepers before the door kept the prison, that no one might so much as attempt to rescue him. Never could the art of man do more to secure a prisoner! Herod, no doubt, said, as Pilate, (Matt. 27. 65.) *Make it as sure as ye can*. When men will think it too hard for God, God will make it appear that he is too hard for them.

3. It was when he was *sleeping between the soldiers*; fast asleep; (1.) Not terrified with his danger, though it was very imminent, and there was no visible way for his escape. There was but a step between him and death, and yet he could *lay him down in peace, and sleep*; sleep in the midst of his enemies, sleep when, it may be, they were awake; having a good cause that he suffered for, and a good conscience that he suffered with, and being assured that God would issue his trial that way that should be most for his glory, having committed his cause to him that judgeth righteously, his soul dwells at ease; and even in prison, between two soldiers, God gives him sleep, as he doth to his beloved. (2.) Not expecting his deliverance. He did not keep awake, looking to the right hand, or to the left, for relief, but lay asleep, and was perfectly surprised with his deliverance. Thus the church; (Ps. 126. 1.) *We were like them that dream*.

III. It also magnified his deliverance very much, that an angel was sent from heaven on purpose to rescue him; which made his escape both practicable and warrantable. This angel brought him a legal discharge, and enabled him to make use of it.

1. *The angel of the Lord came upon him; and he stood over him*; he seemed as one abandoned by men, yet not forgotten of his God; *the Lord thinketh upon him*. Gates and guards keep all his friends from him, but cannot keep the angels of God from him: and they invisibly encamp round about them that fear God, to deliver them, (Ps. 34. 7.) and therefore they need not fear, though an host of enemies encamp against them, Ps. 27. 3. Wherever the people of God are, and however surrounded, they have a way open heavenward, nor can any thing intercept their intercourse with God.

2. *A light shined in the prison*; though it was a dark place, and in the night, Peter shall see his way clear. Some observe, that we do not find in the Old Testament, that where angels appeared, the light shone round about them; for that was a dark dispensation, and the glory of angels was then veiled; but in the New Testament, when mention is made of the appearing of angels, notice is taken of the light that they appeared in; for it is by the gospel that the upper world is brought to light. The soldiers, to whom Peter was chained, were either struck into a deep sleep for the present, (as Saul and his soldiers were when David carried off his spear and cruse of water,) or if they were awake, the appearance of the angel made them to shake,

and to become as dead men, as it was with the guard set on Christ's sepulchre.

3. The angel awaked Peter, by giving him a *blow on his side*, a gentle touch, enough to rouse him out of his sleep, though so fast asleep, that the light that shone upon him did not awake him. When good people slumber in the time of danger, and are not awaked by the light of the word, and the discoveries it gives them, let them expect to be smitten on the side by some sharp affliction; better be raised up so, than left asleep. The language of this stroke, was, *Arise up quickly*; not as if the angel feared coming short by his delay, but Peter must not be indulged in it. When David hears the sound of the going on the tops of the mulberry trees, then he must rise up quickly, and bestir himself.

4. *His chains fell off from his hands.* It seems, they had handcuffed him, to make him sure, but God loosed his bands; and if they fall off from his hands, it is as well as if he had the strength of Samson to break them like threads of tow. Tradition makes a mighty rout about these chains, and tells a formal story that one of the soldiers kept them for a sacred relic, and they were long after presented to Eudoxia the empress, and I know not what miracles are said to be wrought by them; and the Romish church keep a feast on the first of August yearly in remembrance of Peter's chains, *Festum vinculorum Petri—The feast of Peter's chains*; whereas this was at the passover. Surely they are thus fond of Peter's chains, in hopes with them to enslave the world!

5. He was ordered to dress himself presently, and follow the angel; and he did so, *v. 8, 9*. When Peter was awake, he knew not what to do but as the angel directed him. (1.) He must *gird himself*; for those that slept in their clothes, ungirt themselves, so that they had nothing to do, when they got up, but to fasten their girdles. (2.) He must *bind on his sandals*, that he might be fit to walk. Those whose bonds are loosed by the power of divine grace, must have *their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*. (3.) He must *cast his garments about him*, and come away as he was, and follow the angel; and he might go with a great deal of courage and cheerfulness, who had a messenger from heaven for his guide and guard; he went out, and followed him. Those who are delivered out of a spiritual imprisonment, must follow their Deliverer, as Israel when they went out of the house of bondage did; they went out, *not knowing whither they went*, but whom they followed.

Now it is said, when Peter went out after the angel, he *wist not that it was true which was done by the angel*, that it was really matter of fact, but *thought he saw a vision*; and if he did, it was not the first that he had seen: but by this it appears that a heavenly vision was so plain, and carried so much of its own evidence along with it, that it was hard to distinguish between what was done in fact and what was done in vision. When the Lord brought back the captivity of his people, we were like them that dream, Ps. 126. 1. Peter was so, he thought the news was too good to be true.

6. He was led safe by the angel out of danger, *v. 10*. Guards were kept at one pass and at another, which they were to make their way through, when they were out of the prison, and they did so without any opposition; nay, for aught that appears, without any discovery, either their eyes were closed, or their hands were tied, or their hearts failed them; so it was, that the angel and Peter safely passed the first and second ward. Those watchmen represented the watchmen of the Jewish church, on whom God had poured out a spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, Rom. 11. 8. His watchmen are blind,

sleeping, lying down, and loving to slumber. But still there is an iron gate, after all, that will stop them, and if the guards can but recover themselves, there they may recover their prisoners, as Pharaoh hoped to take Israel at the Red Sea; however, up to that gate they march, and, like the Red Sea before Israel, it opened to them; they did not so much as put a hand to it, but it opened of its own accord, by an invisible power; and this was fulfilled in the letter what was figuratively promised to Cyrus, (Isa. 45. 1, 2.) *I will open before him the two-leaved gates, will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.* And probably, the iron gate shut again of itself, that none of the guards might pursue Peter. Note, When God will work salvation for his people, no difficulties in their way are insuperable; but even gates of iron are made to open of their own accord. This iron gate led into the city out of the castle or tower; whether within the gates of the city or without, is not certain, so that when they were through this, they were got into the street.

This deliverance of Peter represents to us our redemption by Christ, which is often spoken of as the setting of prisoners free, not only the proclaiming of liberty to the captives, but the bringing them out of the prison-house. The application of the redemption in the conversion of souls, is the sending forth of the prisoners, by the blood of the covenant, out of the pit wherein is no water, Zech. 9. 11. The grace of God, like this angel of the Lord, brings light first into the prison, by the opening of the understanding; smites the sleeping sinner on the side, by the awakening of the conscience; causes the chains to fall off from the hands, by the renewing of the will; and then gives the word of command. *Gird thyself, and follow me.* Difficulties are to be passed through, and the opposition of Satan and his instruments, a first and second ward, an untoward generation, from which we are concerned to save ourselves; and we shall be saved by the grace of God, if we put ourselves under the divine conduct. And at length the iron gate shall be opened to us, to enter into the New Jerusalem, where we shall be perfectly freed from all the marks of our captivity, and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

7. When this was done, the angel departed from him, and left him to himself; he was out of danger from his enemies, and needed no guard; he knew where he was, and how to find out his friends, and needed no guide, and therefore his heavenly guard and guide bids him farewell. Note, Miracles are not to be expected, when ordinary means are to be used. When Peter has now no more wards to pass, or iron gates to get through, he needs only the ordinary invisible ministration of the angels, who encamp round about them that fear God, and deliver them.

IV. Having seen how his deliverance was magnified, we are next to see how it was manifested both to himself and others, and how, being made great, it was made known. We are here told,

1. How Peter came to himself, and so came himself to the knowledge of it, *v. 11*. So many strange and surprising things coming together upon a man just waked out of sleep, put him for the present into some confusion; so that he knew not where he was, nor what he did, nor whether it was fancy or fact; but at length Peter came to himself, was thoroughly awake, and found that it was not a dream, but a real thing: "*Now I know of a surety, now I know assuredly, now I know that it is truth, and not an illusion of the fancy.*" Now I am well satisfied concerning it, that the Lord Jesus hath sent his angel, for angels are subject to him and go on his errands, and by him hath delivered me out of the hands of

Herod, who thought he had me fast, and so hath disappointed *all the expectation of the people of the Jews*, who doubted not to see Peter cut off the next day, and hoped it was the one neck of christianity, in which it would all be struck off at one blow." For which reason it was a cause of great expectation, among not only the common people, but the great people of the Jews. Peter, when he recollected himself, *perceived of a truth* what great things God had done for him, which at first he could not believe for joy. Thus souls who are delivered out of a spiritual bondage, are not at first aware what God has wrought in them; many have the truth of grace, that want the evidence of it. They are questioning, whether there be indeed this change wrought in them, or whether they have not been all this while in a dream. But *when the Comforter comes, whom the Father will send*, sooner or later he will let them know of a surety what a blessed change is wrought in them, and what a happy state they are brought into.

2. How Peter came to his friends, and brought the knowledge of it to them. Here is a particular account of this, and it is very entertaining.

(1.) He *considered the thing*, (v. 12.) considered how imminent his danger was, how great his deliverance; and now what has he to do, what improvement must he make of this deliverance? What must he do next? God's providence leaves room for the use of our prudence; and what he has begun, though he has undertaken to perform and perfect it, he expects we should *consider* the thing.

(2.) He went directly to a friend's house, which, it is likely, lay near to the place where he was; it was the house of Mary, a sister of Barnabas, and mother of John Mark, whose house, it should seem, was frequently made use of for the private meeting of the disciples; either because it was large, and would hold many, or because it lay obscure, or because she was more forward than others were to open her doors to them; and, no doubt, it was, like the house of Obbedom, blessed for the ark's sake. A church in the house makes it a little sanctuary.

(3.) There he found *many* that were *gathered together praying*, at the dead time of the night, praying for Peter, who was the next day to come upon his trial, that God would find out some way or other for his deliverance. Observe, [1.] They continued in prayer, in token of their importunity; they did not think it enough once to have presented his case to God, but they did it again and again. Thus *men ought always to pray, and not to faint*. As long as we are kept waiting for a mercy, we must continue praying for it. [2.] It should seem that now when the affair came near to a crisis, and the very next day was fixed for the determining of it, they were more fervent in prayer than before; and it was a good sign that God intended to deliver Peter, when he thus stirred up a spirit of prayer for his deliverance, for he never *said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain*. [3.] They gathered together for prayer on this occasion; though that would make them obnoxious to the government if they were discovered, yet they know what an encouragement Christ gave to joint-prayer, Matt. 18. 19, 20. And it was always the practice of God's praying people to unite their forces in prayer, as Esth. 4. 16. 2 Chron. 20. 4. [4.] They were many that were got together for this work, as many perhaps as the room would hold; and first one prayed, and then another of those who gave themselves to the word and prayer, the rest joining with them; or if they had not ministers among them, no doubt but there were many private christians that knew how to pray, and to pray pertinently, and to continue long in prayer, when the affections of those who joined were so stirred as to keep pace with them upon such an occa-

sion. This was in the night, when others were asleep, which was an instance both of their prudence and of their zeal. Note, It is good for christians to have private meetings for prayer, especially in times of distress, and not to let fall or forsake such assemblies. [5.] Peter came to them when they were thus employed: which was an immediate present answer to their prayer. It was as if God should say, "You are praying that Peter may be restored to you; now here he is." *While they are yet speaking, I will hear*, Isa. 65. 24. Thus the angel was sent with an answer of peace to Daniel's prayer, *while he was praying*, Dan. 9. 20, 21. *Ask, and it shall be given*.

(4.) He knocked at the gate, and had much ado to get them to let him in; (v. 13—16.) *Peter knocked at the door of the gate*, designing by it to awaken them out of their sleep, and, for aught that appears, not knowing that he disturbed them in their devotions. Yet if his friends were permitted to speak with him in private in the prison, it is possible he might know of this appointment, and this was it which he recollected and considered when he determined to go to that house, where he knew he should find many of his friends together. Now when he knocked there, [1.] *A damsel came to hearken*; not to open the door till she knew who was there, a friend or a foe, and what their business was, fearing informers. Whether this damsel was one of the family or one of the church, whether a servant or a daughter, does not appear; it should seem by her being named, that she was of note among the christians, and more zealously affected to the better part than most of her age. [2.] She knew Peter's voice, having often heard him pray, and preach, and discourse, with a great deal of pleasure. But instead of letting him in immediately out of the cold, *she opened not the gate for gladness*. Thus sometimes, in a transport of affection to our friends, we do that which is unkind. In an ecstasy of joy she forgets herself, and *opened not the gate*. [3.] She ran in, and probably went up to an upper room where they were together, and told them that Peter was certainly at the gate, though she had not courage enough to open the gate, for fear she should be deceived, and it should be the enemy. But when she spake of Peter's being there, they said, "*Thou art mad*; it is impossible it should be he, for he is in prison." Sometimes that which we most earnestly wish for we are most backward to believe, because we are afraid of imposing upon ourselves, as the disciples, who, when Christ was risen, *believed not for joy*. However, she stood to it, that it was he. Then said they, *It is his angel*, v. 15. First, "It is a messenger from him, that makes use of his name;" so some take it; ἀγγελος often signifies no more than a messenger. It is used of John's messengers, (Luke 7. 24, 27.) of Christ's,—9. 52. When the damsel was confident it was Peter, because she knew his voice, they thought it was because he that stood at the door, had called himself Peter, and therefore offer this solution of the difficulty, "It is one that comes with an errand from him, and thou didst mistake as if it had been he himself." Dr. Hammond thinks this the easiest way of understanding it. Secondly, "It is his guardian angel, or some other angel, that has assumed his shape and voice, and stands at the gate in his resemblance;" some think, that they supposed his angel to appear as a presage of his death approaching; and this agrees with a notion which the vulgar have, that sometimes before persons have died, *their ward has been seen*, that is, some spirit exactly in their likeness for countenance and dress, when they themselves have been at the same time in some other place; they call it their ward, that is their angel, who is their ward. If so, they concluded this an ill omen, that their prayers

were denied, and that the language of the apparition was, "Let it suffice you, Peter must die, say no more of that matter." And if we understand it so, it only proves that they had then such an opinion of a man's *ward* being seen a little before his death, but does not prove that there is such a thing. Others think, they took this to be an angel from heaven, sent to bring them a grant to their prayers. But why should they imagine that angel to assume the voice and shape of Peter, when we find not anything like it in the appearance of angels? Perhaps, they herein spake the language of the Jews, who had a fond conceit, that every good man has a particular tutelary angel, that has the charge of him, and sometimes personates him. The heathen called it a *good genius* that attended a man; but since no other scripture speaks of such a thing, this alone is too weak to bear the weight of such a doctrine. We are sure that the angels are *ministering spirits* for the good of the *heirs of salvation*; that they have a *charge concerning them, and pitch their tents round about them*; and we need not be solicitous that every particular saint should have his *guardian angel*, when we are assured he has a *guard of angels*.

(5.) At length they let him in; (v. 16.) *He continued knocking* though they delayed to open to him, and at last they admitted him. The iron gate, which opposed his enlargement, opened of itself, without so much as once knocking at it; but the door of his friend's house that was to welcome him, does not open of its own accord, but must be knocked at, long knocked at; lest Peter should be puffed up by the honours which the angel did him, he meets with this mortification, by a seeming slight which his friends put upon him. But *when they saw him, they were astonished*, were filled with wonder and joy in him, as much as they were but just now with sorrow and fear concerning him. It was both surprising and pleasing to them in the highest degree.

(6.) Peter gave them an account of his deliverance; when he came to the company that were gathered together with so much zeal to pray for him, they gathered about him with no less zeal to congratulate him on his deliverance; and herein they were so noisy, that when Peter himself begged them to consider what peril he was yet in, if they should be overheard, he could not make them hear him, but was forced to *beckon to them with the hand to hold their peace*, and had much ado thereby to command silence, while he *declared unto them how the Lord Jesus had by an angel brought him out of prison*; and, it is very likely, having found them praying for his deliverance, he did not part with them till he and they had together solemnly given thanks to God for his enlargement; or if he could not stay to do it, it is likely, they stayed together to do it; for what is *won by prayer* must be *worn with praise*; and God must always have the glory of that which we have the comfort of. When David declares *what God had done for his soul*, he blesses God who had not turned away his prayer, Ps. 66. 16, 20.

(7.) Peter sent the account to others of his friends; *God, shew these things to James, and to the brethren with him*; who perhaps were met together in another place at the same time, upon the same errand to the throne of grace; which is one way of keeping up the communion of saints, and wrestling with God in prayer, acting in concert, though at a distance; like Esther and Mordecai. He would have James and his company to know of his deliverance, not only that they might be eased of their pain, and delivered from their fears concerning Peter, but that they might return thanks to God with him and for him. Observe, Though Herod had slain one James with the sword, yet here was another James, and that in Jerusalem too, that stood up in his room

to preside among the brethren there; for when God has work to do, he will never want instruments to do it with.

(8.) Peter had nothing more to do for the present than to shift for his own safety, which he did accordingly; he *departed, and went into another place more obscure*, and therefore more safe. He knew the town very well, and knew where to find a place that would be a shelter to him. Note, Even the christian law of self-denial and suffering for Christ, has not abrogated and repealed the natural law of self-preservation, and care for our own safety, as far as God gives an opportunity of providing for it by lawful means.

V. Having seen the triumph of Peter's friends in his deliverance, let us next observe the confusion of his enemies thereupon; which was so much the greater, because people's expectation was so much raised of the putting of him to death.

1. The guards were in the utmost consternation upon it, for they knew how highly penal it was to them to let a prisoner escape, that they had charge of; (v. 18.) *As soon as it was day, and they found their prisoner gone, there was no small stir or strife*, as some read it, *among the soldiers, what was become of Peter*; he is gone, and nobody knows how or which way. They thought themselves as sure as could be of him but last night; yet now the bird is flown, and they can hear no tale or tidings of him. This set them together by the ears; one says, "It was your fault;" the other, "Nay, but it was yours;" having no other way to clear themselves, but by accusing one another. With us, if but a prisoner for debt escape, the sheriff must answer for the debt. Thus have the persecutors of the gospel of Christ been often filled with vexation to see its cause conquering, notwithstanding the opposition they have given to it.

2. Houses were searched in vain for the rescued prisoner; (v. 19.) *Herod sought for him, and found him not*. Who can find whom God hath hidden? Baruch and Jeremiah are safe, though searched for, because *the Lord has hid them*, Jer. 36. 26. In times of public danger, all believers have God for *their hiding-place*; which is such a secret, that there the ignorant world cannot find them; such a strength, that the impotent world cannot reach them.

3. The keepers were reckoned with for a permissive escape; *Herod examined the keepers*, and finding that they could give no satisfactory account how Peter got away, he *commanded that they should be put to death*, according to the Roman law, and that, (1 Kings 20. 39.) *If by any means he be missing, then shall thy life go for his life*. It is probable that these keepers had been more severe with Peter than they needed to be, (as the jailor, ch. 16. 24.) and had been abusive to him, and to others that had been their prisoners upon the like account; and now justly are they put to death for that which was purely their fault, and by him too that had set them to work to *vex the church*. When the wicked are thus snared in the work of their own hands, the Lord is known by the judgments which he executes. Or, if they had not thus made themselves obnoxious to the justice of God, and it be thought hard that innocent men should suffer thus for that which was purely the act of God; we may easily admit the conjecture of some, that though they were *commanded to be put to death*, to please the Jews, who were sadly disappointed by Peter's escape, yet they were not executed; but Herod's death, immediately after, prevented it.

4. Herod himself retired upon it; *He went down from Judea to Cesarea, and there abode*. He was vexed to the heart, as a lion disappointed of his prey; and the more because he had so much raised the *expectation of the people of the Jews* concerning

Peter, had told them how he would very shortly gratify them with the sight of Peter's head in a charger, which would oblige them as much as John Baptist's did Herodias; it made him ashamed to be robbed of this boasting, and to see himself, notwithstanding his confidence, disabled to make his words good. This is such a mortification to his proud spirit, that he cannot bear to stay in Judea, but away he goes to Cesarea. Josephus mentions this coming of Herod to Cesarea, at the end of the third year of his reign over all Judea; (*Antiquit.* 19. 7.) and says, he came thither to solemnize the plays that were kept there, by a vast concourse of the nobility and gentry of the kingdom, for the health of Cæsar, and in honour of him.

20. And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. 21. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. 22. And the people gave a shout, saying, *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.* 23. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. 24. But the word of God grew and multiplied. 25. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

In these verses, we have,

I. The death of Herod. God reckoned with him, not only for his putting James to death, but for his design and endeavour to put Peter to death; for sinners will be called to an account, not only for the wickedness of their *deeds*, but for the wickedness of their *endeavours*; (Ps. 28. 4.) for the mischief they have done, and the mischief they would have done. It was but a little while that Herod lived after this. Some sinners God makes quick work with. Observe,

1. How the measure of his iniquity was filled up; it was *pride* that did it; that is it that commonly goes more immediately *before destruction*, and a *haughty spirit before a fall*. Nebuchadnezzar had been a very bloody man, and a great persecutor; but the word that was in the king's mouth when the judgments of God fell upon him, was a proud word; *Is not this great Babylon that I have built?* Dan. 4. 30, 31. It is the glory of God to *look on every one that is proud, and bring him low*, Job 40. 11. The instance of it here is very remarkable, and shews how God *resists the proud*.

(1.) The men of Tyre and Sidon had, it seems, offended Herod; those cities were now under the Roman yoke, and some misdemeanors they had been guilty of, which Herod highly resented, and was resolved they should feel his resentment. Some very small matter would serve such a proud imperious man as Herod was for a provocation, where he was minded to pick a quarrel. He was highly displeased with this people, and they must be made to know that his wrath was as the *roaring of a lion, as messengers of death*.

(2.) The offenders truckled, being convinced, if not that they had done amiss, yet that it was in vain to contend with such a potent adversary, who, right

or wrong, would be too hard for them; they submitted, and were willing upon any terms to *make peace with him*. Observe, [1.] The reason why they were desirous to have the matter accommodated; *because their country was nourished by the king's country*. Tyre and Sidon were trading cities, and had little land belonging to them, but were always supplied with corn from the land of Canaan; *Judah and Israel traded in their market, wheat, and honey, and oil*, Ezek. 27. 17. Now if Herod should make a law to prohibit the exportation of corn to Tyre and Sidon, (which they knew not but a man so revengeful as he might soon do, not caring how many were furnished by it,) their country would be undone; so that it was their interest to keep in with him. And is it not then our wisdom to make our peace with God, and humble ourselves before him, who have a much more constant and necessary dependence upon him, than one country can have upon another? for *in him we live, and move, and have our being*. [2.] The method they took to prevent a rupture; *They made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend*; it is very likely, with bribes and good presents; that is usually the way for men to make courtiers their friends. And it is the hard fate of princes, that they must have not only their affairs, but their affections too, governed by such mercenary tools: yet such men as Herod, that will not be governed by reason, had better be so governed than by pride and passion. Blastus had Herod's ear, and has the art of mollifying his resentments; and a time is fixed for the ambassadors of Tyre and Sidon to come and make a public submission, to beg his majesty's pardon, throw themselves upon his clemency, and promise never again to offend in the like kind; and that which will thus feed his pride, shall serve to cool his passion.

(3.) Herod appeared in all the pomp and grandeur he had; he was *arrayed in his royal apparel*, (v. 21.) *and sat upon his throne*. Josephus gives an account of this splendid appearance which Herod made upon this occasion. *Antiquit.* lib. 19. cap. 7. He says, that Herod at this time wore a robe of cloth of silver, so richly woven, and framed with such art, that when the sun shone, it reflected the light with such a lustre as dazzled the eyes of the spectators, and struck an awe upon them. Foolish people value men by their outward appearance; and no better are they who value themselves by the esteem of such; who court it, and recommend themselves to it, as Herod did, who thought to make up the want of a royal heart, with his *royal apparel*; and *sat upon his throne*, as if that gave him a privilege to trample upon all about him as his footstool.

(4.) He made a speech to the men of Tyre and Sidon, a fine oration, in which, probably, after he had aggravated their fault, and commended their submission, he concluded with an assurance that he would pass by their offence, and receive them into his favour again; proud enough that he had it in his power, *whom he would to keep alive*, as well as *whom he would to slay*; and, probably, he kept them in suspense as to what their doom should be, till he made this oration to them, that the act of grace might come to them with the more pleasing surprise.

(5.) The people applauded him, the people that had a dependence upon him, and had benefit by his favour, they *gave a shout*; and this was it they shouted, *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man*, v. 22. God is great and good, and they thought such was Herod's greatness in his apparel and throne, and such his goodness in forgiving them, that he was worthy to be called no less than a god; and perhaps his speech was delivered with such an air of majesty, and a mixture of clemency with it, as affected the auditors thus. Or, it may be, it was

not from any real impression made upon their minds, or any high or good thoughts they had indeed conceived of him; but how meanly soever they thought of him, they were resolved thus to curry favour with him, and strengthen the new-made peace between him and them. Thus great men are made an easy prey to flatterers, if they lend an ear to them, and encourage them. Grotius here observes, that though magistrates are called *gods*, (Ps. 82. 1.) yet *kings or monarchs, that is, single persons, are not, lest countenance should thereby be given to the Gentiles, who give divine honours to their kings alive and dead, as here; but they are a college of senators, or a bench of judges, that are called gods. In collegio toto senatorum non idem erat periculi; itaque eos, non autem reges, invenimus dictos elohim.* Those that live by sense, vilify God, as if he were altogether such a one as themselves; and deity men, as if they were gods; having their persons in admiration, because of advantage. This is not only a great affront to God, giving that glory to others, which is due to him alone, but a great injury to those who are thus flattered, as it makes them forget themselves, and so puffs them up with pride, that they are in the utmost danger possible of falling into the condemnation of the devil.

(6.) These undue praises he took to himself, pleased himself with them, and prided himself in them; and that was his sin. We do not find that he had given any private orders to his confidants to begin such a shout, or to put those words into the mouths of the people, or that he returned them thanks for the compliment, and undertook to answer their opinion of him. But his fault was, that he said nothing, did not rebuke their flattery, nor disown the glory they had given him, nor give God the glory, (v. 23.) but he took it to himself, was very willing it should terminate in himself, and that he should be thought a god and have divine honours paid him. *Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur—If the people will be deceived, let them.* And it was worse in him who was a Jew, and professed to believe one God only, than it was in the heathen emperors, who had gods many and lords many.

2. Observe, How his iniquity was punished; *Immediately* (v. 23.) *the angel of the Lord smote him*, (by the order of Christ, for to him all judgment is committed,) *because he gave not God the glory*; (for God is jealous for his own honour, and will be glorified upon those whom he is not glorified by;) *and he was eaten of worms*, above ground, *and gave up the ghost*. Now he was reckoned with for vexing the church of Christ, killing James, imprisoning Peter, and all the other mischiefs he had done. Observe in the destruction of Herod,

(1.) It was no less than an angel that was the agent; *the angel of the Lord*, that angel that was ordered and commissioned to do it, or that angel that used to be employed in works of this nature, the destroying angel: or *the angel*, that is, that angel that delivered Peter in the former part of the chapter—that angel smote Herod. For, those ministering spirits are the ministers either of divine justice or of divine mercy, as God is pleased to employ them. The angel smote him with a sore disease just at that instant when he was strutting at the applauses of the people, and adoring his own shadow. Thus the king of Tyre said in his pride, *I am a god, I sit in the seat of God; and set his heart as the heart of God*; but he shall be a man, and no god, a weak mortal man, in the hand of him that sayeth him; (Ezek. 28. 2, 9.) so Herod here. Potent princes must know, not only that God is omnipotent, but that angels too are greater in power and might than they. The angel smote him, *because he gave not the glory to God*; angels are jealous for God's honour, and as soon as ever they have com-

mission, are ready to smite those that usurp his prerogatives, and rob God of his honour.

(2.) It was no more than a *worm* that was the instrument of Herod's destruction; he was *eaten of worms*, *γινώμενος σκαλισσόμενος—he became worm-eaten*, so it must be read; rotten he was, and he became like a piece of rotten wood. The body in the grave is destroyed by worms; but Herod's body putrefied while he was yet alive, and bred the worms that began to feed upon it betimes; so Antiochus, that great persecutor, died. See here, [1.] What vile bodies those are which we carry about with us; they carry about with them the seeds of their own dissolution, by which they will soon be destroyed whenever God does but speak the word. Surprising discoveries have of late been made by microscopes of the multitude of worms that there are in human bodies, and how much they contribute to the diseases of them; which is a good reason why we should not be proud of our bodies, or of any of their accomplishments; and why we should not pamper our bodies, for that is but feeding the worms, and feeding them for the worms. [2.] See what weak and contemptible creatures God can make the instruments of his justice, when he pleases. Pharaoh is plagued with *lice* and *flies*, Ephraim consumed as with a *moth*, and Herod eaten of *worms*. [3.] See how God delights not only to bring down proud men, but to bring them down in such a way as is most mortifying, and pours most contempt upon them. Herod is not only destroyed, but destroyed *by worms*, that the pride of his glory may be effectually stained.

This story of the death of Herod is particularly related by Josephus, a Jew, *Antiquit.* lib. 19. cap. 7. thus: "That Herod came down to Cesarea, to celebrate a festival in honour of Cæsar; that the second day of the festival, he went in the morning to the theatre, clothed with that splendid robe mentioned before; that his flatterers saluted him as a god, begged that he would be propitious to them; that hitherto they had revered him as a man, but now they would confess to be in him something more excellent than a mortal nature. That he did not refuse or correct this impious flattery; (so the historian expresses it;) but, presently after, looking up, he saw an owl perched over his head, and was at the same instant seized with a most violent pain in his bowels, and gripes in his belly, which were exquisite from the very first; that he turned his eyes upon his friends, and said to this purpose; Now I, whom you called a god, and therefore immortal, must be proved a man, and mortal. That his torture continued without intermission, or the least abatement, and then he died in the fifty-fourth year of his age, when he had been king seven years."

II. The progress of the gospel after this.

1. *The word of God grew and multiplied*; as seed sown, which comes up with a great increase. thirty, sixty, a hundred-fold; wherever the gospel was preached, multitudes embraced it, and were added to the church by it, v. 24. After the death of James, the word of God grew; for the church, the more it was afflicted, the more it multiplied, like Israel in Egypt. The courage and comfort of the martyrs, and God's owning them, did more to invite them to christianity, than their sufferings did to deter them from it. After the death of Herod the word of God got ground. When such a persecutor was taken off by a dreadful judgment, many were thereby convinced, that the cause of christianity was doubtless the cause of Christ, and therefore embraced it.

2. Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch as soon as they had dispatched the business they were sent upon; *When they had fulfilled their ministry*, had paid in their money to the proper persons.

and taken care about the due distribution of it to those for whom it was collected, they *returned from Jerusalem*. Though they had a great many friends there, yet at present their work lay at Antioch; and where our business is, there we should be; and no longer from it than is requisite. When a minister is called abroad upon any service, when he has fulfilled that ministry, he ought to remember that he has work to do at home, which wants him there, and calls him thither. Barnabas and Saul, when they went to *Antioch, took with them John, whose surname was Mark*, at whose mother's house they had that meeting for prayer which we read of v. 12. She was sister to Barnabas. It is probable that Barnabas lodged there, and perhaps Paul with him, while they were at Jerusalem, and that was it that occasioned the meeting there at that time; for wherever Paul was, he would have some good work a doing; and their intimacy in that family while they were at Jerusalem, occasioned their taking a son of that family with them when they returned, to be trained up under them, and employed by them, in the service of the gospel. Educating young men for the ministry, and entering them into it, is a very good work for elder ministers to take care of, and of good service to the rising generation.

CHAP. XIII.

We have not yet met with any thing concerning the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles, which bears any proportion to the largeness of that commission, Go, and disciple all nations. The door was opened in the baptizing of Cornelius and his friends; but since then we had the gospel preached to the Jews only, ch. 11. 19. It should seem as if the light which began to shine upon the Gentile world, had withdrawn itself. But here in this chapter that work, that great good work, is revived in the midst of the years; and though the Jews shall still have the first offer of the gospel made to them, yet, upon their refusal, the Gentiles shall have their share of the offer of it. Here is, I. The solemn ordination of Barnabas and Saul, by divine direction, to the ministry, to the great work of spreading the gospel among the nations about, (and it is probable that other apostles or apostolical men dispersed themselves by order from Christ, upon the same errand, v. 1. 3.) II. Their preaching the gospel in Cyprus, and the opposition they met with there from Elymas the sorcerer, v. 4. 13. III. The heads of a sermon which Paul preached to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, in their synagogue, which is given us as a specimen of what they usually preached to the Jews, and the method they took with them, v. 14. 41. IV. The preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles at their request, and upon the Jews' refusal of it, wherein the apostles justified themselves against the displeasure which the Jews conceived at it, and God owned them, v. 42. 49. V. The trouble which the infidel Jews gave to the apostles, which obliged them to remove to another place, (v. 50. 52.) so that the design of this chapter is to shew how cautiously, how gradually, and with what good reason, the apostles carried the gospel into the Gentile world, and admitted the Gentiles into the church, which was so great an offence to the Jews, and which Paul is so industrious to justify in his epistles.

1. **N**OW there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

We have here a divine warrant and commission to Barnabas and Saul, to go and preach the gospel

among the Gentiles, and their ordination to that service by the imposition of hands, with fasting and prayer.

I. Here is an account of the present state of the church at Antioch, which was planted *ch. 11. 20*.

1. How well furnished it was with good ministers; there were there *certain prophets and teachers*, (v. 1.) men that were eminent for gifts, graces, and usefulness. Christ, when he *ascended on high*, gave *some prophets, and some teachers*; (Eph. 4. 11.) these were both. Agabus seems to have been a prophet, and not a teacher; and many were teachers, who were not prophets; but those were at times divinely inspired, and had instructions immediately from heaven upon special occasions, which gave them the title of prophets; and withal they were stated teachers of the church in their religious assemblies, expounded the scriptures, and opened the doctrine of Christ with suitable applications. These were the prophets, and scribes, or teachers, which Christ promised to send, (Matt. 23. 34.) such as were every way qualified for the service of the christian church. Antioch was a great city, and the christians there were many, so that they could not all meet in one place; it was therefore requisite they should have many teachers, to preside in their respective assemblies, and to deliver God's mind to them. Barnabas is first named, probably because he was the eldest, and Saul last, probably because he was the youngest; but afterward the last became first, and Saul more eminent in the church.

Three others are mentioned. (1.) *Simeon*, or *Simon*, who for distinction-sake was called *Niger*, Simon the Black, from the colour of his hair; like him that with us was surnamed the Black Prince. (2.) *Lucius* of Cyrene, who, some think, (and Dr. Lightfoot inclines to it,) was the same with this Luke that wrote the Acts; originally a Cyrenian, and educated in the Cyrenian college or synagogue at Jerusalem, and there first receiving the gospel. (3.) *Manaen*, a person of some quality, as it should seem, for he was *brought up with Herod the tetrarch*; either nursed of the same milk, or bred at the same school, or pupil to the same tutor, or rather one that was his constant colleague and companion; that in every part of his education was his comrade and intimate, which gave him a fair prospect of preferment at court, and yet for Christ's sake he quitted all the hopes of it; like Moses, who, *when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*. Had he joined in with Herod, with whom he was brought up, he might have had Blastus's place, and have been his chamberlain; but it is better to be fellow-sufferer with a saint than fellow-persecutor with a tetrarch.

2. How well employed they were; (v. 2.) *They ministered to the Lord, and fasted*. Observe, (1.) Diligent faithful teachers do truly minister unto the Lord. They that instruct christians, serve Christ; they really do him honour, and carry on the interest of his kingdom. They that minister to the church in praying and preaching, (both which are included here,) minister unto the Lord, for they are the church's servants for Christ's sake; to him they must have an eye in their ministrations, and from him they shall have their recompense. (2.) Ministering unto the Lord, in one way or other, ought to be the stated business of churches and their teachers; to this work time ought to be set apart, nay it is set apart, and in this work we ought to spend some part of every day. What have we to do as christians and ministers but to *serve the Lord Christ*? Col. 3. 24. Rom. 14. 18. (3.) Religious *fasting* is of use in our ministering to the Lord, both as a sign of our humiliation and a means of our mortification. Though it was not so much practised by the disciples of Christ *while the Bridegroom was with them*, as it

was by the disciples of John, and of the Pharisees ; yet after the Bridegroom was taken away, they attended in it, as those that had well learned to deny themselves, and to endure hardness.

II. The orders given by the Holy Ghost for the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul, while they were engaged in public exercises ; the ministers of the several congregations in the city joining in one solemn fast or day of prayer, the *Holy Ghost said*, either by a voice from heaven, or by a strong impulse on the minds of those of them that were prophets, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*. He does not specify the work, but refers to a former call which they themselves knew the meaning of, whether others did or no ; as for Saul, he was particularly told that he must bear *Christ's name to the Gentiles*, (ch. 9. 15.) that *he must be sent to the Gentiles*, (ch. 22. 21.) the matter was settled between them at Jerusalem before this, that as Peter, James and John, laid out themselves among them of the circumcision, so Paul and Barnabas should *go to the heathen*, Gal. 2. 7—9. Barnabas, it is likely, knew himself designed for that service as well as Paul. Yet they would not thrust themselves into this harvest, though it appeared plenteous, till they received their orders from the Lord of the harvest ; *Thrust in thy sickle, for the harvest is ripe*, Rev. 14. 15. The orders were, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul*. Observe here,

1. Christ by his Spirit has the nomination of his ministers ; for it is by the Spirit of Christ that they are both qualified in some measure for his service, inclined to it, and taken off from other cares inconsistent with it. There are some whom the Holy Ghost has separated for the service of Christ, has distinguished from others as men that are offered, and that willingly offer themselves to the temple-service ; and concerning them, directions are given to those who are competent judges of the sufficiency of the abilities, and the sincerity of the inclination, to separate them.

2. Christ's ministers are separated to him and to the Holy Ghost ; *Separate them to me* ; they are to be employed in Christ's work, and under the Spirit's guidance, to the glory of God the Father.

3. All that are separated to Christ as his ministers, are separated to work ; Christ keeps no servants to be idle. *If any man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work* ; that is it which he is separated to, *to labour in the word and doctrine*. They are separated to take pains, not to take state.

4. The work of Christ's ministers, to which they are to be separated, is work that is already settled, and that which all Christ's ministers hitherto have been called to, and which they themselves have first been, by an external call, directed to, and have chosen.

III. Their ordination, pursuant to these orders : not to the ministry in general, (Barnabas and Saul had both of them been ministers long before this,) but to a particular service in the ministry, which had something peculiar in it, and which required a fresh commission ; which commission God saw fit at this time to transmit by the hands of *these prophets and teachers*, for the giving of this direction to the church, that teachers should ordain *teachers*, (for prophets we are not now any longer to expect,) and that those who have the dispensing of the oracles of Christ committed to them, should, for the benefit of posterity, *commit the same to faithful men, who shall be able also to teach others*, 2 Tim. 2. 2. So here, Simeon, and Lucius, and Manaen, faithful teachers at this time in the church of Antioch, *when they had fasted and prayed, laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul, and sent them away*, (v. 3.) according to the directions received. Observe,

1. They *prayed* for them. When good men are going forth about good work, they ought to be solemnly and particularly prayed for, especially by their brethren that are their fellow-labourers and fellow-soldiers.

2. They joined *fasting* with their prayers, as they did in their other ministrations, v. 3. Christ has taught us this by his abstaining from sleep, (a night-fast, if I may so call it,) the night before he sent forth his apostles, that he might spend it in prayer.

3. They *laid their hands* on them. Hereby, (1.) They gave them their manumission, dismissal, or discharge, from the present service they were engaged in, in the church of Antioch ; acknowledging not only that they went off fairly and with consent, but honourably and with a good report. (2.) They implored a blessing upon them in their present undertaking, begged that God would be with them, and give them success ; and in order to this, that *they might be filled with the Holy Ghost* in their work. This very thing is explained ch. 14. 26. where it is said, concerning Paul and Barnabas, that from *Antioch they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled*. As it was an instance of the humility of Barnabas and Saul, that they submitted to the imposition of the hands of those that were their equals, or rather their inferiors ; so it was of the good disposition of the other teachers, that they did not envy Barnabas and Saul the honour to which they were preferred, but cheerfully committed it to them, with hearty prayers for them ; and *they sent them away* with all expedition, out of a concern for those countries where they were to break up fallow ground.

4. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia ; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. 5. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews ; and they had also John to their minister. 6. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus : 7. Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man ; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. 8. But Elymas the sorcerer, (for so is his name by interpretation,) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. 9. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him ; 10. And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord ? 11. And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness ; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. 12. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. 13. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came

to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

In these verses, we have,

I. A general account of the coming of Barnabas and Saul to the famous island of Cyprus; and perhaps thitherward they steered their course, because Barnabas was a native of that country, (*ch.* 4. 36.) and he was willing they should have the first fruits of his labours, pursuant to his new commission. Observe,

1. Their being sent forth by the Holy Ghost was the great thing that encouraged them in this undertaking, *v.* 4. If the Holy Ghost send them forth, he will go along with them, strengthen them, carry them on in their work, and give them success; and then they fear no colours, but can cheerfully venture upon a stormy sea from Antioch, which was now to them a quiet harbour.

2. They came to Seleucia, the sea-port town opposite to Cyprus, from thence crossed the sea to Cyprus; and in that island the first city they came to, was, Salamis, a city on the east side of the island, (*v.* 5.) and when they had sown good seed there, *thence they went onward through the isle*, (*v.* 6.) till they came to Paphos, which lay on the western coast.

3. *They preached the word of God*, wherever they came, *in the synagogues of the Jews*; so far were they from excluding them, that they gave them the preference, and so left those among them, who believed not, inexcusable; *they would have gathered them, but they would not*. They did not act clandestinely, nor preach the Messiah to others unknown to them, but laid their doctrine open to the censure of the rulers of their synagogues, who might, if they had any thing to say, object against it. Nor would they have acted separately, but in concert with them, if they had not driven them out from them, and from their synagogues.

4. *They had John to their minister*; not their servant in common things, but their assistant in the things of God; either to prepare their way in places where they designed to come, or to carry on their work in places where they had begun it, or to converse familiarly with those to whom they preached publicly, and explain things to them; and such a one might be many ways of use to them, especially in a strange country.

II. A particular account of their encounter with *Elymas the sorcerer*, whom they met with at Paphos, where the governor resided; a place famous for a temple built to Venus there, thence called *Paphia Venus*; and therefore there was more than ordinary need that *the Son of God* should be manifested to destroy the works of the devil.

1. There the *deputy*, a Gentile, *Sergius Paulus* by name, encouraged the apostles, and was willing to hear their message. He was governor of the country, under the Roman emperor; proconsul or propraetor, such a one as we should call *lord lieutenant of the island*; he had the character of a *prudent man*, an intelligent, considerate man, that was ruled by reason, not passion or prejudice; which appeared by this, that, having a character of Barnabas and Saul, he sent for them, and desired to hear the word of God. Note, That which we hear has a tendency to lead us to God, it is prudence to desire to hear more of it. Those are wise people, however they may be ranked among the foolish of this world, who are inquisitive after the mind and will of God. Though he was a great man, and a man in authority, and the preachers of the gospel were men that made no figure, yet, if they have a message from God, let him know what it is, and if it appear to be so, he is ready to receive it.

2. There Elymas, a Jew, a *sorcerer*, opposed them,

and did all he could to obstruct their progress. This justified the apostles in turning to the *Gentiles*, that this Jew was so malignant against them.

(1.) This Elymas was a pretender to the gift of prophecy, a sorcerer, a false prophet; one that would be taken for a divine, because he was skilled in the arts of divination; was a conjurer, and took on him to tell people their fortune, and to discover things lost, and probably was in league with the devil for that purpose; *his name was Bar-jesus—the son of Joshua*; it signifies the son of salvation; but the Syriac calls him, *Bar-shoma—the son of pride*; *filius inflationis—the son of inflammation*.

(2.) He was hanging on at court, *was with the deputy* of the country; it does not appear that the deputy called for him, as he did for Barnabas and Saul; but he thrust himself upon him, aiming, no doubt, to make a hand of him, and get money by him.

(3.) He made it his business to withstand Barnabas and Saul, as *the magicians of Egypt*, in Pharaoh's court, *withstood Moses and Aaron*, 2 Tim. 3. 8. He set up himself to be a messenger from heaven, and denied that they were. And thus he sought to turn away the deputy from the faith, (*v.* 8.) to keep him from receiving the gospel, which he saw him inclined to do. Note, Satan is in a special manner busy with great men and men in power, to keep them from being religious; because he knows that their example, whether good or bad, will have an influence upon many. And those who are any way instrumental to prejudice people against the truths and ways of Christ, are doing the devil's work.

(4.) *Saul* (who is here for the first time called *Paul*, and never after *Saul*) fell upon him for this with a holy indignation. *Saul, who also is called Paul*, *v.* 9. Saul was his name as he was a Hebrew, and of the tribe of Benjamin; Paul was his name as he was a citizen of Rome. Hitherto we have had him mostly conversant among the Jews, and therefore called by his Jewish name; but now when he is sent forth among the Gentiles, he is called by his Roman name, to put somewhat of a reputation upon him in the Roman cities; *Paulus* being a very common name among them. But, some think, he was never called Paul till now that he was instrumental in the conversion of *Sergius Paulus* to the faith of Christ, and that he took that name *Paulus* as a memorial of that victory obtained by the gospel of Christ; as among the Romans i.e. that had conquered a country, took his denomination from it, as *Germanicus*, *Britannicus*, *Africanus*; or rather, *Sergius Paulus* himself gave him the name *Paulus*, in token of his favour and respect to him, as Vespasian gave his name *Flavius* to Jesephus the Jew. Now of Paul it is said,

[1.] That he was filled with the Holy Ghost upon this occasion, filled with the holy zeal against a professed enemy of Christ, which was one of the graces of the Holy Ghost; *a spirit of burning*; filled with power to denounce the wrath of God against him, which was one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost; *a spirit of judgment*. He felt a more than ordinary fervour in his mind, as the prophet did when he was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord; (*Mic.* 3. 8.) and another prophet when his face was made harder than flint; (*Ezek.* 3. 9.) and another when his mouth was made like a sharp sword, *Isa.* 49. 2. What Paul said, did not come from any personal resentment, but from the strong impressions which the Holy Ghost made upon his spirit.

[2.] He set his eyes upon him, to face him down, and to shew a holy boldness, in opposition to his wicked impudence. He set his eyes upon him, as an indication that the eye of the heart—searching God was upon him, and saw through and through him; *ay, that the face of the Lord was against him*, *Ps.*

34. 16. He fixed his eyes upon him, to see if he could discern in his countenance any marks of remorse for what he had done; which, if he could have discerned the least sign of, it had prevented the ensuing doom.

[3.] He gave him his true character, not in passion, but by the Holy Ghost, who knows men better than they know themselves, v. 10. He describes him to be,

First, An agent for hell; and such there have been upon this earth (the seat of the war between the seed of the woman and of the serpent) ever since Cain, who was of that wicked one, an incarnate devil, slew his brother, for no other reason than because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. This Elymas, though called Bar-jesus—a son of Jesus, was really a child of the devil, bore his image, did his lusts, and served his interests, John 8. 44. In two things he resembled the devil, as a child does his father. 1. In craft; *the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field*; (Gen. 3. 1.) and Elymas, though void of all wisdom, was full of subtlety, expert in all the arts of deceiving men, and imposing upon them. 2. In malice; he was full of all mischief; a spiteful, ill-conditioned man; and a sworn implacable enemy to God and goodness. Note, A fulness of subtlety and mischief together, make a man indeed a child of the devil.

Secondly, An adversary to heaven; if he be a child of the devil, it follows of course that he is an enemy to all righteousness, for the devil is so. Note, Those that are enemies to the doctrine of Christ, are enemies to all righteousness, for in it all righteousness is summed up and fulfilled.

[4.] He charged upon him his present crime, and expostulated with him upon it; “*Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord*, to misrepresent them, to put false colours upon them, and so to discourage people from entering into them, and walking in them?” Note, *First*, The ways of the Lord are right: they are all so, they are perfectly so. The ways of the Lord Jesus are right, the only right ways to heaven and happiness. *Secondly*, There are those who pervert these right ways, who not only wander out of these ways themselves, (as Elihu's penitent, who owns, *I have perverted that which was right, and it profited me not*;) but mislead others, and suggest to them unjust prejudices against these ways: as if the doctrine of Christ were uncertain and precarious, the laws of Christ unreasonable and impracticable, and the service of Christ unpleasant and unprofitable; which is an unjust perverting of the right ways of the Lord, and making them to seem crooked ways. *Thirdly*, Those who pervert the right ways of the Lord, are commonly so hardened in it, that though the equity of those ways be set before them by the most powerful and commanding evidence, yet they will not cease to do it. *Etsi suaseris, non persuaseris*—You may advise, but you will never persuade; they will have it their own way, they have loved strangers, and after them they will go.

[5.] He denounced the judgment of God upon him, in a present blindness; (v. 11.) “*And now behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee*, a righteous hand. God is now about to lay hands on thee, and make thee his prisoner, for thou art taken in arms against him; thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.” This was designed both for the proof of his crime, as it was a miracle wrought to confirm the right ways of the Lord, and consequently to shew the wickedness of him who would not cease to pervert them; as also for the punishment of his crime. It was a suitable punishment; he shut his eyes, the eyes of his mind, against the light of the gospel, and therefore justly were the eyes of his body shut against the light of the sun; he sought to

blind the deputy, as an agent for the god of this world, (who blindeth the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the gospel should shine unto them, 2 Cor. 4. 4.) and therefore is himself struck blind; yet it was a moderate punishment, he was only struck blind, when he might most justly have been struck dead; and that it was only for a season; if he will repent, and give glory to God, by making confession, his sight shall be restored; nay, it should seem, though he do not, yet his sight shall be restored, to try if he will be led to repentance, either by the judgments of God or by his mercies.

[6.] This judgment was immediately executed; there fell on him a mist and a darkness, as on the Sodomites when they persecuted Lot, and on the Syrians when they persecuted Elisha; this silenced him presently, filled him with confusion, and was an effectual confutation of all he said against the doctrine of Christ. Let not him any more pretend to be a guide to the deputy's conscience, who is himself struck blind. It was also an earnest to him of a much sorer punishment if he repent not; for he is one of those wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever, Jude 13. Elymas did himself proclaim the truth of the miracle, when he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand; and where now is all his skill in sorcery, upon which he had so much valued himself, when he can neither find his way himself, nor find a friend that will be so kind as to lead him!

3. Notwithstanding all the endeavours of Elymas to turn away the deputy from the faith, he was brought to believe, and this miracle, wrought upon the magician himself, (like the boils of Egypt, which were upon the magicians, so that they could not stand before Moses, Exod. 9. 11.) contributed to it. The deputy was a very sensible man, and observed something uncommon, and which spake its divine original,

(1.) In Paul's preaching; he was astonished at the doctrine of the Lord, the Lord Christ, the doctrine that is from him, the discoveries he has made of the Father; the doctrine that is concerning him, his person, natures, offices, undertaking. Note, The doctrine of Christ has a great deal in it that is astonishing; and the more we know of it, the more reason we shall see to wonder and stand amazed at it.

(2.) In this miracle; when he saw what was done, and how much Paul's power transcended that of the magician, and how plainly Elymas was baffled and confounded, he believed. It is not said that he was baptized, and so made a complete convert, but it is probable that he was. Paul would not do his business by the halves; as for God, his work is perfect. When he became a christian, he neither laid down his government, nor was turned out of it, but we may suppose, as a christian magistrate, by his influence helped very much to propagate christianity in that island. The tradition of the Roman church, which has taken care to find bishopricks for all the eminent converts we read of in the Acts, has made this Sergius Paulus Bishop of Narbon in France, left there by Paul in his journey to Spain.

III. Their departure from the island of Cyprus. It is probable that they did a great deal more there than is recorded, where an account is given only of that which was extraordinary—the conversion of the deputy. When they had done what they had to do,

1. They quitted the country, and went to Perga. Those that went, were Paul, and his company, which, it is probable, was increased in Cyprus, many being desirous to accompany him. *Ἀναχθῆναι ἰππεῖς τὸν Πάυλον*—They that were about Paul, loosed from Paphos; which supposes that he went too; but such an affection had his new friends for him, that they were always about him, and by their good will would be never from him.

2. Then John Mark *quitted them*, and returned *to Jerusalem*, without the consent of Paul and Barnabas; either he did not like the work, or he wanted to go see his mother. It was his fault, and we shall hear of it again.

14. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and sat down. 15. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, *Ye men and brethren*, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. 16. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with *his* hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. 17. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. 18. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. 19. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot. 20. And after that he gave *unto them* judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. 21. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. 22. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the *son of Jesse*, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. 23. Of this man's seed hath God, according to *his* promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus: 24. When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Who think ye that I am? I am not *he*. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of *his* feet I am not worthy to loose. 26. Men *and* brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. 27. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath-day, they have fulfilled *them* in condemning *him*. 28. And though they found no cause of death *in him*, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. 29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took *him* down from the tree, and laid *him* in a sepulchre. 30. But God raised him from the dead: 31. And he was seen many

days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. 32. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, 33. God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. 34. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. 35. Wherefore he saith also in another *psalm*, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 36. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37. But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. 38. Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39. And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. 40. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; 41. Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

Perga in Pamphylia was a noted place, especially for a temple there erected to the goddess Diana, yet nothing at all is related of what Paul and Barnabas did there, only that *thither they came*, (v. 13.) and *thence they departed*, v. 14. But the history of the apostles' travels, as that of Christ's, passes by many things worthy to have been recorded, because *if all should have been written, the world could not have contained the books*.

But the next place we find them in, is, another Antioch, said to be *in Pisidia*, to distinguish it from that Antioch *in Syria*, from whence they were sent out. Pisidia was a province of the Lesser Asia, bordering upon Pamphylia; this Antioch, it is likely, was the metropolis of it; abundance of Jews lived there, and to them *the gospel was to be first preached*; and Paul's sermon to them is what we have in these verses, which, it is likely, is the substance of what was preached by the apostles generally to the Jews in all places; for in dealing with them, the proper way was to shew them how the New Testament, which they would have them to receive, exactly agreed with the Old Testament, which they not only received, but were zealous for.

We have here,

I. The appearance which Paul and Barnabas made in a religious assembly of the Jews *at Antioch*, v. 14. Though they had lately had such good success with a Roman deputy, yet, *when they came to Antioch*, they did not inquire for the chief magistrate, or make their court to him, but they applied themselves to the Jews; which is a further proof of their good affection to them, and their desire of their welfare.

1. They observed their time of worship, *on the sabbath-day*, the Jewish sabbath. *The first day of the week* they observed among themselves as a Christian sabbath; but if they will meet the Jews, it must be on the seventh-day sabbath; which therefore, upon such occasions, they did as yet sometimes observe. For though it was by the death of Christ that the ceremonial law died, yet it was in the ruins of Jerusalem that it was to be buried; and therefore, though the morality of the fourth commandment was entirely transferred to the christian sabbath, yet it was not incongruous to join with the Jews in their sabbath-sanctification.

2. They met them in their place of worship, *in the synagogue*. Note, Sabbath-days should be kept holy in solemn assemblies, they are instituted chiefly for public worship; *the sabbath-day is a holy convocation*, and for that reason *no servile work must be done therein*. Paul and Barnabas were strangers; but wherever we come, we must inquire out God's faithful worshippers, and join with them, (as these apostles here did,) as those that desire to keep up a communion with all saints; though they were strangers, yet they were admitted *into the synagogue*, and *to sit down there*. Care should be taken in places of public worship, that strangers be accommodated, even the poorest; for those we know nothing else of, we know this, that they have precious souls, which our charity binds us to be concerned for.

II. The invitation given them to preach.

1. The usual service of the synagogue was performed; (*v. 15.*) *The law and the prophets were read*, a portion of each, the lessons for the day. Note, When we come together to worship God, we must do it not only by prayer and praise, but by the reading and hearing of the word of God; hereby we *give him the glory due to his name*, as our Lord and Lawgiver.

2. When that was done, they were asked, *by the rulers of the synagogue*, to give them a sermon; (*v. 15.*) they sent a messenger to them with this respectful message, *Men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on*. It is probable that the rulers of the synagogue had met with them, and been in private conversation with them before; and if they had not an affection to the gospel, yet they had at least the curiosity to hear Paul preach; and therefore, not only gave him permission, but begged the favour of him, that he would speak *a word of exhortation to the people*. Note, (1.) The bare reading of the scriptures in the public assemblies is not sufficient, but they should be expounded, and the people exhorted out of them. This is spreading the net, and assisting people in doing that which is necessary to the making of the word profitable to them—that is, the applying of it to themselves. (2.) Those that preside, and have power, in public assemblies, should provide for a word of exhortation to the people, whenever they come together. (3.) Sometimes a word of exhortation from a strange minister may be of great use to the people, provided he be well approved. It is likely, Paul did often preach in the synagogue, when he was not thus invited to it by the rulers of the synagogues; for he often preached *with much contention*, 1 Thess. 2. 2. But these were more noble, more generous, than the rulers of the synagogues commonly were.

III. The sermon Paul preached in the synagogue of the Jews, at the invitation of the rulers of the synagogue. He gladly embraced the opportunity given him to preach Christ to his countrymen the Jews; he did not object to them, that he was a stranger, and that it was none of his business; nor object to himself, that he may get ill-will by preaching Christ among the Jews; but *stood up*, as one pre-

pared and determined to speak, *and beckoned with his hand*, to excite and prepare them to hear; he waved his hand as an orator, not only desiring silence and attention, but endeavouring to move affection, and to shew himself in earnest. Perhaps, upon the moving of them *to give an exhortation to the people*, there were those in the synagogue, that were ready to mutiny against the rulers, and opposed the toleration of Paul's preaching, and that occasioned some tumult and commotion, which Paul endeavoured to quiet by that decent motion of his hand; as also by his modest desire of a patient impartial hearing; "*Men of Israel*, that are *Jews* by birth, *and ye that fear God*, that are proselyted to the Jewish religion, *give audience*; let me beg your attention a little, for I have something to say to you, which concerns your everlasting peace, and would not say it in vain."

Now this excellent sermon is recorded, to shew that those who preached the gospel to the Gentiles, did it not till they had first used their utmost endeavours with the Jews, to persuade them to come in, and take the benefit of it; and that they had no prejudice at all against the Jewish nation, nor any desire *that they should perish*, but *rather that they should turn and live*. Every thing is touched in this sermon, that might be proper, either to convince the judgment or insinuate into the affections of the Jews, to prevail with them to receive and embrace Christ as the promised Messiah.

1. He owns them to be God's favourite people, whom he had taken into special relation to himself, and for whom he had done great things. Probably, *the Jews of the dispersion*, that lived in other countries, being more in danger of mingling with the nations, were more jealous of their peculiarity than those that lived in their own land were; and therefore Paul is here very careful to take notice of it, to their honour.

(1.) That *the God of the whole earth* was, in a particular manner, *the God of this people Israel*, a God in covenant with them, and that he had given them a revelation of his mind and will, such as he had not given to any other nation or people; so that hereby they were distinguished from, and dignified above, all their neighbours, having peculiar precepts to be governed by, and peculiar promises to depend upon.

(2.) That he had *chosen their fathers* to be his friends: Abraham was called the *friend of God*; to be his prophets, by whom he would reveal his mind to his church, and to be the trustees of his covenant with the church. He puts them in mind of this, to let them know that the reason why God favoured them, though undeserving and ill deserving, was, because he would adhere to the choice he had made of *their fathers*, Deut. 7. 7, 8. *They were beloved purely for the fathers' sake*, Rom. 11. 28.

(3.) That he had *exalted that people*, and put a great deal of honour upon them, had advanced them into a people, and raised them from nothing, then, *when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt*, and had nothing in them to recommend them to the divine favour. They ought to remember this, and to infer from hence, that God was no debtor to them; for it was *ex mero motu*—out of his mere good pleasure, and not upon a valuable consideration, that they had the grant of the divine favour; and therefore it was revocable at pleasure; and God did them no wrong, if he at length plucked up the hedge of their peculiarity. But they were debtors to him, and obliged to receive such further discoveries as he should make of his will, and to admit such further additions as he should make to his church.

(4.) That he had *with a high hand brought them out of Egypt*, where they were not only strangers, but captives; had delivered them at the expense of a great many miracles, both of mercy to them and

judgment on their oppressors; (*signs, and wonders*, Deut. 4. 34.) and at the expense of a great many lives, *all the first-born of Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his host, in the Red Sea; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, gave men for thee*, Isa. 43. 3, 4.

(5.) That he had suffered their manners forty years in the wilderness, v. 18. ἡγετο αὐτοὺς—*he educated them*, because that is the word the Septuagint use concerning the fatherly care God took of that people, Deut. 1. 31. Both may be included; for, [1.] God made a great deal of provision for them for forty years in the wilderness: miracles were their daily bread, and kept them from starving; *they lacked not any thing*. [2.] They exercised a great deal of patience with them; they were a provoking, murmuring, unbelieving people; and yet he bore with them, did not deal with them as they deserved, but suffered his anger many a time to be turned away by the prayer and intercession of Moses. So many years as we have each of us lived in this world, we must own that God has thus been as a tender Father to us, has supplied our wants, *has fed us all our life long unto this day*, has been indulgent to us, a God of pardons, (as he was to Israel, Neh. 9. 17.) and *not extreme to mark what we have done amiss*; we have tried his patience, and yet not tired it. Let not the Jews insist too much upon the privileges of their peculiarity, for they had forfeited them a thousand times.

(6.) That he had put them in possession of the land of Canaan; (v. 19.) *When he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan*, that were doomed to be rooted out to make room for them, *he divided their land to them by lot*, and put them in possession of it. This was a signal favour of God to them, and he owns that hereby a great honour was put upon them, which he would not in the least derogate from.

(7.) That he had raised up men, spirited from heaven, to deliver them out of the hands of those that invaded their rights, and oppressed them after their settlement in Canaan, v. 20, 21. [1.] *He gave them judges*, men qualified for public service, and, oy an immediate impulse upon their spirits, called to it, *pro re nata*—as the occasion required. Though they were a provoking people, and were never in servitude but their sin brought them to it, yet upon their petition, a deliverer was raised up. The critics find some difficulty in computing *these four hundred and fifty years*. From the deliverance out of Egypt, to David's expulsion of the Jebusites from the strong-hold of Zion, which completed the casting out of the heathen nations, *was four hundred and fifty years*; and most of that time they were under judges. Others thus; The government of the judges, from the death of Joshua to the death of Eli, was just *three hundred thirty-nine years*, but it is said to be [4:] as it were *four hundred and fifty years*; because the years of their servitude to the several nations that oppressed them, though really they were included in the years of the judges, are yet mentioned in the history as if they had been distinct from them. Now these, all put together, make *one hundred and eleven years*, and those added to the *three hundred thirty-nine*, make them *four hundred and fifty*; as so many, though not really so many. [2.] He governed them by a *prophet, Samuel*, a man divinely inspired to preside in their affairs. [3.] He afterward, at their request, *set a king over them*, (v. 21.) *Saul, the son of Cis*. Samuel's government and his lasted *forty years*; which was a kind of transition from the theocracy to the kingly government. [4.] At last, he made *David their king*, v. 22. *When God had removed Saul*, for his mal-administration, *he raised up unto them David to be their king*, and made a covenant of royalty with him, and with his seed. Then, when he had

removed one king, he did not leave them as sheep without a shepherd, but soon raised up another; raised him up from a mean and low estate, *raised him up on high*, 2 Sam. 23. 1. He quotes the *testimony* God gave concerning him, *First*, that his choice was divine; *I have found David*, Ps. 89. 20. God himself pitched upon him. Finding implies seeking; as if God had ransacked all the families of Israel to find a man fit for his purpose, and this was he. *Secondly*, That his character was divine; *a man after my own heart*; such a one as I would have; one on whom the image of God is stamped, and therefore one in whom God is well pleased, and whom he approves. This character was given of him before he was first anointed, 1 Sam. 13. 14. *The Lord hath sought him out a man after his own heart*, such a one as he would have. *Thirdly*, That his conduct was divine, and under a divine direction; *He shall fulfil all my will*. He shall desire and endeavour to do the will of God, and shall be enabled to do it, and employed in the doing of it, and go through with it.

Now all this seems to shew not only the special favour of God to the people of Israel, (which the apostle is very willing to oblige them with the acknowledgment of,) but the further favours of another nature, which he designed them, and which were now, by the preaching of the gospel, offered to them. Their deliverance out of Egypt, and settlement in Canaan, *were types and figures of good things to come*; the changes of their government shewed that it made *nothing perfect*, and therefore must give way to the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, which was now in the setting up, and which, if they would admit it, and submit to it, would be *the glory of their people Israel*; and therefore they needed not conceive any jealousy at all of the preaching of the gospel, as if it tended in the least to damage the true excellencies of the Jewish church.

2. He gives them a full account of our Lord Jesus, passing from David to the Son of David, and shews that this Jesus is his promised seed; (v. 25.) *Of this man's seed*, from that root of Jesse, from that man after God's own heart, *hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus*, who carries salvation in his name. How welcome should the preaching of the gospel of Christ be to the Jews, and how should they embrace it, as *well worthy of all acceptance* when it brought them the tidings, (1.) Of a Saviour, to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, as the judges of old, who were therefore called *saviours*; but this a Saviour to do that for them, which, it appears by the history, those could not do—to save them from their sins, their worst enemies. (2.) A Saviour of God's raising up, that has his commission from heaven. (3.) Raised up to be a Saviour unto Israel, to them in the first place; *he was sent to bless them*; so far was the gospel from designing the rejection of Israel, that it designed the gathering of them! (4.) Raised up of the seed of David, that ancient, royal family, which the people of Israel gloried so much in, and which at this time, to the great disgrace of the whole nation, was buried in obscurity. It ought to be a great satisfaction to them, that God had raised up *this horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David*, Luke 1. 69. (5.) Raised up according to his promise, the promise to David, (Ps. 132. 11.) the promise to the Old Testament church, in the latter times of it; *I will raise unto David a righteous branch*, Jer. 23. 5. This promise was it to which the twelve tribes hoped to come; (ch. 26. 7.) why then should they entertain it so coldly, now that it was brought to them?

Now, concerning this Jesus, he tells them,

[1.] That John the Baptist was his harbingers and forerunner; that great man, whom all acknowledged

ed to be a prophet. Let them not say that the Messiah's coming was a surprise upon them, and that that might excuse them if they took time to consider whether they should entertain him or no; for they had sufficient warning by *John*, who *preached before his coming*, v. 24. Two things he did,

First, He made way for his entrance, by *preaching the baptism of repentance*, not to a few select disciples, but to *all the people of Israel*; he shewed them their sins, *warned them of the wrath to come*, called them to repentance, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and bound those to this, who were willing to be bound by the solemn rite or sign of baptism; and by this he made ready a people prepared for the Lord Jesus, to whom his grace would be acceptable, when they were thus brought to know themselves.

Secondly, He gave notice of his approach; (v. 25.) *As he fulfilled his course*, when he was going on vigorously in his work, and had had powerful success in it, and an established interest; "Now," saith he to those that attended his ministry, "*Who think ye that I am?*" What notions have you of me, what expectations from me? You may be thinking that I am the Messiah, whom you expect; but you are mistaken, *I am not he*: (see John 1. 20.) but he is at the door; behold, *there cometh one immediately after me*, who will so far exceed me upon all accounts, that *I am not worthy* to be employed in the meanest office about him, no, not to help him on and off with his shoes; *whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to unloose*; and you may guess who that must be."

[2.] That the rulers and people of the Jews, who should have welcomed him, and been his willing, forward, faithful subjects, were his persecutors and murderers. When the apostles preach Christ as the Saviour, they are so far from concealing his ignominious death, and drawing a veil over it, that they always *preach Christ crucified*, yea, and (though that added much to the reproach of his sufferings) crucified by his own people, by *them that dwelt in Jerusalem*, the holy city: the royal city, and their rulers, v. 27.

First, Their sin was, *that though they found no cause of death in him*, could not prove him, no, nor had any colour to suspect him, guilty of any crime, (the judge himself that tried him, when he had heard all they could say against him, declared he found no fault in him,) yet they desired Pilate that he might be slain, (v. 28.) and presented their address against Christ with such fury and outrage, that they compelled Pilate to crucify him, not only contrary to his inclination, but contrary to his conscience; they condemned him to *so great a death*, though they could not convict him of the least sin. Paul cannot charge this upon his hearers, as Peter did; (ch. 2. 23.) *You have with wicked hands crucified and slain him*; for these, though Jews, were far enough off; but he charges it upon the Jews at Jerusalem, and the rulers, to shew what little reason those Jews of the dispersion had to be so jealous for the honour of their nation as they were, when it had brought upon itself such a load and stain of guilt as this, and how justly they might have been cut off from all benefit by the Messiah, who had thus abused him, and yet they were not; but, notwithstanding all this, the preaching of this gospel shall begin at Jerusalem.

Secondly, The reason of this was, because they knew him not, v. 27. They knew not who he was, nor what errand he came into the world upon; for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Christ owned this in extenuation of their crime; *They know not what they do*: and so did Peter; *I wot, that through ignorance ye did this*, ch. 3. 17. It was also because they knew not the

voice of the prophets, though they heard them read every sabbath-day; they did not understand nor consider that it was foretold that the Messiah should suffer, or else they would never have been the instruments of his suffering. Note, Many that read the prophets, do not know the voice of the prophets, do not understand the meaning of the scriptures; they have the sound of the gospel in their ears, but not the sense of them in their heads, or savour of them in their hearts. And therefore men do not know Christ, nor know how to carry it toward him, because they do not know the voice of the prophets, who testified beforehand concerning Christ.

Thirdly, God overruled them for the accomplishment of the prophecies of the Old Testament; *Because they knew not the voice of the prophets*, which warned them not to touch God's Anointed, they fulfilled them in condemning him; for so it was written, that *Messiah the Prince shall be cut off; but not for himself*. Note, It is possible that men may be fulfilling scripture-prophecies, even when they are breaking scripture-precepts; particularly in the persecution of the church, as in the persecution of Christ. And this justifies the reason which is sometimes given for the obscurity of scripture-prophecies, that if they were too plain and obvious, the accomplishment of them would thereby be prevented. So Paul saith here, *Because they knew not the voice of the prophets, therefore they have fulfilled them*; which implies that if they had understood them, they would not have fulfilled them.

Fourthly, All that was foretold concerning the sufferings of the Messiah, was fulfilled in Christ; (v. 29.) *When they had fulfilled all the rest that was written of him*, even to the giving of him vinegar to drink in his thirst, then they fulfilled what was foretold concerning his being buried—they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. This is taken notice of here, as that which made his resurrection the more illustrious. Christ was separated from this world, as those that are buried have nothing more to do with this world, nor this world with them. And therefore our complete separation from sin is represented by our being buried with Christ. And a good christian will be willing to be buried alive with Christ. They laid him in a sepulchre, and thought they had him fast.

[3.] That he rose again from the dead, and saw no corruption; this was the great truth that was to be preached; for it is the main pillar by which the whole fabric of the gospel is supported, and therefore he insists largely upon this, and shews,

First, That he rose by consent; when he was imprisoned in the grave for our debt, he did not break prison, but had a fair and legal discharge from the arrest he was under; (v. 30.) *God raised him from the dead*; sent an angel on purpose to roll away the stone from the prison-door, returned him the spirit which at his death he had committed into the hands of his Father, and quickened him by the Holy Ghost. His enemies laid him in a sepulchre, with design he should always lie there; but God said, *Arise*; and it was soon seen whose words should stand, his or theirs.

Secondly, That there was sufficient proof of his being risen; (v. 31.) *He was seen many days*, in divers places, upon divers occasions, by them that were most intimately acquainted with him; for they came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, were his constant attendants, and they are his witnesses unto the people; they were appointed to be so, have attested the thing many a time, and are ready to attest it though they were to die for the same. Paul says nothing of his own seeing him, (which he mentions 1 Cor. 15. 8.) because it was in a vision, which was more convincing to himself than it could be when produced to others.

Thirdly, That the resurrection of Christ was the performance of the promise made to the patriarchs; it was not only true news, but good news; "In declaring this, we declare unto you glad tidings, (v. 32, 33.) which should be in a particular manner acceptable to you Jews; so far are we from designing to put any slur upon you, or do you any wrong, that the doctrine we preach, if you receive it aright, and understand it, brings you the greatest honour and satisfaction imaginable; for it is in the resurrection of Christ, that the promise which was made to your fathers, is fulfilled to you." He acknowledges it to be the dignity of the Jewish nation, that to them pertained the promises, (Rom. 9. 4.) that they were the heirs of the promise, as they were the children of the patriarchs to whom the promises were first made. The great promise of the Old Testament was that of the Messiah, *in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed*, and not the family of Abraham only; though it was to be the peculiar honour of that family, that he should be raised up of it, yet it was to be the common benefit of all families, that he should be raised up to them. Note, 1. God hath raised up Jesus, advanced him, and exalted him; *raised him again*; so we read it, meaning *raised from the dead*. We may take it in both senses. God raised up Jesus to be a Prophet, at his baptism; to be a Priest to make atonement, at his death; and to be a King to rule over all, at his ascension; and his raising him up from the dead was the confirmation and ratification of all these commissions, and proved him raised of God to these offices. 2. This is the fulfilling of the promises made to the fathers, the promise of sending the Messiah, and of all those benefits and blessings which were to be had with him and by him; "This is he that should come; and in him you have all that God promised in the Messiah, though not all that you promised yourselves." Paul puts himself into the number of the Jews, to whom the promise was fulfilled, *to us their children*. Now if they who preached the gospel, brought them these glad tidings, instead of looking upon them as enemies to their nation, they ought to caress them as their best friends, and embrace their doctrine with both arms; for if they valued the promise so much, and themselves by it, much more the performance. And the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, which was the great thing that the Jews found themselves aggrieved at, was so far from infringing the promise made to them, that the promise itself, that *all the families of the earth* should be blessed in the Messiah, could not otherwise be accomplished.

Fourthly, That the resurrection of Christ was the great proof of his being the Son of God; and confirms what was written in the second Psalm; (thus ancient was the order in which the Psalms are now placed;) *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*. That the resurrection of Christ from the dead was designed to evidence and evince this, is plain from that of the apostle; (Rom. 1. 4.) *He was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead*. When he was first raised up out of obscurity, God declared concerning him by a voice from heaven, *This is my beloved Son*, (Matt. 3. 17.) which has a plain reference to that in the second Psalm, *Thou art my Son*. Abundance of truth there is couched in those words; that this Jesus was begotten of the Father before all worlds; was the Brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, as the son is of the father's: that he was the *very*, the eternal Thought of the eternal Mind; that he was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin; for upon that account also, that *Holy Thing* was called the Son of God; (Luke 1. 35.) that he was God's Agent in creating and governing the world, and in

redeeming it and reconciling it to himself, and faithful as a son in his own house; and as such was *Heir of all things*. Now all this which was declared at Christ's baptism, and again at his transfiguration, was undeniably proved by his resurrection. The decree which was so long before declared, was then confirmed; and the reason why it was impossible he should be held by the bands of death, was, because he was the Son of God, and consequently had life in himself, which he could not lay down but with a design to resume it. When his eternal generation is spoken of, it is not improper to say, *This day have I begotten thee*; for from everlasting to everlasting, is with God as it were one and the same eternal day. Yet it may also be accommodated to his resurrection, in a subordinate sense, "This day have I made it to appear that I have begotten thee; and this day have I begotten all that are given to thee:" for it is said, (1 Pet. 1. 3.) that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as our God and Father, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Fifthly, That his being raised the third day, so as not to see corruption, and to a heavenly life, so as no more to return to corruption, to the state of the dead, as others did who were raised to life, further confirms his being the Messiah promised.

1. He rose to die no more; so it is expressed Rom. 6. 9. *As concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption*, that is, to the grave, which is called corruption, Job 17. 14. Lazarus came out of the grave with his grave clothes on, because he was to use them again; but Christ, having no more occasion for them, left them behind. Now this was the fulfilling of that scripture, (Isa. 55. 3.) *I will give you the sure mercies of David*; τα ἁγια δαδὶς τοῦ δαυὶδ—the holy things of David, the faithful things; for in the promise made to David, and in him to Christ, great stress is laid upon the faithfulness of God, (Ps. 89. 1, 2, 5, 24, 33.) and upon the oath God had sworn by his holiness, v. 35. Now this makes them sure mercies indeed, that he who is intrusted with the dispensing of them, is risen, to die no more; so that he ever lives to see his own will executed, and the blessings he hath purchased for us, given out to us. As if Christ had died, and had not risen again, so if he had risen to die again, we had come short of the sure mercies, or at least could not have been sure of them.

2. He rose so soon after he was dead, that his body did not see corruption; for it is not till the third day that the body begins to change. Now this was promised to David, it was one of the sure mercies of David; for it was said to him in Ps. 16. 10. *Neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption*, v. 35. God had promised to David, that he would raise up the Messiah of his seed, who should therefore be a Man, but should not like other men see corruption. This promise could not have its accomplishment in David, but looked forward to Christ.

(1.) It could not be accomplished in David himself, (v. 36.) for David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, who raised him up to be what he was, fell asleep, and was laid to his fathers, and saw corruption. Here we have a short account of the life, death, and burial, of the patriarch David, and his continuance under the power of death. [1.] His life; He served his own generation by the will of God, before he slept the sleep of death. David was a useful good man; he did good in the world by the will of God, he made God's precepts his rule; he served his own generation, so as therein to serve God; he so served and pleased men, (as whatever the king did, pleased the people, 2 Sam. 3. 36.) as still to keep himself the faithful servant of

God. See Gal. 1. 10. He served the good of men ; but did not serve the will of men. Or, by the will of God's providence so ordering it, qualifying him for, and calling him to, a public station, he *served his own generation* ; for every creature is that to us, that God makes it to be. David was a great blessing to the age wherein he lived, he was the *servant* of his generation ; many are the curse, and plague, and burthen, of their generation. Even those that are in a lower and narrower sphere, must look upon it, that *therefore* they live, to *serve their generation* ; and those that will do good in the world, must make themselves *servants of all*, 1 Cor. 9. 19. We were not born for ourselves, but are members of communities, to which we must study to be serviceable. Yet here is the difference between David and Christ, that David was to serve only his *own* generation, that generation in which he lived ; and therefore when he had done what he had to do, and written what he had to write, he died, and continued in the grave ; but Christ (not by his writings or words upon record only as David, but by his personal agency) was to serve *all* generations, must ever live to reign over the house of Jacob, not as David, for forty years, but for all ages, *as long as the sun and moon endure*, Ps. 89. 29. His throne must be as the days of heaven, and all generations must be *blessed in him*, Ps. 72. 17. [2.] His death ; *He fell asleep*. Death is a sleep, a quiet rest, to those who, while they lived, laboured in the service of God and their generation. Observe, He did not fall asleep till he had served his generation, till he had done the work for which God raised him up. God's servants have their work assigned them ; and when they have *accomplished as a hireling their day*, then, and not till then, they are called to rest. God's witnesses never die till they have finished their testimony ; and then *the sleep, the death, of the labouring man will be sweet*. David was not permitted to build the temple, and therefore when he had made preparation for it, which was the service he was designed to, he fell asleep, and left the work to Solomon. [3.] His burial ; *He was laid to his fathers*. Though he was buried in the *city of David*, (1 Kings 2. 10.) and not in the sepulchre of Jesse his father at Bethlehem, yet he might be said to be *laid to his fathers* ; for the grave, in general, is the habitation of *our fathers*, of those that are gone before us, Ps. 49. 19. [4.] His continuance in the grave ; *He saw corruption*. We are sure he did not rise again ; this St. Peter insists upon, when he freely speaks of the patriarch David ; (ch. 2. 29.) *He is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day*. He saw corruption, and therefore that promise could not have its accomplishment in him. But,

(2.) It was accomplished in the Lord Jesus ; (v. 37.) *He whom God raised again, saw no corruption* ; for it was in him that the sure mercies were to be reserved for us. He rose the third day, and therefore did not see corruption then ; and he rose to die no more, and therefore never did. Of him therefore the promise must be understood, and no other.

3. Having given them this account of the Lord Jesus, he comes to make application of it.

(1.) In the midst of his discourse, to engage their attention, he had told his hearers, that they were concerned in all this ; (v. 26.) *"To you is the word of this salvation sent ; to you first*. If you by your unbelief make it a word of *rejection* to you, you may thank yourselves ; but it is sent to you for a word of *salvation* ; if it be not so, it is your own fault." Let them not peevishly argue, that because it was sent to the Gentiles, who had no communion with them, therefore it was not sent to them ; for to them it was sent in the first place. *"To you men* this is sent, and not to the angels that sinned. To you living men, and not to the congregation of the dead and

damned, whose day of grace is over." He therefore speaks to them with tenderness and respect ; You are *men and brethren* ; and so we are to look upon all those that stand fair with us for the great salvation, as having the word of salvation sent to them. Those to whom he does by warrant from heaven here bring the *word of salvation*, are, [1.] The native Jews, Hebrews of the Hebrews, as Paul himself was ; *"Children of the stock of Abraham*, though a degenerate race, yet to you is this word of salvation sent ; nay, it is therefore sent to you, to save you from your sins." It is an advantage to be of a good stock ; for though salvation does not always follow the children of godly parents, yet the word of salvation does ; *Abraham will command his children and his household after him*. [2.] The proselytes, the Gentiles by birth, that were in some degree brought over to the Jews' religion ; *"Whosoever among you that feareth God*. You that have a sense of natural religion, and have subjected yourselves to the laws of that, and taken hold of the comforts of that, *to you is the word of this salvation sent* ; you need the further discoveries and directions of revealed religion, are prepared for them, and will bid them welcome, and therefore shall certainly be welcome to take the benefit of them."

(2.) In the close of his discourse, he applies what he had said concerning Christ, to his hearers. He had told them a long story concerning *this Jesus* ; now they would be ready to ask, What is all this to us ? And he tells them plainly, it is to them.

[1.] It will be their unspeakable advantage if they embrace Jesus Christ, and believe this word of salvation ; it will relieve them there where their greatest danger lies ; and that is from the guilt of their sins ; *"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren* ; we are warranted to proclaim it to you, and you are called to take notice of it." He did not stand up to preach *before* them, but to preach *to* them, and not without hopes of prevailing with them ; for they are *men*, reasonable creatures, and capable of being argued with ; they are *brethren*, spoken to, and dealt with, by men like themselves ; not only of the same nature, but of the same nation. It is proper for the preachers of the gospel to call their hearers *brethren* ; as speaking familiarly to them, and with an affectionate concern for their welfare, and as being equally interested with them in the gospel they preach. Let all that hear the gospel of Christ, know these two things :

First, That it is an act of indemnity granted by the King of kings to the children of men, who stand attainted at his bar of treason against his crown and dignity ; and it is for and in consideration of the mediation of Christ between God and man, that this act of grace is passed and proclaimed ; (v. 38.) *"Through this Man*, who died and rose again, *is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins*. We are to tell you, in God's name, that your sins, though many and great, may be forgiven, and how it is come about that they may be so, without any injury to God's honour ; and how you may obtain the forgiveness of your sins. We are to preach repentance for the remission of sins, and divine grace giving both *repentance and remission of sins*. The remission of sins is *through this Man*, by his merit it was purchased, in his name it is offered, and by his authority it is bestowed ; and therefore you are concerned to be acquainted with him, and interested in him. We preach to you the *forgiveness of sins* ; that is the salvation we bring you, the word of God ; and therefore you ought to bid us welcome and look upon us as your friends, and messengers of good tidings."

Secondly, That it does that for us, which the law of Moses could not do. The Jews were jealous for the law, and because it prescribed expiatory and pacificatory sacrifices, and a great variety of purifi-

cations, fancied they might be justified by it before God. "No," saith Paul, "be it known to you, that it is by Christ only that *they who believe in him*, and none else, are *justified from all things*, from all the guilt and stain of sin, *from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*;" (v. 39.) therefore they ought to entertain and embrace the gospel, and not to adhere to the law in opposition to it, because the gospel is perfective, not destructive, of the law. Note, 1. The great concern of sinners, is, to be justified, to be acquitted from guilt, and accepted as righteous in God's sight. 2. Those who are truly justified are acquitted from all their guilt; for if any be left charged upon the sinner, he is undone. 3. It was impossible for a sinner to be justified by the law of Moses; not by his moral law, for we have all broken it, and are transgressing it daily, so that instead of justifying us, it condemns us: not by his remedial law, for it was not possible that *the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin*, should satisfy God's offended justice, or pacify the sinner's wounded conscience. It was but a ritual and typical institution. See Heb. 9. 9.—10. 1, 4. 4. By Jesus Christ we obtain a complete justification; for by him a complete atonement was made for sin. We are justified, not only by him as our Judge, but by him as our Righteousness, *the Lord our Righteousness*. 5. All that *believe in Christ*, that rely upon him, and give up themselves to be ruled by him, are justified by him, and none but they. 6. What the law *could not do for us*, in that it was *weak*, that the gospel of Christ does; and therefore it was folly, out of a jealousy for the law of Moses and the honour of that institution, to conceive a jealousy of the gospel of Christ and the designs of that more perfect institution.

[2.] It is at their utmost peril if they reject the gospel of Christ, and turn their backs upon the offer now made them; (v. 40, 41.) "*Beware therefore*; you have a fair invitation given you, look to yourselves, lest you either neglect or oppose it." Note, Those to whom the gospel is preached, must see themselves upon their trial and good behaviour, and are concerned to beware lest they be found refusers of the grace offered. "Beware, lest you not only come short of the blessings and benefits spoken of in the prophets, as coming upon those that believe, but fall under the doom spoken of in the prophets, as coming upon those that persist in unbelief; *lest that come upon you, which is spoken of*." Note, The threatenings are warnings; what we are told will come upon impenitent sinners, is designed to awaken us to beware lest it do come upon us. Now the prophecy referred to, we have Hab. 1. 5. where the destruction of the Jewish nation by the Chaldeans is foretold as an incredible unparalleled destruction; and that is here applied to the destruction that was coming upon that nation by the Romans, for their rejecting of the gospel of Christ. The apostle follows the Septuagint translation, which reads, *Behold, ye despisers*: (for, *Behold, ye among the heathen*;) because it made the text more apposite to his purpose.

First, "Take heed lest the guilt come upon you, which was spoken of in the prophets—the guilt of despising the gospel and the tenders of it, and despising the Gentiles that were advanced to partake of it. *Beware*, lest it be said to you, *Behold, ye despisers*." Note, It is the ruin of many, that they despise religion, they look upon it as a thing below them, and are not willing to stoop to it.

Secondly, "Take heed lest the judgment come upon you, which was spoken of in the prophets; that *ye shall wonder and perish*, wonderfully perish; your perdition shall be amazing to yourselves and all about you." They that will not wonder and be saved, shall wonder and perish. They that enjoyed

the privileges of the church, and flattered themselves with a conceit that those would save them, will wonder when they find their vain presumption overruled, and that their privileges do but make their condemnation the more intolerable. Let the unbelieving Jews expect that God will *work a work in their days, which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you*. This may be understood as a prediction, either, 1. Of their sin; that they should be incredulous, that that great work of God, the redemption of the world by Christ, though it should be in the most solemn manner *declared unto them*, yet they would in no wise believe it, Isa. 53. 1. *Who hath believed our report?* Though it was of God's working, to whom nothing is impossible, and of his declaring, who cannot lie, yet they would not give credit to it. They that had the honour and advantage to have this work wrought *in their days*, had not the grace to believe it. Or, 2. Of their destruction; the dissolving of the Jewish polity, the taking of the kingdom of God from them and giving it to the Gentiles, the destruction of their holy house and city, and the dispersion of their people, was a work which one would not have believed should ever have been done, considering how much they had been the favourites of Heaven. The calamities that were brought upon them, were such as were never before brought upon any people, Matt. 24. 21. It was said of their destruction by the Chaldeans, and it was true of their last destruction, *All the inhabitants of the world would not have believed that the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem as they did*, Lam. 4. 12. Thus is there a *strange punishment to the workers of iniquity*, especially to the despisers of Christ, Job 31. 3.

42. And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. 43. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44. And the next sabbath-day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. 45. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. 46. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. 47. For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. 48. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. 50. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against

Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. 52. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

The design of this story being to vindicate the apostles, especially Paul, (as he doth himself at large, Rom. 11.) from the reflections of the Jews upon him for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, it is here observed, that he proceeded therein with all the caution imaginable, and upon due consideration, which here there is an instance of.

I. There were some of the Jews that were so incensed against the preaching of the gospel, not to the Gentiles, but to themselves, that they would not bear to hear it, but *went out of the synagogue* while Paul was preaching, (v. 42.) in contempt of him and his doctrine, and to the disturbance of the congregation. It is likely, they whispered among themselves, exciting one another to it, and did it by consent. Now this spoke,

1. An open infidelity; as plain a profession of unbelief, as coming to hear the gospel is of faith. They thus publicly avowed their contempt of Christ and of his doctrine and law; were not ashamed, neither could they blush: and they thus endeavoured to beget prejudices in the minds of others against the gospel; they went out to draw others to follow their pernicious ways.

2. An obstinate infidelity; they went out of the synagogue, not only to shew that they did not believe the gospel, but because they were resolved they would not, and therefore got out of the hearing of those things that had a tendency to convince them. They *stopped their ears*, like the deaf adder. Justly therefore was the gospel taken from them, when they first took themselves from it; and turned themselves out of the church, before they were turned out of it. For it is certainly true, God never leaves any till they first leave him.

II. The Gentiles were as willing to hear the gospel as those rude and ill-conditioned Jews were to get out of the hearing of it; *They besought that these words, or words to this effect, might be preached to them the next sabbath; in the week between, so some take it; on the second and fifth day of the week, which in some synagogues were their lecture days.* But it appears, (v. 44.) that it was the next sabbath-day that they came together. They begged,

1. That the same offer might be made to them, that was made to the Jews. Paul in this sermon had brought the word of salvation to the Jews and proselytes, but had taken no notice of the Gentiles; and therefore they begged, that forgiveness of sins through Christ might be preached to them, as it was to the Jews. The Jews' leavings, nay loathings, were their longings. This justifies Paul in his preaching to them, that he was invited to it, as Peter was sent for to Cornelius. Who could refuse to break the bread of life to those who begged so hard for it; and to give that to the poor at the door, which the children at the table threw under their feet?

2. That the same instructions might be given to them. They had heard the doctrine of Christ, but did not understand it at the first hearing, nor could they remember all that they had heard, and therefore they begged it might be preached to them again. Note, It is good to have the word of Christ repeated to us. What we have heard we should desire to hear again, that it may take deep root in us, and the nail that is driven may be clenched, and be *as a nail in a sure place*. To hear the same things should not be grievous, because it is safe, Phil. 3. 1. It aggravates the ill disposition of the Jews, that the Gentiles desired to hear that often, which they were

not willing to hear once; and commends the good disposition of the Gentiles, that they did not follow the ill example which the Jews set them.

III. There were some, nay, there were many, both of Jews and proselytes, that were wrought upon by the preaching of the gospel; they who aggravated the matter of the Jews' rejection by the preaching of the gospel, cried out, as is usual in such cases, "*They have cast away, and cast off, all the people of God.*" "Nay," says Paul, "that is not so; for abundance of the Jews have embraced Christ, and are taken in;" himself for one, Rom. 11. 1, 5. So it was here; *many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas*, and received further instructions and encouragement from them.

1. They submitted to the grace of God, and were admitted to the benefit and comfort of it; that is implied in their being exhorted to continue in it. They *followed Paul and Barnabas*; they became their disciples, or rather the disciples of Christ, whose agents they were. Those that join themselves to Christ, will join themselves to his ministers, and follow them. And Paul and Barnabas, though they were sent to the Gentiles, yet bid those of the Jews welcome, that were willing to come under their instructions; such nearly well-wishers were they to all the Jews and their friends, if they pleased.

2. They were exhorted and encouraged to persevere herein; *Paul and Barnabas, speaking to them with all the freedom and friendship imaginable, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God*; to hold fast that which they had received; to continue in their belief of the gospel of grace; to continue in their dependence upon the Spirit of grace, and attendance upon the means of grace. And the grace of God shall not be wanting to those who thus continue in it.

IV. There was a cheerful attendance upon the preaching of the gospel the *next sabbath day*; (v. 44.) *Almost the whole city* (the generality of which were Gentiles) *came together to hear the word of God*.

1. It is probable that Paul and Barnabas were not idle in the week-days, but took all opportunities in the week between, (as some think the Gentiles desired,) to bring them acquainted with Christ, and to raise their expectations from him. They did a great deal of service to the gospel in private discourse and conversation, as well as in their public sermons. Wisdom cried in the chief places of concourse, and the opening of the gates, as well as in the synagogues, Prov. 1. 20, 21.

2. This brought a vast concourse of people to the synagogue on the sabbath-day; some came out of curiosity, the thing being new; others, longing to see what the Jews would do upon the second tender of the gospel to them; and many who had heard something of the word of God, came to hear more; and to hear it, *not as the word of men*, but as *the word of God*, by which we must be ruled and judged. Now *this* justified Paul in preaching to the Gentiles, that he met with the most encouraging auditories among them. There *the fields were white to the harvest*, and therefore why should he not there put in his sickle?

V. The Jews were enraged at this; and not only would not receive the gospel themselves, but were filled with indignation at them that crowded after it; (v. 45.) *When the Jews saw the multitudes*, and considered what an encouragement it was to Paul to go on in his work; when they saw people thus flying like doves to their windows, and what probability there was that among these multitudes, some would be, without doubt, wrought upon, and it is likely, the greater part, to embrace Christ—*this filled them with envy*.

1. They grudged the interest the apostles had in the people; were vexed to see the synagogue so full when they were to preach. This was the same spirit that worked in the Pharisees toward Christ, they were cut to the heart when they saw *the whole world go after him*. When the kingdom of heaven was opened, they not only would not go in themselves, but were angry with them that did.

2. They opposed the doctrine the apostles preached; *They shake against those things that were spoken by Paul*, cavilled at them, started objections against them, finding some fault or other with every thing he said, *contradicting, and blaspheming*; ἀντιλέγοντες καὶ βλασφημοῦντες—*contradicting, they contradicted*. They did it with the utmost spite and rage imaginable; they persisted in their contradiction, and nothing would silence them. They contradicted for contradiction-sake, and denied that which was most evident. And when they could find no colour of objection, they broke out into ill language against Christ and his gospel, blaspheming him and it. From the language of the carnal man that receives not the things of the Spirit of God, and therefore contradicts them, they proceeded to the language of incarnate devils, and blasphemed them. Commonly those who begin with contradicting, end with blaspheming.

VI. The apostles hereupon solemnly and openly declare themselves discharged from their obligation to the Jews, and at liberty to bring the word of salvation to the Gentiles, even by the implicit consent of the Jews themselves. Never let the Jew lay the fault of the carrying of the kingdom of God to the Gentiles upon the apostles, for that complaint of their's is for ever silenced by their own act and deed, for what they did here, is for ever an estoppel* to it. "Tender and refusal (we say) are good payment in law." The Jews had the tender of the gospel, and did refuse it, and therefore ought not to say any thing against the Gentiles having it. In declaring this, it is said, (v. 46.) *Paul and Barnabas waxed bold*, more bold than they had been, while they were shy of looking favourably upon the Gentiles, for fear of giving offence to the Jews, and laying a stumbling-block in their way. Note, There is a time for the preachers of the gospel to shew as much of the boldness of the lion, as of the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove. When the adversaries of Christ's cause begin to be daring, it is not for its advocates to be retired and cowardly. While there is any hope of working upon those that oppose themselves, they must be *instructed with meekness*; (2 Tim. 2. 25.) but when that method has long been tried in vain, we must *wax bold*, and tell them what will come of their opposition. The impudence of the enemies of the gospel, instead of frightening, should rather imbolden, the friends of its cause; for they are sure that they have a good cause, and they know whom they have trusted to bear them out.

Now Paul and Barnabas, having made them a fair offer of gospel grace, here give them fair notice of their bringing it to the Gentiles; *if by any means (as Paul says, Rom. 11. 14.) they might provoke them to emulation*.

1. They own that the Jews were entitled to the first offer; "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you, to whom the promise was made; to you of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, whom Christ reckoned himself first sent to." And his charge to the preachers of his gospel to *begin at Jerusalem*, (Luke 24. 47.) was an implicit direction to all that went into other countries, to begin with the Jews, *to whom pertained the giving of the law*, and therefore the preaching of

the gospel. *Let the children first be served*, Mark 7. 27.

2. They charge them with the refusal of it; "Ye put it from you; ye will not accept of it; nay, ye will not so much as bear the offer of it, but take it as an affront to you." If men put the gospel from them, God justly takes it from them; why should manna be given to them that loathe it, and call it *light bread*, or the privileges of the gospel forced on them that put them away, and say, *We have no part in David*; Herein ye judge yourselves unworthy of *everlasting life*. In one sense, we must all judge ourselves unworthy of everlasting life, for there is nothing in us, or done by us, by which we can pretend to merit it, and we must be made sensible of this; but here the meaning is, "Ye discover, or make it to appear, that ye are not meet for eternal life; ye throw away all your claims and hopes, and give up your pretensions to it; since ye will not take it from his hands, into whose hand the Father has given it, *Christ, ye do, in effect, pass this judgment upon yourselves, and out of your own mouth ye shall be judged*; ye will not have it by Christ, by whom alone it is to be had, and so shall your doom be, ye shall not have it at all."

3. Upon this they ground their preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised; "Since ye will not accept eternal life as it is offered, our way is plain, *Lo, we turn to the Gentiles*. If one will not, another will. If those that were first invited to the wedding-feast will not come, we must invite out of the highways and hedges those that will, *for the wedding must be furnished with guests*. If he that is next of kin will not do the kinsman's part, he must not complain that another will." Ruth 4. 4.

4. They justify themselves in this by a divine warrant; (v. 47.) "For so hath the Lord commanded us; the Lord Jesus gave us directions to witness to him in Jerusalem and Judea, first, and after that, *to the utmost part of the earth*, to preach the gospel to every creature, to disciple all nations." This is according to what was foretold in the Old Testament; when the Messiah, in the prospect of the Jews' infidelity, was ready to say, *I have laboured in vain*, he was told, to his satisfaction, that though Israel was not gathered yet he should be glorious; that his blood should not be shed in vain, nor his purchase made in vain, nor his doctrine preached in vain, nor his Spirit sent in vain; "For I have set thee, not only raised thee up, but established thee, to be a *Light of the Gentiles*, not only a shining Light for a time, but a standing Light, set thee for a Light, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth." Note, (1.) Christ is not only the Saviour, but the Salvation, is himself our Righteousness, and Life, and Strength. (2.) Wherever Christ is designed to be Salvation, he is set up to be a Light; he enlightens the understanding, and so saves the soul. (3.) He is, and is to be, *Light and Salvation to the Gentiles, to the ends of the earth*. Those of any nation should be welcome to him, some of every nation have heard of him, (Rom. 10. 18.) and *all nations shall at length become his kingdom*. This prophecy has had its accomplishment in part, in the setting up of the kingdom of Christ in this island of our's, which lies, as it were, in the *ends of the earth*, a corner of the world, and shall be accomplished more and more, when the time comes for the bringing in of the fullness of the Gentiles.

VII. The Gentiles cheerfully embraced that which the Jews scornfully rejected, v. 48, 49. Never was land lost for want of heirs; *through the fall of the Jews, salvation is come to the Gentiles*; the casting off of them was the reconciling of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; so the apostle shews at large, Rom. 11. 11, 12, 15. The Jews, the natural branches, were

broken off, and the *Gentiles*, that were *branches of the wild olive*, were thereupon grafted in, v. 17, 19. Now here we are told how the *Gentiles* welcomed this happy turn in their favour.

1. They took the comfort of it; *When they heard this, they were glad.* It was good news to them, that they might have admission into covenant and communion with God, by a clearer, nearer, and better way than submitting to the ceremonial law, and being proselyted to the Jewish religion; that the *partition-wall* was taken down and they were as welcome to the benefits of the Messiah's kingdom as the Jews themselves, and might share in their promise, without coming under their yoke. This was indeed *glad tidings of great joy to all people.* Note, Our being put into a possibility of salvation, and a capacity for it, ought to be the matter of our rejoicing; when the *Gentiles* did but hear that the offers of grace should be made them, the word of grace preached to them, and the means of grace afforded them, *they were glad*; "Now there is some hope for us." Many grieve under doubts, whether they have an interest in Christ or no, when they should be rejoicing that they *may* have an interest in him; the golden sceptre is held out to them, and they are invited to come, and touch the top of it.

2. They gave God the praise of it; *They glorified the word of the Lord*; that is, Christ, (so some,) the essential Word; they conceived a mighty veneration for him, and expressed the high thoughts they had of him. Or rather, *the gospel*; the more they knew of it, the more they admired it. Oh! what a light, what a power, what a treasure, does this gospel bring along with it! How excellent are its truths, its precepts, its promises! How far transcending all other institutions! How plainly divine and heavenly is its original! Thus they *glorified the word of the Lord*, and that is it which he has himself *magnified above all his name*, (Ps. 138. 2.) and will *magnify and make honourable*, Isa. 42. 21. They glorified the word of the Lord, (1.) Because now the knowledge of it was diffused, and not confined to the Jews only. Note, It is the glory of the word of the Lord, that the further it spreads, the brighter it shines; which shews it to be not like the light of a candle, but like that of the sun when he *goes forth in his strength.* (2.) Because now the knowledge of it was brought to them. Note, Those speak best of the honour of the word of the Lord, that speak experimentally, that have themselves been captivated by its power, and comforted by its sweetness.

3. Many of them became, not only professors of the christian faith, but sincerely obedient to the faith: *As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.* God by his Spirit wrought true faith in them for whom he had in his councils *from everlasting* designed a happiness to *everlasting.* (1.) Those believed, to whom God gave grace to believe; whom, by a secret but mighty operation, he brought into subjection to the *gospel of Christ*, and made willing in the day of his power. Those came to Christ, whom the Father drew, and to whom the Spirit made the gospel-call effectual. It is called *the faith of the operation of God*, (Col. 2. 12.) and is said to be wrought by the same power that raised up Christ, Eph. 1. 19, 20. (2.) God gave this grace to believe, to all those among them, who were *ordained to eternal life*; (for whom he had predestinated, them he also called, Rom. 8. 30.) or as many as were disposed to eternal life, as many as had a concern about their eternal state, and aimed to make sure of eternal life, believed in Christ, in whom God hath treasured up that life, (1 John 5. 11.) and who is the only Way to it; and it was the *grace of God that wrought it in them.* Thus all those captives, and those only, took the benefit of Cyrus's procla-

mation, whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, Ezra 1. 5. Those will be brought to believe in Christ, that by his grace are well disposed to eternal life, and make that their aim.

4. When they believed, they did what they could to spread the knowledge of Christ and his gospel among their neighbours; (v. 49.) *And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region*; when it was received with so much satisfaction in the chief city, it soon spread itself into all parts of the country. Those new converts were themselves ready to communicate to others that which they were so full of themselves. *The Lord gave the word*, and then *great was the company of them that published it*, Ps. 68. 11. Those that have got acquaintance with Christ themselves, will do what they can to bring others acquainted with him. Those in great and rich cities, that have received the gospel, should not think to engross it, as if, like learning and philosophy, it were only to be the entertainment of the more polite and elevated part of mankind, but should do what they can to get it published in the country among the ordinary sort of people, the poor and unlearned, who have souls to be saved as well as they.

VIII. Paul and Barnabas, having sowed the seeds of a christian church there, quitted the place, and went to do the like elsewhere. We read not any thing of their working miracles here, to confirm their doctrine, and to convince people of the truth of it; for though God then did ordinarily make use of that method of conviction, yet he could, when he pleased, do his work without it; and begetting faith by the immediate influence of his Spirit, was itself the greatest miracle to those in whom it was wrought; yet, it is probable that they did work miracles, for we find they did in the next place they came to, ch. 14. 3. Now here we are told,

1. How the *unbelieving Jews* expelled the apostles out of that country. They first turned their back upon them, and then *lifted up the heel against them*, v. 50. *They raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas*; excited the mob to persecute them in their way, by insulting their persons as they went along the streets; excited the magistrates to persecute them in their way, by imprisoning and punishing them; when they could not resist the wisdom and spirit wherewith they spake, they had recourse to these brutish methods, the last refuge of an obstinate infidelity. Satan and his agents are most exasperated against the preachers of the gospel when they see them go on successfully, and therefore then will be sure to raise persecution against them. Thus it has been the common lot of the best men in the world, to suffer ill for doing well; to be persecuted instead of being preferred, for the good services they have done to mankind. Observe,

(1.) What method they took to give them trouble: *They stirred up the devout and honourable women* against them. The Jews could not make any considerable interest themselves, but they applied themselves to some ladies of quality in the city, that were well affected to the Jewish religion, and were *proselytes of the gate*, therefore called *devout women*. These, according to the genius of their sex, were zealous in their way, and bigoted; and it was easy, by false stories and misrepresentations, to incense them against the gospel of Christ, as if it had been destructive of all religion, of which really it is perfective. It is good to see *honourable women devout*, and well affected to religious worship; the less they have to do in the world, the more they should do for their souls, and the more time they should spend in communion with God; but it is sad, when, under colour of devotion to God, they conceive an enmity to Christ, as those here did. What!

men persecutors! Can they forget the tenderness and compassion of their sex? What! *honourable women*! Can they thus stain their honour, and disgrace themselves, and do so mean a thing? But, which is strangest of all, *devout women*! Will they kill Christ's servants, and *think therein they do God service*? Let those therefore that have *zeal*, see that it be *according to knowledge*. By these devout and honourable women they stirred up likewise the *chief men of the city*, the magistrates and the rulers, who had power in their hands, and set them against the apostles, and who had so little consideration as to suffer themselves to be made the tools of this ill-natured party, who *neither would go into the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffer those that were entering, to go in*.

(2.) How far they carried it; so far, that they *expelled them out of their coasts*; they banished them, ordered them to be carried, as we say, from constable to constable, till they were forced out of their jurisdiction; so that it was not by fear, but downright violence, that they were driven out. This was one method which the overruling providence of God took, to keep the first planters of the church from staying too long at a place; as, Matt. 10. 23. *When they persecute you in one city, flee to another*, that thus you may the sooner *go over the cities of Israel*. This was likewise a method God took, to make those that were well disposed the more warmly affected toward the apostles; for it is natural to us to pity those that are persecuted, and to think the better of those that suffer, when we know they suffer unjustly, and to be the more ready to help them. The expelling of the apostles out of their coasts made people inquisitive *what evil they had done*, and, perhaps, raised them more friends than conniving at them in their coasts would have done.

2. How the apostles abandoned and rejected the unbelieving Jews; (v. 51.) *They shook off the dust of their feet against them*. When they went out of the city, they used this ceremony in the sight of them that sat in the gate; or when they went out of the borders of their country, in the sight of them that were sent to see the country rid of them. Hereby,

(1.) They declared that they would have no more to do with them, would take nothing that was their's; for *they sought not their's, but them*; dust they are, and let them keep their dust to themselves, it shall not cleave to them. (2.) They expressed their detestation of their infidelity, and that, though they were Jews by birth, yet, having rejected the gospel of Christ, they were in their eyes no better than heathen and profane. As Jews and Gentiles, if they believe, are equally acceptable to God and good men; so, if they do not, they are equally abominable.

(3.) Thus they set them at defiance, and expressed their contempt of them and their malice, which they looked upon as impotent. It was as much as to say, "Do your worst, we do not fear you; we know whom we serve, and whom we have trusted." (4.) Thus they left a testimony behind them, that they had had a fair offer made them of the grace of the gospel, which shall be proved against them in the day of judgment. This dust will prove that the preachers of the gospel had been among them, but were expelled by them. Thus Christ had ordered them to do, and for this reason, Matt. 10. 14. Luke 9. 5. *When they left them, they came to Iconium*, not so much for safety, as for work.

3. What frame they left the new converts in at Antioch; (v. 52.) *The disciples*, when they saw with what courage and cheerfulness Paul and Barnabas not only bore the indignities that were done them, but went on with their work notwithstanding, they were in like manner spirited. (1.) They were very cheerful; one would have expected that when Paul and Barnabas were expelled out of their coasts, and

perhaps forbidden to return upon pain of death, the disciples should have been full of grief and full of fear, looking for no other than that, if the planters of christianity go, the plantation would soon come to nothing; or that it would be their turn next to be banished the country, and to them it would be more grievous, for it was their own; no, *they were filled with joy* in Christ, had such a satisfactory assurance of Christ's carrying on and perfecting his own work in them, and among them, and that either he would screen them from trouble, or bear them up under it, that all their fears were swallowed up in their believing joys. (2.) They were very courageous; wonderfully animated with a holy resolution to cleave to Christ, whatever difficulties they met with; that seems especially to be meant by *their being filled with the Holy Ghost*; for that is used of Peter's boldness, (ch. 4. 8.) and Stephen's, (ch. 7. 55.) and Paul's, ch. 13. 9. The more we relish the comforts and encouragements we meet with in the power of godliness, and the fuller our hearts are of them, the better prepared we are to face the difficulties we meet with in the profession of godliness.

CHAP. XIV.

We have, in this chapter, a further account of the progress of the gospel, by the ministry of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles; it goes on conquering and to conquer; yet meeting with opposition, as before, among the unbelieving Jews. Here is, I. Their successful preaching of the gospel for some time at Iconium, and their being driven thence by the violence of their persecutors, both Jews and Gentiles, and forced into the neighbouring countries, v. 1. . 7. II. Their healing of a lame man at Lystra, and the profound veneration which the people conceived of them thereupon, which they had much ado to keep from running into an extreme, v. 8. . 18. III. The outrage of the people against Paul, at the instigation of the Jews, the effect of which was, that they stoned him, as they thought, to death; but he was wonderfully restored to life again, v. 19. 20. IV. The visit which Paul and Barnabas made to the churches which they had planted, to confirm them, and put them into order, v. 21. . 23. V. Their return to Antioch, whence they were sent forth; the good they did by the way, and the report they made to the church of Antioch of their expedition, and, if I may so say, of the campaign they had made, v. 24. . 28.

1. **A**ND it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. 2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. 3. Long time therefore abode they, speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4. But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 5. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them, 6. They were ware of *it*, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: 7. And there they preached the gospel.

In these verses, we have,

I. The preaching of the *gospel* in Iconium, whither the apostles were forced to *retire from Antioch*. As "the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the

church," so the banishment of the confessors has helped to scatter that seed. Observe,

1. How they made the first offer of the gospel, *to the Jews, in their synagogues*; thither they went, not only as to a place of meeting, but as to a place of meeting with them, to whom, wherever they came, they were to apply themselves in the first place. Though the Jews at Antioch had used them barbarously, yet they did not therefore decline preaching the gospel to the Jews at Iconium, who perhaps might be better disposed. Let not those of any denomination be condemned in the gross, nor some suffer for others' faults; but let us do good to those who have done evil to us. *Though the blood-thirsty hate the upright, yet the just seek their soul*, (Prov. 29. 10.) seek the salvation of it.

2. How the apostles concurred herein; notice is taken of this, that *they went both together into the synagogue*, to testify their unanimity and mutual affection; that people might say, *See how they love one another*, and might think the better of christianity, and that they might strengthen one another's hands, and confirm one another's testimony, and out of the mouth of two witnesses every word might be established. They did not go one one day, and another another; or one go at the beginning, and the other some time after; but they went in both together.

III. The success of their preaching there; *They so shake, that a great multitude*, some hundreds perhaps, if not thousands, *both of the Jews, and also of the Greeks*, that is, the Gentiles, *believed*. Observe here,

1. That the gospel was now preached to Jews and Gentiles together, and those of each denomination, that believed, came together into the church. In the close of the foregoing chapter it was preached first *to the Jews*, and some of them believed, then *to the Gentiles*, and some of them believed; but here they are put together, being put upon the same level. The Jews have not so lost their preference as to be thrown behind, only the Gentiles are brought to stand upon even terms with them, *both are reconciled to God in one body*, (Ephes. 2. 16.) and both together admitted into the church without distinction.

2. There seems to have been something remarkable in the manner of the apostles' preaching here, which contributed to their success; *They so shake, that a great multitude believed*; so plainly, so convincingly, with such an evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, and with such power; they so spake, so warmly, so affectionately, and with such a manifest concern for the souls of men; they so spake, that one might perceive they were not only convinced, but filled, with the things they spake of; and that what they spake came from the heart, and therefore was likely to reach to the heart; they so spake, so earnestly and seriously, so boldly and courageously, that they who heard them could not but say, *God was with them of a truth*. Yet the success was not to be attributed to the manner of their preaching, but to the Spirit of God, who made use of that means.

III. The opposition that their preaching met with there, and the trouble that was created them; lest they should be puffed up with the multitude of their converts, there was given them this thorn in the flesh,

1. Unbelieving Jews were the first spring of their trouble, here, as elsewhere; (v. 2.) they *stirred up the Gentiles*. The influence which the gospel had upon many of the Gentiles, and their embracing of it, as it provoked some of the Jews to a holy jealousy, and stirred them up to receive the gospel too, (Rom. 11. 14.) so it provoked others of them to a wicked jealousy, and exasperated them against the gospel. Thus as good instructions, so good examples, which

to some are a *savour of life unto life*, to others are a *savour of death unto death*. See 2 Cor. 2. 15, 16.

2. Disaffected Gentiles, irritated by the unbelieving Jews, were likely to be the instruments of their trouble; the Jews, by false suggestions, which they were continually buzzing in the ears of the Gentiles, made *their minds evil affected against the brethren*, whom of themselves they were inclined to think favourably of. They not only took occasion in all companies, as it came in their way, but made it their business to go purposely to such as they had any acquaintance with, and said all that their wit or malice could invent, to beget in them not only a mean but an ill opinion of christianity, telling them how destructive it would certainly be to their pagan theology and worship, and for their parts, they would rather be Gentiles than Christians. Thus they soured and imbibed their spirits against both the converters and the converted. *The old serpent* did, by their poisonous tongues, infuse his venom against *the seed of the woman* into the minds of these Gentiles, and this was a *root of bitterness in them, bearing gall and wormwood*. It is no wonder if those who are ill affected toward good people, wish ill to them, speak ill of them, and contrive ill against them; it is all owing to ill will. *Ἐκένανται, they molested* and vexed the minds of the Gentiles; so some of the critics take it; they were continually teasing them with their impertinent solicitations. The tools of persecutors have a dog's life, set on continually.

IV. Their continuance in their work there, notwithstanding this opposition, and God's owning them in it, v. 3. We have here,

1. The apostles working for Christ, faithfully and diligently according to the trust committed to them; because the minds of the *Gentiles were evil affected against them*, one would think that therefore they should have withdrawn and hastened out of the way, or, if they had preached, should have preached cautiously, for fear of giving further provocation to those who were already enough enraged; no, on the contrary, therefore they *abode there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord*. The more they perceived the spite and rancour of the town against the new converts, the more they were animated to go on in their work, and the more needful they saw it to continue among them, *to confirm them in the faith, and to comfort them*. *They shake boldly*, and were not afraid of giving offence to the unbelieving Jews. What God said to the prophet, with reference to the unbelieving Jews in his day, was now made good to the apostles; *I have made thy face strong against their faces*, Ezek. 3. 7—9. But observe what it was that animated them; *They shake boldly in the Lord*, in his strength, and trusting in him to bear them out; not depending upon any thing in themselves. *They were strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*.

2. Christ working with the apostles, according to his promise, *Lo, I am with you always*. When they went on in his name and strength, he failed not to give testimony to the word of his grace. Note, (1.) The gospel is a word of grace, the assurance of God's good-will to us, and the means of his good work in us. It is the word of Christ's grace, for it is in him alone that we find favour with God. (2.) Christ himself has attested this word of grace, who is *the Amen, the faithful Witness*; he has assured us that it is *the word of God*, and that we may venture our souls upon it. As it was said in general concerning the first preachers of the gospel, that they had *the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by signs following*, (Mark 16. 20.) so it is said particularly concerning the apostles here, that *the Lord confirmed their testimony, in granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands*; in the

miracles they wrought in the kingdom of nature, as well as the wonders done by their word, in the greater miracles wrought on men's minds by the power of divine grace. The Lord was with them, while they were with him, and abundance of good was done.

V. The division which this occasioned in the city ; (v. 4.) *The multitude of the city was divided into two parties, and both active and vigorous ; among the rulers and persons of rank, and among the common people, there were some that held with the unbelieving Jews, and others that held with the apostles.* Barnabas is here reckoned an apostle, though not one of the twelve, nor called in the extraordinary manner that Paul was, because set apart by special designation of *the Holy Ghost to the service of the Gentiles.* It seems, this business of the preaching of the gospel was so universally taken notice of with concern, that every person, even of *the multitude of the city, was either for it or against it ; none stood neuter.* "Either for us or for our adversaries ; for God or Baal ; for Christ or Beelzebub."

1. We may here see the meaning of Christ's prediction, that he *came not to send peace upon earth, but rather division,* Luke 12. 51—53. If all would have given in unanimously to his measures, there had been universal concord ; and could men have agreed in that, there would have been no dangerous discord or disagreement in other things ; but disagreeing here, the breach was wide as the sea. Yet the apostles must not be blamed for coming to Iconium, because before they came the city was united, but now it was divided ; for it is better that part of the city go to heaven than all to hell.

2. We may here take the measures of our expectations ; let us not think it strange, if the preaching of the gospel occasion division, nor be offended at it ; it is better to be reproached and persecuted as dividers for swimming against the stream, than yield ourselves to be carried down the stream that leads to destruction. Let us hold with the apostles, and not fear them that hold with the Jews.

VI. The attempt made upon the apostles by their enemies ; their evil affection against them broke out at length into violent outrages, v. 5. Observe,

1. Who the plotters were ; *both the Gentiles, and the Jews, with their rulers.* The Gentiles and Jews were at enmity with one another, and yet united against Christians, like Herod and Pilate, Sadducees and Pharisees, against Christ ; and like *Gebal and Ammon, and Amalek, of old, against Israel.* If the church's enemies can thus unite for its destruction, shall not its friends, laying aside all personal feuds, unite for its preservation ?

2. What the plot was ; having now got *the rulers* on their side, they doubted not but to carry their point, and their design was *to use the apostles despitefully, to expose them to disgrace, and then to stone them, to put them to death ;* and thus they hoped to sink their cause ; they aimed to take away both their reputation and their life, and that was all they had to lose which they could take from them, for they had neither lands nor goods.

VII. The deliverance of the apostles out of the hands of those *wicked and unreasonable men,* v. 6, 7. They got away, upon notice given them of the design against them, or the beginning of the attempt upon them, which they were soon *aware of,* and they made an honourable retreat (for it was not an inglorious flight) *to Lystra and Derbe ;* and there,

1. They found safety ; their persecutors in Iconium were for the present satisfied that they were thrust out of their borders, and pursued them no further. God has shelters for his people in a storm ; nay, he is, and will be, himself their Hiding-place.

2. They found work, and that was it they went

for ; when the door of opportunity was shut against them at Iconium, it was opened at *Lystra and Derbe ;* to those cities they went, and there, and *in the region that lieth round about, they preached the gospel.* In times of persecution ministers may see cause to quit the spot, when yet they do not quit the work.

8. And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked : 9. The same heard Paul speak : who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, 10. Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. 11. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. 12. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter ; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. 13. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. 14. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15. And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things ? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein : 16. Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. 17. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. 18. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

In these verses we have,

1. A miraculous cure wrought by Paul at Lystra upon a cripple that had been lame from his birth, such a one as was miraculously cured by *Peter and John, ch. 3. 2.* That introduced the gospel among the Jews, this among the Gentiles ; both that and this were designed to represent the impotency of all the children of men in spiritual things ; they are lame from their birth, till the grace of God puts strength into them ; for it was when we were yet *without strength, that Christ died for the ungodly,* Rom. 5. 6. Observe here,

1. The deplorable case of the poor cripple ; (v. 8.) He was *impotent in his feet, disabled,* (so the word is,) to that degree, that it was impossible he should set his foot to the ground, to lay any stress upon it. It was well known that he had been so *from his mother's womb,* and that he *never had walked, or could stand up.* We should take occasion from hence, to thank God for the use of our limbs ; and those who are deprived of it, may observe that their case is not singular.

2. The expectation that was raised in him of a cure ; (v. 9.) He heard Paul preach, and, it is likely,

was much affected with what he heard, believed the message was from heaven, and that the messengers, having their commission thence, had a divine power going along with them, and were therefore able to cure him of his lameness. This Paul was aware of, by the spirit of discerning that he had, and perhaps the shew of his countenance did in part witness for him; *Paul perceived that he had faith to be healed*; desired it, hoped for it, had such a thing in his thoughts; which it does not appear that the lame man Peter healed had, for he expected no more than an *alms*. *There was not found such great faith in Israel*, as was among the Gentiles, Matt. 8. 10.

3. The cure wrought; *Paul, perceiving that he had faith to be healed, brought the word, and healed him*, Ps. 107. 20. Note, God will not disappoint the desires that are of his own kindling, nor the hopes of his own raising. Paul spake to him with a *loud voice*, either because he was at some distance, or to shew that the true miracles, wrought by the power of Christ, were far unlike the lying wonders wrought by deceivers, *that peeped, and muttered, and whispered*, Isa. 8. 19. God saith, *I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth*, Isa. 45. 19. Paul spake to him with a loud voice, that the people about might take notice, and have their expectations raised of the effect. It does not appear that this cripple was a beggar; it is said, (*v. 8.*) *that he sat*, not that he sat *begging*. But we may imagine how melancholy it was to him to see other people walking about him, and himself disabled; and therefore how welcome Paul's word was to him, "*Stand upright on thy feet*"; help thyself, and God shall help thee; try whether thou hast strength, and thou shalt find that thou hast." Some copies read it, *I say unto thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Stand upright on thy feet*. It is certain that that is implied, and, very probably, was expressed, by Paul, and *power went along with this word*; for presently, *he leaped and walked*; leaped up from the place where he sat, and not only *stood upright*, but, to shew that he was perfectly cured, and that immediately, he walked to and fro before them all. Herein the scripture was fulfilled, that when the wilderness of the Gentile world is made to blossom as the rose, then shall the lame man leap as a hart, Isa. 35. 1, 6. Those that by the grace of God are cured of their spiritual lameness, must shew it by leaping with a holy exultation, and walking in a holy conversation.

II. The impression which this cure made upon the people; they were amazed at it, had never seen or heard the like, and fell into an ecstasy of wonder. Paul and Barnabas were strangers, exiles, refugees, in their country; every thing concurred to make them mean and despicable; yet the working of this one miracle was enough to make them in the eyes of this people truly great and honourable, though the multitude of Christ's miracles could not screen him from the utmost contempt among the Jews. We find here,

1. The people take them for gods; (*v. 11.*) *They lifted up their voices* with an air of triumph, saying in their own language, (for it was the common people that said it,) in the speech of *Lycaonia*, which was a dialect of the Greek, *The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men*. They imagined that they were dropped down to them out of the clouds, and that they were some divine powers, no less than gods, though in the likeness of men. This notion of the thing agreed well enough with the pagan theology, and the fabulous account they had of the visits which their gods made to this lower world; and proud enough they were to think that they should have a visit made to them. They carried this notion so far here, that they pretended to tell

which of their gods they were, according to the ideas their poets had given them of the gods; (*v. 12.*) *They called Barnabas, Jupiter*: for if they will have him to be a god, it is as easy to make him the prince of their gods as not. It is probable that he was the senior, and the more portly comely man, that had something of majesty in his countenance. And *Paul they called Mercury*, who was the messenger of the gods, that was sent on their errands, for Paul, though he had not the presence that Barnabas had, was the *chief speaker*, and had a greater command of language, and perhaps appeared to have something mercurial in his temper and genius. *Jupiter* used to take *Mercury* along with him, they said, and if he make a visit to their city, they will suppose he does so now.

2. The priest thereupon prepares to do sacrifice to them, *v. 13*. The temple of Jupiter was, it seems, before the gate of their city, as its protector and guardian; and the priest of that idol and temple, hearing the people cry out thus, took the hint presently, and thought it was time for him to bestir himself to do his duty: many a costly sacrifice he had offered to the image of Jupiter, but if Jupiter be among them himself—in *profuria persona*, it concerns him to do him the utmost honours imaginable; and the people are ready to join with him in it. See how easily vain minds are carried away with a popular outcry! If the crowd give a shout, Here is Jupiter; the priest of Jupiter takes the first hint, and offers his service presently! When Christ, the Son of God, came down, and appeared in the likeness of men, and did many, very many miracles, yet they were so far from doing sacrifice to him, that they made him a sacrifice to their pride and malice; *He was in the world, and the world knew him not*; he came to his own, and his own received him not; but Paul and Barnabas, upon their working of one miracle, are deified presently. The same power of the god of this world, which prejudices the carnal mind against truth, makes errors and mistakes to find easy admission; and both ways his turn is served. They brought oxen, to be sacrificed to them, and garlands, with which to crown the sacrifices. These garlands were made up of flowers and ribbons; and they gilded the horns of the oxen they sacrificed.

Victimæ ad supplicium saginantur, hostiæ ad pœnam coronantur.

So beasts for sacrifice do feed,

First to be crown'd, and then to bleed.

So Octavius in Minutius Felix.

III. Paul and Barnabas protest against this undue respect paid them, and with much ado prevent it. Many of the heathen emperors called themselves gods, and took a pride in having divine honours paid them; but Christ's ministers, though *real* benefactors to mankind, while they only *pretended* to be so, refused those honours when they were rendered. Whose successor therefore he is, who sits in the temple of God, and shews that he is god, (2 Thess. 2, 4.) and who is adored as our lord god, the Pope, it is easy to say. Observe,

1. The holy indignation which Paul and Barnabas conceived at this; *When they heard this, they rent their clothes*. We do not find that they rent their clothes when the people vilified them, and spake of stoning them; they could bear that without disturbance; but when they deified them, and spake of worshipping them, they could not bear it, but rent their clothes, as being more concerned for God's honour than their own.

2. The pains they took to prevent it. They did not connive at it, nor say, "If people will be deceived, let them be deceived;" much less suggest to themselves and one another, that it might contribute both to the safety of their persons and the suc-

cess of their ministry, if they suffered the people to continue in this mistake, and so they might make a good hand of an ill thing. No, God's truth needs not the service of man's lie; Christ had put honour enough upon them in making them apostles, they needed not assume either the honour of princes or the honour of *gods*; they appeared with much more magnificent titles when they were called the *ambassadors of Christ*, and the *stewards of the mysteries of God*, than when they were called *Jupiter* and *Mercury*.

Let us see how they prevented it :

(1.) *They ran in among the people*, as soon as they heard of it, and would not so much as stay awhile to see what the people would do. Their running in, like servants, among the people, shewed that they were far from looking upon themselves as gods, or taking state upon them; they did not stand still, expecting honours to be done them, but plainly declined them by thrusting themselves into the crowd. They ran in, as men in earnest, with as much concern as Aaron ran in between the living and the dead, when the plague was begun.

(2.) They reasoned with them, *crying out*, that all might hear, "*Sirs, why do ye these things? Why do ye go about to make gods of us? It is the most absurd thing ye can do; for,*"

[1.] "*Our nature will not admit it; We also are men of like passions with you*"—*ἡμεῖς ἄνθρωποι*; it is the same word that is used concerning Elias, Jam. 5. 17. where we render it, *subject to like passions as we are*. "*We are men*, and therefore you wrong yourselves if you expect that from us which is to be had in God only; and you wrong God if you give that honour to us, or to any other man, which is to be given to God only. We not only have such bodies as you see, but are of like passions with you, have hearts fashioned like as other men; (Ps. 33. 15.) for, as in water face answers to face, so doth the heart of man to man, Prov. 27. 19. We are naturally subject to the same infirmities of the human nature, and liable to the same calamities of the human life; not only men, but sinful men and suffering men, and therefore will not be deified.

[2.] "*Our doctrine is directly against it. Must we be added to the number of your gods, whose business it is to abolish the gods you have? We preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God. If we should suffer this, we should confirm you in that which it is our business to convert you from:*" and so they take this occasion to shew them how just and necessary it was that they should turn to God from idols, 1 Thess. 1. 9. When they preached to the Jews, who hated idolatry, they had nothing to do but to preach the grace of God in Christ, and needed not, as the prophets in dealing with their fathers, to preach against idolatry; but when they had to do with the Gentiles, they must rectify their mistakes in natural religion, and bring them off from the gross corruption of that.

See here what they preached to the Gentiles :

First, That the gods which they and their fathers worshipped, and all the ceremonies of their worship of them, were *vanities*, idle things, unreasonable, unprofitable, which no rational account could be given of, nor any real advantage gained from. Idols are often called *vanities* in the Old Testament, Deut. 32. 21. 1 Kings 16. 13. Jer. 14. 22. *An idol is nothing in the world*; (1 Cor. 8. 4.) it is not at all what it is pretended to be, it is a cheat, it is a counterfeit; it deceives those that trust to it and expect relief from it. Therefore turn from these *vanities*, turn from them with abhorrence and detestation, as Ephraim did; (Hos. 14. 8.) "*What have I to do any more with idols? I will never again be thus imposed upon.*"

Secondly, That the God whom they would have them turn to, is the *living God*. They had hitherto worshipped dead images, that were utterly unable to help them, (Isa. 44. 9.) or (as they now attempted) dying men, that would soon be disabled to help them; but now they are persuaded to worship a living God, who has life in himself, and life for us, and lives for evermore.

Thirdly, That this God is the Creator of the world, the Fountain of all being and power; "*He made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things therein*; even those things which you worship as gods, so that he is the *God* of your gods; you worship gods which you made, the creatures of your own fancy, and the work of your own hands; we call you to worship the *God that made you and all the world*; worship the *true God*, and cheat not yourselves with pretenders; worship the sovereign Lord of all, and disparage not yourselves in bowing down to his creatures and subjects."

Fourthly, That the world owed it to his patience, that he had not destroyed them long ere this for their idolatry; (v. 16.) *In times past*, for many ages, unto this day, he *suffered all nations to walk in their own ways*. These idolaters, that were called from the service of other gods, might think, "Have we not served these gods hitherto, and our fathers before us, time out of mind; and why may we not as well go on to serve them still?"—"No, your serving of them was a trial of God's patience, and it was a miracle of mercy that you were not cut off for it. But though he did not destroy you for it, while you were in ignorance, and knew no better, (ch. 17. 30. yet now that he has sent his gospel into the world, and by it has made a clear discovery of himself and his will to all nations, and not to the Jews only, if yet you continue in your idolatry, he will not bear with you as he has done." All the nations that had not the benefit of divine revelation, that is, all but the Jews, he *suffered to walk in their own ways*, for they had nothing to check them, or control them, but their own consciences, their own thoughts; (Rom. 2. 15.) no scriptures, no prophets; and then they were the more excusable if they mistook their way: but now that God has sent a revelation into the world, which is to be published to all nations, the case is altered. We may understand it as a judgment upon all nations, that *God suffered them to walk in their own ways, gave them up to their own hearts' lusts*; but now the time is come when the *veil of the covering spread over all nations should be taken off*, (Isa. 25. 7.) and now you will no longer be excused in these *vanities*, but must turn from them. Note, 1. God's patience with us hitherto should lead us to repentance, and not encourage us to presume upon the continuance of it, while we continue to provoke him. 2. Our having done ill while we were in ignorance, will not bear us out in doing ill when we are better taught.

Fifthly, That even then when they were not under the direction and correction of the word of God, yet they might have known, and should have known, to do better by the works of God, v. 17. Though the Gentiles had not the *statutes and judgments* that the Jews had, to witness for God against all pretenders, no tables of testimony, or tabernacle of testimony, yet he *left not himself without witness*; beside the *witness* for God within them—the dictates of natural conscience, they had *witnesses* for God round about them—the bounty of common providence. Their having no scriptures did in part excuse them, and therefore God did not destroy them for their idolatry, as he did the Jewish nation; but that did not wholly excuse them, but that, notwithstanding that, they were highly criminal, and deeply guilty, before God; for there were other *witnesses* for God, sufficient to inform them that he, and he

only, is to be worshipped; and that to *him* they owed all their services, from whom they received all their comforts, and therefore that they were guilty of the highest injustice and ingratitude imaginable, in alienating them from him. God, having *not left himself without witness*, has not left us without a guide, and so has left us without excuse; for whatever is a witness for God, is a witness against us, if we give that glory to any other which is due to him only.

1. The bounties of common providence witness to us, that there is a God, for they are all dispensed wisely and with design. *The rain and fruitful seasons could not come by chance; nor are there any of the vanities of the heathen that can give rain; nor can the heavens of themselves give showers*, Jer. 14. 22. All the powers of nature witness to us a sovereign power in the God of nature, from whom they are derived, and on whom they depend. It is not the heaven that gives us rain, but God that gives us rain from heaven; he is the Father of the rain, Job 38. 28.

2. The benefits we have by these bounties, witness to us, that we ought to make our acknowledgments not to the creatures who are made serviceable to us, but to the Creator who makes them so; *He left not himself without witness, in that he did good*. God seems to reckon the instances of his goodness to be more pregnant, cogent proofs of his title to our homage and adoration, than the evidences of his greatness; for his goodness is his glory. *The earth is full of his goodness; his tender mercies are over all his works; and therefore they praise him*, Ps. 145. 9, 10. God does us good, in preserving to us his air to breathe in, his ground to go upon, the light of his sun to see by; but, because the most sensible instance of the goodness of Providence to each of us in particular, is that of the daily provision made by it of meat and drink for us, the apostle chooses to insist upon that, and shews how God does us good; (1.) In preparing it for us, and that by a long train of causes which depend upon him as the first Cause; *The heavens hear the earth; the earth hears the corn, and wine, and oil; and they hear Jezreel*, Hos. 2. 21, 22. He does us good in giving us rain from heaven; rain for us to drink; for if there were no rain, there would be no springs of water, and we should soon die for thirst; rain for our land to drink, for our meat as well as drink we have from the rain; in giving us that, he gives us fruitful seasons. *If the heavens be as iron, the earth will soon be as brass*, Lev. 26. 19. *That is the river of God which greatly enriches the earth, and by it God prepares us corn*, Ps. 65. 9—11. Of all the common operations of providence, the heathen chose to form their notion of the supreme God by that which speaks terror, and is proper to strike an awe of him upon us, and that was the thunder; and therefore they called Jupiter the thunderer, and represented him with a thunderbolt in his hand; and it appears by Ps. 29. 3. that that ought not to be overlooked; but the apostle here, to engage us to worship God, sets before us his beneficence, that we may have good thoughts of him in every thing wherein we have to do with him; may love him and delight in him, as one that doeth good, doeth good to us, doeth good to all, in giving rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons; and if at any time rain be withheld, or the seasons unfruitful, we may thank ourselves, it is our sin that turns away these good things from us which were coming to us, and stops the current of God's favours. (2.) In giving us the comforts of it; it is he that fills our hearts with food and gladness. God is rich in mercy to all, (Rom. 10. 12.) he gives us richly all things to enjoy; (1 Tim. 6. 17.) is not only a Benefactor, but a bountiful one: not only gives us the things we need, but gives us to

enjoy them; (Eccl. 2. 24.) he fills our hearts with food, he gives us food to our hearts' content, or according to our hearts' desire; not merely for necessity, but plenty, dainty, and variety. Even these nations that had lost the knowledge of him, and worshipped other gods, yet he filled their houses, filled their mouths, filled their bellies, (Job 22. 18. Ps. 17. 14.) with good things. *The Gentiles that lived without God in the world, yet lived upon God*; which Christ urges as a reason why we should do good to those that hate us, Matt. 5. 44, 45. These heathen had their hearts filled with food, that was their felicity and satisfaction, they desired no more; but these things will not fill the soul, (Ezek. 7. 19.) nor will those that know how to value their own souls, be satisfied with them; but the apostles put themselves in as sharers in the divine beneficence; we must all own that God fills our hearts with food and gladness; not only food, that we may live, but gladness, that we may live cheerfully; to him we owe it that we do not all our days eat in sorrow. Note, We must thank God, not only for our food, but for our gladness; that he gives us leave to be cheerful, cause to be cheerful, and hearts to be cheerful: And if our hearts be filled with food and gladness, they ought to be filled with love and thankfulness, and enlarged in duty and obedience, Deut. 8. 10.—28. 47.

Lastly, The success of this prohibition which the apostles gave to the people; (v. 18.) *By these sayings, with much ado, they restrained the people from doing sacrifice to them*; so strongly were idolaters set upon their idolatry! It was not enough for the apostles to refuse to be deified, (that would be construed only a pang of modesty,) but they resent it, they shew them the evil of it, and all little enough, for they scarce restrained them from it; and some of them were ready to blame the priest, that he did not go on with his business notwithstanding. We may see here, what gave rise to the pagan idolatry; it was, terminating those regards in the instruments of our comfort, which should have passed through them to the Author. Paul and Barnabas have cured a cripple, and therefore they deified them, instead of glorifying God for giving them such power; which should make us very cautious that we do not either give that honour to another, or take it to ourselves, which is due to God only.

19. And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. 20. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. 21. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22. Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. 23. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. 24. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went

down into Attalia: 26. And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. 27. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. 23. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

We have here a further account of the services and sufferings of Paul and Barnabas.

I. How Paul was stoned and left for dead, but miraculously came to himself again, *v.* 19, 20. They fell upon Paul rather than Barnabas, because Paul, being the chief speaker, galled and vexed them more than Barnabas did. Now observe here,

1. How the people were incensed against Paul; not by any injury they pretended he had done them; if they took it for an affront that he would not let them misplace divine honours upon him, when they considered themselves they would easily forgive him that wrong. But *there came certain Jews from Antioch*, hearing, it is likely, and vexed to hear, what respect was shewed to Paul and Barnabas at Lystra; and they incensed the people against them, as factious, seditious, dangerous persons, not fit to be harboured. See how restless the rage of the Jews was against the gospel of Christ; they could not bear that it should have footing any where.

2. To what degree they were incensed by these barbarous Jews; they irritated them to that degree, that the mob rose and stoned Paul, not by a judicial sentence, but in a popular tumult; they threw stones at him, with which they knocked him down, and then *drew him out of the city*, as one not fit to live in it, or drew him out upon a sledge, or in a cart, to bury him, *supposing he had been dead*. So strong is the bent of the corrupt and carnal heart to that which is evil, even in contrary extremes, that as it is with great difficulty that men are restrained from evil on one side, so it is with great ease that they are persuaded to evil on the other side. See how fickle and mutable the minds of carnal worldly people are, that do not know and consider things! Those that but the other day would have treated the apostles as more than men, now treat them as worse than brutes, as the worst of men, as the worst of malefactors. To-day *Hosanna*, to-morrow *Crucify*; to-day sacrificed to, to-morrow sacrificed. We have an instance of a change the other way, *ch.* 28. *This man is a murderer*; *v.* 4; no doubt, *he is a god*, *v.* 6. Popular breath turns like the wind. If Paul would have been Mercury, he might have been enthroned, nay, he might have been enshrined; but if he will be a faithful minister of Christ, he shall be stoned, and thrown out of the city. Thus they who easily submit to strong delusions, hate to receive the truth in the love of it.

3. How he was delivered by the power of God; When he was *drawn out of the city*, the disciples stood round about him, *v.* 20. It seems, there were some here at Lystra that became disciples, that found the mean between deifying the apostles and rejecting them; and even these new converts had courage to own Paul when he was thus run down, though they had reason enough to fear that the same that stoned him would stone them for owning him. They stood round about him, as a guard to him against the further outrage of the people; stood about him, to see whether he were alive or dead; and all of a sudden *he rose up*; though he was not dead, yet he was ill crushed and bruised, no doubt,

and fainted away; he was in a *deliquium*, so that it was not without a miracle that he came so soon to himself, and was so well as to be able to go into the city. Note, God's faithful servants, though they may be brought within a step of death, and may be looked upon as dead both by friends and enemies, shall not die as long as he has work for them to do. They are *cast down*, but *not destroyed*, 2 Cor. 4. 9.

II. How they went on with their work, notwithstanding the opposition they met with; all the stones they threw at Paul, will not beat him off from his work; They *drew him out of the city*, (*v.* 19.) but, as one that set them at defiance, he *came into the city* again, to shew that he did not fear them; *none even of these things move him*. However, their being persecuted here is a known indication to them to seek for opportunities of usefulness elsewhere, and therefore for the present they quit Lystra.

And, 1. They went to break up and sow fresh ground at *Derbe*; thither the next day *Paul and Barnabas departed*, a city not far off; there they preached the gospel, there they *taught many*, *v.* 21. And it should seem that Timothy was of that city, and was one of the disciples that now attended Paul, had met him at Antioch, and accompanied him in all this circuit; for, with reference to this story, Paul tells him how fully *he had known the afflictions he endured at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra*, 2 Tim. 3. 10, 11. Nothing is recorded that happened at *Derbe*.

2. They returned, and went over their work again, watering what they had sown; and having staid as long as they thought fit at *Derbe*, they came back to Lystra, to Iconium, and Antioch, the cities where they had preached, *v.* 21. Now, as we have had a very instructive account of the methods they took in laying the foundation, and beginning the good work, so here we have the like of their building upon that foundation, and carrying on that good work. Let us see what they did.

(1.) They *confirmed the souls of the disciples*; they inculcated that upon them which was proper to confirm them, *v.* 22. Young converts are apt to waver, and a little thing shocks them; their old acquaintance beg they will not leave them; those that they look upon to be wiser than they, set before them the absurdity, indecency, and danger, of a change; they are allured, by the prospect of preferment, to stick to the traditions of their fathers; they are frightened with the danger of swimming against the stream. All this tempts them to think of making a retreat in time; but the apostles come and tell them that *this is the true grace of God wherein they stand*, and therefore they must stand to it, that there is no danger like that of losing their part in Christ, no advantage like that of keeping their hold of him; that, whatever their trials may be, they shall have strength from Christ to pass through them; and, whatever their losses may be, they shall be abundantly recompensed. And this *confirms the souls of the disciples*, it fortifies their pious resolutions in the strength of Christ, to adhere to Christ whatever it cost them. Note, [1.] Those that are converted need to be *confirmed*; those that are planted need to be rooted. Ministers' work is to establish saints as well as to awaken sinners. *Von minor est virtus quam quærerè partem tueri—To retain is sometimes as difficult as to acquire.* Those that were instructed in the truth must know the *certainty* of the things in which they have been instructed; and those that are resolved must be fixed in their resolutions. [2.] True confirmation is confirmation of the soul; it is not binding the body by severe penalties on apostates, but binding the soul; the best ministers can do that only by pressing those things which are proper to bind the soul; it is the grace of God, and nothing less, that can effectually

confirm the souls of the disciples, and prevent their apostasy.

(2.) They exhorted them to continue in the faith ; or, as it may be read, they encouraged them. They told them it was both their duty and interest to persevere ; to abide in the belief of Christ's being the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Note, Those that are in the faith are concerned to continue in the faith, notwithstanding all the temptations they may be under to desert it, from the smiles or frowns of this world. And it is requisite that they should often be exhorted to do so. They that are continually surrounded with temptations to apostasy, have need to be continually attended with pressing exhortations to perseverance.

(3.) That which they insisted most upon, was, that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Not only they must, but we must ; it must be counted upon, that all that will go to heaven must expect tribulation and persecution in their way thither. But is this the way to confirm the souls of the disciples, and to engage them to continue in the faith ? One would think it should rather shock them, and make them weary. No, as the matter is fairly stated and taken entire, it would help to confirm them, and fix them for Christ. It is true, they will meet with tribulation, with much tribulation, that is the worst of it : but then, [1.] It is so appointed, they must undergo it, there is no remedy, the matter is already fixed, and cannot be altered. He that has the sovereign disposal of us, has determined it to be our lot, that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution ; and he that has the sovereign command over us, has determined this to be our duty, that all that will be Christ's disciples must take up the cross ; so that when we gave up our names to Jesus Christ, it was what we agreed to ; when we sat down and counted the cost, if we reckoned right, it was what we counted upon : so that if tribulation and persecution arose because of the word, it is but what we had notice of before, it must be so, he performeth the thing that is appointed for us. The matter is fixed unalterably ; and shall the rock be for us removed out of its place ? [2.] It is the lot of the leaders in Christ's army as well as of the soldiers. It is not only you, but we, that (if it be thought a hardship) are subject to it ; therefore as your own sufferings must not be a stumbling-block to you, so neither must ours ; see 1 Thess. 3. 3. Let none be moved by our afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. As Christ did not put the apostles upon any harder service than what he underwent before them, so neither did the apostles put the ordinary Christians. [3.] It is true, we must count upon much tribulation, but this is encouraging, that we shall get through it ; we shall not be lost and perish in it. It is a Red Sea, but the Lord has opened a way through it, for the redeemed of the Lord to pass over. We must go down to trouble, but we shall come up again. [4.] We shall not only get through it, but get through it into the kingdom of God ; and the joy and glory of the end will make abundant amends for all the difficulties and hardships we may meet with in the way. It is true, we must go by the cross, but it is as true, that if we keep in the way, and do not turn aside or turn back, we shall go to the crown, and the believing prospect of that will make the tribulation easy and pleasant.

(4.) They ordained them elders, or presbyters, in every church. Now at this second visit they settled them in some order, formed them into religious societies under the conduct of a settled ministry, and settled that distinction between them that are taught in the word and them that teach. [1.] Every church had its governors or presidents, whose office it was to pray with the members of the church, and

to preach to them in their solemn assemblies, to administer all gospel-ordinances to them, and to take the oversight of them, to instruct the ignorant, warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, and to convince gainsayers. It is requisite that every particular church should have one or more such to preside in it. [2.] These governors were then elders, that had in their qualification the wisdom and gravity of seniors, and had in their commission the authority and command of seniors : not to make new laws ; that is the prerogative of the Prince, the great Lawgiver, (the government of the church is an absolute monarchy, and the legislative power entirely in Christ,) but to see to the observation and execution of the laws Christ has made ; and so far they are to be obeyed and submitted to. [3.] These elders were ordained. The qualifications of such as were proposed, or proposed themselves, (whether the apostles or the people put them up,) were judged of by the apostles, as most fit to judge ; and they themselves, having devoted themselves, were solemnly set apart to the work of the ministry, and bound to it. [4.] These elders were ordained to them, to the disciples, to their service, for their good. Those that are in the faith have need to be built up in it, and have need of the elders' help therein ; the pastors and teachers, who are to edify the body of Christ.

(5.) By prayer, joined with fasting they commended them to the Lord, to the Lord Jesus, on whom they believed. Note, [1.] When persons are brought to believe, and that sincerely, yet ministers' care concerning them is not then over ; there is need of watching over them still, instructing and admonishing them still, there is still that lacking in their faith, which needs to be perfected. [2.] The ministers that take most care of them that believe, must after all commend them to the Lord, and put them under the protection and conduct of his grace ; Lord, keep them through thine own name. To his custody they must commit themselves, and their ministers must commit them. [3.] It is by prayer that they must be commended to the Lord. Christ, in his prayer, (John 17.) commended his disciples to his Father ; Thine they were, and thou gavest them me. Father, keep them. [4.] It is a great encouragement to us, in commending the disciples to the Lord, that we can say, "It is he in whom they believed, we commit them to him, who have committed themselves to him, and who know they have believed in one who is able to keep what they and we have committed to him against that day," 2 Tim. 1. 12. [5.] It is good to join fasting with prayer, in token of our humiliation for sin, and in order to the adding of vigour to our prayers. [6.] When we are parting with our friends, the best farewell is to commend them to the Lord, and to leave them with him.

3. They went on preaching the gospel in other places where they had been, but, as it should seem, had not made so many converts as that now at their return they could form them into churches ; therefore thither they came to pursue and carry on conversion-work. From Antioch they passed through Pisidia, the province in which that Antioch stood, thence they came into the province of Pamphylia, the head city of which was Perga, where they had been before, (ch. 13. 13.) and came thither again to preach the word, (v. 25.) making a second offer, to see if they were now better disposed than they were before to receive the gospel. What success they had there, we are not told, but that from thence they went down to Attalia, a city of Pamphylia, on the sea-coast. They stayed not long at a place, but wherever they came endeavoured to lay a foundation which might afterward be built upon, and to sow the seeds which would in time produce a great

CHAP. XV.

increase. Now Christ's parables were explained; in which he resembled the kingdom of heaven to a *little leaven*, which in time *leavened the whole lump*; to a *grain of mustard-seed*, which, though very inconsiderable at first, grew to a *great tree*; and to the *seed which a man sowed in his ground*, and it *sprang up he knew not how*.

III. How they at length came back to Antioch in Syria, from whence they were sent forth upon this expedition. From Attalia they came by sea to Antioch, v. 26. And we are here told,

1. Why they came thither; because *from thence they had been recommended to the grace of God*, and such a value did they put upon a solemn recommendation to the grace of God, though they had themselves a great interest in heaven, that they never thought they could shew respect enough to those who had so recommended them. They having recommended them to the grace of God, for the work *which they fulfilled*; now that they had fulfilled it, they thought they owed them an account of it, that they might help them by their praises, as they had done by their prayers.

2. What account they gave them of their negotiation; (v. 27.) They *gathered the church together*. It is probable that the christians at Antioch were more than ordinarily met, or could meet, in one place, but on this occasion they called together the *leading men* of them; as the heads of the tribes are often called the *congregation* of Israel, so the ministers and principal members of the church at Antioch are called the *church*; or perhaps as many of the people as the place would hold came together on that occasion. Or, some met at one time, or in one place, and others at another. But when they had them together, they gave them an account of two things:

(1.) Of the tokens they had had of the divine presence with them in their labours; *They rehearsed all that God had done with them*. They did not tell what they had done, (that would have savoured of vain-glory,) but of what God had done with them and by them. Note, The praise of all the little good we do at any time must be ascribed to God: for it is he that not only *worketh in us* both to will and to do, but then *worketh with us* to make what we do successful. God's grace can do any thing without ministers' preaching: but ministers' preaching, even Paul's, can do nothing without God's grace; and the operations of that grace must be acknowledged in the efficacy of the word.

(2.) Of the fruit of their labours among the heathen. They told how *God had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*; had not only ordered them to be invited to the gospel-feast, but had inclined the hearts of many of them to accept the invitation. Note. [1.] There is no entering into the kingdom of Christ but by the door of faith; we must firmly believe in Christ, or we have no part in him. [2.] It is God that opens the door of faith, that opens to us the truths we are to believe, opens our hearts to receive them, and makes this a wide door, and an effectual, into the church of Christ. [3.] We have reason to be thankful that God has *opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*, has both sent them his gospel, which is *made known to all nations for the obedience of faith*, (Rom. 16. 26.) and has also given them hearts to entertain the gospel. Thus the gospel was spread, and it shined more and more, and none was able to shut this door which God had opened; not all the powers of hell and earth.

3. How they disposed of themselves for the present; *There they abode long time with the disciples*, (v. 28.) longer than perhaps at first they intended; not because they *feared their enemies*, but because they *loved their friends*, and were loath to part from them.

Hitherto we have, with a great deal of pleasure, attended the apostles in their glorious travels for the propagating of the gospel in foreign parts; have seen the bounds of the church enlarged by the accession both of Jews and Gentiles to it; and thanks be to that God who always caused them to triumph! We left them, in the close of the foregoing chapter, reposing themselves at Antioch, and edifying the church there with the rehearsal of their experiences, and it is pity they should ever be otherwise employed; but in this chapter we find other work (nothing so pleasant) cut out for them. The christians and ministers are engaged in controversy, and they that should have been now busied in enlarging the dominions of the church, have as much as they can do to compose the divisions of it: when they should have been making war upon the devil's kingdom; they have much ado to keep the peace in Christ's kingdom. Yet that occurrence and the record of it are of great use to the church, both for warning to us to expect such unhappy discords among christians, and direction to us what method to take for the accommodating of them. Here is, I. A controversy raised at Antioch by the judaizing teachers, who would have the believing Gentiles brought under the yoke of circumcision and the ceremonial law, v. 1. 2. II. A consultation had with the church at Jerusalem about this matter, and the sending of delegates thither for that purpose, which occasioned the starting of the same question there, v. 2. . 5. III. An account of what passed in the synod that was convened upon this occasion, v. 6. What Peter said, v. 7. . 11. What Paul and Barnabas discoursed of, v. 12. And lastly, what James proposed for the settling of this matter, v. 13. . 21. IV. The result of this debate, and the circular letter that was written to the Gentile converts, directing them how to govern themselves with respect to the Jews, v. 22. . 29. V. The delivering of this determination to the church at Antioch, and the satisfaction it gave them, v. 30. . 35. VI. A second expedition designed by Paul and Barnabas to preach to the Gentiles, in which they quarrelled about their assistant, and parted upon it, one steering one course, and the other another, v. 36. . 41.

1. **AND** certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. 5. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

Even when things go on very smoothly and pleasantly in a state or in a church, it is folly to be secure, and to think the mountain stands strong, and cannot be moved; some uneasiness or other will arise, which is not foreseen, cannot be prevented, but must be prepared for. If ever there was a heaven upon earth, surely it was in the church at Antioch at this time, when there were so many excellent ministers there, and blessed Paul among them, building up that church in their most holy faith. But

here we have their peace disturbed, and differences arising. Here is,

1. A new doctrine started among them, which occasioned this division, obliging the Gentile converts to submit to circumcision and the ceremonial law, *v. 1*. Many that had been proselytes to the Jewish religion became Christians; and they would have such as were proselyted to the Christian religion to become Jews.

1. The persons that urged this, were, *certain men which came down from Judea*; some think, such as had been of the Pharisees, (*v. 5.*) or perhaps of those priests which were *obedient to the faith, ch. 6, 7.* They came from Judea, pretending perhaps to be sent by the apostles at Jerusalem, at least to be countenanced by them. Having a design to spread their notions, they came to Antioch, because that was the head-quarters of those that preached to the Gentiles, and the rendezvous of the Gentile converts; and if they could but make an interest there, this heaven would soon be diffused to all the churches of the Gentiles. They insinuated themselves into an acquaintance with the brethren, pretending to be very glad that they had embraced the Christian faith, and congratulated them on their conversion; but tell them, that *yet one thing they lack*, they must be circumcised. Note, Those that are ever so well taught, have need to stand upon their guard, that they be not untaught again, or ill taught.

2. The position they laid down, the thesis they gave, was this, that except the Gentiles, who turned Christians, were *circumcised after the manner of Moses*, and thereby obliged themselves to all the observances of the ceremonial law, *they could not be saved.* As to this,

(1.) Many of the Jews who embraced the faith of Christ, yet continued very *zealous for the law, ch. 21. 20.* They knew it was from God, and its authority was sacred; valued it for its antiquity, had been bred up in the observance of it, and, it is probable, had been often devoutly affected in their attendance on those observances; they therefore kept them up after they were by baptism admitted into the Christian church; kept up the distinction of meats, and used the ceremonial purifyings from ceremonial pollutions, attended the temple-service, and celebrated the feasts of the Jews. Herein they were connived at, because the prejudices of education are not to be got over all at once, and in a few years the mistake would be effectually rectified by the destruction of the temple, and the total dissolution of the Jewish church; by which the observation of the Mosaic ritual would become utterly impracticable. But this did not suffice them, that they were herein indulged themselves, they must have the Gentile converts brought under the same obligations which they continued under. Note, There is a strange proneness in us to make our own opinion and practice a rule and a law to every body else; to judge of all about us by our standard, and to conclude, that because we do well, all do wrong, that do not just as we do.

(2.) Those Jews who believed that Christ was the Messiah, as they could not get clear of their affection to the law, so they could not get clear of the notions they had of the Messiah, that he should set up a temporal kingdom in favour of the Jewish nation, should make that illustrious and victorious; it was a disappointment to them that there was as yet nothing done toward this in the way they expected. But now that they hear the doctrine of Christ is received among the Gentiles, and his kingdom begins to be set up in the midst of them, if they can but persuade those that embrace Christ, to embrace the law of Moses too, they hope their point will be gained, the Jewish nation will be made as considerable as they can wish, though in another way; and

"Therefore by all means let the brethren be pressed to be *circumcised, and keep the law*; and then with our religion our dominion will be extended, and we shall in a little time be able to shake off the Roman yoke; and not only so, but to put it on the necks of our neighbours, and so shall have such a kingdom of the Messiah as we promised ourselves." Note, It is no wonder if those who have wrong notions of the kingdom of Christ, take wrong measures for the advancement of it, and such as really tend to the destruction of it, as these do.

(3.) The controversy about the circumcising of the Gentile proselytes had been on foot among the Jews long before this. This is observed by Dr. Whitby out of Josephus, *Antiquit. lib. 20. cap. 2.* "That when Izates, the son of Helen queen of Adiabene, embraced the Jews' religion, Ananias declared he might do it *without* circumcision; but Eleazar maintained, that it was a great impiety to remain uncircumcised." And when two eminent Gentiles fled to Josephus, (as he relates in the history of his own life,) "the zealots among the Jews were urgent for their circumcision; but Josephus dissuaded them from insisting upon it." Such has been the difference in all ages between bigotry and moderation.

(4.) It is observable what a mighty stress they laid upon it; they do not only say, "*You ought to be circumcised after the manner of Moses*, and it will be good service to the kingdom of the Messiah if you be; and will best accommodate matters between you and the Jewish converts, and we shall take it very kindly if you will, and shall converse the more familiarly with you;" but, "*Except you be circumcised, you cannot be saved.*" If you be not herein of our mind and way, you will never go to heaven, and therefore of course must go to hell." Note, It is common for proud imposers to enforce their own inventions, under pain of damnation; and to tell people, unless they believe just as they would have them believe, and do just as they would have them do, they cannot be *saved*, it is impossible they should; not only their case is hazardous, but it is desperate. Thus the Jews tell the brethren, that except they be of *their church*, and come into their communion, and conform to the ceremonies of their worship, though otherwise good men, and believers in Christ, yet they *cannot be saved*; salvation itself cannot save them. None are in Christ, but they that are within their pale. We ought to see ourselves well warranted by the word of God, before we say, "Except you do so and so, you cannot be saved."

II. The opposition which Paul and Barnabas gave to this schismatical notion, which engrossed salvation to the Jews, now that Christ had opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles, *v. 2. They had no small dissension, and disputation with them.* They would by no means yield to this doctrine, but appeared and argued publicly against it.

1. As faithful servants of Christ, they would not see his truths betrayed; they knew that Christ came to free us from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and to take down that wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, and unite them both in himself; and therefore cannot bear to hear of circumcising the Gentile converts, when their instructions were only to baptize them. The Jews would unite with the Gentiles, that is, they would have them to conform in every thing to their rites, and then, and not till then, they will look upon them as their brethren; and no thanks to them. But this not being the way in which Christ designed to unite them, it is not to be admitted.

3. As spiritual fathers to the Gentile converts, they would not see their liberties encroached upon; they had told them, that if they *believed in Jesus*

Christ, they should be *saved*; and now to be told, that that was not enough to save them, except they were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses—this was such a discouragement to them at setting out, and would be such a stumbling-block in their way, as might almost tempt them to think of returning into Egypt again; and therefore they set themselves against it.

III. The expedient pitched upon for the preventing of the mischief of this dangerous notion, and the silencing of those that vented it, and the quieting of the minds of the people with reference to it. They determined that Paul and Barnabas, and some others of their number, should go to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders, concerning this doubt. Not that the church at Antioch had any doubt concerning it, they knew the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free; but they sent the case to Jerusalem,

1. Because those who taught this doctrine came from Jerusalem, and pretended to have directions from the apostles there, to urge circumcision upon the Gentile converts; it was therefore very proper to send to Jerusalem about it, to know if they had any such direction from the church there. And it was soon found to be all wrong, which yet pretended to be of apostolical right. It was true that these *went out from them*, (v. 24.) but they never went out with any such orders from them.

2. Because those who were taught this doctrine, would be the better confirmed in their opposition to it, and in the less danger of being shocked and disturbed by it, if they were sure that the *apostles and elders at Jerusalem* (which was that Christian church that of all other retained the most affection to the law of Moses) were against it; and if they could but have that under their hands, it would be the likeliest means to silence and shame these incendiaries who had pretended to have it from them.

3. Because the apostles at Jerusalem were fittest to be consulted in a point yet not fully settled; and being most eminent for an infallible Spirit, peculiar to them as apostles, their decision would be likely to end the controversy. It was owing to the subtlety and malice of the great enemy of the church's peace, (as it appears by Paul's frequent complaints of these *judaizing teachers*, these *false apostles*, these *deceitful workers*, these *enemies of the cross of Christ*,) that it had not that effect.

IV. Their journey to Jerusalem upon this errand, v. 3. Where we find,

1. That they were honoured at parting; *They were brought on their way by the church*; which was then much used as a token of respect to useful men, and is directed to be done *after a godly sort*, 3 John 6. Thus the church shewed their favour to them who witnessed against these encroachments on the liberties of the Gentile converts, and stood up for them.

2. That they did good as they went along; they were men that would not lose time, and therefore visited the churches *by the way*; they passed through Phenice and Samaria, and as they went *declared the conversion of the Gentiles*, and what wonderful success the gospel had had among them; which *caused great joy to all the brethren*. Note, The progress of the gospel is and ought to be a matter of great joy. *All the brethren*, the faithful brethren in Christ's family, rejoice when more are born into the family; for the family will be never the poorer for the multitude of its children. In Christ and heaven there is portion enough, and inheritance enough for them all.

V. Their hearty welcome at Jerusalem, v. 4.

1. The good entertainment their friends gave them; *They were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders*; were embraced as bre-

thren, and had audience as messengers of the church at Antioch; they received them with all possible expressions of love and friendship.

2. The good entertainment they gave their friends; *They declared all things that God had done with them*; gave them an account of the success of their ministry among the Gentiles, not what they had done, but what *God had done with them*; what he had by his grace in them enabled them to do; and what he had by his grace in their hearers enabled them to receive. As they *went* they had *planted*, as they *came back* they had *watered*; but in both they were ready to own it was God that *gave the increase*. Note, It is a great honour to be employed for God, to be workers for him; for those that are so, have him a Worker with them, and he must have all the glory.

VI. The opposition they met with from the same party at Jerusalem, v. 5. When Barnabas and Paul gave an account of the multitude of the Gentiles, and of the great harvest of souls gathered in to Christ there, and all about them congratulated them upon it, *there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees*, who received the tidings very coldly, and, though they believed in Christ, yet were not satisfied in the admission of those converts, but thought it was needful to circumcise them. Observe here,

1. That those who have been most prejudiced against the gospel, yet have been captivated by it; so mighty has it been through God to the pulling down of strong-holds. When Christ was here upon earth, few or none of the rulers and of the *Pharisees believed on him*, but now there are those of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, and many of them, we hope, in sincerity.

2. That it is very hard for men suddenly to get clear of their prejudices; those that had been Pharisees, even after they became Christians, retained some of the old leaven. All did not so, witness Paul, but some did; and had such a jealousy for the ceremonial law, and such a dislike of the Gentiles, that they could not admit the Gentiles into communion with them, unless they would be circumcised, and thereby engage themselves to keep the law of Moses. This was, in their opinion, needful; and for their parts, they would not converse with them unless they submitted to it.

6. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. 7. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; 9. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. 12. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. 13. And

after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me : 14. Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16. After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17. That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 18. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. 19. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20. But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. 21. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath-day.

We have here a council called, not by writ, but by consent, on this occasion; (v. 6.) *The apostles and presbyters came together, to consider of this matter.* They did not give their judgment separately, but *came together* to do it, that they might hear one another's sense in this matter; for in the multitude of counsellors there is safety and satisfaction. They did not give their judgment rashly, but considered of this matter. Though they were clear concerning it in their own minds, yet they would take time to consider of it, and to hear what was to be said by the adverse party. Nor did the apostles give their judgment concerning it without the *elders*, the inferior ministers, to whom they thus condescended, and on whom they thus put an honour. Those that are most eminent in gifts and graces, and are in the most exalted stations in the church, ought to shew respect to their juniors and inferiors; for though *days should speak, yet there is a spirit in man*, Job 32. 7, 8. Here is a direction to the pastors of the churches, when difficulties arise, to *come together* in solemn meetings for mutual advice and encouragement, that they may know one another's mind, and strengthen one another's hand, and may act in concert.

Now here we have,

I. Peter's speech in this synod. He did not in the least pretend to any primacy or headship in this synod; he was not master of this assembly, nor so much as chairman, or moderator *pro hac vice*—on this occasion; for we do not find that either he spake first, to open the synod, (*there having been much disputing before he rose up,*) nor that he spake last, to sum up the cause and collect the suffrages; but he was a faithful, prudent, zealous member of this assembly, and offered that which was very much to the purpose, and which would come better from him than from another, because he had himself been the first that preached the gospel to the Gentiles. *There had been much disputing, pro and con*, upon this question, and liberty of speech allowed, as ought to be in such cases; those of the *sect of the Pharisees* were some of them present, and allowed to say what they could in defence of those of

their opinion at Antioch, which probably was answered by some of the elders: such questions ought to be fairly disputed before they are decided. When both sides had been heard, *Peter rose up*, and addressed himself to the assembly, *Men and brethren*, as did James afterward, v. 13. And here,

1. He put them in mind of the call and commission he had some time ago to *preach the gospel to the Gentiles*; he wondered there should be any difficulty made of a matter already settled: "*Ye know that ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχαίας—from the beginning of the days of the gospel, many years ago, God made choice among us apostles of one to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and I was the person chosen, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word, and believe, v. 7. Ye know, I was questioned about it, and cleared myself to universal satisfaction; every body rejoiced that God had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life, and nobody said a word of circumcising them, nor was there any thought of such a thing. (See ch. 11. 18.) Why should the Gentiles who hear the word of the gospel by Paul's mouth, be compelled to submit to circumcision, any more than those that heard it by my mouth? Or why should the terms of their admission now be made harder than they were then?*"

2. He puts them in mind how remarkably God owned him in preaching to the Gentiles, and gave testimony to their sincerity in embracing the christian faith; (v. 8.) "*God, who knows the hearts, and therefore is able to judge infallibly of men, he bore them witness that they were his indeed, by giving them the Holy Ghost; not only the graces and comforts, but the extraordinary miraculous gifts, of the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us apostles.*" See ch. 11. 15—17. Note, (1.) *The Lord knows them that are his*, for he knows men's hearts; and we are as our hearts are. (2.) Those to whom God gives the Holy Ghost, he thereby bears witness to that they are his; hence we are said to be sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, marked for God.

God had bid the Gentiles welcome to the privilege of communion with him, without requiring them to be circumcised, and to keep the law; and therefore shall not we admit them into communion with us but upon those terms? v. 9. God has put no difference between us and them; they, though Gentiles, are as welcome to the grace of Christ and the throne of grace as we Jews are; why then should we set them at a distance, as if we were holier than they? Isa. 65. 5. Note, We ought not to make any conditions of our brethren's acceptance with us, but such as God has made the conditions of their acceptance with him, Rom. 14. 3. Now the Gentiles were fitted for communion with God, in *having their hearts purified by faith*, and that faith God's own work in them; and therefore why should we think them unfit for communion with us, unless they will submit to the ceremonial purifying enjoined by the law to us? Note, [1.] *By faith the heart is purified*; we are not only justified, and conscience purified, but the work of sanctification is begun and carried on. [2.] Those that have their hearts purified by faith, therein are made so nearly to resemble one another, that, whatever other difference there may be between them, no account is to be made of it; for the faith of all the saints is alike precious, and has like precious effects; (2 Pet. 1. 1.) and they that by it are united to Christ, are so to look upon themselves as joined to one another, as that all distinctions, even that between Jew and Gentile, are immersed and swallowed up in it.

3. He sharply reproves those teachers (some of whom, it is likely, were present) who went about to bring the Gentiles under the obligation of the law of Moses, v. 10. The thing is so plain, that he cannot forbear speaking of it with some warmth

"*Now therefore, since God has owned them for his, why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, of the believing Gentiles and their children;*" (for circumcision was a yoke upon their infant seed, who are here reckoned among the disciples;) "*a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*" Here he shews that in this attempt, (1.) They offered a very great affront to God; "*You tempt him, by calling that in question which he has already settled and determined by no less an indication than that of the gift of the Holy Ghost; you do, in effect, ask, 'Did he know what he did? Or was he in earnest in it? Or will he abide by his own act?'*" Will you try whether God, who designed the ceremonial law for the people of the Jews only, will now, in its last ages, bring the Gentiles too under the obligation of it; to gratify you?" Those tempt God, who prescribe to him, and say that people *cannot be saved* but upon such and such terms, which God never appointed; as if the God of salvation must come into their measures. (2.) They offered a very great wrong to the disciples; Christ came to proclaim *liberty to the captives*, and they go about to *enslave those whom he has made free*. See Neh. 5. 8. The ceremonial law was a heavy yoke; they and their fathers found it difficult to be borne, so numerous, so various, so pompous, were the institutions of it! The distinction of meats was a heavy yoke, not only as it rendered conversation less pleasant, but as it embarrassed conscience with endless scruples. The ado that was made about even the unavoidable touch of a grave or a dead body, the pollution contracted by it, and the many rules about purifying from that pollution, were a heavy burthen. This yoke Christ came to ease us of, and called those that were *weary and heavy laden* under it, to come and take his yoke upon them, his *easy yoke*. Now for these teachers to go about to lay that yoke upon the neck of the Gentiles, which he came to free even the Jews from, was the greatest injury imaginable to them.

4. Whereas the Jewish teachers had urged that circumcision was necessary to salvation, Peter shews it was so far from being so, that both Jews and Gentiles were to be *saved purely through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and no other way; (v. 11.) *We believe to be saved through that grace only; πιστεύουσιν ὑμῖν—We hope to be saved; or, We believe unto salvation in the same manner as they—καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ αὐτοῦ.* "We that are circumcised, believe to salvation, and so do they that are uncircumcised; and as our circumcision will be no advantage to us, so their uncircumcision will be no disadvantage to them; for we must depend upon the grace of Christ for salvation, and must apply that grace by faith, as well as they. There is not one way of salvation for the Jews and another for the Gentiles; *neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision*, (that is neither here nor there,) *but faith which works by love*, Gal. 5. 6. Why should we burthen them with the law of Moses, as necessary to their salvation, when it is not that, but the gospel of Christ, that is necessary both to our salvation and theirs?"

11. An account of what Barnabas and Paul said in this synod, which did not need to be related, for they only gave in a narrative of what was recorded in the foregoing chapters, *what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them*, v. 12. This they had given in to the church at Antioch, (ch. 14. 27.) *to their brethren by the way*, (ch. 15. 3.) and now again to the synod; and it was very proper to be given in here: that which was contended for, was, that the Gentiles ought to submit to the law of Moses; now, in opposition to this, Paul and Barnabas undertake to shew, by a plain relation of matters of fact, that God owned the

preaching of the pure gospel to them without the law, and therefore to press the law upon them now was to undo what God had done. Observe,

1. What account they gave; they declared, or opened in order, and with all the magnifying and affecting circumstances, *what glorious miracles, what signs and wonders, God had wrought among the Gentiles by them*; what confirmation he had given to their preaching by miracles wrought in the kingdom of *nature*, and what success he had given to it by miracles wrought in the kingdom of *grace*. Thus God had honoured these apostles whom the Jewish teachers condemned, and had thus honoured the Gentiles whom they contemned. What need had they of any other advocate, when God himself pleaded their cause? The conversion of the Gentiles was itself a wonder, all things considered, no less than a miracle. Now if they, *received the Holy Ghost by the hearing of faith*, why should they be embarrassed with the *works of the law*? See Gal. 3. 2.

2. What attention was given to them; *All the multitude* (who, though they had not votes, yet came together to hear what was said) *kept silence, and gave audience to Paul and Barnabas*; it should seem, they took more notice of their narrative than they did of all the arguments that were offered. As in natural philosophy and medicine nothing is so satisfactory as experiments, and in law nothing is so satisfactory as cases adjudged, so in the things of God the best explication of the word of grace, is, the accounts given of the *operations of the Spirit of grace*; these the multitude will with *silence give audience to*. They that *fear God*, will most readily hear them that can tell them *what God has done for their souls*, or by their means, Ps. 66. 16.

III. The speech which James made to the synod. He did not interrupt Paul and Barnabas, though, it is likely, he had before heard their narrative, but let them go on with it, for the edification of the company, and that they might have it from the first and best hand; but *after they had held their peace*, then James stood up. *Ye may all prophesy one by one*, Cor. 14. 31. God is the God of order. He let Paul and Barnabas say what they had to say, and then he made the application of it. The hearing of variety of ministers may be of use when one truth does not drive out, but clench, another.

1. He addresses himself respectfully to these present; "*Men and brethren, hearken unto me*. You are *men*, and therefore, it is to be hoped, will hear reason; you are my *brethren*, and therefore will hear me with candour." We are all *brethren*, and equally concerned in this cause, that nothing be done to the dishonour of Christ, and the uneasiness of christians.

2. He refers himself to what Peter had said concerning the conversion of the *Gentiles*; (v. 14.) "*Simon*" (Simon Peter) "*hath declared, and opened the matter to you how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, in Cornelius and his friends, who were the first-fruits of the Gentiles*; how, when the gospel began first to spread, presently the Gentiles were invited to come and take the benefit of it;" and James observes here, (1.) That the *grace of God* was the rise of it; it was God that *visited the Gentiles*; and it was a kind visit; had they been left to themselves, they would never have visited him, but the acquaintance began on his part; he not only *visited and redeemed his people*, but visited and redeemed those that were to *ammi—not a people*. (2.) That the glory of God was the end of it; it was to *take out of them a people for his name*, who should glorify him, and in whom he would be glorified. As of old he took the Jews, so now the Gentiles, *to be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory*, Jer. 13. 11. Let all the people of God remember, that *therefore* they are thus dignified in God, that God may be glorified in them.

3. He confirms this with a quotation out of the Old Testament; he could not prove the calling of the Gentiles by a vision, as Peter could, or by miracles wrought by his hand, as Paul and Barnabas could, but he would prove that it was foretold in the Old Testament, and therefore it must be fulfilled, *v. 15. To this agree the words of the prophets*; most of the Old Testament prophets spake more or less of the calling in of the Gentiles, even Moses himself, Rom. 10. 19. It was the general expectation of the pious Jews, that the Messiah should be *a Light to lighten the Gentiles*; (Luke 2. 32.) but James waves the more illustrious prophecies of this, and pitches upon one that seemed more obscure; *It is written, Amos 9. 11, 12. where is foretold,*

(1.) The setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah; (*v. 16.*) *I will raise up the tabernacle of David, that is fallen.* The covenant was made with David and his seed; but the house and family of David are here called his *tabernacle*, because David in his beginning was a shepherd, and dwelt in tents, and his house, that had been as a stately palace, was become a mean and despicable *tabernacle*, reduced in a manner to its small beginning; this tabernacle was ruined and *fallen down*; there had not been for many ages a king of the house of David; *the sceptre was departed from Judah*, the royal family was sunk and buried in obscurity, and as it should seem, not inquired after; but *God will return, and will build it again*, raise it out of its ruins, a phoenix out of its ashes; and this was now lately fulfilled, when our Lord Jesus was raised out of that family, had *the throne of his father David* given him, with a promise, *that he should reign over the house of Jacob for ever*, Luke 1. 32, 33. And when the *tabernacle of David* was thus rebuilt in Christ, all the rest of it was, not many years after, wholly extirpated and cut off, as was also the nation of the Jews itself, and all their genealogies lost. The church of Christ may be called the *tabernacle of David*; this may sometimes be brought very low, and may seem to be in ruins, but it shall be *built again*, its withering interests shall revive; it is *cast down, but not destroyed*; even *dry bones* are made to live.

(2.) The bringing in of the Gentiles, as the effect and consequence of this; (*v. 17.*) *That the residue of men might seek after the Lord*: not the Jews only, who thought they had the monopoly of the tabernacle of David, but *the residue of men*, such as had hitherto been left out of the pale of the visible church; they must now, upon this re-edifying of the tabernacle of David, be brought *to seek after the Lord*, and to inquire how they may obtain his favour; when David's tabernacle is set up, they shall *seek the Lord their God, and David their king*, Hos. 3. 5. Jer. 30. 9. *Then Israel shall possess the remnant of Edom*; so it is in the Hebrew; for the Jews called all the Gentiles *Edomites*, and therefore the Septuagint there leave out the particular mention of Edom, and read it just as it is here, *that the residue of men might seek*, (St. James here adds, *after the Lord*), and *all the Gentiles*, or heathen, *upon whom my name is called*. The Jews were for many ages so peculiarly favoured, that the residue of men seemed neglected; but now God will have an eye to them, and his name shall be called upon by the Gentiles; his name shall be declared and published among them, and they shall be brought forth to know his name, and to call upon it, they shall call themselves the people of God, and he shall call them so; and thus by consent of both parties, *his name is called upon them*. This promise we may depend upon the fulfilling of in its season; and now it begins to be fulfilled, for it is added, *saith the Lord, who doeth this; who doeth all these things*; so the Seventy there, and the apostle here; *he saith*

it, who doeth it; who therefore said it, because he was determined to do it; and who therefore doeth it, because he hath said it; for though with us saying and doing are two things, they are not so with God. The uniting of *Jews and Gentiles in one body*, and all these things that were done in order to it, which were here foretold, were, [1.] What God did; *This was the Lord's doing*; whatever instruments were employed in it: and, [2.] It was what God delighted in, and was well pleased with; for he is *the God of the Gentiles, as well as the Jews*, and it is his honour *to be rich in mercy to all that call upon him*.

4. He resolves it into the purpose and counsel of God; (*v. 18.*) *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.* He not only foretold the calling of the Gentiles many ages ago by the prophets, (and therefore it ought not to be a surprise or stumbling-block to us,) but he foresaw and foreordained it in his eternal counsels, which are unquestionably wise, and unalterably firm. It is an excellent maxim here laid down concerning all God's works, both of providence and grace, in the natural and spiritual kingdom, that they were all *known unto him from the beginning of the world*, from the time he first began to work, which supposes his knowing them (as other scriptures speak) *from before the foundation of the world*, and therefore from all eternity. Note, Whatever God does, he did before design and determine to do; for he works all, not only according to *his will*, but *according to the counsel of his will*: he not only *does whatever he determined*, (Ps. 135. 6.) which is more than we can do, (our purposes are frequently broken off, and our measures broken,) but he *determined what ever he does*; whatever he may say to prove us, *he himself knows what he will do*; for we knew not our works beforehand, but must do *as occasion shall serve*, 1 Sam. 10. 7. What we shall do in such or such a case we cannot tell till it comes to the setting to; but *known unto God are all his works*; in the volume of his book (called the *scriptures of truth*, Dan. 10. 21.) they are all *written in order*, without any rasure or interlining; (Ps. 40. 7.) and all God's works will, in the day of review, be found to agree exactly with his counsels, without the least error or variation. We are poor short-sighted creatures; the wisest men can see but a little way before them, and not at all with any certainty; but this is our comfort, that, whatever uncertainty we are at, there is an infallible certainty in the divine prescience, *known unto God are all his works*.

5. He gives his advice what was to be done in the present case, as the matter now stood with reference to the Gentiles; (*v. 19.*) *My sentence is; ἐγὼ κρίνω—I give it as my opinion, or judgment*; not as having authority over the rest, but as being an adviser with them. Now his advice is,

(1.) That circumcision and the observation of the ceremonial law be by no means imposed upon the Gentile converts; no not so much as recommended or mentioned to them. "There are many from among the Gentiles that are turned to God in Christ, and we hope there will be many more. Now I am clearly for using them with all possible tenderness, and putting no manner of hardship or discouragement upon them," *μὴ παρεχλίνω*—"not to give them any molestation or disturbance, or suggest any thing to them that may be disquieting, or raise scruples in their minds, or perplex them." Note, Great care must be taken not to discourage or disquiet young converts with *matters of doubtful disputation*. Let the essentials of religion, which an awakened conscience will readily receive, be first impressed deeply upon them, and those will satisfy them, and make them easy; and let not things foreign and circumstantial be urged upon them, which will but

trouble them. *The kingdom of God*, which they are to be trained up in, *is not meat and drink*, either the *opposition* or the *imposition* of indifferent things, which will but trouble them; *but it is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, which we are sure will trouble nobody.

(2.) That yet it would do well that in some things, which gave most offence to the Jews, the Gentiles should comply with them; because they must not nourish them so far as to be circumcised, and keep the *whole* law, it does not therefore follow that they must act in a continual contradiction to them, and study how to provoke them. It will please the Jews (and if a little thing will oblige them, better do so than cross them) if the *Gentile converts* abstain,

[1.] *From pollutions of idols and from fornication*; which are two bad things, and always to be abstained from; *but writing to them* particularly and expressly *to abstain from them*, (because in these things the Jews were jealous of the Gentile converts, lest they should transgress,) would very much gratify the Jews; not but that the apostles, both in preaching and writing to the Gentiles that embraced christianity, were careful to warn against, *First, Pollutions of idols*, that they should have no manner of fellowship *with idolaters in their idolatrous worship*, and particularly not in the feasts they held upon their sacrifices. See 1 Cor. 10. 14, &c. 2 Cor. 6. 14, &c. *Secondly, Fornication, and all manner of uncleanness*. How large, how pressing, is St. Paul in his cautions against this sin! 1 Cor. 6. 9, 15. Eph. 5. 3, &c. But the Jews, who were willing to think the worst of those they did not like, suggested that these were things which the Gentiles, even after conversion, allowed themselves in, and the apostles of the Gentiles connived at it. Now, to obviate this suggestion, and to leave no room for this calumny, St. James advises, *that*, beside the private admonitions which were given them by their ministers, they should be publicly warned *to abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication*; that herein they should be very circumspect, and should avoid all appearances of those two evils, which would be in so particular a manner offensive to the Jews.

[2.] *From things strangled, and from blood*; which, though not evil in themselves, as the other two, nor designed to be always abstained from, as those were, had been forbidden by the *precepts of Noah*, (Gen. 9. 4.) before the *giving of the law of Moses*; and the Jews had a great dislike to them, and to all those that took a liberty to use them; and therefore, to avoid giving offence, let the Gentile converts, abridge themselves of their liberty herein, 1 Cor. 8. 9, 13. Thus we must *become all things to all men*.

6. He gives a reason for his advice—That great respect ought to be shewed to the Jews, for they have been so long accustomed to the solemn injunctions of the ceremonial law, that they must be borne with, if they cannot presently come off from them; (v. 21.) *For Moses hath of old them that preach him in every city*, his writings (a considerable part of which is the ceremonial law) *being read in the synagogues every sabbath-day*. “You cannot blame them, if they have a great veneration for the law of Moses; for besides that they are very sure God spake by Moses,” (1.) “Moses is continually preached to them, and they are called upon to *remember the law of Moses*,” Mal. 4. 4. Note, Even that word of God which is *written* to us, should also be *preached*; those that have the scriptures, have need of ministers to help them to understand and apply the scriptures. (2.) “His writings are *read* in a solemn religious manner, *in their synagogues*, and on the *sabbath-day*, in the place and at the time of their meetings for the worship of God; so that from their child-

hood they have been trained up in a regard to the law of Moses; the observance of it is a part of their religion.” (3.) “This has been done *of old time*; they have received from their fathers an honour for Moses; they have antiquity for it.” (4.) “This has been done *in every city*, wherever there are any Jews, so that none of them can be ignorant what stress that law laid upon these things; and therefore, though the gospel has set us free from these things, yet they cannot be blamed if they are loath to part with them, and cannot of a sudden be persuaded to look upon those things as needless and indifferent, which they, and their fathers before them, had been so long taught, and taught of God too, to place religion in; and therefore we must give them time, must meet them half-way, they must be borne with a while, and brought on gradually, and we must comply with them as far as we can without betraying our gospel-liberty.” Thus does this apostle shew the spirit of a moderator, that is, a spirit of moderation, being careful to give no offence either to Jew or Gentile, and contriving, as much as may be, to please both sides, and provoke neither. Note, We are not to think it strange if people be wedded to customs which they have had transmitted to them from their fathers, and which they have been educated in an opinion of as sacred; and therefore allowances must be made in such cases, and not rigour used.

22. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23. And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send greeting* unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia: 24. Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment: 25. It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26. Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth. 28. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burthen than these necessary things; 29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. 30. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31. *Which* when they had read they rejoiced for the consolation. 32. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren

with many words, and confirmed *them*. 33. And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. 34. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. 35. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

We have here the result of the consultation that was had at Jerusalem about the imposing of the ceremonial law upon the Gentiles. Much more, it is likely, was said about it than is here recorded; but at length it was brought to a head, and the advice which James gave, was universally approved of, and agreed to *namine contradicente—unanimously*; and letters were accordingly sent by messengers of their own to the *Gentile converts*, acquainting them with their sentiments in this matter; which would be a great confirmation to them against the false teachers. Now observe here,

I. The choice of the delegates that were to be sent with Paul and Barnabas on this errand; not as if they had any suspicion of the fidelity of these great men, and could not trust them with their letters; or as if they thought those to whom they sent them, would suspect them to have altered any thing in their letter; no, their charity thought no such evil concerning men of such tried integrity; but,

1. They thought fit to send men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas, v. 22. This was agreed to by the apostles and elders, with the whole church, who, it is likely, undertook to bear their charges, 1 Cor. 9. 7. They sent these messengers, (1.) To shew their respect to the church at Antioch, as a sister-church, though a younger sister, and that they looked upon it as upon the same level with them; as also that they were desirous further to know their state. (2.) To encourage Paul and Barnabas, and to make their journey home the more pleasant, (for it is likely they travelled on foot,) by sending such excellent men to bear them company; *amicus pro vehiculo—a friend instead of a carriage*. (3.) To put a reputation upon the letters they carried, that it might appear a solemn embassy, and so much the more regard might be had to the message, which was likely to meet with opposition from some. (4.) To keep up the communion of saints, and cultivate an acquaintance between churches and ministers that were at a distance from each other, and to shew, *that though they were many, yet they were one*.

2. Those they sent were not inferior persons, who might serve to carry the letters, and attest the receipt of them from the apostles; but *they were chosen men, and chief men among the brethren*, men of eminent gifts, graces, and usefulness; for those are the things which denominate men *chief among the brethren*, and qualify them to be the messengers of the churches. They are here named, Judas, who was called Barsabas, probably the brother of that Joseph who was called Barsabas, that was a candidate for the apostleship, ch. 1. 23. The character which these men had in the church at Jerusalem, would have some influence upon them that came from Judea, as those false teachers did, and engage them to pay the more deference to the message that was sent by them.

II. The drawing up of the letters, circular letters, that were to be sent to the churches, to notify the sense of the synod in this matter.

1. Here is a very condescending obliging preamble to this decree, v. 23. Here is nothing in it haughty or assuming, but, (1.) That which speaks the humility of the apostles, that they join the elders

and brethren in commission with them, the ministers, the ordinary christians, whom they had advised with in this case, as they used to do in other cases. Though never men were so qualified as they were for a monarchical power and conduct in the church, nor had such a commission as they had, yet their decrees run not, "We, the apostles, Christ's vicars upon earth, and pastors of all the pastors of the churches," (as the Pope styles himself,) "and sole judges in all matters of faith;" but the apostles, and elders, and brethren, agree in their orders; herein they remembered the instructions their Master gave them, (Matt. 23. 8.) *Be not ye called Rabbi; for all ye are brethren*. (2.) That which speaks their respect to the churches they wrote to; they send them greeting, wish them health and happiness and joy, and call them *brethren of the Gentiles*; thereby owning their admission into the church, and giving them the right hand of fellowship; "You are our brethren though Gentiles; for we meet in Christ, the first-born among many brethren, in God our common father." Now that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and of the same body, they are to be countenanced and encouraged, and called brethren.

2. Here is a just and severe rebuke to the judaizing teachers; (v. 24.) "We have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, and we are very much concerned to hear it; now this is to let them know, that those who preached this doctrine were false teachers, both as they produced a false commission, and as they taught a false doctrine."

(1.) They did a great deal of wrong to the apostles and ministers at Jerusalem, in pretending that they had instructions from them, to impose the ceremonial law upon the Gentiles, when there was no colour for such a pretension. "They went out from us indeed, they were such as belonged to our church, which, when they had a mind to travel, we gave them perhaps a testimonial of; but, as for their urging the law of Moses upon you, we gave them no such commandment, nor had we ever thought of such a thing, nor given them the least occasion to use our names in it." It is no new thing for apostolical authority to be pleaded in defence of those doctrines and practices which yet the apostles gave neither command nor encouragement for.

(2.) They did a great deal of wrong to the Gentile converts, in saying, *Ye must be circumcised, and must keep the law*. [1.] It perplexed them; "They have troubled you with words, have occasioned disturbance and disquietment to you; you depended upon those who told you, 'If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be saved'; and now you are startled by those that tell you, *You must keep the law of Moses, or you cannot be saved*; by which you see yourselves drawn into a snare. They trouble you with words; words, and nothing else; very words; sound, but no substance." How has the church been troubled with words, by the pride of men that loved to hear themselves talk! [2.] It endangered them; they subverted their souls, put them into disorder, and pulled down that which had been built up. They took them off from pursuing pure christianity, and minding the business of that, by filling their heads with the necessity of *circumcision, and the law of Moses*, which were nothing to the purpose.

3. Here is an honourable testimony given of the messengers by whom these letters were sent.

(1.) Of Paul and Barnabas, whom these judaizing teachers had opposed and censured as having done their work by the halves, because they had brought the Gentile converts to *Christianity* only, and not to *Judaism*. Let them say what they will of these men, [1.] "They are men that are dear to us, they are our beloved Barnabas and Paul; men whom

we have a value for, a kindness for, a concern for." Sometimes it is good for those that are of eminency to express their esteem, not only for the despised truth of Christ, but for the despised preachers and defenders of that truth, to encourage them, and weaken the hands of their opposers. [2.] "They are men that have *signalized* themselves in the service of Christ, and therefore have deserved well of all the churches; they are men that *have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, (v. 26.) and therefore are worthy of double honour, and cannot be suspected of having sought any secular advantage to themselves; for they have ventured their all for Christ, have engaged in the most dangerous services, as good soldiers of Christ, and not only in laborious services." It is not likely that such faithful confessors should be unfaithful preachers; they that urged *circumcision*, did it to *avoid persecution*, (Gal. 6. 12, 13.) they that opposed it, knew they thereby exposed themselves to *persecution*; and which of these were most likely to be in the right?

(2.) Of Judas and Silas; "*They are chosen men*, (v. 25.) and they are men that have heard our debates, and are perfectly apprized of the matter, and will *tell you the same things by mouth*," v. 27. What is of use to us, it is good to have both in writing and by word of mouth; that we may have the advantage both of reading and of hearing it. The apostles refer themselves to the bearers for a further account of their judgment and their reasons, and the bearers will refer themselves to *their letters* for the certainty of the determination.

4. Here is the direction given what to require from the Gentile converts; where observe,

(1.) The matter of the injunction, which is according to the advice given by St. James, *that*, to avoid giving offence to the Jews, [1.] They should never eat any thing that they knew had been offered in sacrifice to an idol, but look upon it as, though clean in itself, yet *thereby polluted to them*. This prohibition was afterward in part taken off, for they were allowed to eat *whatever was sold in the shambles, or set before them at their friend's table, though it had been offered to idols*, except when there was *danger of giving offence by it*, that is, of giving occasion either to a weak christian to think the worse of our christianity, or to a wicked heathen to think the better of his idolatry; and in those cases it is good to *forbear*, 1 Cor. 10. 25, &c. This to us is an anti-ipated case. [2.] *That they should not eat blood, or drink it*; but avoid every thing that looked cruel and barbarous in that ceremony which had been of so long standing. [3.] *That they should not eat any thing that was strangled, or died of itself, or had not the blood let out*. [4.] That they should be very strict in censuring those that *were guilty of fornication*, or marrying within the degrees prohibited by the Levitical law; which, some think, is principally intended here. See 1 Cor. 5. 1. Dr. Hammond states this matter thus; The judaizing teachers would have the Gentile converts to submit to all that those submitted to, whom they called the *proslutes of righteousness, to be circumcised, and keep the whole law*; but the apostles required no more of them than what was required of the *proslutes of the gate*, which was to observe the *seven precepts of the sons of Noah*, which, he thinks, are here referred to. But the only ground of this decree being in complaisance to the rigid Jews that had embraced the christian faith, and, except in that one case of scandal, all meats being pronounced free and indifferent to all Christians, as soon as the reason of the decree ceased, which, at furthest, was after the destruction of Jerusalem, the obligation of it ceased likewise. "These things are in a particular manner offensive to the Jews, and therefore do not disoblige them herein for the present; in a little time

the Jews will incorporate with the Gentiles, and then the danger is over."

(2.) The manner how it is worded.

[1.] They express themselves with something of authority, that what they wrote might be received with respect, and deference paid to it; *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us*, that is, to us under the conduct of the *Holy Ghost*, and by direction from him: not only the apostles, but others, were endued with spiritual gifts extraordinary, and knew more of the mind of God than any since those gifts ceased can pretend to; their infallibility gave an incontestable authority to their decrees, and they would not order any thing because it *seemed good to them*, but that they knew it *first seemed good to the Holy Ghost*. Or it refers to what the Holy Ghost had determined in this matter formerly. When the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles, he endued them with the *gift of tongues*, in order to their preaching the *gospel to the Gentiles*; which was a plain indication of God's purpose to call them in. When the Holy Ghost descended upon Cornelius and his friends, upon Peter's preaching, it was plain that Christ designed the taking down of the Jewish pale, within which they fancied the Spirit had been inclosed.

[2.] They expressed themselves with abundance of tenderness and fatherly concern.

First, They are afraid of *burthening* them; *We will lay upon you no greater burthen*. So far were they from delighting to *impose* upon them, that they dreaded nothing so much as imposing too far upon them, so as to discourage them at their setting out!

Secondly, They impose upon them *no other than necessary things*; "The avoiding of *fornication* is necessary to all christians at all times; the avoiding of *things strangled*, and of *blood*, and of *things offered to idols*, is necessary at this time, for the keeping up of a good understanding between you and the Jews, and the preventing of offence;" as long as it continues necessary for that end, and no longer, it is enjoined. Note, Church rulers should impose only *necessary things*, things that Christ has made our duty, and have a real tendency to the *edification of the church*, and, as these here, to the uniting of good christians. If they *impose* things only to shew their own authority, and to try people's obedience, they forget that they have not authority to make new laws, but only to see that the *laws of Christ* be duly executed, and to enforce the observation of them.

Thirdly, They enforce their order with a commendation of those that shall comply with it, rather than with the condemnation of those that shall transgress it; they do not conclude, "From which if you do not keep yourselves, ye shall be an anathema, ye shall be cast out of the church, and accursed," according to the style of after-councils, and particularly that of Trent; but, "*From which if you keep yourselves, as we do not question but ye will, ye shall do well*; it will be for the glory of God, the furtherance of the gospel, the strengthening of the hands of your brethren, and your own credit and comfort." It is all sweetness and love and good-humour, such as became the followers of him who, when he called us to *take his yoke upon us*, assured us we should find him *meek and lowly in heart*. The difference of the style of the true apostles from that of the false is very observable. They that were for *imposing* the ceremonial law, were positive and imperious; *Except ye keep it, ye cannot be saved*, (v. 1.) ye are excommunicated *ipso facto—at once, and delivered to Satan*. The apostles of Christ, who only recommend *necessary things*, are mild and gentle; "*From which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well*, and as becomes you. *Fare ye well*; we are hearty well-wishers to your honour and peace."

III. The delivering of the letters, and how the messengers disposed of themselves.

1. When they were dismissed, had had their audience of leave of the apostles (it is probable that they were dismissed with prayer, and a solemn blessing in the name of the Lord, and with instructions and encouragements in their work) *they then came to Antioch*; they stayed no longer at Jerusalem than till their business was done, and then came back, and perhaps were met at their return by them that brought them on their way at their setting out; for those that have taken pains in public service, ought to be countenanced and encouraged.

2. As soon as they came to Antioch, they gathered the multitude together, and delivered the epistle to them, (v. 30, 31.) that they might all know what it was that was forbidden them, and might observe these orders, which would be no difficulty for them to do, most of them having been, before their conversion to Christ, *proslaves of the gate*, who had laid themselves under these restrictions already; but this was not all; it was that they might know that *no more than this was forbidden them*; that it was no longer a sin to eat swine's flesh, no longer a pollution to touch a grave or a dead body.

3. The people were wonderfully pleased with the orders that came from Jerusalem; (v. 31.) *They rejoiced for the consolation*; and a great consolation it was to the multitude, (1.) That they were confirmed in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and were not burthened with that, as those upstart teachers would have had them to be. It was a comfort to them to hear that the carnal ordinances were no longer imposed on them, which perplexed the conscience, but could not purify or pacify it. (2.) That those who troubled their minds with an attempt to force circumcision upon them, were hereby for the present silenced and put to confusion, the fraud of their pretensions to an apostolical warrant being now discovered. (3.) That the Gentiles were hereby encouraged to receive the gospel, and those that had received it to adhere to it. (4.) That the peace of the church was hereby restored, and that removed, which threatened a division. All this was consolation which they rejoiced in, and blessed God for.

4. They got the strange ministers that came from Jerusalem to give them each a sermon, and more, v. 32. Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, endued with the Holy Ghost, and called to the work, and being likewise intrusted by the apostles to deliver some things relating to this matter by word of mouth, *exhorted the brethren with many words*, and confirmed them. Even they that had the constant preaching of Paul and Barnabas, yet were glad of the help of Judas and Silas; the diversity of the gifts of ministers is of use to the church. Observe what is the work of ministers with those that are in Christ; (1.) To confirm them, by bringing them to see more reason both for their faith in Christ, and their obedience to him; to confirm their choice of Christ, and their resolutions for Christ. (2.) To exhort them to perseverance, and to the particular duties required of them: to quicken them to that which is good, and direct them in it. They comforted the brethren (so it may be rendered;) and that would contribute to the confirming of them; for the joy of the Lord will be our strength. They exhorted them with many words, they used a very great copiousness and variety of expression; one word would affect one, and another another: and therefore, though what they had to say might have been summed up in a few words, yet it was for the edification of the church that they used many words, *διὰ λόγον πολλόν—with much speech, much reasoning; precept must be upon precept*.

5. The dismissal of the Jerusalem ministers, v.

33. When they had spent some time among them, (so it might be read,) *ἀναστὰς ἔειπεν—having made some stay*, and having made it to good purpose, not having trifled away time, but having filled it up, they were let go in peace from the brethren at Antioch, to the apostles at Jerusalem, with all possible expressions of kindness and respect; they thanked them for their coming and pains, and the good service they had done, wished them their health and a good journey home; and committed them to the custody of the peace of God.

6. The continuance of Silas, notwithstanding, together with Paul and Barnabas, at Antioch. (1.) Silas, when it came to the setting to, would not go back with Judas to Jerusalem, but let him go home himself, and chose rather to abide still at Antioch, v. 34. And we have no reason at all to blame him for it, though we know not the reason that moved him to it. I am apt to think the congregations at Antioch were both more large and more lively than these at Jerusalem, and that tempted him to stay there, and he did well: so did Judas; who, notwithstanding this, returned to his post of service at Jerusalem. (2.) Paul and Barnabas, though their work lay chiefly among the Gentiles, yet continued for some time in Antioch, being pleased with the society of the ministers and people there, which, it should seem by divers passages, was more than ordinarily inviting. They continued there, not to take their pleasure, but teaching and preaching the word of God. Antioch being the chief city of Syria, it is likely that there was a great resort of Gentiles thither from all parts upon one account or other, as there was of Jews to Jerusalem; so that in preaching there, they did in effect preach to many nations; for they preached to those who would carry the report of what they preached to many nations, and thereby prepare them for the apostles' coming in person to preach to them. And thus they were not only not idle at Antioch, but were serving their main intention. (3.) There were many others also there, labouring at the same oar. The multitude of workmen in Christ's vineyard does not give us a writ of ease. Even there where there are many others labouring in the word and doctrine, yet there may be opportunity for us; the zeal and usefulness of others should excite us, not lay us asleep.

36. And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. 37. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark, 38. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 39. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; 40. And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. 41. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

We have seen one unhappy difference among the brethren, that was of a public nature, brought to a good issue; but here we have a private quarrel between two ministers, no less men than Paul and Barnabas, not compromised indeed, yet ending well.

I. Here is a good motion Paul made to Barnabas

to go and review their work among the Gentiles, and renew it; to take a circuit among the churches they had planted, and see what progress the gospel made among them. Antioch was now a safe and quiet harbour for them, they had there no adversary or evil occurrent; but Paul remembered that they only put in there to refit and refresh themselves, and therefore begins now to think of putting to sea again; and having been in winter quarters long enough, he is for taking the field again, and making another campaign, in a vigorous prosecution of this holy war against Satan's kingdom. Paul remembers that the work appointed him, was *afar off among the Gentiles*, and therefore he is here meditating a second expedition among them to do the same work, though to encounter the same difficulties; and this *some days after*, for his active spirit could not bear to be long out of work; no, nor his bold and daring spirit to be long out of danger. Observe,

1. To whom he makes this motion; to Barnabas, his old friend and fellow-labourer; he invites his company and help in this work. We have need one of another, and may be many ways serviceable one to another; and therefore should be forward both to borrow and lend assistance. Two are better than one. Every soldier has his comrade.

2. For whom the visit is designed; "Let us not presently begin new work, or break up new ground; but let us take a view of the fields we have sown. *Come, and let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine flourish*, Cant. 7. 12. *Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord.*" Observe, He calls all the Christians brethren, and not ministers only; for, *Have we not all one Father?* He has a concern for them in *every city*, even there where the brethren were fewest and poorest, and most persecuted and despised; yet let us visit them. Wherever we have *preached the word of the Lord*, let us go and water the seed sown. Note, Those that have preached the gospel, should visit those to whom they have preached it. As we must look after our praying, and hear what answer God gives to that; so we must look after our preaching, and see what success that has. Faithful ministers cannot but have a particular tender concern for those to whom they have preached the gospel, that they may not bestow upon them *labour in vain*. See 1 Thess. 3. 5, 6.

3. What was intended in this visit; "Let us see *how they do*," *ὡς ἔχουσιν—how it is with them*. It was not merely a compliment that he designed, nor did he take such a journey with a bare *How do you do?* No, he would visit them, that he might acquaint himself with their case, and impart unto them such spiritual gifts as were suited to it; as the physician visits his recovering patient, that he may prescribe what is proper for the perfecting of his cure, and the preventing of a relapse. Let us see how they do, that is, (1.) What spirit they are of, how they stand affected, and how they behave themselves; it is probable that they frequently heard from them; "But let us go see them; let us go see whether they hold fast what we preached to them; and live up to it, that we may endeavour to reduce them if we find them wandering, to confirm them if we find them wavering, and to comfort them if we find them steady." (2.) What state they are in; whether the churches have rest and liberty; or whether they are not in trouble or distress, that we may *rejoice with them* if they rejoice, and caution them against security; and may *weep with them* if they weep, and comfort them under the cross, and may know the better how to *pray for them*.

II. The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas about an assistant; it was convenient to have a

young man with them that should attend on them and minister to them, and be a witness of their *doctrine, manner of life, and patience*; and that should be fitted and trained up for further service, by being occasionally employed in the present service. Now,

1. Barnabas would have his nephew John, whose surname was Mark, to go along with them, v. 37. He determined to take him, because he was his relation, and, it is likely, was brought up under him, and he had a kindness for him, and was solicitous for his welfare. We should suspect ourselves of partiality, and guard against it in preferring our relations.

2. Paul opposed it; (v. 38.) *He thought not good to take him with them, ὅτι ἐγένετο—he did not think him worthy of the honour, nor fit for the service, who had departed from them, clandestinely as it should seem, without their knowledge, or wilfully without their consent, from Pamphylia, (ch. 13. 13.) and went not with them to the work, either because he was lazy, and would not take the pains that must be taken; or cowardly, and would not run the hazard. He runs his colours just as they were going to engage. It is probable that he promised very fair now, that he would not do so again. But Paul thought it was not fit he should be thus honoured, who had forfeited his reputation; nor thus employed, who had betrayed his trust; at least, not till he had been longer tried. If a man deceive me once, it is his fault; but if twice, it is my own, for trusting him. Solomon saith, *Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble, is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint*, which will hardly be used again, Prov. 25. 19.*

III. The issue of this disagreement; it came to such a height, that they parted upon it. The contention, the *marasmus* (so the word is,) the fit of passion which this threw them both into, was so sharp, that they *departed asunder one from the other*. Barnabas was peremptory that he would not go with Paul unless they took John Mark with them; Paul was as peremptory that he would not go if John did go with them. Neither would yield, and therefore there is no remedy but they must part. Now here is that which is very humbling, and just matter of lamentation, and yet very instructive. For we see,

1. That the best of men are but men, *subject to like passions* as we are, as these two good men had expressly owned concerning themselves; (ch. 14. 15.) and now it appeared too true. I doubt there was (as usually there is in such contentions) a *fault on both sides*; perhaps Paul was too severe upon the young man, and did not allow his fault the extenuation it was capable of, did not consider what a useful woman his mother was in Jerusalem, (ch. 12. 12.) nor make the allowances he might have made to Barnabas's natural affection. But it was Barnabas's fault that he took that into consideration in a case wherein the interest of Christ's kingdom was concerned, and indulged it too much. And they were certainly both in fault to be so hot as to let the contention be so *sharp*, (it is to be feared they gave one another some hard words) as also to be so stiff, as each to stick so resolutely to his opinion, and neither to yield. It was a pity that they did not refer the matter to a third person; or that some friend did not interpose to prevent its coming to an open rupture. Is there never a wise man among them to interpose his good offices, and to accommodate the matter, and to put them in mind of the Canaanite and the Perizzite that were *now in the land*; and that not only Jews and heathens, but the false brethren among themselves, would warm their hands at the flames of the contention between Paul and Barnabas? We must own it was their infirmity, and is recorded for our admonition; not that we must

make use of it to excuse our own intemperate heats and passions, or to rebate the edge of our sorrow and shame for them; we must not say, "What if I was in a passion, were not Paul and Barnabas so? No; but it must check our censures of others, and moderate them. If good men are soon put into a passion, we must make the best of it; it was the infirmity once of two of the best men that ever the world had! Repentance teaches us to be severe in reflections upon ourselves; but charity teaches us to be candid in our reflections upon others. It is only Christ's example that is a copy without a blot.

2. That we are not to think it strange, if there be differences among wise and good men; we were told before that such *offences will come*, and here is an instance of it. Even they that are united to one and the same Jesus, and sanctified by one and the same Spirit, have different apprehensions, different opinions, different views, and different sentiments in point of prudence. It will be so while we are in this state of darkness and imperfection; we shall never be all of a mind till we come to heaven, where light and love are perfect. That is *charity*, which *never fails*.

3. That these differences often prevail so far as to occasion separations. Paul and Barnabas, that were not separated by the persecutions of the unbelieving Jews, nor the impositions of the believing Jews, were yet separated by an unhappy disagreement between themselves. O the mischief that even the poor and weak remainders of pride and passion, that are found even in good men, do in the world, do in the church! No wonder the consequences are so fatal where they reign!

IV. The good that was brought out of this evil. Meat out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong. It was strange that even the sufferings of the apostles, (as Phil. 1. 12.) but much more strange that even the quarrels of the apostles, should tend to the *furtherance of the gospel of Christ*; yet so it proved here. God would not permit such things to be, if he knew not how to make them serve his own purposes.

1. More places are hereby *visited*. Barnabas went one way; he sailed to Cyprus, (v. 39.) that famous island where they began their work, (ch. 13. 4.) and which was *his own country*, ch. 4. 36. Paul went another way into Cilicia, which was *his own country*, ch. 21. 39. Each seem to be influenced by their affection to their native soil, as usual; (*Nescio quâ natale solum dulcedine cunctos ducit. — There is something that attaches us all to our native soil*;) and yet God served his own purposes by it, for the diffusing of gospel-light.

2. More hands are hereby employed in the ministry of the gospel among the Gentiles; for, (1.) John Mark, who had been an *unfaithful* hand, is not rejected, but is again made use of, against Paul's mind, and, for aught we know, proves a very useful and successful hand; though many think it was not the same with that Mark that wrote the gospel, and founded the church at Alexandria, he whom Peter calls his son, 1 Pet. 5. 13. (2.) Silas was a *new* hand, and never yet employed in that work, nor designed to be, but to return to the service of the church at Jerusalem, had not God changed his mind; (v. 33, 34.) he is brought in, and engaged in that noble work.

We may further observe,

[1.] That the church at Antioch seemed to countenance Paul in what he did. Barnabas sailed with his nephew to Cyprus, and no notice was taken of him, nor a *bene discessit*—a recommendation given him. Note, Those that in their service of the church are swayed by private affections and regards, forfeit public honours and respect. But when Paul departed, he was *recommended by the brethren to the*

grace of God. They thought he was in the right in refusing to make use of John Mark, and could not but blame Barnabas for insisting upon it, though he was one who had deserved well of the church, (ch. 11. 22.) before they knew Paul. And therefore they prayed publicly for Paul, and for the success of his ministry, encouraged him to go on in his work, and though they could do nothing themselves to further him, they transferred the matter to the grace of God, leaving it to that grace, both to work upon him, and to work with him. Note, Those are happy *at all times*, and especially in times of disagreement and contention, who are enabled so to carry themselves as not to forfeit their interest in the love and prayers of good people.

[2.] That yet Paul afterward seemed to have had, though not upon second thoughts, yet, upon further trial, a better opinion of John Mark than now he had; for he writes to Timothy, (2 Tim. 4. 11.) *Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry*; and he writes to the Colossians concerning Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, that *if he came to them they should receive him*, bid him welcome, and employ him, Col. 4. 10. Which teaches us, *First*, That even those whom we justly condemn, we should condemn moderately, and with a great deal of temper, because we know not but afterward we may see cause to think better of them, and both to make use of them and make friendship with them, and we should so regulate our resentments, that if it should prove so, we may not afterward be ashamed of them. *Secondly*, That even those whom we have justly condemned, if afterward they prove more faithful, we should cheerfully receive, forgive and forget, and put a confidence in, and, as there is occasion, give a good word to.

[3.] That Paul, though he wanted his old friend and companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, yet went on cheerfully in his work; (v. 41.) *He went through Syria and Cilicia*, countries which lay next to Antioch, *confirming the churches*. Though we change our colleagues, we do not change our principal President. And observe, Ministers are well employed, and ought to think themselves so, and be satisfied, when they are made use of in confirming those that believe, as well as in converting those that believe not.

CHAP. XVI.

It is some rebuke to Barnabas, that after he left Paul we hear no more of him, of what he did or suffered for Christ. But Paul, as he was recommended by the brethren to the grace of God, so his services for Christ after this are largely recorded; we are to attend him in this chapter from place to place, wherever he came, doing good, either watering or planting, beginning new work, or improving what was done. Here is, I. The beginning of his acquaintance with Timothy, and taking him to be his assistant, v. 1. . 3. II. The visit he made to the churches for their establishment, v. 4. 5. III. His call to Macedonia, (after a restraint he had been under from going to some other places,) and his coming to Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia, with his entertainment there, v. 6. . 13. IV. The conversion of Lydia there, v. 14, 15. V. The casting of an evil spirit out of a damsel, v. 16. . 18. VI. The accusing and abusing of Paul and Silas for it, their imprisonment, and the indignities done them, v. 19. . 24. VII. The miraculous conversion of the jailer to the faith of Christ, v. 25. . 34. VIII. The honourable discharge of Paul and Silas by the magistrates, v. 35. . 40.

1. **T**HEN came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: 2. Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

3. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him, because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. 4. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained by the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. 5. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Paul was a spiritual father, and as such a one we have him here adopting Timothy, and taking care of the education of many others, who had been begotten to Christ by his ministry: and in all he appears to have been a wise and tender father.

I. Here is his taking of Timothy into his acquaintance, and under his tuition. One thing designed in the book of the Acts is to help us to understand Paul's epistles, two of which are directed to Timothy; it was therefore necessary that in the history of Paul we should have some account concerning him. And we are here accordingly told,

1. That he was a disciple, one that belonged to Christ, and was baptized, probably in his infancy, when his mother became a believer, as Lydia's household was baptized upon her believing, *v. 15*. Him that was a disciple of Christ, Paul took to be his disciple, that he might further train him up in the knowledge and faith of Christ; he took him to be brought up for Christ.

2. That his mother was a Jewess originally, *but believed in Christ*; her name was *Eunice*, his grandmother's name was *Lois*. Paul speaks of them both with great respect, as women of eminent virtue and piety, and commends them especially for their unfeigned faith, (*2 Tim. 1. 5.*) their sincere embracing of, and adhering to, the doctrine of Christ.

3. That his father was a Greek, a Gentile; the marriage of a Jewish woman by a Gentile husband (though some would make a difference) was prohibited as much as the marriage of a Jewish man to a Gentile wife, *Deut. 7. 3.* Thou shalt no more *give thy daughter to his son than take his daughter to thy son*: yet that seems to have been limited to the nations that lived among them in Canaan, whom they were most in danger of infection from. Now because his father was a Greek, he was not circumcised; for the entail of the covenant and the seal of it, as of other entails in that nation, went by the father, not by the mother; so that his father being no Jew, he was not obliged to circumcision, nor entitled to it, unless when he grew up he did himself desire it. But observe, though his mother could not prevail to have him circumcised in his infancy, because his father was of another mind and way, yet she educated him in the fear of God; that though he wanted the sign of the covenant, he might not want the thing signified.

4. That he had gained a very good character among the Christians; he was *well reported of by the brethren* that were at Lystra and Iconium; he had not only an unblemished reputation, and was free from scandal, but he had a bright reputation, and great encomiums were given of him, as an extraordinary young man, and one from whom great things were expected. Not only those in the place where he was born, but those in the neighbouring cities, admired him, and spake honourably of him. He had a name for good things with good people.

5. That Paul would have him to go forth with him, to accompany him, to give attendance on him, to receive instruction from him, and to join with him

in the work of the gospel; to preach for him when there was occasion, and to be left behind in places where he had planted churches. Paul took a great love to him, not only because he was an ingenious young man, and one of great parts, but because he was a serious young man, and one of devout affections: for Paul was always *mindful of his tears, 2 Tim. 1. 4.*

6. That Paul took him and circumcised him, or ordered it to be done. This was strange! Had not Paul opposed those with all his might that were for imposing circumcision upon the Gentile converts? Had he not at this time the decrees of the council at Jerusalem with him, which witnessed against it? He had, and yet circumcised Timothy, not, as those teachers designed in imposing circumcision, to oblige him to keep the ceremonial law, but only to render his conversation and ministry passable, and, if it might be, acceptable among the Jews that abounded in those quarters. He knew Timothy was a man likely to do a great deal of good with them, being admirably qualified for the ministry, if they were not invincibly prejudiced against him; and therefore, that they might not shun him as one unclean, because uncircumcised, he took him and *circumcised him*. Thus to the Jews he became as a Jew, that he might gain the Jews, and all things to all men, that he might gain some. He was against those who made circumcision necessary to salvation, but himself used it when it was conducive to edification; nor was he rigid in opposing it, as they were in imposing it. Thus, though he went not in this instance according to the letter of the decree, he went according to the spirit of it; which was a spirit of tenderness toward the Jews, and willingness to bring them off gradually from their prejudices. Paul made no difficulty of taking him to be his companion, though he was uncircumcised; but the Jews would not hear him if he were, and therefore Paul will humour them herein. It is probable that it was at this time that Paul laid his hands on Timothy, for the conferring of the gift of the Holy Ghost upon him, *2 Tim. 1. 6.*

II. Here is his confirming of the churches which he had planted; (*v. 4. 5.*) *He went through the cities where he had preached the word of the Lord*, as he intended, (*ch. 15. 36.*) to inquire into their state. And we are told,

1. That they delivered them copies of the decrees of the Jerusalem synod, to be a direction to them in the government of themselves, and that they might have wherewith to answer the judaizing teachers, and to justify themselves in adhering to the *liberty with which Christ had made them free*. All the churches were concerned in that decree, and therefore it was requisite they should all have it well attested. Though Paul had for a particular reason circumcised Timothy, yet he would not have that drawn into a precedent; and therefore he *delivered the decrees* to the churches, to be religiously observed; for they must abide by the rule, and not be drawn from it by a particular example.

2. That this was of very good service to them.

(1.) The churches were hereby *established in the faith, v. 5.* They were confirmed particularly in their opinion against the imposing of the ceremonial law upon the Gentiles; the great assurance and heat wherewith the judaizing teachers pressed the necessity of circumcision, and the plausible arguments they produced for it, had shocked them, so that they began to waver concerning it. But when they saw the testimony, not only of the apostles and elders, but of the Holy Ghost in them, against it, they were established, and did no longer waver about it. Note, Testimonies to truth, though they may not prevail to convince those that oppose it, may be of very good use to establish those that are in doubt

concerning it, and to fix them. Nay, the design of this decree being to set aside the ceremonial law, and the carnal ordinances of that, they were by it established in the christian faith in general, and were the more firmly assured that it was of God, because it set up a spiritual way of serving God, as more suited to the nature both of God and man; and besides, that spirit of tenderness and condescension which appeared in these letters, plainly shewed, that the apostles and elders were herein under the guidance of Him who is Love itself.

(2.) They *increased in number daily*; the imposing of the yoke of the ceremonial law upon their converts, was enough to frighten people from them. If they had been disposed to turn Jews, they could have done that long since, before the apostles came among them; but if they cannot be interested in the Christian privileges without submitting to the Jews' yoke, they will be as they are. But if they find there is no danger of their being so enslaved, they are ready to embrace Christianity, and join themselves to the church. And thus the church *increased in numbers daily*: not a day passed but some or other gave up their names to Christ. And it is a joy to those who heartily wish well to the honour of Christ and the welfare of the church, and the souls of men, to see such an increase.

6. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, 7. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. 8. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. 9. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. 10. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. 11. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; 12. And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. 13. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river-side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. 14. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 15. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

In these verses, we have,

I. Paul's motions up and down to do good.

1. He and Silas his colleague went throughout

Phrygia and the region of Galatia, where, it should seem, the gospel was already planted, but whether by Paul's hand or no, is not mentioned; it is likely it was, for in his epistle to the Galatians, he speaks of his *preaching the gospel to them at the first*, and how very acceptable he was among them, Gal. 4. 13—15. And it appears by that epistle, that the judaizing teachers had then done a great deal of mischief to these churches of Galatia, and had prejudiced them against Paul, and drawn them from the gospel of Christ, for which he there severely reproves them. But, probably, that was a great while after this.

2. They were forbidden at this time to preach the gospel in Asia, (that country properly so called,) either because it did not need, for other hands were at work there; or because they were not yet prepared to receive it, as they were afterwards, (ch. 19. 10.) when *all they that dwell in Asia heard the word of the Lord*; or, as Dr. Lightfoot suggests, because at this time Christ would employ Paul in a piece of new work, which was to preach the gospel to a Roman colony at Philippi, for hitherto the Gentiles he had preached to were Greeks. The Romans were more particularly hated by the Jews than other Gentiles, their armies were the *abomination of desolation*; and therefore there is this among other things extraordinary in his call thither, that he is forbidden to preach the gospel in Asia, and other places, in order to his preaching it there; which is an intimation, that the light of the gospel would in aftertimes be directed more westward than eastward. It was the *Holy Ghost that forbade them*, either by secret whispers in the minds of both of them, which, when they came to compare notes, they found to be the same, and to come from the same Spirit; or by some prophets who spake to them from the Spirit. The removes of ministers, and the dispensing of the means of grace by them, are in a particular manner under a divine conduct and direction. We find an Old Testament minister forbidden to preach at all; (Ezek. 3. 26.) *Thou shalt be dumb*. But these New Testament ministers are only forbidden to preach *in one place*, while they are directed to another where there is more need.

3. They would have gone into Bithynia, but were not permitted; *the Spirit suffered them not, v. 7*. They came to Mysia, and, as it should seem, preached the gospel there; for though it was a very mean contemptible country, even to a proverb, *Mysorum ultimus*, in Cicero, is a *most despicable man*; yet the apostles disdained not to visit it, owning themselves debtors both to the wise and to the unwise, Rom. 1. 14. In Bithynia was the city of Nice, where the first general council was held against the Arians; into these countries Peter sent his epistle, 1 Pet. 1. 1. And there were flourishing churches here; for though they had not the gospel sent them now, they had it in their turn, not long after. Observe, Though their judgment and inclination were to go into Bithynia, yet, having then extraordinary ways of knowing the mind of God, they were overruled by them, contrary to their own mind. We must now follow providence, and submit to the guidance of that pillar of cloud and fire; and what we assay to do, if that *suffer us not*, we ought to acquiesce, and believe it for the best. *The Spirit of Jesus* suffered them not; so many ancient copies read it. *The servants of the Lord Jesus* ought to be always under the check and conduct of the *Spirit of the Lord Jesus*, by whom he governs men's minds.

4. They *passed by Mysia*, or passed through it, so some; sowing good seed, we may suppose, as they went along; and they came down to Troas, the city of Troy, so much talked of, or the country thereabout, that took its denomination from it. Here a church was planted; for here we find one in being,

ch. 20. 6, 7. and probably planted at this time, and in a little time. It should seem, that at Troas Luke fell in with Paul, and joined himself to his company; for from henceforward, for the most part, when he speaks of Paul's journeys, he puts himself into the number of his retinue, *we went*, v. 10.

II. Paul's particular call to Macedonia, that is, to Philippi, the chief city, inhabited mostly by Romans, as appears, v. 21. Here we have,

1. The vision Paul had, v. 9. Paul had many visions, sometimes to encourage, sometimes, as here, to direct him in his work. An angel appeared to him, to intimate to him that it was the will of Christ he should go to Macedonia. Let him not be discouraged by the embargo laid upon him once and again, by which his designs were crossed; for though he shall not go where he has a mind to go, he shall go where God has work for him to do. Now observe,

(1.) The person Paul saw; there stood by him a man of Macedonia, who by his habit or dialect seemed so to Paul, or who told him he was so. The angel, some think, assumed the shape of such a man; or, as others think, impressed upon Paul's fancy, between sleep and wake, the image of such a man: he dreamed he saw such a one. Christ would have Paul directed to Macedonia, not as the apostles were at other times, by a messenger from heaven, to send him thither, but by a messenger from thence to call him thither, because in that way he would afterward ordinarily direct the motions of his ministers, by inclining the hearts of those who need them to invite them. Paul shall be called to Macedonia by a man of Macedonia, and by him speaking in the name of the rest. Some make this man to be the tutelar angel of Macedonia; supposing angels to have charge of particular places as well as persons, and that so much is intimated Dan. 10. 20. where we read of the *princes of Persia and Græcia*, that seem to have been angels. But there is no certainty of that. There was presented either to Paul's eyes, or to his mind, a man of Macedonia. The angel must not preach the gospel himself to the Macedonians, but must bring Paul to them. Nor must he by the authority of an angel order him to go, but in the person of a Macedonian court him to come. A man of Macedonia, not a magistrate of the country, much less a priest, (Paul was not accustomed to receive invitations from such,) but an ordinary inhabitant of that country, a plain man, that carried in his countenance marks of probity and seriousness, that did not come to banter Paul or trifle with him, but in good earnest, and with all earnestness to importune his assistance.

(2.) The invitation given him; this honest Macedonian prayed him, saying, *Come over into Macedonia, and help us*; that is, "Come and preach the gospel to us; let us have the benefit of thy labours." [1.] "*Thou hast helped many*, we have heard of those in this and the other country that thou hast been very useful to; and why may not we put in for a share? O come and help us." The benefits others have received from the gospel, should quicken our inquiries, our further inquiries, after it. [2.] "It is thy business, and it is thy delight, to help poor souls; thou art a physician for the sick, that art to be ready at the call of every patient; O come and help us." [3.] "*We have need of thy help*, as much as any people; we in Macedonia are as ignorant and as careless in religion, as any people in the world are; are as idolatrous and as vicious as any, and as ingenious and industrious to ruin ourselves as any; and therefore, O come, come with all speed among us. *If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*" [4.] "Those few among us that have any sense of things, and any concern for their own souls and the souls of others, have done what can

be done by the help of natural light; I have done my part for one, we have carried the matter as far as it will go, to persuade our neighbours to fear and worship God, but we can do little good among them, *O come, come thou over, and help us.* The gospel thou preachest, has arguments and powers beyond those we have been yet furnished with." [5.] "Do not only help us with thy prayers here, that will not do; thou must come over and help us." Note, People have great need of help for their souls, and it is their duty to look out for it, and invite those among them that can help them.

2. The interpretation made of the vision; (v. 10.) They gathered assuredly from thence, that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel there; and they were ready to go wherever God directed. Note, We may sometimes infer a call of God from a call of man. If a man of Macedonia say, *Come and help us*, from thence Paul gathers assuredly, that God saith, *Go and help them*. Ministers may go on with great cheerfulness and courage in their work, when they perceive Christ calling them, not only to preach the gospel, but to preach it at this time, in this place, to this people.

III. Paul's voyage to Macedonia hereupon; he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but followed this divine direction much more cheerfully, and with more satisfaction, than he would have followed any contrivance or inclination of his own.

1. Thitherward he turned his thoughts; now that he knows the mind of God in the matter, he is determined, for this was all he wanted; now he thinks no more of Asia, or Bithynia, but immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia. Paul only had the vision, but he communicated it to his companions, and they all, upon the credit of that, resolved for Macedonia. As Paul will follow Christ, so all his will follow him, or rather follow Christ with him. They are getting things in readiness for this expedition immediately, without delay. Note, God's calls must be complied with presently; as our obedience must not be disputed, so it must not be deferred; do it to-day, lest thy heart be hardened. Observe, They could not immediately go into Macedonia; but they immediately endeavoured to go. If we cannot be so quick as we should be in our performances, yet we may be in our endeavours, and that shall be accepted.

2. Thitherward he steered his course; they set sail by the first shipping, and with the first fair wind from Troas; for they may be sure they have done what they have to do there, when God calls them to another place. They came with a straight course, a prosperous voyage, to Samothracia; the next day they came to Neapolis, a city in the confines of Thrace and Macedonia; and at last they landed at Philippi, a city so called from Philip king of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great; it is said (v. 12.) to be (1.) The chief city of that part of Macedonia; or, as some read it, the first city, the first they came to when they came from Troas; so that like an army that lands in a country which they design to make themselves masters of, they begin with the reduction of the first place they come to; so did Paul and his assistants, they began with the chief city, because if the gospel were received there, it would the more easily spread from thence all the country over. (2.) It was a colony. The Romans not only had a garrison, but the inhabitants of the city were Romans, the magistrates at least, and the governing part. There were the greatest numbers and variety of people, and therefore the most likelihood of doing good.

IV. The cold entertainment which Paul and his companions met with at Philippi. One would have expected that having such a particular call from God thither, they should have had a joyful welcome

there, as Peter had with Cornelius when the angel sent him thither. Where was the man of Macedonia that begged Paul to come thither with all speed? Why did not *he* stir up his countrymen, some of them at least, to go meet him? Why was he not introduced with solemnity, and the keys of the city put into his hand? Here is nothing like that; for,

1. It is a good while before any notice at all is taken of him; *We were in that city abiding certain days*; probably at a public house, and at their own charge, for they had no friend to invite them so much as to a meal's meat, till Lydia welcomed them. They had made all the haste they could thither, but now that they are there, are almost tempted to think they might as well have stayed where they were. But so it was ordered for their trial, whether they could bear the pain of silence and lying by, when that was their lot; those eminent useful men are not fit to live in this world, that know not how to be slighted and overlooked. Let not ministers think it strange if they be first strongly invited to a place, and yet looked shyly upon when they come.

2. When they have an opportunity of preaching, it is in an obscure place, and to a mean and small auditory, *v. 13*. There was no *synagogue of the Jews* there, for aught that appears, to be a *door of entrance to them*, and they never went to the idol temples of the Gentiles, to preach to the auditories there; but here, upon inquiry, they found out a little meeting of good women, *that were proselytes of the gate*, who will be thankful to them if they will give them a sermon. The place of this meeting is out of the city, there it was connived at, but would not be suffered any where within the walls. It was a place *where prayer was wont to be made*; *προσευχή*—where an oratory or house of prayer was, so some; a chapel, or lesser synagogue. But I rather take it, as we read it, where prayer was *appointed*, or accustomed to be. They that worshipped the true God, and would not worship idols, met there to pray together, and, according to the description of the most ancient and universal devotion, to *call upon the name of the Lord*. They each of them prayed apart every day, that was always the practice of them that worshipped God; but beside that, *they came together on the sabbath-day*; though they were but a few discountenanced by the town, though their meeting was at some distance, though, for aught that appears, none but women, yet a solemn assembly the worshippers of God must have, if by any means it be possible, *on the sabbath-day*; and when we cannot do as we would, we must do as we can; if we have not synagogues, we must be thankful for more private places, and resort to them; *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, according as our opportunities are. This place is said to be *by a river-side*, which perhaps was chosen, as befriending contemplation. Idolaters are said to *take their lot among the smooth stones of the stream*, Isa. 57. 6. But these proselytes had in their eye, perhaps, the example of those prophets who had their visions, one by the *river of Chebar*, (Ezek. 1. 1.) another by the *great river Hiddekel*, Dan. 10. 4. Thither Paul and Silas and Luke went, and *sat down*, to instruct the congregation, that they might the better pray with them; they *spoke unto the women which resorted thither*, encouraged them in practising according to the light they had, and led them on further to the knowledge of Christ.

V. The conversion of *Lydia*, who probably was the first that was wrought upon there to believe in Christ, though not the last. In this story of the *Acts*, we have not only the conversion of places recorded, but of many particular persons; for such is the worth of souls, that the reducing of one to God is a great matter! Nor have we only the conversions that were done by miracle, as Paul's, but some

that were done by the ordinary methods of grace, as Lydia's here. Observe,

1. Who this convert was, that there is such particular notice taken of; four things are recorded of her:

(1.) Her name, *Lydia*; it is an honour to her to have her name recorded here in the book of God, so that *wherever the scriptures are read, there shall this be told concerning her*. Note, The names of the saints are precious with God, and should be so with us; we cannot have our names recorded in the Bible, but, if God *open our hearts*, we shall find them *written in the book of life*, and that is better, (Phil. 4. 3.) and more to be rejoiced in, Luke 10. 20.

(2.) Her calling; she was a *seller of purple*; either of purple dye, or of purple cloth or silk. Observe, [1.] She had a calling, an honest calling, which the historian takes notice of to her praise; she was none of those women that the apostle speaks of, (1 Tim. 5. 13.) *who learn to be idle, and not only idle, &c.* [2.] It was a mean calling; she was a *seller of purple*, not a *wearer* of purple, few such are called; the notice taken of this here is an intimation to those who are employed in honest callings, if they be honest in the management of them, not to be ashamed of them. [3.] Though she had a calling to mind, yet she was a worshipper of God, and found time to improve advantages for her soul. The business of our particular callings may be made to consist very well with the business of religion, and therefore it will not excuse us from religious exercises alone, and in our families, or in solemn assemblies, to say, We have shops to look after, and a trade to mind; for have we not also a God to serve, and a soul to look after? Religion does not call us from our business in the world, but directs us in it. Every thing in its time and place.

(3.) The place she was of, *of the city of Thyatira*; which was a great way from Philippi; there she was born and bred, but either married at Philippi, or brought by her trade to settle there. The providence of God, as it always *appoints*, so it often removes, the *bounds of our habitation*; and sometimes makes the change of our outward condition or place of our abode, wonderfully subservient to the designs of his grace concerning our salvation; Providence brings Lydia to Philippi, to be under Paul's ministry, and there, where she met with it, she made a good use of it; so should we improve opportunities.

(4.) Her religion before the Lord *opened her heart*.

[1.] She worshipped God according to the knowledge she had; she was one of the *devout women*. Sometimes the grace of God wrought upon those who, before their conversion, were very wicked and vile, *publicans and harlots*; *such were some of you*, 1 Cor. 6. 11. But sometimes it fastened upon those that were of a good character, that had some good in them, as the eunuch, Cornelius, and Lydia here. Note, It is not enough to be worshippers of God, but we must be believers in Jesus Christ, for there is no coming to God as a Father, but by him as Mediator. But those who worshipped God according to the light they had, stood fair for the discoveries of Christ and his grace to them; for *to him that has, shall be given*; and to them Christ would be welcome; for they that know what it is to worship God, see their need of Christ, and know what use to make of his mediation.

[2.] She *heard us*. Here, where prayer was made, when there was an opportunity, the word was preached; for hearing the word of God is a part of religious worship; and how can we expect God should hear our prayers, if we will not hearken to his word? They that worshipped God according to the light they had, looked out for further light;

we must improve *the day of small things*, but must not rest in it.

2. What the work was, that was wrought upon her *whose heart the Lord opened*. Observe herc,

(1.) The Author of this work ; it was *the Lord*, the Lord Christ, to whom this judgment is committed ; *the Spirit of the Lord*, who is the Sanctifier. Note, Conversion-work is God's work ; it is he *that works in us both to will and to do* ; not as if we had nothing to do ; but of ourselves, without God's grace, we can do nothing ; nor as if God were in the least chargeable with the ruin of them that perish ; but the salvation of them that are saved must be wholly ascribed to him.

(2.) The seat of this work ; it is in the heart that the change is made, it is to the heart that this blessed turn is given ; it was *the heart of Lydia* that was wrought upon ; conversion-work is *heart-work* ; it is a *renewing of the heart, the inward man, the spirit of the mind*.

(3.) The nature of the work ; she had not only her heart *touched*, but her *heart opened*. An unconverted soul is *shut up*, and fortified against Christ, *straitly shut up*, as Jericho against Joshua, Josh. 6. 1. Christ, in dealing with the soul, *knocks at the door that is shut against him* ; (Rev. 3. 20.) and when a sinner is effectually persuaded to embrace Christ, *then the heart is opened for the King of glory to come in* ; the understanding is opened to receive the divine light, the will opened to receive the divine law, and the affections opened to receive the divine love. When the heart is thus opened to Christ, the ear is opened to his word, the lips opened in prayer, the hand opened in charity, and the steps enlarged in all manner of gospel-obedience.

3. What were the effects of this work on her heart.

(1.) She took great notice of the word of God ; her heart was so *opened*, *that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul* ; she not only gave attendance on Paul's preaching, but gave attention to it ; *she applied to herself* (so some read it) *the things that were spoken of Paul* ; and then only the word does us good, and makes an abiding impression upon us, when we apply it to ourselves. Now this was an evidence of the opening of her heart, and was the fruit of it ; wherever the heart is opened by the grace of God, it will appear by a diligent attendance on, and attention to, the word of God, both for Christ's sake, whose word it is, and for our own sakes, who are so nearly interested in it.

(2.) She gave up her name to Jesus Christ, and took upon her the profession of his holy religion ; *she was baptized*, and by that solemn rite was admitted a member of the Church of Christ ; and with her *her household* also was baptized, those of them that were infants, in her right, for *if the root be holy, so are the branches*, and those that were grown up, by her influence and authority. *She and her household were baptized*, by the same rule that Abraham and his household were circumcised, because *the seal of the covenant belongs to the covenanters and their seed*.

(3.) She was very kind to the ministers, and very desirous to be further instructed by them in *the things pertaining to the kingdom of God* ; *She besought us*, saying, "*If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, if ye take me to be a sincere christian, manifest your confidence in me by this, come into my house, and abide there.*" Thus she desired an opportunity, [1.] To testify her gratitude to them, who had been the instruments of divine grace in this blessed change that was wrought upon her. When her heart was open to Christ, her house was open to his ministers for his sake, and they were welcome to the best entertainment she had, which she did not think too good for those of whose spiritual things she had reaped so plentifully.

Nay, they are not only welcome to her, but she is extremely pressing and importunate with them ; *she constrained us* ; which intimates that Paul was very backward and unwilling to go, because he was afraid of being burthensome to the families of the young converts, and would study to *make the gospel of Christ without charge*, (1 Cor. 9. 18. Acts 20. 34.) that those that were without might have no occasion given them to reproach the preachers of the gospel as designing, self-seeking men, and that those that were within might have no occasion to complain of the expenses of their religion ; but Lydia would have no nay, she will not believe that they take her to be a sincere christian, unless they will oblige her herein ; like Abraham inviting the angels, (Gen. 18. 3.) *If now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away from thy servant*. [2.] She desired an opportunity of receiving further instruction. If she might but have them for a while in her family, she might hear *them daily*, (Prov. 8. 34.) and not only on sabbath-days at the meeting ; in her own house she might not only *hear them*, but *ask them questions* ; and she might have *them to pray with her daily, and to bless her household*. Those that know something of Christ, cannot but desire to know more, and seek opportunities of increasing their acquaintance with his gospel.

16. And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying : 17. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. 18. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. 19. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew *them* into the market-place unto the rulers, 20. And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21. And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. 22. And the multitude rose up together against them : and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*. 23. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely : 24. Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

Paul and his companions, though they were for some time buried in obscurity at Philippi, yet now begin to be taken notice of.

1. A damsel that had a spirit of divination, made them to be taken notice of, by proclaiming them to be *the servants of God*. Observe,

1. The account that is given of this damsel ; she was *pythionissa*, possessed with such a spirit of divination as that damsel was, by whom the oracles of Apollo at Delphos were delivered ; she was acted

by an evil spirit, that dictated ambiguous answers to those who consulted her, which served to gratify their vain desire of knowing things to come, but often deceived them. In those times of ignorance, infidelity, and idolatry, the devil, by the divine permission, thus *led men captive at his will*; and he could not have gained such adoration from them as he had, if he had not pretended to give oracles to them; for by both his usurpation is maintained as *the god of this world*. This damsel brought her masters much gain by soothsaying; many came to consult this witch for the discovery of robberies, the finding of things lost, and especially to be told their fortune; and none came but *with the rewards of divination in their hands*, according to the quality of the person, and the importance of the case. Probably, there were many that were thus kept for fortune-tellers, but, it should seem, this was more in repute than any of them; for while others brought some gain, this *brought much gain to her masters*, being consulted more than any other.

2. The testimony which this damsel gave to Paul and his companions; she met them in the street, as they were going to prayer, to the house of prayer, or rather to the work of prayer there, v. 16. They went thither publicly, every body knew whither they were going, and what they were going to do. If what she did was likely to be any distraction to them, or a hinderance in their work, it is observable how subtle Satan is, that great tempter, to give us diversion *then* when we are going about any religious exercises, to ruffle us, and to put us out of temper *then* when we need to be most composed. When she met with them, she followed them, crying, "*These men*, how contemptible soever they look and are looked upon, are great men, for they are the servants of the most high God, and men that should be very welcome to us, for they shew unto us the way of salvation, both the salvation that will be our happiness, and the way to it, that will be our holiness."

Now, (1.) This witness is true; it is a comprehensive encomium on the faithful preachers of the gospel, and makes *their feet beautiful*, Rom. 10. 15. Though they are *men subject to like passions as we are*, and *earthen vessels*; yet, [1.] "They are the servants of the most high God, they attend on him, are employed by him, and are devoted to his honour, as servants; they come to us on his errands, the message they bring is from him, and they serve the purposes and interests of his kingdom. The gods we Gentiles worship, are inferior beings, therefore not gods, but they belong to the supreme *Numen*, to the most high God, who is over all men, over all gods, who made us all, and to whom we are all accountable. They are his servants, and therefore it is our duty to respect them, and hearken to them for their Master's sake, and it is at our peril if we affront them." [2.] "They shew unto us the way of salvation." Even the heathen had some notion of the miserable, deplorable state of mankind, and their need of salvation, and it was what they made some inquiries after. "Now," (saith she) "*these are the men that shew us what we have in vain sought for in our superstitious, profitless application to our priests and oracles.*" Note, God has, in the gospel of his Son, plainly shewed us the way of salvation; has told us what we must do, that we may be delivered from the misery to which by sin we have exposed ourselves.

But, (2.) How came this testimony from the mouth of one that had a spirit of divination? Is Satan divided against himself? Will he cry up those whose business it is to pull him down? We may take it either,

[1.] As extorted from this spirit of divination for the honour of the gospel by the power of God; as

the devil was forced to say of Christ, (Mark 1. 24.) *I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God*. The truth is sometimes magnified by the confession of its adversaries, in which they are witnesses against themselves. Christ would have this testimony of the damsel to rise up in judgment against those at Philippi, who slighted and persecuted the apostles; though the gospel needed no such testimony, yet it shall serve to add to their condemnation, that the damsel whom they looked upon as an oracle in other things, proclaimed the apostles God's servants. Or,

[2.] As designed by the evil spirit, that subtle serpent, to the dishonour of the gospel; some think she designed hereby to gain credit to herself and her prophecies, and so to increase her master's profit by pretending to be in the interest of the apostles, who, she thought, had a growing reputation, or to speak Paul fair, not to part between her and her familiar. Others think, Satan, who can transform himself into an *angel of light*, and can say any thing to serve a turn, designed hereby to disgrace the apostles; as if these divines were of the same fraternity with their diviners, because they were witnessed to by them; and then the people might as well adhere to those they had been used to. Those that were most likely to receive the apostles' doctrine, were such as were prejudiced against these spirits of divination, and therefore would, by this testimony, be prejudiced against the gospel; and as for those who regarded these diviners, the devil thought himself sure of them.

II. Christ made them to be taken notice of, by giving them power to cast the devil out of this damsel. She continued many days clamouring thus; (v. 18.) and, it should seem, Paul took no notice of her, not knowing but it might be ordered of God for the service of his cause, that she should thus witness concerning his ministers; but finding perhaps that it did them a prejudice, rather than any service, he soon silenced her, by casting the devil out of her.

1. He was grieved. It troubled him to see the damsel made an instrument of Satan to deceive people, and to see the people imposed upon by her divinations. It was a disturbance to him to hear a sacred truth so profaned, and good words come out of such an ill mouth with such an ill design. Perhaps they were spoken in an ironical bantering way, as ridiculing the apostles' pretensions, and mocking them; as when Christ's persecutors complimented him with *Hail, king of the Jews*; and then justly might Paul be grieved, as any good man's heart would be, to hear any good truth of God bawled out in the streets in a canting jeering way.

2. He commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. He turned with a holy indignation, angry both at the flatteries, and at the reproaches, of the unclean spirit, and said, *I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her*; and by this he will shew that those men are the servants of the living God, and are able to prove themselves so, without her testimony; her silence shall demonstrate it more than her speaking could do. Thus Paul shews the way of salvation indeed, that it is by breaking the power of Satan, and chaining him up, that he may not deceive the world, (Rev. 20. 3.) and that this salvation is to be obtained in the name of Jesus Christ only, as in his name the devil was now cast out, and by no other. It was a great blessing to the country when Christ by a word cast the devil out of those in whom he frightened people and molested them, so that no man might pass by that way; (Matt. 8. 28.) but it was a much greater kindness to the country when Paul now, in Christ's name, cast the devil out of one who deceived people, and imposed upon their credulity. Power went along with the word of Christ, which Satan could not stand before, but was

forced to quit his hold, and in this case it was a strong hold; *he came out the same hour.*

III. The masters of the damsel that was dispossessed, made them to be taken notice of, by bringing them before the magistrates for doing it, and laying it to their charge as their crime. *The preachers of the gospel* would never have had an opportunity of speaking *to the magistrates*, if they had not been brought before them as evil doers. Observe here,

1. That which provoked them, was, that, the damsel being restored to herself, *her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone*, v. 19. See here what evil *the love of money is the root of!* If the preaching of the gospel ruin the craft of the *silver-smiths* (ch. 19. 24.) much more the craft of the *sooth-sayers*; and therefore here is a mighty outcry raised, when Satan's power to deceive is broken; and therefore the priests hated the gospel, because it turned men from the blind service of dumb idols, and so the hope of their gains was gone. The power of Christ, which appeared in dispossessing the woman, and the great kindness done to her in delivering her out of Satan's hand, made no impression upon them, when they apprehended that they should lose money by it.

2. The course they took with them, was, to increase the higher powers against them, as men fit to be punished; *They caught them* as they went along, and, with the utmost fury and violence *dragged them into the market-place*, where public justice was administered. (1.) They brought them *to the rulers*, their justices of peace, to do by them as men taken into the hands of the law, the *duumviri*. (2.) From them they hurried them *to the magistrates*, the prætors or governors of the city, *τοῖς στρατηγοῖς*—the officers of the army, so the word signifies; but it is taken in general for the judges, or chief rulers; to them they brought their complaint.

3. The charge they exhibit against them, is, *that they were the troublers of the land*, v. 20. They take it for granted that they were Jews, a nation, at this time, as much an abomination to the Romans, as they had long ago been to the Egyptians. Piteous was the case of the apostles, when it was turned to their reproach that they were Jews, and yet the Jews were their most violent persecutors! (1.) The general charge against them, is, *that they troubled the city*, sowed discord, and disturbed the public peace, and occasioned riots and tumults; than which nothing could be more false and unjust, as was Ahab's character of Elijah, (1 Kings 18. 17.) *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* If they troubled the city, it was but like the angel's troubling the water of Bethesda's pool, in order to healing; shaking, in order to a happy settlement. Thus they that rouse the sluggards, are exclaimed against for troubling them. (2.) Their proof of their charge, is, their teaching customs not proper to be admitted by a Roman colony, v. 21. The Romans were always very jealous of innovations in religion; right or wrong, they would adhere to that, how vain soever, which they had received by tradition from their fathers; no foreign or upstart deity must be allowed of, without the approbation of the senate; the gods of their country must be their gods, true or false. It was one of the laws of the twelve tables. *Hath a nation changed their gods?* This incensed them against the apostles, that they taught a religion destructive of polytheism and idolatry, and preached to them to turn from those vanities. This the Romans could not bear; "If this grow upon us, in a little while we shall lose our religion."

IV. The magistrates, by their proceedings against them, made them to be taken notice of.

1. By countenancing the persecution, they raised the mob upon them; (v. 22.) *The multitude rose up together against them*, and were ready to pull them to pieces. It has been the artifice of Satan, to make

God's ministers and people odious to the commonalty, by representing them as dangerous men, and aiming at the destruction of the constitution, and the changing of the customs; when really there has been no ground for such an imputation.

2. By going on to an execution they further represented them as the vilest of malefactors; *They rent off their clothes*, with rage and fury, not having patience till they were taken off, in order to their being scourged. This the apostle refers to, when he speaks of their being shamefully entreated at Philippi, 1 Thess. 2. 2. They commanded that they should be whipped as vagabonds, by the lictors or beaules who attended the prætors, and carried rods with them for that purpose; this was one of those *three times that Paul was beaten with rods*, according to the Roman usage, which was not under the compassionate limitation of the number of stripes not to exceed forty, which was provided by the Jewish law. It is here said, that *they laid many stripes upon them*, (v. 23.) without counting how many, because *they seemed vile unto them*, Deut. 25. 3.

Now, one would think, this might have satiated their cruelty; if they must be whipped, sure they must be discharged; no, they are imprisoned, and, it is probable, their present purpose was to try them for their lives, and put them to death; else why should there be such care taken to prevent their escape?

(1.) The judges made their commitment very strict; they charged the jailer to keep them safely, and have a very watchful eye upon them, as if they were dangerous men, that either would venture to break prison themselves, or were in confederacy with those that would attempt to rescue them. Thus they endeavoured to render them odious, that they might justify themselves in the base usage they had given them.

(2.) The jailer made their confinement very severe; (v. 24.) Having received such a charge, though he might have kept them safely enough in the outer prison, yet he thrust them into the inner prison. He was sensible that the magistrates had a great indignation against these men, and were inclined to be severe with them, and therefore he thought to ingratiate himself with them, by exerting his power likewise against them to the uttermost. When magistrates are cruel, it is no wonder that the officers under them are so too. He put them into the inner prison, the dungeon, into which none were usually put but condemned malefactors, dark at noon-day, damp and cold, dirty, it is likely, and every way offensive, like that into which Jeremiah was let down; (Jer. 38. 6.) and, as if that were not enough, he made their feet fast in the stocks. Perhaps, having heard a report of the escape of the preachers of the gospel out of prison, when the doors were fast barred, (ch. 5. 19.—12. 9.) he thought he would be wiser than other jailers had been, and therefore would effectually secure them by fastening them in the stocks; and they were not the first of God's messengers that had their feet in the stocks; Jeremiah was so treated, and publicly too, in the high-gate of Benjamin, Jer. 20. 2. Joseph had his feet hurt with fetters, Ps. 105. 18. Oh what hard usage have God's servants met with, as in the former days, so in the latter times! Witness the Book of Martyrs, martyrs in Queen Mary's time.

25. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and

every one's bands were loosed. 27. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison-doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm; for we are all here. 29. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their stripes*; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

We have here the designs of the persecutors of Paul and Silas baffled and broken.

I. The persecutors designed to dishearten and discourage the preachers of the gospel, and to make them sick of the cause, and weary of their work; but here we find them both hearty and heartened.

1. They were themselves hearty, wonderfully hearty; never were poor prisoners so truly cheerful, nor so far from laying their hard usage to heart. Let us consider what their case was; the praetors among the Romans had rods carried before them, and axes bound upon them; the *fascies* and *secures*. Now they had felt the smart of the rods, the *ploughers had ploughed upon their backs, and made long furrows; the many stripes they had laid on them* were very sore, and one might have expected to hear them complaining of them, of the rawness and soreness of their backs and shoulders; yet this was not all, they had reason to fear the axes next; their Master was first scourged, and then crucified; and they might expect the same. In the mean time they were in the *inner prison, their feet in the stocks*, which, some think, not only held them, but hurt them; and yet, *at midnight*, when they should have been trying, if possible, to get a little rest, *they prayed, and sang praises to God*. (1.) They prayed together; prayed to God to support them, and comfort them, in their afflictions; to visit them, as he did Joseph in the prison, and to be with them; *prayed that their consolations in Christ might abound, as their afflictions for him did*; prayed that even their bonds and stripes might turn to the furtherance of the gospel; prayed for their persecutors, that God would forgive them, and turn their hearts. This was not at an hour of prayer, but at midnight; it was not in a house of prayer, but in a dungeon; yet it was seasonable to pray, and the prayer was acceptable. As in the dark, so out of the depths, we may cry unto God. No place, no time, amiss for prayer, if the heart be lifted up to God. They that are companions in suffering, should join in prayer. *Is any afflicted? let him pray*. No trouble, how grievous soever, should indispose us for prayer. (2.) *They sang praises to God; they praised God; for we must in every thing give thanks*. We never want matter for praise, if we do not want a heart. And what should put the heart of a child of God out of tune for that duty, if a dungeon and a pair of

stocks will not do it? *They praised God that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, and that they were so wonderfully supported and borne up under their sufferings, and felt divine consolations so sweet, so strong, in their souls*. Nay, *they not only praised God, but they sang praises to him, in some psalm, or hymn, or spiritual song; either one of David's, or some modern composition, or one of their own, as the Spirit gave them utterance*. As our rule is, *that the afflicted should pray*, and therefore, being in affliction, they prayed; so our rule is, *that the merry should sing psalms*, (James 5. 13.) and therefore, being merry in their affliction, *merry after a godly sort, they sang psalms*. This proves that singing of psalms is a gospel-ordinance, and ought to be used by all good christians; and that it is instituted, not only for the expressing of their joys in a day of triumph, but for the balancing and relieving of their sorrows in a day of trouble. It was at midnight that they sang psalms, according to the example of the sweet psalmist of Israel; (Ps. 119. 62.) *At midnight will I rise to give thanks unto thee*. Notice is here taken of one circumstance, that the prisoners heard them. If they did not hear them pray, yet they heard them sing praises. [1.] It intimates how hearty they were in singing praises to God; they sang so loud, that, though they were in the dungeon, they were heard all the prison over; nay so loud, that they waked the prisoners; for we may suppose, being at midnight, they were all asleep. We should sing psalms with all our heart. The saints are called upon to sing aloud upon their beds, Ps. 149. 5. But gospel-grace carries the matter further, and gives us an example of those that sang aloud in the prison, in the stocks. [2.] Though they knew the prisoners would hear them, yet they sang aloud, as those that were not ashamed of their Master or of his service. Shall those that would sing psalms in their families, plead, in excuse for their omission of the duty, that they are afraid their neighbours should hear them; when those that sing profane songs, roar them out, and care not who hears them? [3.] The prisoners were made to hear the prison-songs of Paul and Silas, that they might be prepared for the miraculous favour shewed to them all for the sake of Paul and Silas, when the prison-doors were thrown open. By this extraordinary comfort which they were filled with, it was published, that he whom they preached was the consolation of Israel. Let the prisoners that mean to oppose him, hear and tremble before him; let those that are faithful to him, hear and triumph, and take of the comfort that is spoken to the prisoners of hope, Zech. 9. 12.

2. God heartened them wonderfully by his signal appearances for them, v. 26. (1.) *There was immediately a great earthquake*; how far it extended, we are not told, but it was such a violent shock in this place, that the very foundations of the prison were shaken. While the prisoners were hearkening to the midnight devotions of Paul and Silas, and perhaps laughing at them, and making a jest of them, this earthquake would strike a terror upon them, and convince them that those men were the favourites of Heaven, and such as God owned. We had the house of prayer shaken, in answer to prayer, and as a token of God's acceptance of it, ch. 4. 31. Here the prison shaken. The Lord was in these earthquakes, to shew his resentment of the indignities done to his servants, to testify to those whose confidence is in the earth, the weakness and instability of that which they confide in, and to teach his people, that though the earth be moved, yet they need not fear. (2.) *The prison-doors were thrown open, and the prisoners' fetters were knocked off, every man's bands were loosed*. Perhaps the prisoners, when they heard Paul and Silas pray, and sing psalms,

admired them, and spake honourably of them, and said what the damsel had said of them, Surely, *these men are the servants of the living God*; to recompense them for, and confirm them in, their good opinion of them, they share in the miracle, and have *their bands loosed*; as afterward God gave to Paul all those that were in the shift with him, (ch. 27. 24.) so now he gave him all those that were in the prison with him. God hereby signified to these prisoners, as Grotius observes, that the apostles, in preaching the gospel, were public blessings to mankind, as they *proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison-doors to them that were bound*, Isa. 61. 1. *Et per eos solvi animorum vincula—and as by them the bonds of souls were unloosed.*

II. The persecutors designed to stop the progress of the gospel, that no more might embrace it; thus they hoped to ruin the meeting by the river-side, that no more hearts should be opened there; but here we find converts made in the prison, that house turned into a meeting, the trophies of the gospel's victories erected there, and the jailer, their own servant, become a servant of Christ. It is probable that some of the prisoners, if not all, were converted; surely the miracle wrought on their bodies, in loosing their bands, was wrought on their souls too; see Job 36. 8, 9, 10. Ps. 107. 14, 15. But it is only the conversion of the jailer that is recorded.

1. He is afraid he shall lose his life, and Paul makes him easy as to that care, v. 27, 28.

(1.) He *awoke out of his sleep*; it is probable that the shock of the earthquake waked him, and the opening of the prison-doors, and the prisoners' expressions of joy and amazement, when in the dark they found their bands loosed, and called to tell one another what they felt; this was enough to wake the jailer, whose place required that he should not be hard to wake. This wakening of him out of his sleep, signified the awakening of his conscience out of its spiritual slumber. The call of the gospel is, *Awake, thou that sleepest*, (Eph. 5. 14.) like that, Jonah 1. 6.

(2.) He saw the prison-doors open, and supposed, as well he might, that the prisoners were fled; and then what would become of him? He knew the Roman law in that case, and it was executed not long ago upon the keepers out of whose hands Peter escaped, ch. 12. 19. It was according to that of the prophet, (1 Kings 20. 39, 42.) *Keep this man; if he be missing, thy life shall go for his life*. The Roman lawyers, after this, in their readings upon the law, *De custodia reorum—The custody of criminals*, (which appoints that the keeper should undergo the same punishment that should have been inflicted on the prisoner if he let him escape,) take care to except an escape by miracle.

(3.) In his fright, he drew his sword, and was going to kill himself, to prevent a more terrible death, an expected one, a pompous ignominious death, which he knew he was liable to for letting his prisoners escape, and not looking better to them; and the extraordinary strict charge which the magistrates gave him concerning Paul and Silas, made him conclude they would be very severe upon him if they were gone. The philosophers generally allowed self-murder; Seneca prescribes it as the last remedy which those that are in distress may have recourse to. The stoics, notwithstanding their pretended conquest of the passions, yielded thus far to them. And the Epicureans, who indulged the pleasures of sense, to avoid its pains chose rather to put an end to it. This jailer thought there was no harm in anticipating his own death; but christianity by this proves itself to be of God, that it keeps us to the law of our creation—revives, enforces, and establishes that; obliges us to be just to our own lives, and teaches us cheerfully to resign them to

our graces, but courageously to hold them out against our corruptions.

(4.) Paul stopped him from his proceeding against himself; (v. 28.) He cried with a loud voice, not only to make him hear, but to make him heed, saying, *Do not practise any evil to thyself; Do thyself no harm*. All the cautions of the word of God against sin, and all appearances of it and approaches to it, have this tendency, "*Do thyself no harm*. Man, woman, do not wrong thyself, nor ruin thyself; hurt not thyself, and then none else can hurt thee; do not sin, for nothing but that can hurt thee." Even as to the body, we are cautioned against those sins which do harm to that, and are taught not to hate our own flesh, but to nourish and cherish it. The jailer needs not fear being called to an account for the escape of his prisoners, for they are all here. It was strange that some of them did not slip away, when the prison-doors were opened, and they were loosed from their bands; but their amazement held them fast, and, being sensible it was by the prayers of Paul and Silas that they were loosed, they would not stir unless they stirred; and God shewed his power in binding their spirits, as much as in loosing their feet.

2. He is afraid he shall lose his soul, and Paul makes him easy as to that care too. One concern leads him to the other, and a much greater; and being hindered from hastening himself out of this world, he begins to think, if he had pursued his intention, whither death would have brought him, and what would have become of him on the other side death—a very proper thought for such as have been snatched as a brand out of the fire, when there was but a step between them and death. Perhaps, the heinousness of the sin he was running into, helped to alarm him.

(1.) Whatever was the cause, he was put into a great consternation; the Spirit of God, that was sent to convince, in order to his being a Comforter, struck a terror upon him, and startled him; whether he took care to shut the prison-doors again, we are not told; perhaps he forgot that; as the woman of Samaria, when Christ had impressed convictions on her conscience, left her water-pot, and forgot her errand to the well; for he called for a light with all speed, and sprang in to the inner prison, and came trembling to Paul and Silas. Those that have sin set in order before them, and are made to know their abominations, cannot but tremble at the apprehension of their misery and danger. This jailer, when he was thus made to tremble, could not apply himself to a more proper person than to Paul, for it had once been his own case; he had been once a persecutor of good men, as this jailer was; had cast them into prison, as he kept them; and when, like him, he was made sensible of it, he trembled, and was astonished; and therefore was able to speak the more feelingly to the jailer.

(2.) In this consternation, he applied himself to Paul and Silas for relief. Observe,

[1.] How reverent and respectful his address to them is; he called for a light, because they were in the dark, and that they might see what a fright he was in; he fell down before them, as one amazed at the badness of his own condition, and ready to sink under the load of his terror because of it; he fell down before them, as one that had upon his spirit an awe of them, and of the image of God upon them, and of their commission from God. It is probable that he had heard what the damsel said of them, that they were the servants of the living God, which shewed to them the way of salvation, and as such he thus expressed his veneration for them. He fell down before them, to beg their pardon, as a penitent, for the indignities he had done them, and to beg their advice, as a supplicant what he should do

He gave them a title of respect, *Sirs, κύριοι—lords, masters*; it was but now, *Rogues and villains*, and he was their master; but now, *Sirs, lords*, and they are his masters. Converting grace changes people's language of and to good people and good ministers; and to those who are thoroughly convinced of sin, the very feet of those are beautiful, that bring tidings of Christ; yea, though they are disgracefully fastened in the stocks.

[2.] How serious his inquiry is; *What must I do to be saved?* *First*, His salvation is now his greatest concern, and lies nearest his heart, which before was the furthest thing from his thoughts. Not, *What shall I do to be preferred, to be rich and great in the world?* but, *What shall I do to be saved?* *Secondly*, He does not inquire concerning others, *what they must do*; but concerning himself, "*What must I do?*" It is his own precious soul that he is in care about; "*Let others do as they please*; tell me what I must do, what course must I take." *Thirdly*, He is convinced that something must be done, and done by him too, in order to his salvation; that it is not a thing of course, a thing that will do itself, but a thing about which we must strive, wrestle, and take pains. He asks not, "*What may be done for me?*" but, "*What shall I do, that, being now in fear and trembling, I may work out my salvation?*" As Paul speaks in his epistle to the church at Philippi, of which this jailer was, perhaps, with respect to his trembling inquiry here; intimating that he must not only ask after salvation, (as he had done,) but *work out his salvation with a holy trembling*, Phil. 2. 12. *Fourthly*, He is willing to do any thing; "*Tell me what I must do, and I am here ready to do it.* *Sirs*, put me into any way, if it be but the right way, and a sure way; though narrow, and thorny, and up-hill, yet I will walk in it." Note, Those who are thoroughly convinced of sin, and truly concerned about their salvation, will surrender at discretion to Jesus Christ, will give him a blank to write what he pleases, will be glad to have Christ upon his own terms, Christ upon any terms. *Fifthly*, He is inquisitive what he should do, is desirous to know what he should do, and asks those that were likely to tell him. *If ye will inquire, inquire ye*, Isa. 21. 12. They that set their faces Zion-ward, must ask the way thither, Jer. 50. 5. We cannot know it of ourselves, but God has made it known to us by his word, has appointed his ministers to assist us in consulting the scriptures, and has promised to *give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him*, to be their Guide in the way of salvation. *Sixthly*, He brought them out, to put this question to them, that their answer might not be by duress or compulsion, but they might prescribe to him, though he was their keeper, with the same liberty as they did to others. He brings them out of the dungeon, in hopes they would bring him out of a much worse.

(3.) They very readily directed him what he must do, v. 31. They were always ready to answer such inquiries; though they are *cold*, and *sore*, and *sleepy*, they do not adjourn this cause to a more convenient time and place, do not bid him come to them the next Sabbath at their meeting-place by the river side, and they will tell him, but they strike while the iron is hot, take him now when he is in a good mind, lest the conviction should wear off; now that God begins to work, it is time for them to set in as *workers together with God*. They do not upbraid him with his rude and ill carriage toward them, and his going beyond his warrant; all this is forgiven and forgotten, and they are as glad to shew him the way to heaven, as the best friend they have. They did not triumph over him, though he trembled; they gave him the same directions they did to others, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*. One would think they should have said, "*Repent of thy abusing us,*

in the first place." No, that is overlooked and easily passed by, if he will but believe in Christ. This is an example to ministers, to encourage penitents, to meet those that are coming to Christ, and take them by the hand; not to be hard upon any for unkindnesses done to them; but to seek Christ's honour more than their own. Here is the sum of the whole gospel, the covenant of grace in a few words; *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*. Here is,

[1.] The happiness promised; "*Thou shalt be saved*: not only rescued from eternal ruin, but brought to eternal life and blessedness. *Thou*, though a *poor man*, an under-jailer or turnkey, mean and of low condition in the world, yet that shall be no bar to thy salvation. *Thou*, though a *great sinner*, though a *persecutor*, yet thy heinous transgressions shall be all forgiven through the merits of Christ; and thy hard imbittered heart shall be softened and sweetened by the grace of Christ; and thus thou shalt neither die for thy crime, nor die of thy disease."

[2.] The condition required; *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*. We must admit the record that God hath given in his gospel concerning his Son, and assent to it as *faithful*, and well *worthy of all acceptance*. We must approve the method God has taken of reconciling the world to himself by a Mediator; and accept of Christ as he is offered to us, and give up ourselves to be ruled and taught and saved by him. This is the only way, and a sure way to salvation. No other way of salvation than *by Christ*, and no other way of our being saved by Christ than *by believing* in him; and no danger of coming short, if we take this way; for it is the way that God has appointed, and he is faithful, that has promised; it is the gospel that is to be preached to every creature, *He that believes shall be saved*.

[3.] The extent of this to his family; *Thou shalt be saved, and thy house*; that is, "*God will be in Christ a God to thee and to thy seed*, as he was to Abraham. *Believe*, and salvation shall come to *thy house*, Luke 19. 9. Those of thy house that are infants, shall be admitted into the visible church with thee, and thereby put into a fair way for salvation; those that are grown up, shall have the means of salvation brought to them, and, be they ever so many, let them believe in Jesus Christ, and they shall be saved; they are all welcome to Christ upon the same terms."

(4.) They proceeded to instruct him and his family in the doctrine of Christ; (v. 32.) They *spoke unto him the word of the Lord*. He was, for aught that appears, an utter stranger to Christ, and therefore it is requisite he should be told who this Jesus is, that he may *believe in him*, John 9. 36. And the substance of the matter lying in a little compass, they soon told him enough to make his being baptized a reasonable service. Christ's ministers should have the word of the Lord so ready to them, and so richly dwelling in them, as to be able to give instructions off-hand to any that desire to hear and receive them, for their direction in the way of salvation. They spake the word not only to him, but to *all that were in his house*. Masters of families should take care that all under their charge partake of the means of knowledge and grace, and that the *word of the Lord be spoken to them*; for the souls of the poorest servants are as precious as those of their masters, and are bought with the same price.

(5.) The jailer and his family were immediately baptized, and thereby took upon them the profession of christianity, submitted to its laws, and were admitted to its privileges, upon their declaring solemnly, as the eunuch did, that they believed that *Jesus Christ is the Son of God*; he was baptized, *he and all his, straightway*. Neither he nor any of his

family desired time to consider whether they should come into baptismal bonds or no; nor did Paul and Silas desire time to try their sincerity, and to consider whether they should baptize them or no. But the spirit of grace worked such a strong faith in them, all on a sudden, as superseded further debate; and Paul and Silas knew by the Spirit, that it was a work of God that was wrought in them: so that there was no occasion for demur. This therefore will not justify such precipitation in ordinary cases.

(6.) The jailer was hereupon very respectful to Paul and Silas, as one that knew not how to make amends for the injury he had done to them, much less for the kindness he had received from them; he *took them the same hour of the night*, would not let them lie a minute longer in the inner prison; but, [1.] He *washed their stripes*, to cool them, and abate the smart of them; to clean them, from the blood which the stripes had fetched; it is probable that he bathed them with some healing liquor; as the good Samaritan helped the wounded man by *pouring in oil and wine*. [2.] He *brought them into his house*, bid them welcome to the best room he had, and prepared his best bed for them. Now nothing was thought good enough for them, as before nothing bad enough. [3.] He *set meat before them*, such as his house would afford, and they were welcome to it; by which he expressed the welcome which his soul gave to the gospel. They had *spoken to him the word of the Lord*, had broken the bread of life to him and his family; and he, having reaped so plentifully of *their spiritual things*, thought it was but reasonable that they should reap of *his carnal things*, 1 Cor. 9. 11. What have we houses and tables for, but, as we have opportunity, to serve God and his people with them?

(7.) The voice of rejoicing with that of salvation was heard in the jailer's house; never was such a truly merry night kept there before; he *rejoiced, believing in God with all his house*. There was none in his house that refused to be baptized, and so made a jar in the harmony; but they were unanimous in embracing the gospel, which added much to the joy. Or, it may be read, *He, believing in God, rejoiced all the house over*; *αὐτοὶ δὲ*; he went to every apartment, expressing his joy. Observe, [1.] His believing in *Christ* is called believing in *God*; which intimates that Christ is God, and that the design of the gospel is so far from being to draw us from God, (saying, *go serve other gods*, Deut. 13. 2.) that it has a direct tendency to bring us to God. [2.] His faith produced joy; they that by faith have given up themselves to God in Christ as their's, have a great deal of reason to rejoice. The eunuch, when he was converted, *went on his way rejoicing*; and here the jailer rejoiced. The conversion of the nations is spoken of in the Old Testament as their rejoicing, Ps. 67. 4.—96. 11. *For believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory*. Believing in Christ, is rejoicing in Christ. [3.] He signified his joy to all about him; out of the abundance of the joy in his heart, his mouth spake to the glory of God, and their encouragement who believed in God too. Those who have themselves tasted the comforts of religion, should do what they can to bring others to the taste of them. One cheerful Christian should make many.

35. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. 36. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go—now therefore depart, and go in peace. 37. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly

uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. 38. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. 39. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. 40. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

In these verses, we have,

I. Orders sent for the discharge of Paul and Silas out of prison; v. 35, 36.

1. The magistrates that had so basely abused them the day before, gave the orders; and their doing it so early, *as soon as it was day*, intimates that either they were sensible the terrible earthquake they felt at midnight was intended to plead the cause of their prisoners, or their consciences had smitten them for what they had done, and made them very uneasy. While the persecuted were singing in the stocks, the persecutors were full of tossings to and fro upon their beds, through anguish of mind, complaining more of the lashes of their consciences than the prisoners did of the lashes on their backs; and more in haste to give them a discharge than they were to petition for one. Now God made his servants to be *pitied of them that had carried them captives*, Ps. 106. 46. The magistrates sent *serjeants, ἐπίδουλος*—those that had the rods, the vergers, the tipstaves, the beadles, those that had been employed in beating them, that they might go and ask them forgiveness. The order was, *Let those men go*. It is probable that they designed further mischief to them, but God turned their hearts, and as he had made their *wrath* hitherto to praise him, so the *remainder thereof he did restrain*, Ps. 76. 10.

2. The jailer brought them the news; (v. 36.) *The magistrates have sent to let you go*. Some think the jailer had betimes transmitted an account to the magistrates of what had passed in his house that night, and so had obtained this order for the discharge of his prisoners; *Now therefore depart*. Not that he was desirous to part with them as his guests, but as his prisoners; they shall still be welcome to his house, but he is glad they are at liberty from his stocks. God could by his grace as easily have converted the magistrates as the jailer, and have brought them to faith and baptism; but God hath *chosen the poor of this world*, James 2. 5.

II. Paul's insisting upon the breach of privilege which the magistrates had been guilty of, v. 37. Paul said to the serjeants, *They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison* against all law and justice, and *now do they thrust us out privily*, and think to make us amends with that for the injury done us? *Nay verily; but let them come themselves, and fetch us out*, and own that they have done us wrong. It is probable that the magistrates had some intimation that they were Romans, and were made sensible that their fury had carried them further than the law could bear them out; and that was the reason they gave orders for their discharge. Now observe,

1. Paul did not plead this before he was beaten, though it is probable that it might have prevented it, lest he should seem to be afraid of suffering for the truth which he had preached. Tully, in one of his orations, against Verres, tells of one Ganius, who was ordered by Verres to be beaten in Sicily, that

all the while he was under the lash he cried out nothing, but *Civis Romanus sum—I am a citizen of Rome*; Paul did not do so; he had nobler things than that to comfort himself with in his affliction.

2. He did plead it afterward, to put an honour upon his sufferings, and upon the cause he suffered for, to let the world know that the preachers of the gospel were not such despicable men as they were commonly looked upon to be, and that they merited better treatment. He did it likewise to mollify the magistrates toward the christians at Philippi, and to gain better treatment for them, and beget in the people a better opinion of the christian religion, when they saw that Paul had a fair advantage against their magistrates, might have brought his action against them, and had them called to an account for what they had done, and yet did not take the advantage; which was very much to the honour of *that worthy name by which he was called*. Now here,

(1.) Paul lets them know how many ways they had run themselves into a premunire, and that he had law enough to know it. [1.] They had *beaten them* that were Romans; some think that Silas was a Roman citizen as well as Paul; others that that does not necessarily follow. Paul was a citizen, and Silas was his companion. Now both the *lex Porcia* and the *lex Sempronia* did expressly forbid *liberum corpus Romani civis, virgis aut aliis verberibus cædi—the free body of a Roman citizen to be beaten with rods or otherwise*. Roman historians give instances of cities that had their charters taken from them for indignities done to Roman citizens; we shall afterward find Paul making use of this plea, *ch. 22. 25, 26*. To tell them that they had beaten them that were the messengers of Christ, and the favourites of Heaven, would have had no influence upon them; but to tell them they have abused Roman citizens, will put them into a fright; so common is it for people to be more afraid of Cæsar's wrath than of Christ's. He that affronts a Roman, a gentleman, a nobleman, though ignorantly, and through mistake, thinks himself concerned to cry *Peccavi—I have done wrong*, and make his submission; but he that persecutes a christian because he belongs to Christ, stands to it, and thinks he may do it securely, though God hath said, *He that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of my eye*, and Christ has warned us of the danger of *offending his little ones*. [2.] They had beaten them *uncondemned; indicta causa—without a fair hearing*, had not calmly examined what was said against them, much less inquired what they had to say for themselves. It is a universal rule of justice, *Causâ cognitâ possunt multi absolvi, incognitâ nemo condemnari potest—Many may be acquitted in consequence of having had a hearing; while without a hearing no one can be condemned*. Christ's servants would not have been abused as they have been, if they and their cause might but have had an impartial trial. [3.] It was an aggravation of this, that they had done it openly, which, as it was so much the greater disgrace to the sufferers, so it was the bolder defiance to justice and the law. [4.] They had *cast them into prison*, without shewing any cause of their commitment, and in an arbitrary manner, by a verbal order. [5.] They now *thrust them out privily*; they had not indeed the impudence to stand by what they had done, but yet had not the honesty to own themselves in a fault.

(2.) He insists upon it, that they should make them an acknowledgment of their error, and give them a public discharge, to make that the more honourable, as they had done them a public disgrace, which made that the more disgraceful; "*Let them come themselves, and fetch us out*, and give a testimony to our innocence, and that we have done nothing worthy of stripes or of bonds." It was not a point of honour that Paul stood thus stiffly upon, but

a point of justice, and not to himself so much as to his cause; "*Let them come and stop the clamours of the people, by confessing that we are not the troublers of the city*."

III. The magistrates' submission, and the reversing of the judgment given against Paul and Silas, *v. 38, 39*.

1. The magistrates were frightened when they were told (though it may be they knew it before) that Paul was a Roman. They feared when they heard it, lest some of his friends should inform the government of what they had done, and they should fare the worse for it. The proceedings of persecutors have often been illegal, even by the law of nations, and often inhuman, against the law of nature, but always sinful, and against God's law.

2. They *came, and besought them* not to take the advantage of the law against them, but to overlook the illegality of what they had done, and say no more of it; they *brought them out of the prison*, owning that they were wrongfully put into it, and desired them that they would peaceably and quietly *depart out of the city*. Thus Pharaoh and his servants, who had set God and Moses at defiance, came to Moses, and *bowed down themselves to him, saying, Get thee out*, *Exod. 11. 8*. God can make the enemies of his people ashamed of their envy and enmity to them, *Isa. 26. 11*. Jerusalem is sometimes made a burthensome stone to them that heave at it, which they would gladly get clear of, *Zech. 12. 3*. Yet if the repentance of these magistrates had been sincere, they would have *desired them not to depart out of their city*, (as the Gadarenes desired to be rid of Christ,) but would have courted their stay, and begged of them to continue in their city, to shew them the way of salvation. But many are convinced that christianity is not to be persecuted, who yet are not convinced that it ought to be embraced, or at least are not persuaded to embrace it. They are compelled to do honour to Christ and his servants, *to worship before their feet, and to know that he has loved them*, (*Rev. 3. 9.*) and yet do not go so far as to have benefit by Christ, or to come in for a share in his love.

IV. The departure of Paul and Silas from Philippi, *v. 40*. They went out of the prison when they were legally discharged, and not till then, though they were illegally committed, and then,

1. They took leave of their friends; they *went to the house of Lydia*, where, probably, the disciples had met to pray for them, and there they *saw the brethren*, or visited them at their respective habitations; (which was soon done, they were so few;) and they *comforted them*, by telling them (saith an ancient Greek commentary) what God had done for them, and how he had owned them in the prison. They encouraged them to keep close to Christ, and hold fast the profession of their faith, whatever difficulties they might meet with, assuring them, that all would then end well, everlastingly well. Young converts should have a great deal said to them to comfort them, for the *joy of the Lord will be very much their strength*.

2. They quitted the town; they departed. I wonder they should do so; for now that they had had such an honourable discharge from their imprisonment, surely they might have gone on at least for some time in their work without danger; but I suppose they went away upon that principle of their Master's, (*Mark 1. 38.*) *Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, for therefore came I forth*. Paul and Silas had an extraordinary call to Philippi; and yet when they were come thither, they see little of the fruit of their labours, and are soon driven thence; yet they did not come in vain, though the beginnings here were *small*, the *latter end greatly increased*; now they laid the found-

dation of a church at Philippi, which became very eminent; had its bishops and deacons, and people that were more generous to Paul than any other church, as appears by his epistle to the Philippians, *ch. 1. 1.—4. 15.* Let not ministers be discouraged, though they see not the fruit of their labours presently; the seed sown seems to be lost under the clods, but it shall come up again in a plentiful harvest in due time.

CHAP. XVII.

We have here a further account of the travels of Paul, and his services and sufferings for Christ. He was not like a candle upon a table, that gives light only to one room, but like the sun that goes its circuit to give light to many. He was called into Macedonia, a large kingdom, *ch. 16. 9.* He began with Philippi, because it was the first city he came to; but he must not confine himself to that. We have him here, I. Preaching and persecuted at Thessalonica, another city of Macedonia, *v. 1. 9.* II. Preaching at Berea, where he met with an encouraging auditory, but was driven thence also by persecution, *v. 10. 15.* III. Disputing at Athens, the famous university of Greece, (*v. 16. 21.*) and the account he gave of natural religion, for the conviction of those that were addicted to polytheism and idolatry, and to lead them to the christian religion, (*v. 22. 31.*) together with the success of this sermon, *v. 32. 34.*

1. **N**OW when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: 2. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3. Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. 4. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. 5. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; 7. Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, that there is another king, *one* Jesus. 8. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

Paul's two epistles to the Thessalonians, the two first he wrote by inspiration, give such a shining character of that church, that we cannot but be glad here in the history to meet with an account of the first founding of the church there.

I. Here is Paul's coming to Thessalonica, which was the chief city of this country, called at this day *Salonech*, in the Turkish dominions. Observe,

1. Paul went on with his work, notwithstanding the ill usage he had met with at Philippi; he did not fail, nor was discouraged. He takes notice of this

in his first epistle to the church here: (1 Thess. 2. 2.) *After we were shamefully entreated at Philippi, yet we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God.* The opposition and persecution that he met with, made him the more resolute. None of these things moved him; he could never have held out, and held on, as he did, if he had not been animated by a spirit of power from on high.

2. He did but *pass* through *Amphipolis* and *Apollonia*, the former a city near Philippi, the latter near Thessalonica; doubtless, he was under divine direction, and was told by the Spirit, who, as the wind, bloweth where he listeth, what places he should *pass through*, and what he should *rest in*. *Apollonia* was a city of Illyricum, which, some think, illustrates that of Paul, that he had preached the gospel *from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum*, (*Rom. 15. 9.*) that is, to the borders of Illyricum, where he now was: and we may suppose, though he be said only to *pass through* these cities, yet that he staid so long in them as to publish the gospel there, and to prepare the way for the entrance of other ministers among them, whom he would afterward send.

II. His preaching to the Jews first, in their synagogue at Thessalonica. He found a synagogue of the Jews there, (*v. 1.*) which intimates that one reason why he passed through those other cities mentioned, and did not continue long in them, was, because there were no synagogues in them. But, finding one in Thessalonica, by it he made his entry.

1. It was always his manner to begin with the Jews; to make them the first offer of the gospel, and not to turn to the Gentiles till they had refused it, that their mouths might be stopped from clamouring against him because he preached to the Gentiles, for if they received the gospel, they would cheerfully embrace the new converts; if they refused it, they might thank themselves if the apostles carried it to those that would bid it welcome. That command of *beginning at Jerusalem* was justly construed as a direction, wherever they came, to begin with the Jews.

2. He met them in their synagogue on the sabbath-day, in their place and at their time of meeting, and thus he would pay respect to both. *Sabbaths and solemn assemblies* are always very precious to those to whom Christ is precious, *Ps. 84. 10.* It is good being in the house of the Lord on his day. This was Christ's manner, and Paul's manner, and has been the manner of all the saints, the *good old way* which they have walked in.

3. He reasoned with them out of the scriptures. They agreed with him to receive the scriptures of the Old Testament, so far they were of a mind; but they received the scripture, and therefore thought they had reason to reject Christ; Paul received the scripture, and therefore saw great reason to embrace Christ. It was therefore requisite, in order to their conviction, that he should, by reasoning with them, the Spirit setting in with him, convince them that his inferences from scripture were right and their's were wrong. Note, The preaching of the gospel should be both scriptural preaching, and rational; such Paul's was, for he *reasoned out of the scriptures*: we must take the scriptures for our foundation, our oracle, and touchstone, and then reason out of them and upon them, and against those who, though they pretend zeal for the scriptures, as the Jews did, yet wrest them to their own destruction. Reason must not be set up in competition with the scripture, but it must be made use of in explaining and applying the scripture.

4. He continued to do this *three sabbath-days* successively. If he could not convince them the first sabbath, he would try the second and the third; for *precept must be upon precept, and line upon line*

God waits for sinners' conversion, and so must his ministers; all the labourers come not into the vineyard at the first hour, nor at the first call; nor are wrought upon so suddenly as the jailer.

5. The drift and scope of his preaching and arguing was to prove that *Jesus is the Christ*; this was that which he opened and alleged, v. 3. He first explained his thesis, and opened the terms, and then alleged it, and laid it down, as that which he would abide by, and which he summoned them in God's name to subscribe to. Paul had an admirable method of discourse; and shewed he was himself both well apprized of the doctrine he preached, and thoroughly understood it, and that he was fully assured of the truth of it, and therefore he opened it like one that knew it, and alleged it like one that believed it. He shewed them,

(1.) That it was necessary the Messiah should suffer, and die, and rise again; that the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah made it necessary he should. The great objection which the Jews made against Jesus being the Messiah, was, his ignominious death and sufferings; the *cross of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block*, because it did by no means agree with the idea they had framed of the Messiah; but Paul here alleges and makes it out undeniably, not only that it was possible he might be the Messiah, though he suffered, but that, being the Messiah, it was necessary he should suffer; he could not be made perfect but by sufferings; for if he had not died, he could not have risen again from the dead. This was it which Christ himself insisted upon; (Luke 24. 26.) *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?* And again, (v. 46.) *Thus it is written, and therefore thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead. He must needs have suffered for us, because he could not otherwise purchase our redemption for us; and he must needs have risen again, because he could not otherwise apply the redemption to us.*

(2.) That Jesus is the Messiah; "*This Jesus whom I preach unto you, and call upon you to believe in, is Christ, is the Christ, is the Anointed of the Lord, is he that should come, and you are to look for no other; for God has both by his word and by his works, (the two ways of his speaking to the children of men,) by the scriptures and by miracles, and the gift of the Spirit to make both effectual, borne witness to him.*" Note, [1.] Gospel-ministers should preach Jesus; he must be their principal subject; their business is to bring people acquainted with him. [2.] That which we are to preach concerning Jesus, is, that *he is Christ*; and therefore we may hope to be saved by him, and are bound to be ruled by him.

III. The success of his preaching there, v. 4.

1. Some of the Jews believed, notwithstanding their rooted prejudices against Christ and his gospel, and they consorted with Paul and Silas: they not only associated with them as friends and companions, but they gave up themselves to their direction, as their spiritual guides; they put themselves into their possession as an inheritance into the possession of the right owner, so the word signifies; they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to them by the will of God, 2 Cor. 8. 5. They clave to Paul and Silas, and attended them wherever they went. Note, They that believe in Jesus Christ, come into communion with his faithful ministers, and consort with them.

2. Many more of the devout Greeks, and of the chief women, embraced the gospel. These were proselytes of the gate; the *godly among the Gentiles*, so the Jews called them: such as, though they did not submit to the law of Moses, yet renounced idolatry and immorality, worshipped the true God

only, and did no man any wrong. These were the *οἱ σεβόμενοι Ἕλληνες*—the *worshipping Gentiles*; as in America they call those of the natives that are converted to the faith of Christ, the *praying Indians*; these were admitted to join with the Jews in their synagogue-worship. Of these a great multitude believed, more of them than of the thorough-paced Jews, that were wedded to the ceremonial law. And not a few of the chief women of the city, that were devout, and had a sense of religion, embraced christianity. Particular notice is taken of this, for an example to the ladies, the chief women, and an encouragement to them to employ themselves in the exercises of devotion, and to submit themselves to the commanding power of Christ's holy religion, in all the instances of it; for this intimates how acceptable it will be to God, what an honour to Christ, and what great influence it may have upon many, beside the advantages of it to their own souls.

No mention is here made of their preaching the gospel to the Gentile idolaters at Thessalonica; and yet it is certain that they did, and that great numbers were converted; nay, it should seem that of the Gentile converts that church was chiefly composed, though notice is not taken of them here: for Paul writes to the christians there, as having *turned to God from idols*, (1 Thess. 1. 9.) and that at the first entering in of the apostles among them.

IV. The trouble that was given to Paul and Silas at Thessalonica; wherever they preached, they were sure to be persecuted; bonds and afflictions did abide them in every city. Observe,

1. Who were the authors of their trouble; the Jews which believed not, that were moved with envy, v. 5. The Jews were in all places the most inveterate enemies to the Christians, especially to those Jews that turned Christians, whom they had a particular spleen against, as deserters. Now see what that division was, which Christ came to send upon earth; some of the Jews believed the gospel, and pitied and prayed for those that did not; while those that did not, envied and hated those that did. St. Paul in his epistle to this church takes notice of the rage and enmity of the Jews against the preachers of the gospel, as their measure-filling sin. 1 Thess. 2. 15, 16.

2. Who were the instruments of the trouble; the Jews made use of certain lewd persons of the baser sort, whom they picked up and got together, and who must undertake to give the sense of the city against the apostles. All wise and sober people looked upon them with respect, and valued them, and none would appear against them but such as were the scum of the city, a company of vile men, that were given to all manner of wickedness. Tertullian pleads this with those that opposed christianity, that the enemies of it were generally the worst of men; *Tales semper nobis insecutores, injusti, infideli, turpes, quos, et ipsi damnare consueverunt*—Our persecutors are invariably unjust, impious, infamous, whom you yourselves have been accustomed to condemn. Apologia, cap. 5. It is the honour of religion, that those who hate it, are generally the lewd fellows of the baser sort, that are lost to all sense of justice and virtue.

3. In what method they proceeded against them.

(1.) They set the city in an uproar; made a noise to put people in a fright, and then every body ran to see what the matter was; they began a riot, and then the mob was up presently. See who are the troublers of Israel—not the faithful preachers of the gospel, but the enemies of it. See how the devil carries on his designs; he sets cities in an uproar, sets souls in an uproar, and then fishes in troubled waters.

(2.) They assaulted the house of Jason, where the apostles lodged, with a design to bring them out to

the people, whom they had incensed and enraged against them, and by whom they hoped to see them pulled to pieces. The proceedings here were altogether illegal; if Jason's house must be searched, it ought to be done by the proper officers, and not without a warrant: "A man's house" (the law says) "is his castle;" and for them in a tumultuous manner to assault a man's house, to put him and his family in fear, was but to shew what outrages men are carried to by a spirit of persecution. If men have offended, magistrates are appointed to inquire into the offence, and to judge of it; but to make the rabble judges and executioners too (as these here designed to do,) was to make *truth fall in the street*, to set *servants on horseback*, and *princes to walk as servants on the earth*; to depose equity, and enthroned fury.

(3.) When they could not get the apostles into their hands, whom they would have punished as vagabonds, and incensed the people against as strangers that came to spy out the land, and devour its strength, and eat the bread out of their mouths; then they fall upon an honest citizen of their own, who entertained the apostles in his house, his name Jason, a converted Jew, and drew him out with some other of the brethren to the rulers of the city. The apostles were advised to withdraw, for they were more obnoxious, *Currenti cede furori—Retire before the torrent*. But their friends were willing to expose themselves, being better able to weather this storm. *For a good man*, for such good men as the apostles were, *some would even dare to die*.

(4.) They accused them to the rulers, and represented them as dangerous persons not fit to be tolerated; the crime charged upon Jason, is, receiving and harbouring the apostles, (v. 7.) countenancing them, and promoting their interest. And what was the apostles' crime, that it should be no less than misprision of treason to give them lodging? Two very black characters are here given them, enough to make them odious to the people and obnoxious to the magistrates, if they had been just.

[1.] That they were enemies to the public peace, and threw every thing into disorder wherever they came; *Those that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also*. In one sense it is true, that wherever the gospel comes in its power to any place, to any soul, it works such a change there, gives such a wide change to the stream, so directly contrary to what it was, that it may be said to *turn the world upside down* in that place, in that soul. The love of the world is rooted out of the heart; and the way of the world contradicted in the life; so that *the world is turned upside down there*. But in the sense in which they meant it, it is utterly false: they would have it thought, that the preachers of the gospel were incendiaries and mischief-makers wherever they came; that they sowed discord among relations, set neighbours together by the ears, obstructed commerce, and inverted all order and regularity. Because they persuaded people to turn from vice to virtue; from idols to the living and true God; from malice and envy to love and peace; they are charged with *turning the world upside down*, when it was only the kingdom of the devil in the world that they thus overturned. Their enemies *set the city in an uproar*, and then laid the blame upon them; as Nero set Rome on fire, and then charged it upon the christians. If Christ's faithful ministers, even those that are most *quiet in the land*, be thus invidiously misrepresented and miscalled, let them not think it strange or be exasperated by it; we are not better than Paul and Silas, who were thus abused. The accusers cry out, "They are *come hither also*;" they have been doing all the mischief they could in other places, and now they have brought the infection hither; it

is therefore time for us to bestir ourselves, and make head against them."

[2.] That they were enemies to the established government, and disaffected to that, and their principles and practices were destructive to monarchy, and inconsistent with the constitution of the state, v. 7. They all *do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar*; not to any particular decree, for there was as yet no law of the empire against christianity; but contrary to Cæsar's power in general to make decrees; for they say, *There is another King, one Jesus*; not only a King of the Jews, as our Saviour was himself charged before Pilate, but *Lord of all*; so Peter called him in the first sermon he preached to the Gentiles, ch. 10. 36. It is true, the Roman government, both while it was a commonwealth, and after it came into the Cæsars' hands, was very jealous of any governor under their dominion, taking upon him the title of king, and there was an express law against it. But Christ's kingdom *was not of this world*. His followers said indeed, *Jesus is a King*, but not an earthly king, not a rival with Cæsar, nor his ordinances interfering with the decrees of Cæsar, but who had made it a law of his kingdom, to *render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's*. There was nothing in the doctrine of Christ that tended to the dethroning of princes, or the depriving them of any of their prerogatives; and they knew it very well, and it was against their conscience that they laid this to their charge. And of all people it ill became the Jews to do it, who hated Cæsar and his government, and sought the ruin of him and it, and who expected a Messiah that should be a temporal prince, and overturn the thrones of kingdoms, and were therefore opposing our Lord Jesus, because he did not appear under that character. Thus they have been most spiteful in representing God's faithful people as enemies to Cæsar, and hurtful to kings and provinces, who have been themselves setting up *imperium in imperio—a kingdom within a kingdom*, a power not only in competition with Cæsar's but superior to it, that of the papal supremacy.

4. The great uneasiness which this gave to the city; (v. 8.) *They troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things*. They had no ill opinion of the apostles or their doctrine, could not apprehend any danger to the state from them, and therefore were willing to connive at them; but if they be represented to them by the prosecutors as enemies to Cæsar, they will be obliged to take cognizance of them, and to suppress them, for fear of the government, and this troubled them. Claudius, the present emperor, is represented by Suetonius as a man very jealous of the least commotion, and timorous to the last degree, which obliged the rulers under him to be watchful against every thing that looked dangerous, or gave the least cause of suspicion; and therefore it troubled them to be brought under a necessity of disturbing good men.

5. The issue of this troublesome affair; the magistrates had no mind to prosecute the christians; care was taken to secure the apostles, they absconded, and fled, and kept out of their hands; so that nothing was to be done but to discharge Jason and his friends upon bail, v. 9. The magistrates here were not so easily incensed against the apostles as the magistrates at Philippi were, but were more considerate and of better temper; so they *took security of Jason and the other*, bound them to their good behaviour; and perhaps they gave bond for Paul and Silas, that they should be forth-coming when they were called for, if any thing should afterward appear against them.

Among the persecutors of christianity, as there have been instances of the madness and rage of brutes, so there have been likewise of the prudence and temper of men; moderation has been a virtue.

10. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea : who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12. Therefore many of them believed : also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. 13. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. 14. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea : but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. 15. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens : and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

In these verses, we have,

I. Paul and Silas removing to Berea, and employed in preaching the gospel there, *v.* 10. They had gone so far at Thessalonica, that the foundations of a church were laid, and others were raised up to carry on the work that was begun, whom the rulers and people were not so much prejudiced against, as they were against Paul and Silas ; and therefore when the storm rose they withdrew, taking that as an indication to them, that they must quit that place for the present. That command of Christ to his disciples, *When they persecute you in one city, flee to another*, intends their flight to be not so much for their own safety, "Flee to another, to *hide* there," as for the carrying on of their work ; "Flee to another, to *preach* there ;" as appears by the reason given—*You shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come*, Matt. 10. 23. *They out of the eater came forth meat*, and the devil was outshot in his own bow ; he thought by persecuting the apostles to stop the progress of the gospel ; but it was so overruled, as to be made to further it. See here,

1. The care that the brethren took of Paul and Silas, when they perceived how the plot was laid against them ; they *immediately sent them away by night*, incognito, to Berea. This could be no surprise to the young converts ; *For when we were with you*, (saith Paul to them, 1 Thess. 3. 4.) *when we came first among you, we told you that we should suffer tribulation even as it came to pass, and ye know*. It should seem, that Paul and Silas would willingly have stayed, and faced the storm, if the brethren would have let them ; but they would rather want their help than expose their lives, which, it should seem, were dearer to their friends than to themselves. *They sent them away by night*, under the covert of 'hat, as if they had been evil-doers.

2. The constancy of Paul and Silas in their work ; though they fled from Thessalonica, they did not flee from the service of Christ ; *when they came to Berea, they went into the synagogue of the Jews*, and made their public appearance there. Though the Jews at Thessalonica had been their spiteful enemies, and, for aught they knew, the Jews at Berea would be so too, yet they did not therefore decline paying their respect to the Jews, either in revenge for the injuries they had received, or for fear of

what they might receive. If others wil. not do their duty to us, yet we ought to do our's to them.

II. The good character of the Jews in Berea ; (*v.* 11.) *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica* ; the Jews in the synagogue at Berea, were better disposed to receive the gospel than the Jews in the synagogue at Thessalonica ; they were not so bigoted and prejudiced against it, not so peevish and ill-natured, *they were more noble*, *ωὗς ἐστίν*—*better bred* ; 1. They had a freer thought, and lay more open to conviction, were willing to hear reason, and admit the force of it, and to subscribe to that which appeared to them to be truth, though it was contrary to their former sentiments ; this was more noble. 2. They had a better temper, were not so sour and morose and ill-conditioned towards all that were not of their mind. As they were ready to come into a unity with those that by the power of truth they were brought to concur with, so they continued in charity with those that they saw cause to differ from ; this was more noble. They neither prejudged the cause, nor were moved with envy at the managers of it, as the Jews at Thessalonica were, but very generously gave both it and them a fair hearing, without passion or partiality ; for,

(1.) *They received the word with all readiness of mind* ; they were very willing to hear it, presently apprehended the meaning of it, and did not shut their eyes against the light. *They attended to the things that were spoken of Paul*, as Lydia did, and were very well pleased to hear them. They did not pick quarrels with the word, nor find fault, nor seek occasion against the preachers of it ; but bid it welcome, and put a candid construction upon every thing that was said ; herein *they were more noble than the Jews in Thessalonica*, but walked in the same spirit, and in the same steps, with the Gentiles there, of whom it is said, *that they received the word with joy of the Holy Ghost*, and turned to God from idols, 1 Thess. 1. 6, 9. This was true nobility. The Jews gloried much in their being Abraham's seed, thought themselves well-born, and that they could not be better born. But they are here told, who among them were the *most noble*, and the best-bred men—those that were most disposed to receive the gospel, and had the high and conceited thoughts in them captivated, and brought into obedience to Christ. These were the most noble, and, if I may so say, the most gentlemen-like men. *Nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus*—*Virtue and piety are true nobility*, true honour : and without that, *Stemmata quid prosunt*—*What are pedigrees and pompous titles worth ?*

(2.) *They searched the scriptures daily whether these things were so*. Their readiness of mind to receive the word, was not such, as that they took things upon trust, swallowed them upon an implicit faith : no ; but since Paul reasoned out of the scriptures, and referred them to the Old Testament for the proof of what he said, they had recourse to their Bibles, turned to the places he referred them to, read the context, considered the scope and drift of them, compared them with other places of scripture, examined whether Paul's inferences from them were natural and genuine, and his arguments upon them cogent, and determined accordingly. Observe, [1.] The doctrine of Christ does not fear a scrutiny ; we that are advocates for his cause, desire no more than that people will not say, *These things are not so*, till they have first, without prejudice and partiality, examined *whether they be so* or no. [2.] The New Testament is to be examined by the Old. The Jews received the Old Testament, and those that did so, if they considered things aright, could not but see cause sufficient to receive the New, because in it they see all the prophecies and promises of the Old fully and exactly accomplished. [3.] These

that read and receive the scriptures, must search them, (John 5. 39.) must study them, and take pains in considering them, both that they may find out the truth contained in them, and may not mistake the sense of them, and so run into error; or remain in it; and that they may find out the whole truth contained in them, and may not rest in a superficial knowledge, in the outward court of the scriptures, but may have an intimate acquaintance with the mind of God revealed in them. [4.] Searching the scriptures must be our daily work; they that heard the word in the synagogue on the sabbath-day, did not think that enough, but were searching it every day in the week, that they might improve what they had heard the sabbath before, and prepare for what they were to hear the sabbath after. [5.] Those are truly noble, and are in a fair way to be more and more so, that make the scriptures their oracle and touchstone, and consult them accordingly. Those that rightly study the scriptures, and meditate therein day and night, have their minds filled with noble thoughts, fixed to noble principles, and formed for noble aims and designs. *These are more noble.*

III. The good effect of the preaching of the gospel at Berea: it had the desired success; the people's hearts being prepared, a great deal of work was done suddenly, v. 12.

1. Of the Jews there were many that believed; at Thessalonica there were only some of them that believed, (v. 4.) but at Berea, where they heard with unprejudiced minds, many believed; many more Jews than at Thessalonica. Note, God gives grace to those whom he first inclines to make a diligent use of the means of grace, and particularly to search the scriptures.

2. Of the Greeks likewise, the Gentiles, many believed, both of the honourable women, the ladies of quality, and of men not a few, men of the first rank, as should seem by their being mentioned with the honourable women. The wives first embraced the gospel, and then they persuaded their husbands to embrace it. *For what knowest thou, O wife, but thou shalt save thy husband?* 1 Cor. 7. 16.

IV. The persecution that was raised against Paul and Silas at Berea, which forced Paul thence.

1. The Jews at Thessalonica were the mischief-makers at Berea; they had notice that the word of God was preached at Berea; for envy and jealousy bring quick intelligence; and likewise that the Jews there were not so inveterately set against it as they were; they came thither also, to turn the world upside down there, and they stirred up the people, and incensed them against the preachers of the gospel; as if they had such a commission from the prince of darkness to go from place to place to oppose the gospel, as the apostles had to go from place to place to preach it. Thus we read before that the Jews at Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra on purpose to incense the people against the apostles, ch. 14. 19. See how restless Satan's agents are in their opposition to the gospel of Christ, and the salvation of the souls of men! This is an instance of the enmity that is in the serpent's seed against the seed of the woman; and we must not think it strange if persecutors at home extend their rage to stir up persecution abroad.

2. This occasioned Paul's remove to Athens; by seeking to extinguish this divine fire which Christ had already kindled, they did but spread it farther, and the faster; so long Paul stayed at Berea, and such success he had there, that there were brethren there, and sensible active men too, which appeared by the care they took of Paul, v. 14. They were aware of the coming of the persecuting Jews from Thessalonica, and that they were busy irritating the people against Paul; and fearing what it would come to, they lost no time, but immediately sent Paul away, whom they were most prejudiced

and enraged against, hoping that that would pacify them, while they retained Silas and Timothy there still, who, now that Paul had broken the ice, might be sufficient to carry on the work without exposing them. *They sent Paul to go even to the sea, so some; to go as it were to the sea, so we read it; ὡς ἐν τῇ θάλασσᾳ.* He went out from Berea, in that road which went to the sea, that the Jews, if they inquired after him, might think he was gone to a great distance; but he went by land to Athens, in which there was no culpable dissimulation at all. *They that conducted Paul,* (as his guides and guards, he being both a stranger in the country, and one that had many enemies,) *brought him to Athens.* The Spirit of God, influencing his spirit, directing him to that famous city; famous of old for its power and dominion, when the Athenian commonwealth coped with the Spartan; famous afterward for learning, it was the rendezvous of scholars; those that wanted learning, went thither to get it, because those that had learning, went thither to shew it. It was a great university, much resorted to from all parts, and therefore, for the better diffusing of gospel-light, Paul is sent thither, and is not ashamed or afraid to shew his face among the philosophers there, and there to preach Christ crucified, though he knew it would be as much foolishness to the Greeks as it was to the Jews a stumbling-block.

3. He ordered Silas and Timothy to come to him to Athens, when he found there was a prospect of doing good there; or, because there being none there that he knew, he was solitary and melancholy without them. Yet, it should seem, that, great as was the haste he was in for them, he ordered Timothy to go about by Thessalonica, to bring him an account of the affairs of that church; for he says, (1 Thess. 3. 1, 2.) *We thought it good to be left at Athens alone, and sent Timotheus to establish you.*

16. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. 17. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. 18. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him; and some said, What will this babbler say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. 19. And they took him, and brought him to Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? 20. For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. 21. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

A scholar that has acquaintance, and is in love, with the learning of the ancients, would think he should have been very happy if he were where Paul now was, at Athens, in the midst of the various sects of philosophers, and would have had a great many curious questions to ask them, for the explicating of the remains we have of the Athenian learning; but Paul, though bred a scholar, and an ingenious active man, does not make that any of his bu-

ness at Athens; he has other work to mind: it is not the improving of himself in their philosophy that he aims at, he has learned to call it a *vain* thing, and is above it; (Col. 2. 8.) his business is, in God's name, to correct their disorders in religion, and to turn them from the service of idols, and of Satan in them, to the service of the true and living God in Christ.

2. Here is the impression which the abominable ignorance and superstition of the Athenians made upon Paul's spirit, v. 16. Observe,

1. The account here given of that city; it was wholly given to idolatry. This agrees with the account which the heathen writers give of it, that there were more idols in Athens than there were in all Greece besides put together; and that they had twice as many sacred feasts as others had. Whatever strange gods were recommended to them, they admitted them, and allowed them a temple, and an altar, so that they had almost as many gods as men — *facilius possis deum quam hominem invenire*. And this city, after the empire became christian, continued incurably addicted to idolatry, and all the pious edicts of the christian emperors could not root it out, till, by the irruption of the Goths, that city was in so particular a manner laid waste, that there are now scarcely any remains of it. It is observable, that there, where human learning most flourished, idolatry most abounded, and the most absurd and ridiculous idolatry; which confirms that of the apostle, that when they professed themselves to be wise, they became fools, (Rom. 1. 22.) and, in the business of religion, were of all other the most vain in their imaginations. The world by wisdom knew not God, 1 Cor. 1. 21. They might have reasoned against polytheism and idolatry; but, it seems, the greatest pretenders to reason were the greatest slaves to idols; so necessary was it to the re-establishing even of natural religion, that there should be a divine revelation, and that centering in Christ.

2. The disturbance which the sight of this gave to Paul; Paul was not willing to appear publicly, till Silas and Timothy came to him, that out of the mouth of two or three witnesses the word might be established; but in the mean time his spirit was stirred within him; he was filled with concern for the glory of God, which he saw given to idols, and with compassion to the souls of men, which he saw thus enslaved to Satan, and led captive by him at his will. He beheld these transgressors, and was grieved; and horror took hold of him. He had a holy indignation at the heathen priests; that led the people such an endless trace of idolatry, and at their philosophers, that knew better, and yet never said a word against it, but themselves went down the stream.

II. The testimony that he bore against their idolatry, and his endeavours to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. He did not, as Witsius observes, in the heat of his zeal break into the temples, pull down their images, demolish their altars, or fly in the face of their priests; nor did he run about the streets crying, "You are all the bond-slaves of the devil," though it was too true; but he observed decorum, and kept himself within due bounds, doing that only which became a prudent man.

1. He went to the synagogue of the Jews, who, though enemies to christianity, were free from idolatry, and joined with them in that among them which was good, and took the opportunity given him there of disputing for Christ, v. 17. He discoursed with the Jews, reasoned fairly with them, and put it to them, what reason they could give, why, since they expected the Messiah, they would not receive Jesus. There he met with the devout persons, that had forsaken the idol temples, but rested in the Jews' synagogue, and he talked with these to lead them

on to the christian church, to which the Jews' synagogue was but as a porch.

2. He entered into conversation with all that came in his way about matters of religion; In the market — *ἐν τῷ ἀγορῇ*, in the exchange, or place of commerce, he disputed daily, as he had occasion, with them that met with him, or that he happened to fall into company with, that were heathen, and never came to the Jews' synagogue. The zealous advocates for the cause of Christ will be ready to plead it in all companies, as occasion offers. The ministers of Christ must not think it enough to speak a good word for Christ once a week, but should be daily speaking honourably of him to such as meet with them.

III. The inquiries which some of the philosophers made concerning Paul's doctrine. Observe,

1. Who they were, that encountered him, that entered into discourse with him, and opposed him; he disputed with all that met him, in the places of concourse, or rather of discourse; most took no notice of him, slighted him, and never minded a word he said; but there were some of the philosophers that thought him worth making remarks upon, and they were those whose principles were most directly contrary to christianity.

(1.) The Epicureans, who thought God altogether such a one as themselves, an idle, unactive Being, that minded nothing, nor put any difference between good and evil; they would not own, either that God made the world, or that he governs it; nor that man needs to make any conscience of what he says or does, having no punishment to fear, or rewards to hope for; all which loose atheistical notions christianity is levelled against. The Epicureans indulged themselves in all the pleasures of sense, and placed their happiness in them, in what Christ has taught us in the first place to deny ourselves.

(2.) The Stoics, who thought themselves altogether as good as God, and indulged themselves as much in the pride of life as the Epicureans did in the lusts of the flesh and of the eye; they made their virtuous man to be no way inferior to God himself, nay to be superior. *Esse aliquid quo sapiens excelsat Deum*—There is that in which a wise man excels God, so Seneca: to which christianity is directly opposite, as it teaches us to deny ourselves, and abase ourselves, and to come off from all confidence in ourselves, that Christ may be all in all.

2. What their different sentiments were of him; such there were, as there were of Christ, v. 18.

(1.) Some called him a babbler, and thought he spoke, without any design, whatever came uppermost, as men of crazed imaginations do; *What will this babbler say?* ὁ σπερματικός ἐστίν—this scatterer of words, that goes about, throwing here one idle word or story, and there another, without any intentment or signification; or, this picker up of seeds. Some of the critics tell us, it is used for a little sort of bird, that is worth nothing at all, either for the spit or for the cage, that picks up the seeds that lie uncovered, either in the field or by the way-side, and hops here and there for that purpose—*Avicula parva quæ semina in trivis dispersa colligere solet*; such a pitiful contemptible animal they took Paul to be, or supposed he went from place to place, venting his notions to get money, a penny here, and another there, as that bird picks up here and there a grain. They looked upon him as an idle-fellow, and regarded him, as we say, no more than a ballad-singer.

(2.) Others called him a setter forth of strange gods, and thought he spoke with design to make himself considerable by that means. And if he had strange gods to set forth, he could not bring them to a better market than to Athens. He did not, as many did, directly set forth new gods, nor avowedly; but they thought he seemed to do so, because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection;

from his first coming among them he ever and anon harped upon these two strings, which are indeed the principal doctrines of christianity—Christ, and a future state; Christ our Way, and heaven our end; and though he did not call these *gods*, yet they thought he meant to make them so. *Τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὸν ἑνὰς αὐτῶν*, “Jesus they took for a new god, and *anastasis*, the resurrection, for a new goddess.” Thus they lost the benefit of the christian doctrine by dressing it up in a pagan dialect, as if believing in *Jesus*, and looking for the *resurrection*, were the worshipping of new demons.

3. The proposal they made to give him a free, full, fair, and public hearing, *v.* 19, 20. They had heard some broken pieces of his doctrine, and are willing to have a more perfect knowledge of it.

(1.) They took upon it as strange and surprising, and very different from the philosophy that had for many ages been taught and professed at Athens, “It is a *new doctrine*, which we do not understand the drift and design of. *Thou bringest certain strange things to our ears*, which we never heard of before, and know not what to make of now.” By this it should seem, that among all the learned books they had, they either had not, or heeded not, the books of *Moses and the prophets*, else the doctrine of Christ would not have been so perfectly new and strange to them. There was but one book in the world that was of divine inspiration, and that was the only book they were strangers to; which, if they would have given a due regard to it, would, in its very first page, have determined that great controversy among them about the origin of the universe.

(2.) They desire to know more of it, only because it was *new and strange*; “*May we know what this new doctrine is?* Or, is it (like the mysteries of the gods) to be kept as a profound secret? If it may be, *we would gladly know*, and desire thee to tell us, *what these things mean*, that we may be able to pass a judgment upon them.” This was a fair proposal; it was fit they should know what this doctrine was, before they embraced it; and they were so fair as not to condemn it till they had had some account of it.

(3.) The place *they brought him to*, in order to this public declaration of his doctrine; it was to *Areopagus*, the same word that is translated, (*v.* 22.) *Mars-hill*; it was the town-house, or guild-hall of their city, where the magistrates met upon public business, and the courts of justice were kept; and it was as the theatre in the university, or the schools, where learned men met to communicate their notions. The court of justice which sat here was famous for its equity, which drew appeals to it from all parts; if any denied a God, he was liable to the censure of this court; Diagoras was by them put to death, as a contemner of the gods; nor might any *new god* be admitted without their approbation; hither they brought Paul to be tried, not as a criminal, but as a candidate.

4. The general character of the people of that city given upon this occasion; (*v.* 21.) *All the Athenians*, that is, natives of the place, and strangers which sojourned there for their improvement, *spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing*; which comes in as the reason why they were inquisitive concerning Paul’s doctrine, not because it was *good*, but because it was *new*. It is a very sorry character which is here given of these people, yet many transcribe it. (1.) They were all for *conversation*. St. Paul exhorts his pupil to *give attendance to reading and meditation*, (1 Tim. 4. 13, 15.) but these people despised those old-fashioned ways of getting knowledge, and preferred that of *telling and hearing*. It is true, that good company is of great use to a man, and will polish one that has laid a good foundation in study;

but that knowledge will be very flashy and superficial, which is got by conversation only. (2.) They affected novelty; they were for *telling and hearing some new thing*; they were for new schemes and new notions in philosophy; new forms and plans of government in politics; and, in religion, for *new gods that came newly up*, (Deut. 32. 17.) new demons, new-fashioned images, and altars; (2 Kings 16. 10.) they were given to change. Demosthenes, an orator of their own, had charged this upon them long before in one of his philippics, that their common question in the markets, or wherever they met, was *ἡ τί λέγειται νῦν*—*if there was any news*. (3.) They meddled in other people’s business, and were inquisitive concerning that, and never minded their own. *Tattlers are always busy bodies*, 1 Tim. 5. 13. (4.) They spent their time in *nothing else*, and a very uncomfortable account they must needs have to make of their time, who thus spend it. Time is precious, and we are concerned to be good husbands of it, because eternity depends upon it, and it is hastening apace into eternity, but abundance of it is wasted in unprofitable converse. *To tell and hear the new occurrences of providence concerning the public, in our own or other nations, and concerning our neighbours and friends, is of good use now and then; but to set up for news-mongers, and to spend our time in nothing else*, is to lose that which is very precious for the gain of that which is worth little.

22. Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars-hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. 23. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. 24. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25. Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 27. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: 28. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. 29. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. 30. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31. Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

We have here St. Paul's sermon at Athens; divers sermons we have had, which the apostles preached to the Jews, or such Gentiles as had an acquaintance with and veneration for the Old Testament, and were worshippers of the true and living God; and all they had to do with them, was to open and allege that *Jesus is the Christ*; but here we have a sermon to heathens, that worshipped false gods, and were without the true God in the world, and to them the scope of their discourse was quite different from what it was to the other. In the former case their business was to lead their hearers by prophecies and miracles to the knowledge of the Redeemer, and faith in him; in the latter it was to lead them by the common works of providence to the knowledge of the Creator, and worship of him. One discourse of this kind we had before to the rude idolaters of Lystra that deified the apostles; (ch. 14. 15.) this recorded here, is to the more polite and refined idolaters at Athens, and an admirable discourse it is, and every way suited to his auditory, and the design he had upon them.

I. He lays down this as the scope of his discourse, that he aimed to bring them to the knowledge of the one only living and true God, as the sole and proper Object of their adoration; he is here obliged to lay the foundation, and to instruct them in the first principle of all religion, that there is a God, and that God is but one. When he preached against the gods they worshipped, he had no design to draw them to atheism, but to the service of the true Deity. Socrates, who had exposed the pagan idolatry, was indicted in this very court, and condemned, not only because he did not esteem those to be gods, whom the city esteemed to be so, but because he introduced new demons; and this was the charge against Paul. Now he tacitly owns the former part of the charge, but guards against the latter, by declaring that he does not introduce any new gods, but reduce them to the knowledge of one God, the Ancient of days. Now,

1. He shews them that they needed to be instructed herein; for they had lost the knowledge of the true God that made them, in the worship of false gods that they made; *Deos qui rogat ille facit—He who worships the gods, makes them. I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.* The crime he charges upon them, is, giving that glory to others which is due to God only; that they feared and worshipped demons, spirits that they supposed inhabited the images to which they directed their worship. "It is time for you to be told that there is but one God, who are multiplying deities above any of your neighbours, and mingle your idolatries with all your affairs. You are in all things too superstitious—*ὑπερσυνεσις*; you easily admit every thing that comes under shew of religion, but it is that which corrupts it more and more; I bring you that which will reform it." Their neighbours praised them for this as a pious people, but Paul condemns them for it. Yet it is observable how he mollifies the charge, does not aggravate it, to provoke them; he uses a word which among them was taken in a good sense; *You are every way more than ordinary religious*, so some read it; *you are very devout in your way*; or, if it be taken in an ill sense, it is mitigated; "You are, as it were, (εὖ) more superstitious than you need be;" and he says no more than what he himself perceived; *ἑώραξα—I see it, I observe it.* They charged Paul with setting forth new demons; "Nay," (says he,) "you have an abundance of demons already, I will not add to the number of them."

2. He shews them that they themselves had given a fair occasion for the declaring of this one true God to them, by setting up an altar, *To the unknown God*; which intimated an acknowledgment that

there was a God, which was yet to them an unknown God; and it is sad to think, that at Athens, a place which was supposed to have the monopoly of wisdom, the true God was an unknown God, the only God that was unknown. "Now you ought to bid Paul welcome, for this is the God whom he comes to make known to you, the God whom you implicitly complain that you are ignorant of." There, where we are sensible we are defective and come short, just there, the gospel takes us up, and carries us on. Various conjectures the learned have concerning this altar dedicated to the unknown God.

(1.) Some think the meaning is, *To the God whose honour it is to be unknown*, and that they intended the God of the Jews, whose name is ineffable, and whose nature is unsearchable. It is probable that they had heard from the Jews, and from the writings of the Old Testament, of the God of Israel, who had proved himself to be above all gods, but was a God hiding himself, Isa. 45. 15. The heathen called the Jews' God, *Deus incertus, incertum Mosi Numen—an uncertain God, the uncertain Deity of Moses*, and the God without name. Now this God, says Paul, this God, who cannot by searching be found out to perfection, I now declare unto you.

(2.) Others think the meaning is, *To the God whom it is our unhappiness not to know*; which intimates that they would think it their happiness to know him. Some tell us, that upon occasion of a plague that raged at Athens, when they had sacrificed to all their gods one after another for the staying of the plague, they were advised to let some sheep go where they pleased, and where they lay down, to build an altar, *τῷ προσκυνῶντι θεῷ—to the proper God, or the God to whom that affair of staying the pestilence did belong*; and, because they knew not how to call him, they inscribed it, *To the unknown God*. Others, from some of the best historians of Athens, tell us, they had many altars inscribed, *To the gods of Asia, Europe, and Africa; To the unknown God*: and some of the neighbouring countries used to swear by the God that was unknown at Athens; so Lucian.

Now observe how modestly Paul mentions this; that he might not be thought a spy, or one that had intruded himself, more than became a stranger, into the knowledge of their mysteries; he tells them that he observed it as he passed by, and saw their devotions, or their sacred things; it was public, and he could not forbear seeing it, and it was proper enough to make his remarks upon the religion of the place; and observe how prudently and ingeniously he takes rise from this to bring in his discourse of the true God; [1.] He tells them, that the God he preached to them, was one that they did already worship, and therefore he was not a setter-forth of new or strange gods; "As you have a dependence upon him, so he has had some kind of homage from you." [2.] He was one whom they ignorantly worshipped, which was a reproach to them who were famous all the world over for their knowledge. "Now," (says he,) "I come to take away that reproach, that you may worship him understandingly, whom now you worship ignorantly; and it cannot but be acceptable to have your blind devotion turned into a reasonable service, that you may not worship ye know not what."

II. He confirms his doctrine of one living and true God, by his works of creation and providence; "The God whom I declare unto you to be the sole Object of your devotion, and call you to the worship of, is the God that made the world, and governs it; and by the visible proofs of these, you may be led to this invisible Being, and be convinced of his eternal power and Godhead." The Gentiles in general, and the Athenians particularly, in their devotions were governed, not by their philosophers, many of

whom spake clearly and excellently well of one supreme *Numen*, and of his infinite perfections, and universal agency and dominion; (witness the writings of Plato, and long after of Cicero;) but by their poets and their idle fictions. Homer's works were the Bible of the pagan theology, or demonology rather, not Plato's; and the philosophers tamely submitted to this, rested in their speculations, disputed them among themselves, and taught them their scholars, but never made the use they ought to have made of them in opposition to idolatry; so little certainty were they at concerning them, and so little impression did they make upon them! Nay, they ran themselves into the superstition of their country, and thought they ought to do so. *Eamus ad communem errorem—Let us embrace the common error.*

Now Paul here sets himself, in the first place, to reform the philosophy of the Athenians, (he corrects the mistakes of that,) and to give them right notions of the *one only living and true God*, and then to carry the matter further than they ever attempted, for the reforming of their worship, and the bringing them off from their polytheism and idolatry. Observe what glorious things Paul here says of that God whom he served, and would have them to serve:

1. He is the *God that made the world, and all things therein; the Father almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.* This was admitted by many of the philosophers; but those of Aristotle's school denied it, and maintained, "that the world was from eternity, and every thing always was what now it is." Those of the school of Epicurus fancied, "that the world was made by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, which, having been in a perpetual motion, at length accidentally jumped into this frame." Against both these, Paul here maintains, *that God, by the operations of an infinite power, according to the contrivance of an infinite wisdom, in the beginning of time made the world and all things therein; the rise of which was owing, not as they fancied, to an eternal matter, but to an eternal mind.*

2. He is therefore *Lord of heaven and earth*, that is, he is the rightful Owner, Proprietor, and Possessor, of all the beings, powers, and riches of the upper and lower world, material and immaterial, visible and invisible. This follows from his making of heaven and earth. If he created all, without doubt he has the disposing of all; and where he gives being, has an indisputable right to give law.

3. He is, in a particular manner, *the Creator of men, of all men, (v. 26.) He made of one blood all nations of men;* he made the first man, he makes every man, is the Former of every man's body, and the Father of every man's spirit; he has *made the nations of men*, not only all men in the nations, but as nations in their political capacity; he is their Founder, and disposed them into communities for their mutual preservation and benefit; he made them *all of one blood*, of one and the same nature, *he fashions their hearts alike;* descended from one and the same common ancestor, in Adam they are all akin, so they are in Noah, that hereby they might be engaged in mutual affection and assistance, as fellow-creatures and brethren. *Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?* Mal. 2. 10. *He hath made them for to dwell on all the face of the earth*, which, as a bountiful Benefactor, he has given, with all its fulness, to the children of men. He made them not to live in one place, but to be dispersed over all the earth; one nation therefore ought not to look with contempt upon another, as the Greeks did upon all other nations; for those on all the face of the earth are of the same blood.

The Athenians boasted that they sprung out of their own earth, were *aborigines*, and nothing akin by

blood to any other nation; which proud conceit of themselves the apostles here takes down.

4. That he is the great Benefactor of the whole creation; (v. 25.) *He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;* he not only *breathed into the first man the breath of life*, but still breathes it into every man; he gave us these souls, he formed the spirit of man within him; he not only gave us our life and breath, when he brought us into being, but he is continually giving it us; his providence is a continued creation; he *holds our souls in life*; every moment *our breath goes forth*, but he graciously gives it us again the next moment; it is not only *his air that we breathe in, but it is in his hand that our breath is*, Dan. 5. 23. *He gives to all the children of men their life and breath;* for as the meanest of the children of men live upon him, and receive from him, so the greatest, the wisest philosophers and mightiest potentates, cannot live without him; *he gives to all*, not only to all the children of men, but to the inferior creatures, to all animals, *every thing wherein is the breath of life*, (Gen. 6. 17.) they have their life and breath from him; and where he gives life and breath, he gives all things, all other things needful for the support of life. *The earth is full of his goodness*, Ps. 104. 24, 27.

5. That he is the sovereign Disposer of all the affairs of the children of men, according to the counsel of his will; (v. 26.) *He hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.* See here, (1.) The sovereignty of God's disposal concerning us; he *hath determined* every event, *space*, the matter is fixed; the disposals of Providence are incontestable, and must not be disputed; unchangeable, and cannot be altered. (2.) The wisdom of his disposals; he *hath determined* what was before *appointed*; the determinations of the Eternal Mind are not sudden resolves, but the counterparts of an eternal counsel, the copies of divine decrees. *He performeth the thing that is appointed for me*, Job 23. 14. *Whatever comes forth from God, was before all worlds hid in God.* (3.) The things about which his providence is conversant; these are time and place: the times and places of our living in this world, are determined and appointed by the God that made us. [1.] *He has determined the times* that are concerning us; times to us seem changeable, but God has fixed them. *Our times are in his hand*, to lengthen or shorten, imbitter or sweeten, as he pleases. He has appointed and determined the time of our coming into the world, and the time of our continuance in the world; *our time to be born, and our time to die*, (Eccl. 3. 1, 2.) and all that little that lies between them; the time of all our concerns in this world, whether they be prosperous times or calamitous times, it is he that has determined them; and on him we must depend, with reference to the times that are yet before us. [2.] He has also *determined and appointed the bounds of our habitation*; he that *appointed the earth to be a habitation for the children of men*, has appointed to the children of men a distinction of habitations upon the earth, has instituted such a thing as *property*, to which he has set bounds to keep us from trespassing one upon another. The particular *habitations* in which our lot is cast, the place of our nativity and of our settlement, are of God's determining and appointing; which is a reason why we should accommodate ourselves to the habitations we are in, and make the best of that which is.

6. That he is not far from every one of us, v. 27. He is every where present, not only is at *our right hand*, but has *possessed our ruins*, (Ps. 139. 13.) has his eye upon us at all times, and knows us better than we know ourselves. Idolaters made images of God, that they might have him with them in those images, which the apostle here shews the absurdity

of; for he is an infinite Spirit, *that is not far from any of us*, and never the nearer, but in one sense the further off from us, for our pretending to realize or presentiate him to ourselves by any image. He is *nigh unto us*, both to receive the homage we render him, and to give the mercies we ask of him, wherever we are; though near no altar, image, or temple. The Lord of all, as *he is rich*, (Rom. 10. 12.) *so he is nigh* (Deut. 4. 7.) *to all that call upon him*. He that wills us to *pray every where*, assures us, that he is *no where far from us*; whatever country, nation, or profession, we are of, whatever our rank and condition in the world are, be we in a palace or in a cottage, in a crowd or in a corner, in a city or in a desert, in the depths of the sea or afar off upon the sea, this is certain, *God is not far from every one of us*.

7. That in him we live, and move, and have our being, v. 28. We have a necessary and constant dependence upon his providence, as the streams have upon the spring, and the beams upon the sun.

(1.) *In him we live*; that is, the continuance of our lives is owing to him and the constant influence of his providence; *he is our Life, and the length of our days*. It is not only owing to his patience and pity that our forfeited lives are not cut off, but it is owing to his power, and goodness, and fatherly care, that our frail lives are prolonged; there needs not a positive act of his wrath to destroy us; if he suspend the positive acts of his goodness, we die of ourselves. (2.) *In him we move*; it is by the uninterrupted concurrence of his providence that our souls move themselves in their outgoings and operations, that our thoughts run to and fro about a thousand subjects, and our affections run out toward their proper objects. It is likewise by him that our souls move our bodies; we cannot stir a hand, or a foot, or a tongue, but by him, who, as he is the *first Cause*, so he is the *first Mover*. (3.) *In him we have our being*; not only from him we had it at first, but in him we have it still; to his continued care and goodness we owe it, not only that we have a being, and are not sunk into non-entity, but that we have our being, have this *being*, were and still are of such a noble rank of *beings*, capable of knowing and enjoying God; and are not thrust into the meanness of brutes, or the misery of devils.

8. That upon the whole matter, we are *God's offspring*; he is our *Father that begat us*, (Deut. 32. 6, 18.) and he hath *nourished and brought us up as children*, Isa. 1. 2. The confession of an adversary in such a case, is always looked upon to be of use as *argumentum ad hominem*—an argument to the man, and therefore the apostle here quotes a saying of one of the Greek poets, Aratus, a native of Cilicia, Paul's countryman, who, in his *Phænomena*, in the beginning of his book, speaking of the heathen *Jupiter*, that is, in the poetical dialect, the supreme God, says this of him, τὸ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἰσμεν—for we are also his offspring. And he might have quoted other poets to the purpose of what he was speaking, that in God we live and move;

Spiritus intus alit, totamque infusa per artus
Mens agitat molem.

This active mind, infus'd through all the space,
Unites and mingles with the mighty mass.

So Virgil, *Æneid* vi.

Est Deus in nobis, agitante calescimus illo.
'Tis the Divinity that warms our hearts.

So Ovid, *Fastorum* vi.

Jupiter est quodcumque vides,
Quocumque moveris.

Where'er you look, where'er you rove,
The spacious scene is full of Jove.

So Lucan, *lib. ii.*

But he chooses this of Aratus, as having much in a little. By this it appears not only that Paul was

himself a scholar, but that human learning is both ornamental and serviceable to a gospel minister, especially for the convincing of those that are without; for it enables them to beat them at their own weapons, and to cut off Goliath's head with his own sword. How can the adversaries of truth be beaten out of their strong-holds by those that do not know them? It may likewise shame God's professing people, who forget their relation to God, and walk contrary to it, that a heathen poet could say of God, *We are his offspring*, formed by him, formed for him, more the care of his providence than ever any children were the care of their parents; and therefore are obliged to obey his commands, and acquiesce in his disposals, and to be unto him for a name and a praise; since in him and upon him we live, we ought to live to him; since in him we move, we ought to move toward him; and since in him we have our being, and from him we receive all the supports and comforts of our being, we ought to consecrate our being to him, and to apply ourselves to him for a new being, a better being, an eternal well-being.

III. From all these great truths concerning God, he infers the absurdity of their idolatry, as the prophets of old had done. If this be so,

1. Then God cannot be represented by an image. If we are the *offspring of God*, as we are spirits in flesh, then certainly he who is the *Father of our spirits*, (and they are the principal part of us, and that part of us by which we are denominated *God's offspring*;) is himself a *Spirit*, and we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device, v. 29. We wrong God, and put an affront upon him, if we think so. God honoured man in making his soul after his likeness; but man dishonours God, if he makes him after the likeness of his body. The Godhead is spiritual, infinite, immaterial, and incomprehensible, and therefore it is a very false and unjust conception which an image gives us of God, be the matter ever so rich, gold or silver; be the shape ever so curious, and be it ever so well graven by art and man's device, its countenance, posture, or dress, ever so significant, it is a *teacher of lies*.

2. Then he dwells not in temples made with hands, v. 24. He is not invited to any temple men can build for him, nor confined to any. A temple brings him never the nearer to us, nor keeps him ever the longer among us. A temple is convenient for us to come together in to worship God; but God needs not any place of rest or residence, or the magnificence and splendour of any structure, to add to the glory of his appearance. A pious, upright heart, a temple not made with hands, but by the *Spirit of God*, is that which he dwells in, and delights to dwell in. See 1 Kings 8. 27. Isa. 66. 1, 2.

3. Then he is not worshipped, *συνεβέναι*, he is not served, or ministered unto, with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, v. 25. He that made all, and maintains all, cannot be benefited by any of our services, nor needs them. If we receive and derive all from him, he is all-sufficient, and therefore cannot but be self-sufficient, and independent. What need can God have of our services, or what benefit can he have by them, when he has all perfection in himself, and we have nothing that is good but what we have from him? The philosophers, indeed, were sensible of this truth, that God has no need of us or our services; but the vulgar heathen built temples, and offered sacrifices to their gods, with an opinion that they needed houses and food. See Job 35. 5—8. Ps. 50. 8, &c.

4. Then it concerns us all to inquire after God: (v. 27.) *That they should seek the Lord*, that is, fear and worship him in a right manner. Therefore God has kept the children of men in a constant dependence upon him for life, and all the comforts of

life, that he might keep them under constant obligations to him. We have plain indications of God's presence among us, his presidency over us, the care of his providence concerning us, and his bounty to us, that we might be put upon inquiring, *Where is God our Maker, who giveth songs in the night; who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?* Job 35. 10, 11. Nothing, one would think, should be more powerful with us to convince us that there is a God, and to engage us to seek his honour and glory in our services, and to seek our happiness in his favour and love, than the consideration of our own nature, especially the noble powers and faculties of our own souls. If we reflect upon those, and contemplate these, we may perceive both our relation and obligation to a God above us. Yet so dark is this discovery, in comparison with that by divine revelation, and so unapt are we to receive it, that they who have no other, could but *haply feel after God, and find him*. (1.) It was very uncertain whether they could by this searching *find out God*; it is but a peradventure, *if haply they might*. (2.) If they did find out something of God, yet it was but some confused notions of him; they did but *feel after* him, as men in the dark, or blind men, who lay hold on a thing that comes in their way, but know not whether it be that which they are in quest of or no. It is a very confused notion which this poet of their's has of the relation between God and man, and very general, that *we are his offspring*: as was also that of their philosophers. Pythagoras said, *Θείον γένος ἐστὶ βροτῶν*—*Men have a sort of a divine nature*. And Heraclitus (*apud Lucian*) being asked, *What men are?* answered, *Θεοὶ θνητοί*—*Mortal gods*; and, *What are the gods?* answered, *ἀθάνατοι ἀβιωτοί*—*Immortal men*. And Pindar saith, *Nemean, Ode 6. Ἐν ἁνθρώποις ἐν θεῶν γένος*—*God and man are near a-kin*. It is true, that by the knowledge of ourselves, we may be led to the knowledge of God, but it is a very confused knowledge. This is but *feeling after* him. We have therefore reason to be thankful, that by the gospel of Christ we have notices given us of God much clearer than we could have by the light of nature; we do not now *feel after* him, but *with open face behold, as in a glass, the glory of God*.

IV. He proceeds to call them all to repent of their idolatries, and to turn from them, *v. 30, 31*. This is the practical part of Paul's sermon before the university; having declared God to them, (*v. 23*.) from thence he properly presses upon them *repentance toward God*; and would have taught them also *faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*, if they would have had the patience to hear him. Having shewed them the absurdity of their worshipping other gods, he persuades them to go on no longer in that foolish way of worship, but to return from it to the living and true God. Observe,

1. The conduct of God toward the Gentile world before the gospel came among them; *The times of this ignorance God winked at*. (1.) They were times of great ignorance; human learning flourished more than ever in the Gentile world just before Christ's time; but in the things of God they were grossly ignorant. Those are ignorant indeed, who either know not God, or worship him *ignorantly*; idolatry was owing to ignorance. (2.) These times of ignorance *God winked at*. Understand it, [1.] As an act of divine justice. God *despised or neglected* these times of ignorance, and did not send them his gospel, as now he does. It was very provoking to him to see his glory thus given to another; and he *detested and hated* these times. So some take it. Or rather, [2.] As an act of divine patience and forbearance; he winked at these times; he did not restrain them from these idolatries by sending prophets to them, as he did to Israel; he did

not punish them in their idolatries, as he did Israel; but gave them the gifts of his providence, *ch. 14. 16, 17. These things thou hast done, and I kept silence*, Ps. 50. 21. He did not give them such calls and motives to repentance as he does now; he *let them alone*; because they did not improve the light they had, but were willingly ignorant, he did not send them greater lights. Or, he was not quick and severe with them, but was *long-suffering* toward them, because they did it ignorantly, *1 Tim. 1. 13*.

2. The charge God gave to the Gentile world by the gospel, which he now sent among them; *He now commandeth all men every where to repent*; to change their mind and their way; to be ashamed of their folly, and to act more wisely; to *break off* the worship of idols, and bind themselves to the worship of the true God. Nay, it is to turn with sorrow and shame *from every sin*, and with cheerfulness and resolution *to every duty*. (1.) This is God's command; it had been a great favour if he had only told us, that there was room left for repentance, and we might be admitted to it; but he goes farther, he interposes his own authority for our good, and has made that our duty, which is our privilege. (2.) It is his command *to all men, every where*; to men, and not to angels, that need it not; to men, and not to devils, that are excluded the benefit of it; to *all men in all places*; all men have made work for repentance, and have cause enough to repent, and all men are invited to repent, and shall have the benefit of it. The apostles are commissioned to preach this every where. The prophets were sent to command the Jews to repent; but the apostles were sent to preach *repentance and remission of sins to all nations*. (3.) Now in gospel-times it is more earnestly commanded, because more encouraged than it had been formerly; now the way of remission is more opened than it had been, and the promise more fully confirmed; and therefore now he expects we should *all repent*. "*Now repent; now at length, now in time, repent*; for you have too long gone on in sin. Now in time repent, for it will be too late shortly."

3. The great reason to enforce this command, taken from the judgment to come. God commands us to repent, *because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness*, (*v. 31*.) and has now under the gospel made a clearer discovery of a state of retribution in the other world than ever before. Observe,

(1.) *The God that made the world, will judge it*; that gave the children of men their being and faculties, will call them to an account for the use they have made of them, and recompense them accordingly; whether the body served the soul in serving God, or the soul was a drudge to the body in making provision for the flesh; and *every man shall receive according to the things done in the body*, *2 Cor. 5. 10*. The God that now *governs* the world, will *judge* it, will reward the faithful friends of his government, and punish the rebels.

(2.) *There is a day appointed* for this general review of all that men have done in time, and a final determination of their state for eternity. The day is *fixed* in the counsel of God, and cannot be altered; but it is *hid* there, and cannot be known. A day of *decision*, a day of *recompense*; a day that will put a final period to all the days of time.

(3.) *The world will be judged in righteousness*; for God is not *unrighteous*, who *taketh vengeance*, far be it *from him that he should do iniquity*. His knowledge of all men's characters and actions is infallibly true, and therefore his sentence upon them incontestably just. And as there will be no appeal from it, so there will be no exception against it.

(4.) God will judge the world *by that man whom he hath ordained*, who can be no other than *the Lord Jesus*, to whom *all judgment is committed*. By him

God made the world, by him he redeemed it, by him he governs it, and by him he will judge it.

(5.) God's raising Christ from the dead is the great proof of his being appointed and ordained the Judge of quick and dead. His doing him that honour, evidenced his designing him this honour. His raising him from the dead, was the beginning of his exaltation, his judging the world will be the perfection of it; and he that begins, will make an end. God hath *given assurance unto all men*, sufficient ground for their faith to build upon, both that there is a judgment to come, and that Christ will be their Judge; the matter is not left doubtful, but is of unquestionable certainty. Let all his enemies be assured of it, and tremble before him; let all his friends be assured of it, and triumph in him.

(6.) The consideration of the judgment *to come*, and of the great hand Christ will have in that judgment, should engage us all to repent of our sins, and turn from them to God. This is the only way to make the Judge our Friend in that day, which will be a terrible day to all that live and die impenitent; but true penitents will then *lift up their heads with joy, knowing that their redemption draws nigh*.

32. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. 33. So Paul departed from among them. 34. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

We have here a short account of the issue of Paul's preaching at Athens.

I. Few were the better: the gospel had as little success at Athens as any where; for the pride of the philosophers there, as of the Pharisees at Jerusalem, prejudiced them against the gospel of Christ.

1. Some ridiculed Paul and his preaching; they heard him patiently till he came to speak of the *resurrection of the dead*, (v. 32.) and then some of them began to *hiss* him, they *mocked*; what he had said before, was somewhat like what they had sometimes heard in their own schools; and some notion they had of a resurrection, as it signifies a *future state*; but if he speak of a *resurrection of the dead*, though it be of the resurrection of Christ himself, it is altogether incredible to them, and they cannot bear so much as to hear of it, as being contrary to a principle of their philosophy. *A privatione ad habitum non datur regressus—Life, when once lost, is irrecoverable*. They had deified their heroes after their death; but they never thought of their being raised from the dead, and therefore they could by no means reconcile themselves to this doctrine of Christ's being raised from the dead, how can this be? This great doctrine, which is the saints' *joy*, is their *jest*; when it was but mentioned to them, they *mocked*, and made a laughing matter of it. We are not to think it strange, if sacred truths of the greatest certainty and importance are made the scorn of profane wits.

2. Others were willing to take time to consider of it; they said, *We will hear thee again of this matter*. They would not at present comply with what Paul said, or oppose it; but *we will hear thee again of this matter of the resurrection from the dead*. It should seem, they overlooked that which was plain and uncontroverted, and shifted off the application and the improvement of that, by starting objections against that which was disputable, and would admit a debate. Thus many lose the benefit of the practical doctrine of christianity, by wading beyond their depth into controversy; or rather, by objecting

against that which has some difficulty in it; whereas, if any man were disposed and determined to *do the will of God*, as far as it is discovered to him, he should *know of the doctrine of Christ*, that it is *of God, and not of man*, John 7. 17. Those that would not yield to the present convictions of the word, thought to get clear of them, as Felix did, by putting them off to another opportunity; they will hear of it again some time or other, but they know not when; and thus the devil cozens them of *all* their time, by cozening them of the *present* time.

3. Paul thereupon left them for the present to consider of it; (v. 33.) *He departed from among them* as seeing little likelihood of doing any good with them at this time; but, it is likely, with a promise to those that were willing to hear him again, that he would meet them whenever they pleased.

II. Yet there were some that were wrought upon, v. 34. If some would not, others would.

1. There were *certain men that clave to him, and believed*; when he departed from among them, they would not part with him so; wherever he went, they would follow him, with a resolution to adhere to the doctrine he preached, which they believed.

2. Two are particularly named; one was an eminent man, *Dionysius the Areopagite*; one of that high court or great council that sat in Areopagus, or Mars-hill; a judge, a senator, one of those before whom Paul was summoned to appear; his judge becomes his convert. The accounts which the ancients give of this Dionysius, is, that he was bred at Athens, had studied astrology in Egypt, where he took notice of the miraculous eclipse at our Saviour's passion, that, returning to Athens, he became a senator; disputed with Paul, and was by him converted from his error and idolatry; and, being by him thoroughly instructed, was made the first bishop of Athens. So Eusebius, *lib. 5. cap. 4. lib. 4. cap. 22*. The *woman named Damaris*, was, as some think, the wife of Dionysius; but rather, some other person of quality; and though there was not so great a harvest gathered in at Athens as there was at some other places, yet these few being wrought upon there, Paul had no reason to say, he had *laboured in vain*.

CHAP. XVIII.

In this chapter, we have, I. Paul's coming to Corinth, his private converse with Aquila and Priscilla, and his public reasonings with the Jews, from whom, when they rejected him, he turned to the Gentiles, v. 1..6. II. The great success of his ministry there, and the encouragement Christ gave him in a vision to continue his labours there, in hopes of further success, v. 7..11. III. The molestations which after some time he met with there from the Jews, which he got pretty well through by the coldness of Gallio, the Roman governor, in the cause, v. 12..17. IV. The progress Paul made through many countries, after he had continued long at Corinth, for the edifying and watering of the churches which he had founded and planted, in which circuit he made a short visit to Jerusalem, v. 18..23. V. An account of Apollo's improvement in knowledge, and of his usefulness in the church, v. 24..28.

1. **A**FTER these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth: 2. And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome;) and came unto them. 3. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent-makers. 4. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the

Greeks. 5. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus was Christ*. 6. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook *his* raiment, and said unto them, Your blood *be* upon your own heads; *I am clean*: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

We do not find that Paul was much persecuted at Athens, nor that he was driven from thence by any ill usage, as he was from those places where the Jews had or could make any interest; but his reception at Athens being cold, and little prospect of doing good there, he departed from Athens, leaving the care of those there who believed, with Dionysius; and from thence he came to Corinth, where he was now instrumental in planting a church that became upon many accounts considerable. Corinth was the chief city of Achaia, now a province of the empire, a rich and splendid city; *Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum—It is not permitted every man to see Corinth*; the country thereabouts at this day is called the *Morea*. Now here we have,

I. Paul working for his living, v. 2, 3.

1. Though he was bred a scholar, yet he was master of a handicraft trade. He was a tent-maker, an upholsterer; he made tents for the use of soldiers and shepherds, of cloth or stuff, or (as some say, tents were then generally made) of leather or skins, as the outer covering of the tabernacle. Hence to live in tents was to live *sub pellibus—under skins*. Dr. Lightfoot shews, that it was the custom of the Jews to bring up their children to some trade, yea, though they gave them learning or estates. Rabbi Judah says, "He that teaches not his son a trade, is as if he taught him to be a thief." And another saith, "He that has a trade in his hand, is as a vineyard that is fenced." An honest trade, by which a man may get his bread, is not to be looked upon by any with contempt. Paul, though a Pharisee, and bred up at the feet of Gamaliel, yet, having in his youth learned to make tents, did not by disuse lose the art.

2. Though he was entitled to a maintenance from the churches he had planted, and from the people he preached to, yet he worked at his calling to get bread; which is more to his praise who did not ask for supplies, than to their's who did not supply him unasked, knowing what straits he was reduced to. See how humble Paul was, and wonder that so great a man could stoop so low; but he had learned condescension of his Master, who came not to be ministered to, but to minister. See how industrious he was, and how willing to take pains. He that had so much excellent work to do with his *mind*, yet, when there was occasion, did not think it below him to work with his *hands*. Even those that are *redeemed from the curse of the law*, are not exempt from that sentence, *In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread*. See how careful Paul was to recommend his ministry, and to prevent prejudices against it, even the most unjust and unreasonable; he *therefore* maintained himself with his own labour, that he might not make the gospel of Christ *burthensome*, 2 Cor. 11. 7, &c. 2 Thess. 3. 8, 9.

3. Though we may suppose he was master of his trade, yet he did not disdain to work journey-work; he *wrought with Aquila and Priscilla*, who were of *that calling*; so that he got no more than day-wages; a bare subsistence. Poor tradesmen must be thankful if their callings bring them in a maintenance for themselves and their families, though they cannot

do as the rich merchants that raise estates by their callings.

4. Though he was himself a great apostle, yet he chose to work with Aquila and Priscilla, because he found them to be very intelligent in the things of God, as appears afterward, (v. 26.) and he owns that they had been *his helpers in Christ Jesus*, Rom. 16. 3. This is an example to those who are going to service, to seek for those services in which they may have the best help for their souls. Choose to work with those that are likely to be *helpers in Christ Jesus*. It is good to be in company, and to have conversation with those that will further us in the knowledge of Christ, and to put ourselves under the influence of such as are resolved that they will *serve the Lord*.

Concerning this Aquila we are here told, (1.) That he was a Jew, but born in Pontus, v. 2. Many of the *Jews of the dispersion* were seated in that country, as appears 1 Pet. 1. 1. (2.) That he was lately come from Italy to Corinth; it seems, he often changed his habitation; this is not the world we can propose ourselves a settlement in. (3.) That the reason of his leaving Italy, was, because by a late edict of the emperor Claudius Caesar all Jews were banished from Rome; for the Jews were generally hated, and every occasion was taken to put hardship and disgrace upon them; God's heritage was as a *speckled bird, the birds round about were against her*, Jer. 12. 9. Aquila, though a Christian, was banished because he had been a Jew; and the Gentiles had such confused notions of the thing, that they could not distinguish between a Jew and a Christian. Suetonius, in the Life of Claudius, speaks of this decree in the ninth year of his reign, and says, The reason was, because the Jews were a *turbulent people—assiduo tumultuantes*; and that it was *impulsore Christo—upon the account of Christ*; some zealous for him, others bitter against him, which occasioned great heats, such as gave umbrage to the government, and provoked the emperor, who was a timorous jealous man, to order them all to be gone. If Jews persecute Christians, it is not strange if heathens persecute them both.

II. We have here Paul preaching to the Jews, and dealing with them to bring them to the faith of Christ; both the native *Jews and the Greeks*, that is, those that were more or less proselyted to the Jewish religion, and frequented their meetings.

1. He *reasoned with them in the synagogue publicly every sabbath*. See in what way the apostles propagated the gospel, not by force and violence, by fire and sword, not by demanding an implicit consent, but by fair arguing; they drew *with the cords of a man*; gave a reason for what they said, and gave a liberty to object against it, having satisfactory answers ready. God invites us to *come and reason with him*, (Isa. 1. 18.) and challenges sinners to *produce their cause, and bring forth their strong reasons*, Isa. 41. 21. Paul was a rational as well as scriptural preacher.

2. He *persuaded them—πειθίζε*; it denotes, (1.) The urgency of his preaching; he did not only dispute argumentatively with them, but he followed his arguments with affectionate persuasions, beseeching of them for God's sake, for their own souls' sake, for their children's sake, not to refuse the offer of salvation made them. Or, (2.) The good effect of his preaching; he persuaded them, that is, he prevailed with them; so some understand it. *In sententiam suam adducebat—He brought them over to his own opinion*. Some of them were convinced by his reasonings, and yielded to Christ.

3. He was yet more earnest in this matter when his fellow-labourers, his seconds, came up with him; (v. 5.) *When Silas and Timothy were come from Macedonia*, and had brought him good tidings from

the churches there, and were ready to assist him here, and strengthened his hands, then Paul was more than before *pressed in spirit*, which made him more than ever pressing in his preaching. He was grieved for the obstinacy and infidelity of his countrymen the Jews, was more intent than ever upon their conversion, and the *love of Christ constrained him* to it; (2 Cor. 5. 14.) it is the word that is used here, it *pressed him in spirit* to it. And being thus pressed, he *testified to the Jews* with all possible solemnity and seriousness, as that which he was perfectly well assured of himself, and attested to them as a *faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation*, that *Jesus is the Christ*, the Messiah promised to the fathers, and expected by them.

III. We have him here abandoning the unbelieving Jews, and turning from them to the Gentiles, as he had done in other places, v. 6.

1. Many of the Jews, and indeed the most of them, persisted in their contradiction to the gospel of Christ, and would not yield to the strongest reasonings, or the most winning persuasions; they *opposed themselves and blasphemed*; they *set themselves in battle array* (so the word signifies) against the gospel; they joined hand in hand to stop the progress of it. They resolved they would not believe it themselves, and would do all they could to keep others from believing it; they could not argue against it, but what was wanting in reason they made up in ill language; they *blasphemed*, spake reproachfully of Christ, and in him of God himself, as Rev. 13. 5, 6. To justify their infidelity, they broke out into downright blasphemy.

2. Paul hereupon declared himself discharged from them, and left them to perish in their unbelief. He that was *pressed in spirit to testify to them*, (v. 5.) when they opposed that testimony, and persisted in their opposition, was *pressed in spirit to testify against them*; (v. 3.) and his zeal herein also he shewed by a sign, he *shook his raiment*, shaking off the dust of it, (as before they *shook off the dust of their feet*, ch. 13. 51.) for a testimony against them. Thus he cleared himself from them, but threatened the judgments of God against them; as Pilate by washing his hands signified the devolving of the guilt of Christ's blood from himself upon the Jews, so Paul by shaking his raiment signified what he said, if possible to affect them with it. (1.) He had done his part, and *was clean* from the blood of their souls; he had, like a faithful watchman, given them warning, and thereby had *delivered his soul*, though he could not prevail to deliver theirs; he had tried all methods to work upon them, but all in vain, so that if they perish in their unbelief, their blood is not to be required at his hands; here and ch. 20. 26. he plainly refers to Ezek. 33. 8, 9. It is very comfortable to a minister to have the testimony of his conscience for him, that he has faithfully discharged his trust by warning sinners. (2.) They would certainly perish if they persisted in their unbelief, and the blame would lie *wholly upon themselves*; "*Your blood be upon your own heads*, you will be your own destroyers, your nation will be ruined in this world, and particular persons will be ruined in the other world, and *you alone shall bear it*." If any thing would frighten them at last into a compliance with the gospel, surely this would.

3. Having given them over, yet he does not give over his work; though Israel be not gathered, Christ and his gospel shall be glorious; *From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles*: and the Jews cannot complain, for they had the first offer, and a fair one, made to them. The guests that were first invited will not come, and the provision must not be lost, guests must be had therefore *from the highways and the hedges*. "*We would have gathered the Jews*, (Matt. 23. 37.) would have *healed them*, (Jer. 51. 9.)

and they *would not*; but Christ must not be a Head without a body, nor a Foundation without a building, and therefore if they will not, we must try whether others will." Thus the *fall and diminishing of the Jews* were the riches of the Gentiles; and Paul said this to their faces, not only because it was what he could justify, but to *provoke them to jealousy*, Rom. 11. 12, 14.

7. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain *man's* house, named Justus, *one* that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. 9. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10. For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. 11. And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Here we are told,

I. That Paul changed his quarters. Christ directed his disciples, when he sent them forth, not to *go from house to house*; (Luke 10. 7.) but there might be occasion to do it, as Paul did here. He departed out of the synagogue, being driven out by the perverseness of the unbelieving Jews, and he *entered into a certain man's house, named Justus*, v. 7. It should seem, he went to this man's house, not to lodge, for he continued with Aquila and Priscilla, but to preach. When the Jews would not let him go on peaceably with his work in their meeting, this honest man opened his doors to him, and told him, he should be welcome to preach there; and Paul accepted the motion; it was not the first time that God's ark had taken up its lodging in a private house. When Paul could not have liberty to preach in the synagogue, he preached in a house, without any disparagement to his doctrine. But observe the account of this man and his house.

1. The man was next door to a Jew; he was one that *worshipped God*; he was not an idolater, though he was a Gentile, but was a worshipper of the God of Israel, and him only, as Cornelius: that Paul might give the less offence to the Jews, though he had abandoned them, he set up his meeting in that man's house. Even *then* when he was under a necessity of breaking off from them to turn to the Gentiles, yet he would study to oblige them.

2. The house was next door to the *synagogue*, it *joined close to it*; which some perhaps might interpret as done with design to draw people from the synagogue to the meeting; but I rather think it was done in *charity*, to shew that he would come as near them as he could, and was ready to return to them if they were but willing to receive his message, and would not contradict and blaspheme as they had done.

II. That Paul saw the good fruit of his labours presently, both among Jews and Gentiles.

1. *Crispus* a Jew, an eminent one, the *chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord Jesus, with all his house*, v. 8. It was for the honour of the gospel, that there were some rulers, and persons of the first rank both in church and state, that embraced it. This would leave the Jews inexcusable, that the ruler of their synagogue, who may be supposed to have excelled the rest in knowledge of the scriptures and zeal for their religion, believed the gospel,

and yet they opposed and blasphemed it. Not only he, but *his house*, believed, and, probably, were baptized with him by Paul, 1 Cor. 1. 14.

2. Many of the Corinthians, who were Gentiles, (and some of them persons of an ill character, as appears, 1 Cor. 6. 11. *such were some of you*,) *hearing, believed, and were baptized*. First, they heard, for *faith comes by hearing*. Some perhaps came to hear Paul, under some convictions of conscience, that the way they were in was not right; but it is probable that the most came only for curiosity, because it was a *new doctrine* that was preached; but hearing, *they believed*, by the power of God working upon them; and *believing*, they were *baptized*, and so fixed for Christ, took upon them the profession of christianity, and became entitled to the privileges of christians.

III. That Paul was encouraged by a vision to go on with his work at Corinth; (v. 9.) *The Lord Jesus spake to Paul in the night by a vision*; when he was musing on his work, *communing with his own heart upon his bed*, and considering whether he should continue here or no, what method he should take here, and what probability there was of doing good, then Christ appeared very seasonably to him, and in the multitude of his thoughts within him delighted his soul with divine consolations.

1. He renewed his commission and charge to preach the gospel; "*Be not afraid of the Jews*; though they are very outrageous, and perhaps the more enraged by the conversion of the chief ruler of their synagogue; be not afraid of the magistrates of the city, for they have no power against thee but what is given them from above. It is the cause of heaven thou art pleading, do it boldly. *Be not afraid of their words, nor dismayed at their looks*; but *speak, and hold not thy peace*; let slip no opportunity of speaking to them, *cry aloud, spare not*; do not hold thy peace from speaking for fear of them, nor hold thy peace in speaking;" (if I may so say;) "do not speak shyly and with caution, but plainly and fully and with courage; speak out, use all the liberty of spirit that becomes an ambassador for Christ."

2. He assured him of his presence with him, which was sufficient to animate him, and put life and spirit into him; "*Be not afraid, for I am with thee*, to protect thee, and bear thee out, and to deliver thee from all thy fears: *speak, and hold not thy peace*; for *I am with thee*, to own what thou sayest, to work with thee, and to confirm the word by signs following." The same promise that ratified the general commission, (Matt. 28. 19, 20.) *Lo, I am with you always*, is here repeated. They that have Christ with them, need not to fear, and ought not to shrink.

3. He gave him a warrant of protection to save him harmless; "*No man shall set on thee to hurt thee*; thou shalt be delivered out of the hands of wicked and unreasonable men, and shalt not be driven hence, as thou wast from other places, by persecution." He does not promise, that *no man should set on him*; (for the next news we hear, is, that he is set upon, and brought to the judgment-seat, v. 12.) but, "*No man shall set on thee to hurt thee*; the remainder of their wrath shall be restrained; thou shalt not be beaten and imprisoned here, as thou wast at Philippi." Paul met with coarser treatment at first than he did afterward, and was now comforted according to the time wherein he had been afflicted. Trials shall not last always, Ps. 66. 10—12. Or, we may take it more generally, "*No man shall set on thee, τὸ κακὸς οὐκ ἐστὶν—*to do evil to thee; whatever trouble they may give thee, there is no real evil in it. They may kill thee, but they cannot hurt thee; for *I am with thee*," Ps. 23. 4. Isa. 41. 10.

4. He gave him a prospect of success; "*For I have much people in this city*. Therefore no man shall prevail to obstruct thy work, therefore I will be with thee to own thy work, and therefore do thou go on vigorously and cheerfully in it; for there are many in this city that are to be effectually called by thy ministry, in whom thou shalt see of the travail of thy soul." *Δύσκει μὲν αὖτε—*There is to me a great people here. The Lord knows them that are his, yea, and them that shall be his: for it is by his work upon them that they become his, and known unto him are all his works. "I have them, though they yet know me not; though yet they are led captive by Satan at his will: for the Father has given them me, to be a seed to serve me; I have them written in the book of life; I have their names down, and of all that were given me I will lose none; I have them, for I am sure to have them;" whom he did predestinate, them he called. In this city, though it be a very profane wicked city, full of impurity, and the more so for a temple of Venus there, to which there was a great resort; yet in this heap, that seems to be all chaff, there is wheat; in this ore, that seems to be all dross, there is gold. Let us not despair concerning any place, when even in Corinth, Christ had much people.

IV. That upon this encouragement he made a long stay there; (v. 11.) He continued at Corinth a year and six months, not to take his ease, but to follow his work, *teaching the word of God among them*; and it being a city flocked to from all parts, he had opportunity there of preaching the gospel to strangers, and sending notice of it thence to other countries. He stayed so long,

1. For the bringing in of those that were without. Christ had much people there, and by the power of his grace he could have had them all converted in one month or week, as at the first preaching of the gospel, when thousands were enclosed at one cast of the net; but God works variously. The people Christ has at Corinth must be called in by degrees, some by one sermon, others by another; *we see not yet all things put under Christ*. Let Christ's ministers go on in their duty, though their work be not done all at once; nay, though it be done but a little at a time.

2. For the building up of those that were within. Those that are converted, have still need to be taught the word of God; and particular need at Corinth to be taught it by Paul himself: for no sooner was the good seed sown in that field, than the enemy came and sowed tares, the false apostles, those deceitful workers, whom Paul in his epistles to the Corinthians complains so much of. When the hands of Jewish persecutors were tied, who were professed enemies to the gospel, Paul had a more vexatious trouble created him, and the church more mischievous damage done it, by the tongue of judaizing preachers, who, under colour of the christian name, undermined the very foundations of christianity. Soon after Paul came to Corinth, it is supposed that he wrote the first epistle to the Thessalonians, which in order of time was the first of all the epistles he wrote by divine inspiration; and the second epistle to the same church was written not long after. Ministers may be serving Christ, and promoting the great ends of their ministry, by writing good letters, as well as by preaching good sermons.

12. And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, 13. Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. 14. And when Paul was

now about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: 15. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. 16. And he drave them from the judgment-seat. 17. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

We have here an account of some disturbance given to Paul and his friends at Corinth, but no great harm done, nor much hinderance given to the work of Christ there.

I. Paul is accused by the Jews before the Roman governor, v. 12, 13. The governor was *Gallio*, *deputy of Achaia*, that is, pro-consul; for Achaia was a consular province of the empire. This Gallio was elder brother to the famous Seneca; in his youth he was called *Novatus*, but took the name of *Gallio* upon his being adopted into the family of Julius Gallio; he is described by Seneca, his brother, to be a man of great ingenuity and great probity, and a man of a wonderful good temper; he was called *Dulcis Gallio*—*Sweet Gallio*, for his sweet disposition; and is said to have been universally beloved. Now observe,

1. How rudely Paul is apprehended, and brought before Gallio; *The Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul*. They were the ringleaders of all the mischief against Paul, and they entered into a confederacy to do him a mischief; they were unanimous in it, they came upon him *with one accord, hand joined in hand* to do this wickedness; they did it with violence and fury, *they made an insurrection* to the disturbance of the public peace, and hurried Paul away to the judgment-seat, and, for aught that appears, allowed him no time to prepare for his trial.

2. How falsely Paul is accused before Gallio; (v. 13.) *This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law*. They could not charge him with persuading men not to worship God at all, or to worship other gods, (Deut. 13. 2.) but only to worship God in a way contrary to the law. The Romans allowed the Jews in their provinces the observation of their own law; and what then? Must they therefore be prosecuted as criminals, who worship God in any other way? Does their toleration include a power of imposition? But the charge was unjust; for their own law had in it a promise of a Prophet whom God would raise up to them, and him they should hear. Now Paul persuaded them to believe in this Prophet, who was come, and to hear him, which was according to the law; for he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. The law relating to the temple-service those Jews at Corinth could not observe, because of their distance from Jerusalem, and there was no part of their synagogue-worship which Paul contradicted. Thus when people are taught to worship God in Christ, and to worship him in the Spirit, they are ready to quarrel, as if they were taught to worship him contrary to the law; whereas this is indeed perfective of the law.

II. Gallio, upon the first hearing, or rather without any hearing at all, dismisses the cause, and will not take any cognizance of it, v. 14, 15. Paul was going about to make his defence, and to shew that he did not teach men to worship God contrary to the law; but the judge being resolved not to pass any

sentence upon this cause, would not give himself the trouble of examining it. Observe,

1. He shews himself very ready to do the part of a judge in any matter that it was proper for him to take cognizance of. He said to the Jews, that were the prosecutors, "*If it were a matter of wrong, or wicked lewdness, if you could charge the prisoner with theft or fraud, with murder or rapine, or any act of immorality, I should think myself bound to bear with you in your complaints, though they were clamorous and noisy;*" for the rudeness of the petitioners was no good reason, if their cause was just, why they should not have justice done them; it is the duty of magistrates to right the injured, and to animadvert upon the injurious; and if the complaint be not made with all the decorum that might be, yet they should hear it out. But,

2. He will by no means allow them to make a complaint to him of a thing that was not within his jurisdiction; (v. 15.) "*If it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it;*" end it among yourselves as you can, but *I will be no judge of such matters;* you shall neither burthen my patience with the hearing of it, nor burthen my conscience with giving judgment upon it;" and therefore, when they were urgent, and pressing to be heard, he drave them from the judgment-seat, (v. 16.) and ordered another cause to be called.

Now, (1.) Here was something right in Gallio's conduct, and praise-worthy—that he would not pretend to judge of things he did not understand; that he left the Jews to themselves in matters relating to their own religion, but yet would not let them, under pretence of that, run down Paul, and abuse him; or, at least, would not himself be the tool of their malice, to give judgment against him: he looked upon the matter to be not within his jurisdiction, and therefore would not meddle in it.

But, (2.) It was certainly wrong to speak so slightly of a law and religion which he might have known to be of God, and which he ought to have acquainted himself with. In what way God is to be worshipped, whether Jesus be the Messiah, whether the gospel be a divine revelation, were not questions of words and names, as he scornfully and profanely called them; they are questions of vast importance, and in which, if he had understood them himself aright, he would have seen himself nearly concerned. He speaks as if he boasted of his ignorance of the scriptures, and took a pride in it; as if it were below him to take notice of the law of God, or make any inquiries concerning it.

III. The abuse done to Sosthenes, and Gallio's unconcernedness in it, v. 17.

1. The parties put a great contempt upon the court, when they took Sosthenes and beat him before the judgment-seat. Many conjectures there are concerning this matter, because it is uncertain who this Sosthenes was, and who the Greeks were, that abused him. It seems most probable, that Sosthenes was a christian, and Paul's particular friend, that appeared for him on this occasion, and probably had taken care of his safety, and conveyed him away, when Gallio dismissed the cause; so that, when they could not light on Paul, they fell foul on him who protected him. It is certain that there was one Sosthenes that was a friend of Paul, and well known at Corinth; it is likely, he was a minister, for Paul calls him his brother, and joins him with himself in his first epistle to the church at Corinth, (1 Cor. 1. 1.) as he does Timothy in his second, and it is probable that this was he: he is said to be a ruler of the synagogue, either joint ruler with Crispus, (v. 8.) or a ruler of one synagogue, as Crispus was of another. As for the Greeks that abused him, it is very probable that they were either Hellenist Jews, or Jewish Greeks,

those that joined with the Jews in opposing the gospel; (v. 4, 6.) and that the native Jews put them on to do it, thinking it would in them be less offensive. They were so enraged against Paul, *that they beat Sosthenes*; and so enraged against Gallio, because he would not countenance the prosecution, *that they beat him before the judgment-seat*, whereby they did, in effect, tell him, that they cared not for him; if he would not be their executioner, they would be their own judges.

2. The court put no less a contempt upon the cause, and the persons too; but *Gallio cared for none of these things*. If by this be meant that he cared not for the affronts of bad men, it was commendable; while he steadily adhered to the laws and rules of equity, he might despise their contempts; but if it be meant, (as I think it is,) that he concerned not himself for the abuses done to good men, it carries his indifference too far, and gives us but an ill character of him. Here is *wickedness done in the place of judgment*, (which Solomon complains of, Eccl. 3. 16.) and nothing done to discountenance and suppress it. Gallio, as a judge, ought to have protected Sosthenes, and restrained and punished the Greeks that assaulted him; for a man to be mobbed in the street or in the market, perhaps, may not be easily helped; but to be so in his court, the judgment-seat, the court sitting and not concerned at it, is an evidence *that truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter; for he that departeth from evil, maketh himself a prey*, Isa. 59. 14, 15. Those that see and hear of the sufferings of God's people, and have no sympathy with them, or concern for them, do not pity and pray for them, it being all one to them whether the interests of religion sink or swim, are of the spirit of Gallio here, who, when a good man was abused before his face, *cared for none of these things*; like them that were at ease in Zion, and were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, (Amos 6. 6.) like the king and Haman, *that sat down to drink when the city Shushan was perplexed*, Esth. 3. 15.

18. And Paul *after this tarried there yet a good while*, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. 19. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. 20. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; 21. But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. 22. And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. 23. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over *all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order*, strengthening all the disciples.

We have here Paul in motion, as we have had him at Corinth for some time at rest, but in both busy, very busy in the service of Christ; if he sat still, if he went about, still it was to do good. Here is,

1. Paul's departure from Corinth, v. 18.

1. He did not go away till some time after the trouble he met with there; from other places he had

departed when the storm rose, but not from Corinth, because there it was no sooner risen than it fell again. Some tell us, that Gallio did privately countenance Paul, and took him into his favour, and that this occasioned a correspondence between Paul and Seneca, Gallio's brother, which some of the ancients speak of. *After this he tarried there yet a good while*, some think, beyond the year and half, mentioned v. 11. While he found he laboured not in vain, he continued labouring.

2. When he went, he *took leave of the brethren*, solemnly, and with much affection, with suitable comforts and counsels, and prayers at parting, commending what was good, reproving what was otherwise, and giving them necessary cautions against the wiles of the false apostles; and his farewell sermon would leave impressions upon them.

3. He *took with him Priscilla and Aquila*, because they had a mind to accompany him; for they seemed disposed to remove, and not inclined to stay long at a place; a disposition which may come from a good principle, and have good effects, and therefore ought not to be condemned in others, though it ought to be suspected in ourselves. There was a mighty friendship contracted between them and Paul, and therefore when he went, they begged to go along with him.

4. At Cenchrea, which was hard by Corinth, the port where those that went to sea from Corinth took ship, either Paul or Aquila (for the original does not determine which) had his head shaved, to discharge himself from the vow of a Nazarite. *Having shorn his head at Cenchrea; for he had a vow*. Those that lived in Judea were, in such a case, bound to do it at the temple; but those who lived in other countries might do it in other places. The Nazarite's head was to be shaved, when either his consecration was accidentally polluted, in which case he must begin again, or *when the days of his separation were fulfilled*, (Numb. 6. 9, 13, 18.) which, we suppose, was the case here. Some throw it upon Aquila, who was a Jew, (v. 2.) and retained perhaps more of his Judaism than was convenient; but I see no harm in admitting it concerning Paul, for concerning him we must admit the same thing, (ch. 21. 24, 26.) not only in compliance for a time with the Jews, to whom he *became as a Jew*, (1 Cor. 9. 20.) *that he might win upon them*, but because the vow of the Nazarites, though ceremonial, and as such ready to vanish away, had yet a great deal of moral and very pious significance, and therefore was fit to die the last of all the Jewish ceremonies. *The Nazarites are joined with the prophets*, (Amos 2. 11.) and were very much *the glory of Israel*; (Lam. 4. 7.) and therefore it is not strange if Paul bound himself for some time with the vow of a Nazarite from wine and strong drink, and from being trimmed, to recommend himself to the Jews; and from this he now discharged himself.

II. Paul's calling at Ephesus, which was the metropolis of the Lesser Asia, and a sea-port.

1. *There he left Aquila and Priscilla*; not only because they would be but burthensome to him in his journey, but because they might be serviceable to the interests of the gospel at Ephesus. Paul intended shortly to settle there for some time, and he left Aquila and Priscilla there in the mean time, for the same end as Christ sent his disciples before to every place where he himself would come, to prepare his way. Aquila and Priscilla might, by private conversation, being very intelligent judicious christians, dispose the minds of many to give Paul, when he should come among them, a favourable reception, and to understand his preaching; therefore he calls them his *helpers in Christ Jesus*, Rom. 16. 3.

2. *There he preached to the Jews in their synagogue*; though he did but call there in his journey,

yet he would not go without giving them a sermon; *he entered into the synagogue*, not as a hearer, but as a preacher, for *there he reasoned with the Jews*. Though he had abandoned the Jews at Corinth, who opposed themselves, and blasphemed, yet he did not, for their sakes, decline the synagogues of the Jews in other places, but still made the first offer of the gospel to them. We must not condemn a whole body or denomination of men, for the sake of some that conduct themselves ill.

3. The Jews at Ephesus were so far from driving Paul away, that they courted his stay with them; (*v. 20.*) *They desired him to tarry longer with them*, to instruct them in the gospel of Christ. *These were more noble*, and better bred than those Jews at Corinth, and other places; and it was a sign that God had not quite cast away his people, but had a remnant among them.

4. Paul would not stay with them now; *He consented not; but bade them farewell*; he had further to go; *he must by all means keep this feast at Jerusalem*; not that he thought himself bound in duty to it, (he knew the laws of the feasts were no longer binding,) but he had business at Jerusalem, (whatever it was,) which would be best done at the time of the feast, when there was a general rendezvous of all the Jews from all parts; which of the feasts it was, we are not told, probably it was the passover, which was the most eminent.

5. He intimated his purpose, after this journey, to come and spend some time at Ephesus; being encouraged by their kind invitation to hope that he should do good among them; it is good to have opportunities in reserve, when one good work is over, to have another to apply ourselves to; *I will return again to you*, but he inserts that necessary proviso, *if God will*. Our times are in God's hand; we purpose, but he disposes; and therefore we must make all our promises with submission to the will of God. *If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that. I will return again to you, if the Spirit suffer me*; (*ch. 16. 7.*) that was included in Paul's case; not only if providence permit, but if God do not otherwise direct my motions.

III. Paul's visit to Jerusalem; a short visit it was, but it served as a token of respect to that truly mother-church.

1. He came by sea to that port that lay next to Jerusalem; *he sailed from Ephesus*, (*v. 21.*) and landed at *Cæsarea*, *v. 22.* He chose to go by sea, for expedition and for safety, and that he might see *the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep*. Joppa had been the port for Jerusalem, but Herod having improved Cæsarea, and the port at Joppa being dangerous, that was generally made use of.

2. He went *up, and saluted the church*; by which, I think, is plainly meant the church at Jerusalem, which is emphatically called *the church*, because there the christian church began, *ch. 15. 4.* Paul thought it requisite to shew himself among them, that they might not think his success among the Gentiles had made him think himself either above them, or estranged from them; or that the honour God had put upon him, made him unmindful of the honour he owed to them. His going to *salute the church at Jerusalem*, intimates, (1.) That it was a very friendly visit that he made them, in pure kindness, to inquire into their state, and to testify his hearty good-will to them. Note, The increase of our new friends should not make us to forget our old ones, but it should be a pleasure to good men, and good ministers, to revive former acquaintance. The ministers at Jerusalem were constant residents, Paul was a constant itinerant; but he took care to keep up a good correspondence with them, that they might rejoice with him in his going out, and he might rejoice with them in their tents, and they might both

congratulate and wish well to one another's comfort and success. (2.) That it was but a short visit; he went *up, and saluted them*, perhaps, *with the holy kiss*, and made no stay among them. It was designed but for a transient interview, and yet Paul undertook this long journey for that. This is not the world we are to be together in. God's people are *the salt of the earth*, dispersed and scattered; yet it is good to see one another sometimes, if it be but to see one another, that we may confirm mutual love, may the better keep up our spiritual communion with one another at a distance, and may long the more for that heavenly Jerusalem, in which we hope to be together for ever.

IV. His return through those countries where he had formerly preached the gospel.

1. *He went and spent some time in Antioch*, among his old friends there, whence he was first sent out to preach among the Gentiles, *ch. 13. 1.* He went down to Antioch, to refresh himself with the sight and conversation of the ministers there; and a very good refreshment it is to a faithful minister, to have for a while the society of his brethren; for *as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend*. Paul's coming to Antioch would bring to remembrance the former days, which would furnish him with matter for fresh thanksgiving.

2. *Thence he went over the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order*, where he had preached the gospel, and planted churches; which, though very briefly mentioned, (*ch. 16. 6.*) was yet a glorious work, as appears by *Gal. 4. 14, 15.* where Paul speaks of his preaching of the gospel to the Galatians at the first, and *their receiving him as an angel of God*. These country-churches (for such they were, (*Gal. 1. 2.*) and we read not of any city in Galatia where a church was) Paul visited *in order* as they lay, watering what he had been instrumental to plant, and *strengthening all the disciples*. His very coming among them, and owning them, were a great strengthening to them and their ministers. Paul's countenancing of them was encouraging them; but that was not all; he preached that to them which strengthened them, which confirmed their faith in Christ, and their resolutions for Christ, and their pious affections to him. Disciples need to be strengthened, for they are compassed about with infirmity; ministers must do what they can to strengthen them, to strengthen them all, by directing them to Christ, and bringing them to live upon him, whose *strength is perfected in their weakness*, and who is himself their Strength and Song.

24. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the Spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord; knowing only the baptism of John. 26. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. 27. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: 28. For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

The sacred history leaves Paul upon his travels, and goes here to meet Apollos at Ephesus, and to give us some account of him, which was necessary to our understanding some passages in Paul's epistles.

I. Here is an account of his character, when he came to *Ephesus*.

1. He was a Jew, born at *Alexandria* in Egypt, but of Jewish parents; for there were abundance of Jews in that city, since the dispersion of the people, as it was foretold, (Deut. 28. 68.) *The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again*. His name was not *Apollo*, the name of one of the heathen gods, but *Apollos*, some think, the same with *Apelles*, Rom. 16. 10.

2. He was a man of excellent good parts, and well fitted for public service, he was an *eloquent man*, and *mighty in the scriptures* of the Old Testament, which he was, as a Jew, brought up in the knowledge of. (1.) He had a great command of language, he was an *eloquent man*; he was *ἀνὴρ λόγιος*—*a prudent man*, so some; *a learned man*, so others; *historiarum peritus*—*a good historian*; which is an excellent qualification for the ministry: he was one that could speak well, so it properly signifies; he was an *oracle of a man*; he was famous for speaking pertinently and closely, fully and fluently, upon any subject. (2.) He had a great command of scripture-language, and that was the eloquence he was remarkable for; he came to *Ephesus*, being *mighty in the scriptures*, so the words are placed; having an excellent faculty of expounding scriptures, he came to Ephesus, which was a public place, to trade with that talent, for the honour of God and the good of many. He was not only ready in the scriptures, able to quote texts off-hand, and repeat them, and tell you where to find them; (many of the carnal Jews were so, who were therefore said to have the *form of knowledge*, and the *letter of the law*;) but he was *mighty in the scriptures*; he understood the sense and meaning of them, he knew how to make use of them and to apply them, how to reason out of the scriptures, and to reason strongly; a convincing, commanding, confirming power went along with all his expositions and applications of the scripture. It is probable that he had given proof of his knowledge of the scriptures, and his abilities in them, in many synagogues of the Jews.

3. He was instructed in the way of the Lord; that is, he had some acquaintance with the doctrine of Christ, had got some general notions of the gospel and the principles of christianity, that *Jesus is the Christ*, and that *prophet that should come into the world*; the first notice of this would be readily embraced by one that was so mighty in the scriptures as Apollos was, and therefore understood the signs of the times. He was instructed, *καταχρημένος*—*he was catechised*, (so the word is,) either by his parents or by ministers; he was taught something of Christ and the way of salvation by him. Those that are to teach others, must first be themselves taught the word of the Lord, not only to talk of it, but to walk in it. It is not enough to have our tongues tuned to the word of the Lord, but we must have our feet directed into the way of the Lord.

4. Yet he knew only the baptism of John; he was instructed in the gospel of Christ as far as John's ministry carry him, and no farther: he knew the preparing of the way of the Lord, by that voice crying in the wilderness, rather than the way of the Lord itself. We cannot but think he had heard of Christ's death and resurrection, but he was not let into the mystery of them, had not had opportunity of conversing with any of the apostles since *P'c pouring out of the Spirit*; or he had himself been baptized only with the baptism of John, but was not baptized with the Holy Ghost, as the disciples were at the day of Pentecost.

II. We have here the employment and improvement of his gifts at Ephesus; he came thither, seeking opportunities of doing and getting good; and he found both.

1. He there made a very good use of his gifts in public; he came, probably, recommended to the synagogue of the Jews, as a fit man to be a teacher there, and according to the light he had, and the measure of the gift given to him, he was willing to be employed; (v. 25.) *Being fervent in the Spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord*. Though he had not the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, as the apostles had, he made use of the gifts he had; for the dispensation of the Spirit, whatever the measure of it is, is given to every man to profit withal. And our Saviour, by a parable, designed to teach his ministers, that though they had but one talent they must not bury that.

We have seen how Apollos was qualified with a good head and a good tongue; he was an *eloquent man*, and *mighty in the scriptures*; he had a good stock of useful knowledge, and had an excellent faculty of communicating it. Let us now see what he had further to recommend him as a preacher; and his example is recommended to the imitation of all preachers:

(1.) He was a lively affectionate preacher; as he had a good head, so he had a good heart; he was *fervent in Spirit*; he had in him a great deal of divine fire as well as divine light; was burning, as well as shining. He was full of zeal for the glory of God, and the salvation of precious souls. This appeared both in his forwardness to preach when he was called to it by the rulers of the synagogue, and in his fervency in his preaching; he preached as one in earnest, and that had his heart in his work. What a happy composition was here! Many are fervent in spirit, but are weak in knowledge, in scripture-knowledge, and far to seek for proper words, and full of improper ones; and, on the other hand, many are eloquent enough, and *mighty in the scriptures*, and learned, and judicious, but they have no life or fervency. Here was a complete man of God, thoroughly furnished for his work; both eloquent and fervent, full both of divine knowledge and of divine affections.

(2.) He was an industrious laborious preacher; *he spake and taught diligently*; he took pains in his preaching, what he delivered was elaborate; and he did not offer that to God, or to the synagogue, that either cost nothing, or cost him nothing; he first worked it upon his own heart, and then laboured to impress it on those he preached it to; *he taught diligently*, *ἀκριβῶς*—*accurately, exactly*; every thing he said was well-weighed.

(3.) He was an evangelical preacher; though he knew only the baptism of John, yet that was the beginning of the gospel of Christ, and to that he kept close; for he taught the things of the Lord, of the Lord Christ, the things that tended to make way for him, and to set him up. The things pertaining to the kingdom of the Messiah, were the subjects he chose to insist upon; not the things of the ceremonial law, though those would be pleasing to his Jewish auditors; not the things of the Gentile philosophy, though he could have discoursed very well on those things; but the things of the Lord.

(4.) He was a courageous preacher; *he began to speak boldly in the synagogue*, as one who, having put confidence in God, did not fear the face of man; he spake as one that knew the truth of what he said, and had no doubt of it; and that knew the worth of what he said, and was not afraid to suffer for it; in the synagogue, where the Jews not only were present, but had power, there he preached the things of God, which he knew they were prejudiced against.

2. He there made a good increase of his gifts in private, not so much in study, as in conversation with *Aquila and Priscilla*. If Paul or some other apostle or evangelist had been at *Ephesus*, they would have instructed him; but, for want of better help, *Aquila and Priscilla* (who were tent-makers) *expounded to him the way of God more perfectly*. Observe,

(1.) *Aquila and Priscilla* heard him preach in the synagogue. Though in knowledge he was much inferior to them, yet, having excellent gifts for public service, they encouraged his ministry, by a diligent and constant attendance upon it. Thus young ministers, that are hopeful, should be countenanced by grown christians, for it becomes them to *fulfil all righteousness*.

(2.) Finding him defective in his knowledge of christianity, *they took him to them*, to lodge in the same house with them, and *expounded to him the way of God*, the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, *more perfectly*. They did not take occasion from what they observed of his deficiency, either to despise him themselves, or to disparage him to others; did not call him a young raw preacher, not fit to come into a pulpit, but considered the disadvantages he had laboured under, as knowing only the baptism of John; and having themselves got great knowledge in the truths of the gospel by their long and intimate conversation with Paul, they communicated what they knew to him, and gave him a clear, distinct, and methodical account of those things which before he had but confused notions of. [1.] See here an instance of that which Christ has promised, that *to him that hath, shall be given*; he that has, and uses what he has, shall have more. He that diligently traded with the talent he had, doubled it quickly. [2.] See an instance of truly christian charity in *Aquila and Priscilla*; they did good according to their ability. *Aquila*, though a man of great knowledge, yet did not undertake to speak in the synagogue, because he had not such gifts for public work as *Apollos* had; but he furnished *Apollos* with matter, and then left him to clothe it with acceptable words. Instructing young christians and young ministers privately in conversation, who mean well, and perform well, as far as they go, is a piece of very good service, both to them and to the church. [3.] See an instance of great humility in *Apollos*; he was a very bright young man, of great parts and learning, newly come from the university, a popular preacher, and one mightily cried up and followed; and yet, finding that *Aquila and Priscilla* were judicious serious christians, that could speak intelligently and experimentally of the things of God, though they were but mechanics, poor tent-makers, he was glad to receive instruction from them, to be shewed by them his defects and mistakes, and to have his mistakes rectified by them, and his deficiencies made up. Young scholars may gain a great deal by converse with old christians, as young students in the law may by old practitioners. *Apollos*, though he *was instructed in the way of the Lord*, did not rest in the knowledge he had attained, nor thought he understood christianity as well as any man, (which proud conceited young men are apt to do,) but was willing to have it *expounded to him more perfectly*. They that know much should covet to know more, and what they know, to know it better, pressing forward toward perfection. [4.] Here is an instance of a good woman, though not permitted to speak in the church or in the synagogue, yet doing good with the knowledge God had given her in private converse. Paul will have the *aged women to be teachers of good things*, Titus 2. 3, 4.

III. Here is his preferment to the service of the church of Corinth, which was a larger sphere of usefulness than *Ephesus* at present was. Paul had

set the wheels a-going in *Achaia*, and particularly at *Corinth*, the county-town; many were stirred up by his preaching to *receive the gospel*, and they needed to be confirmed; and many were likewise irritated to oppose the gospel, and they needed to be confuted. Paul was gone, was called away to other work, and now there was a fair occasion in this vacancy for *Apollos* to set in, who was fitted rather to *water* than to *plant*, to *build up those that were within* than to *bring in those that were without*. Now here we have,

1. His call to this service, not by a vision, as Paul was called to *Macedonia*, no, nor so much as by the invitation of those he was to go to; but, (1.) He himself inclined to go; *he was disposed to pass into Achaia*; having heard of the state of the churches there, he had a mind to try what good he could do among them; though there were those there who were eminent for spiritual gifts, yet *Apollos* thought there might be some work for him, and God disposed his mind that way. (2.) His friends encouraged him to go, and approved of his purpose; and he being a perfect stranger there, they gave him a testimonial or letters of recommendation, *exhorting the disciples in Achaia to entertain him and employ him*. In this way, among others, the communion of churches is kept up, by the recommending of members and ministers to each other, when ministers, as *Apollos* here, are disposed to remove. Though they at *Ephesus* had a great loss of his labours, they did not grudge them in *Achaia* the benefit of them; but, on the contrary, used their interest in them to introduce him; for the churches of Christ, though they are many, yet they are one.

2. His success in this service, which both ways answered his intention and expectation; for,

(1.) Believers were greatly edified, and they that had received the gospel were very much confirmed; *he helped them much, who had believed through grace*. Note, [1.] Those who believe in Christ, it is through grace that they believe; it is *not of themselves*, it is *God's gift to them*, it is his work in them. [2.] Those who through grace do believe, yet still have need of help; as long as they are here in this world, there are remainders of unbelief, and something lacking in their faith to be perfected, and the work of faith to be fulfilled. [3.] Faithful ministers are capable of being many ways helpful to those who through grace do believe, and it is their business to help them, to help them much; and when a divine power goes along with them, they will be helpful to them.

(2.) Unbelievers were greatly mortified, their objections were fully answered, the folly and sophistry of their arguments were discovered, so that they had nothing to say in defence of the opposition they made to the gospel; their mouths were stopped, and their faces filled with shame; (*v.* 28.) *He mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly*, before the people; he did it, *wisely*—earnestly, and with a great deal of vehemence; he took pains to do it; his heart was upon it, as one that was truly desirous both to serve the cause of Christ and to save the souls of men; he did it effectually and to universal satisfaction; he did it *levi negotio*—with facility; the case was so plain, and the arguments so strong on Christ's side, that it was an easy matter to baffle all that the Jews could say against it; though they were so fierce, yet their cause was so weak that he made nothing of their opposition. Now that which he aimed to convince them of, was, *that Jesus is the Christ*, that he is *the Messiah promised to the fathers, who should come*, and they were to *look for no other*. If the Jews were but convinced of this—that Jesus is Christ, even their own law would teach them to hear him. Note, The business of ministers is to preach Christ; *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*.

The way he took to convince them, was, *by the scriptures*; thence he fetched his arguments; for the Jews owned the scriptures to be of divine authority; and it was easy for him, who was *mighty in the scriptures*, from them to shew that *Jesus is the Christ*. Note, Ministers must be able not only to preach the truth, but to prove it and defend it, and to convince gainsayers with meekness and yet with power, instructing those that oppose themselves; and this is real service to the church.

CHAP. XIX.

We left Paul in his circuit visiting the churches, (ch. 18. 23.) but we have not forgotten, nor has he, the promise he made to his friends at Ephesus, to return to them, and make some stay there; now this chapter shews us his performance of that promise, his coming to Ephesus, and his continuance there two years; we are here told, I. How he laboured there in the word and doctrine, how he taught some weak believers that had gone no further than John's baptism, (v. 1. . 7.) how he taught three months in the synagogue of the Jews, (v. 8.) and when he was driven thence, how he taught the Gentiles a long time in a public school, (v. 9, 10.) and how he confirmed his doctrine by miracles, v. 11, 12. II. What was the fruit of his labour, particularly among the conjurers, the worst of sinners: some were confounded, that did but make use of his name; (v. 13. . 17.) but others were converted, that received and embraced his doctrine, v. 18, 20. III. What projects he had of further usefulness, (v. 21, 22.) and what trouble at length he met with at Ephesus from the silversmiths, which forced him thence to pursue the measures he had laid; how a mob was raised by Demetrius to cry up Diana, (v. 23. . 34.) and how it was suppressed and dispersed by the town-clerk, v. 35. . 41.

1. **A**ND it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, 2. He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. 3. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, That they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5. When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6. And when Paul had laid *his* hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7. And all the men were about twelve.

Ephesus was a city of great note in Asia, famous for a temple built there to Diana, which was one of the wonders of the world; thither Paul came to preach the gospel while Apollos was at Corinth; (v. 1.) while he was watering there, Paul was planting here; and grudging not that Apollos entered into his labours, and was building upon his foundation; but rejoiced in it, and went on in the new work that was cut out for him at Ephesus, with the more cheerfulness and satisfaction, because he knew that such an able minister of the New Testament as Apollos was, was now at Corinth, carrying on the good work there; though there were those that made him the head of a party against Paul, (1 Cor. 1. 12.) yet Paul had no jealousy of him, nor any way disliked the affection the people had for him. Paul, having gone through the country of Galatia and Phrygia, having passed through the upper coasts, Pontus and

Bithynia, that lay north, at length came to Ephesus, where he had left Aquila and Priscilla, and there found them.

At his first coming, he met with some disciples there, who professed faith in Christ as the true Messiah, but were as yet in the first and lowest form in the school of Christ, under his usher John the Baptist; they were in number about twelve, (v. 7.) they were much of the standing that Apollos was of when he came to Ephesus, (for he knew only the baptism of John, ch. 18. 25.) but either they had not opportunity of being acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, or had not been so long in Ephesus, or were not so willing to receive instruction as Apollos was, otherwise they might have had the way of God expounded to them more perfectly, as Apollos had. Observe here,

I. How Paul catechised them; he was told, probably by Aquila and Priscilla, that they were believers, that they did own Christ, and had given up their names to him: now Paul hereupon takes them under examination;

1. They did believe in the Son of God; but Paul inquires, whether they had received the Holy Ghost, whether they believed in the Spirit, whose operations on the minds of men, for conviction, conversion, and comfort, were revealed some time after the doctrine of Jesus being the Christ; whether they had been acquainted with, and had admitted, this revelation? That was not all; extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were conferred upon the apostles and other disciples presently after Christ's ascension, which was frequently repeated upon occasion; had they participated of these gifts? "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? Have you had that seal of the truth of Christ's doctrine in yourselves?" We are not now to expect any such extraordinary gifts as they had then. The canon of the New Testament being long since completed and ratified, we depend upon that as the most sure word of prophecy. But there are graces of the Spirit given to all believers, which are as earnest to them, 2 Cor. 1. 22.— 5. 5. Eph. 1. 13. Now it concerns us all who profess the christian faith, seriously to inquire, whether we have received the Holy Ghost or not. The Holy Ghost is promised to all believers, to all petitioners; (Luke 11. 13.) but many are deceived in this matter, thinking they have received the Holy Ghost, when really they have not. As there are pretenders to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, so there are to his graces and comforts; we should therefore strictly examine ourselves, Have we received the Holy Ghost since we believed? The tree will be known by its fruits. Do we bring forth the fruits of the Spirit? Are we led by the Spirit? Do we walk in the Spirit? Are we under the government of the Spirit?

2. They owned their ignorance in this matter; "Whether there be a Holy Ghost is more than we know; that there is a promise of the Holy Ghost we know from the scriptures of the Old Testament, and that that promise will be fulfilled in its season we doubt not; but so much have we been out of the way of intelligence in this matter, that we have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost be indeed yet given as a Spirit of prophecy." They knew (as Dr. Lightfoot observes) that, according to the tradition of their nation, after the death of Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Ghost departed from Israel, and went up; and they professed that they had never heard of his return. They spake as if they expected it, and wondered they did not hear of it, and were ready to welcome the notice of it. The gospel-light, like that of the morning, shone more and more, gradually; not only clearer and clearer, in the discovery of truths not before heard of, but further and further, in the discovery of them to persons that had not before heard of them

3. Paul inquired how they came to be baptized, if they knew nothing of the Holy Ghost; for if they were baptized by any of Christ's ministers, they were instructed concerning the Holy Ghost, and were baptized in his name. "Know ye not that Jesus being glorified, consequently the Holy Ghost is given; *unto what then were ye baptized?*" This is strange and unaccountable. What! baptized, and yet know nothing of the Holy Ghost? Surely your baptism was a nullity, if you know nothing of the Holy Ghost; for it is the receiving of the Holy Ghost that is signified and sealed by that washing of regeneration. Ignorance of the Holy Ghost, is as inconsistent with a sincere profession of christianity, as ignorance of Christ is." Applying it to ourselves, it intimates, that those are baptized to no purpose, and have received the grace of God therein in vain, that do not receive and submit to the Holy Ghost. It is also an inquiry we should often make, not only to whose honour we were born, but into whose service we were baptized; that we may study to answer the ends both of our birth and of our baptism. Let us often consider, *unto what we were baptized*, that we may live up to our baptism.

4. They own, that they were baptized *unto John's baptism*—*ὡς τὸ Ἰωάννου βάπτισμα*; that is, (as I take it,) they were baptized in the name of John, not by John himself; he was far enough from any such thought, but by some weak well-meaning disciple of his, that ignorantly kept up his name, as the head of a party, retaining the spirit and notion of those disciples of his that were jealous of the growth of Christ's interest, and complained to him of it, John 3. 26. Some one or more of these, that found themselves much edified by John's baptism of *repentance for the remission of sins*, not thinking that the kingdom of heaven, which he spake of as at hand, was so very near as it proved, ran away with that notion, rested in what they had, and thought they could not do better than to persuade others to do so too; and so, ignorantly, in a blind zeal for John's doctrine, they baptized here and there one in John's name, or, as it is here expressed, *unto John's baptism*, looking no further themselves, nor directing those that they baptized any further.

5. Paul explains to them the true intent and meaning of John's baptism, as principally referring to Jesus Christ, and so rectifies the mistake of those who had baptized them into the baptism of John, and had not directed them to look any further, but to rest in that. They that have been left in ignorance, or led into error, by any infelicities of their education, should not therefore be despised or rejected by those who are more knowing and orthodox, but should be compassionately instructed, and better taught, as those here were by Paul. (1.) He owns that John's baptism was a very good thing, as far as it went; *John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance*. By this baptism he obliged people to be sorry for their sins, and to confess them, and turn from them; and to bring any to this, is a great point gained. But, (2.) He shews them, that John's baptism had a further reference, and he never designed that those he baptized should rest there, but told them, that they should believe on him who should *come after him*, that is, on Christ Jesus; that his baptism of repentance was designed only to *prepare the way of the Lord*, and to dispose them to receive and entertain Christ, whom he left them big with expectations of; nay, whom he directed them to; *Behold the Lamb of God*. "John was a great and good man; but he was only the harbinger, Christ is the Prince; his baptism was the porch which you were to pass through, not the house you were to rest in; and therefore it was all wrong for you to be baptized into the baptism of John."

6. When they were thus shewed the error they

were led into, they thankfully accepted the discovery, and *were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*, v. 5. As for Apollos, of whom it was said, (ch. 18. 25.) that he *knew the baptism of John*, that he rightly understood the meaning of it when he was baptized with it, though he knew that *only*; yet, when he *understood the way of God more perfectly*, he was not again baptized, any more than Christ's first disciples that had been baptized with John's baptism, and knew it referred to the Messiah at the door, and with an eye to that, submitted to it, were baptized again. But to these here, who received it only with an eye to John, and looked no further, as if he were their saviour, it was such a fundamental error as was as fatal to it, as it would have been for any to be baptized in the name of Paul, 1 Cor. 1. 13. And therefore when they came to understand themselves better, they desired to be *baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and were so. Not by Paul himself, as we have reason to think, but by some of those who attended him. It does not therefore follow hence, that there was not an agreement between John's baptism and Christ's; or that they were not for substance the same; much less does it follow that those who have been once baptized *in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, (which is the appointed form of Christ's baptism,) may be again baptized in the same name; for those that were here baptized *in the name of the Lord Jesus*, had never been so baptized before.

II. How Paul conferred the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost upon them, v. 6.

1. Paul solemnly *prayed to God* to give them those gifts, signified by his *laying his hands on them*, which was a gesture used in blessing by the patriarchs, especially in conveying the great trust of the promise, as Gen. 48. 14. The Spirit being the great promise of the New Testament, the apostles conveyed it by the imposition of hands; "The Lord bless thee with that blessing, that blessing of blessings," Isa. 44. 3.

2. God granted the thing he prayed for; *The Holy Ghost came upon them* in a surprising, overpowering manner, and they *spoke with tongues and prophesied*, as the apostles did and the first Gentile converts, ch. 10. 44. This was intended to introduce the gospel at Ephesus, and to awaken in the minds of men an expectation of some great things from it; and some think that it was further designed to qualify these twelve men for the work of the ministry, and that these twelve were the elders of Ephesus, to whom Paul committed the care and conduct of that church. They had the Spirit of prophecy, that they might understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God themselves, and the gift of tongues, that they might *preach* them to *every nation and language*. Oh! what a wonderful change was here made on a sudden in these men; they that but just now *had not so much as heard that there was any Holy Ghost*, are now themselves *filled with the Holy Ghost*; for the Spirit, like the *wind, blows where and when he listeth*.

3. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. 9. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. 10. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard, the word

of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. 11. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: 12. So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

Paul is here very busy at Ephesus to do good.

I. He begins, as usual, in the Jews' synagogue, and makes the first offer of the gospel to them, that he might gather in the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*, who were now *scattered upon the mountains*. Observe,

1. Where he preached to them; in their synagogue, (v. 8.) as Christ used to do. He went and joined with them in their synagogue-worship, to take off their prejudices against him, and to ingratiate himself with them, while there was any hope of winning upon them. Thus he would bear his testimony to public worship on sabbath-days. Where there were no Christian assemblies yet formed, he frequented the Jewish assemblies, while the Jews were not as yet wholly cast off. Paul went into the synagogue, because there he had them together, and had them, it might be hoped, in a good frame.

2. What he preached to them; *the things concerning the kingdom of God* among men, the great things which concerned God's dominion over all men, and favour to them, and men's subjection to God, and happiness in God. He shewed them our obligations to God, and interest in him, as our Creator, by which the kingdom of God was set up—the violation of those obligations, and the forfeiture of that interest, by sin, by which the kingdom of God was pulled down—and the renewing of those obligations upon us, and the restoring of us to that interest again, by the Redeemer, whereby that kingdom of God was again set up. Or more particularly, *the things concerning the kingdom of the Messiah*, which the Jews were in expectation of, and promised themselves great matters from; he opened the scriptures which spake concerning this, gave them a right notion of this kingdom, and shewed them their mistakes about it.

3. How he preached to them. (1.) He preached argumentatively; he disputed; gave reasons, scripture-reasons, for what he preached; and answered objections, for the convincing of men's judgments and consciences, that they might not only believe, but might see cause to believe. He preached *διὰ λόγων*—*dialogue-wise*; he put questions to them, and received their answers; gave them leave to put questions to him, and answered them. (2.) He preached affectionately; he persuaded; he used not only logical arguments, to enforce what he said upon their understandings, but rhetorical motives, to impress what he said upon their affections; shewing them that the things he preached concerning the kingdom of God, were things *concerning themselves*, which they were nearly concerned in, and therefore ought to *concern themselves about*, 2 Cor. 5. 11. *We persuade men*. Paul was a moving preacher, and was master of the art of persuasion. (3.) He preached undauntedly, and with a holy resolution; he spake boldly, as one that had not the least doubt of the things he spake of, nor the least distrust of him he spake from, or the least dread of them he spake to.

4. How long he preached to them; *for the space of three months*; which was a competent time allowed them to consider of it; in that time those among them that belonged to the election of grace were called in, and the rest were left inexcusable. Thus long Paul preached the gospel *with much con-*

tention, (1 Thess. 2. 2.) yet he *did not fail, nor was discouraged*.

5. What success his preaching had among them. (1.) There were some that were persuaded to believe in Christ; some think that is intimated in that word, *persuading*; he prevailed with them. But, (2.) Divers continued in their infidelity, and were confirmed in their prejudices against christianity. When Paul called on them before, and preached only some general things to them, they courted his stay among them; (*ch.* 18. 20.) but now that he settled among them, and his word came more closely to their consciences, they were soon weary of him. [1.] They had an invincible aversion to the gospel of Christ themselves; they were *hardened, and believed not*; they were resolved they would not believe, though the truth shone in their faces with ever such a convincing light and evidence. *Therefore they believed not*, because they were *hardened*. [2.] They did their utmost to raise and keep up in others an aversion to the gospel; they not only entered not into the kingdom of God themselves, but neither did they suffer those that were *entering to go in*; for *they shake evil of that way before the multitude*, to prejudice them against it. Though they could not shew any manner of evil in it, yet they said all manner of evil concerning it. These sinners, like the angels that sinned, became Satans, adversaries and devils, false accusers.

II. When he had carried the matter as far as it would go in the synagogue of the Jews, and found that their opposition grew more obstinate, he left the synagogue, because he could not safely, or rather because he could not comfortably and successfully, continue in communion with them. Though their worship was such as he could join in, and they had not silenced him, nor forbidden him to preach among them; yet they drove him from them with their railing at those things which he spake *concerning the kingdom of God*: they hated to be reformed, hated to be instructed, and therefore *he departed from them*. Here we are sure there was a *separation*, and no *schism*; for there was a just cause for it, and a clear call to it. Now observe,

1. When Paul departed from the Jews, he took the disciples with him, and *separated them, to save them from that untoward generation*; (according to the charge Peter gave to his new converts, *ch.* 2. 40.) lest they should be infected with the poisonous tongues of those blasphemers, he separated them which believed, to be the foundation of a christian church, now that they were a competent number to be incorporated, that others might attend with them upon the preaching of the gospel, and might, upon their believing, be added to them. When Paul departed, there needed no more to *separate the disciples*; let him go where he will, they will follow him.

2. When Paul separated from the synagogue, he set up a meeting of his own, he *disputed daily in the school of one Tyrannus*; he left the synagogue of the Jews, that he might go on with the more freedom in his work; still he disputed for Christ and christianity, and was ready to answer all opponents whatsoever in defence of them; and he had by this separation a double advantage, (1.) That now his opportunities were more frequent. In the synagogue he could only preach every sabbath-day, (*ch.* 13. 42.) but now he disputed *daily*, he set up a lecture every day, and thus redeemed time: those whose business would not permit them to come one day, might come another day; and those were welcome, who *watched daily at these gates of wisdom, and waited daily at the posts of her doors*. (2.) That now they were more open. To the synagogue of the Jews none might come, or could come, but Jews or proselytes; Gentiles were excluded; but when

he set up a meeting in the school of Tyrannus, both Jews and Greeks attended his ministry; v. 10. Thus, as he describes this gate of opportunity at Ephesus, (1 Cor. 16. 8, 9.) *a wide door* and an *effectual* was *opened to him*, though *there were many adversaries*. Some think this school of Tyrannus was a divinity-school of the Jews, and such a one they commonly had in their great cities beside their synagogue; they called it *Bethmidrash*, the *house of inquiry*, or of *repetition*; and they went to that on the sabbath-day, after they had been in the synagogue; they go *from strength to strength*, from the *house of the sanctuary to the house of doctrine*. If this were such a school, it shews that though Paul left the synagogue, he left it gradually, and still kept as near it as he could, as he had done, *ch. 18. 7.* But others think it was a philosophy-school of the Gentiles, belonging to one Tyrannus, or a retiring place, (for so the word *σχολή* sometimes signifies,) belonging to a principal man or governor of the city; some convenient place it was, which Paul and the disciples had the use of, either for love or money.

3. Here he continued his labours for *two years*, read his lectures, and disputed daily. These two years commence from the end of the *three months* which he spent in the synagogue; (v. 8.) after they were ended, he continued for some time in the country about, preaching, therefore he might justly reckon it in all three years, as he does, *ch. 20. 31.*

4. The gospel hereby spread far and near; (v. 10.) *All they that dwell in Asia, heard the word of the Lord Jesus*; not only all that dwelt in Ephesus, but all that dwelt in that large province called *Asia*, which Ephesus was the head city of; *Asia the Less* it was called. There was great resort to Ephesus from all parts of the country, for law, traffic, religion, or education; which gave Paul an opportunity of sending the report of the gospel to all the towns and villages of that country. They all heard the word of the Lord Jesus. The gospel is Christ's word, it is a word concerning Christ. This they heard, or at least heard of it. Some of all sects, some out of all parts both in city and country, embraced this gospel, and entertained it, and by them it was communicated to others; and so they all *heard the word of the Lord Jesus*, or might have heard it. Probably, Paul sometimes made excursions himself into the country, to preach the gospel, or sent his missionaries or assistants that attended him, and thus the word of the Lord was *heard throughout that region*. Now they that sat in darkness, saw a great light.

III. God confirmed Paul's doctrine by miracles, which awakened people's inquiries after it, fixed their affection to it, and engaged their belief of it, v. 11, 12. I wonder we have not read of any miracle wrought by Paul since the casting of the evil spirit out of the damsel at Philippi; why did he not work miracles at Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens? Or, if he did, why are they not recorded? Was the success of the gospel, without miracles in the kingdom of nature, itself such a miracle in the kingdom of grace, and the divine power which went along with it such a proof of its divine original, that there needed no other? It is certain that at Corinth he wrought many miracles, though Luke has recorded none, for he tells them (2 Cor. 12. 12.) that the signs of his apostleship were among them, in *wonders and mighty deeds*.

But here at Ephesus we have a general account of the proofs of this kind, which he gave of his divine mission.

1. They were *special miracles*—*δυνάμεις ἰσχυραί*. God exerted powers that were not according to the common course of nature: *Virtutes non vulgares*. Things were done, which could by no means be ascribed either to *chance* or *second causes*. Or, they

were not only (as all miracles are) *out of the common road*; but they were even uncommon miracles, such miracles as had not been wrought by the hands of any other of the apostles. The opposers of the gospel were so prejudiced, that any miracles would not serve their turn; therefore God wrought *virtutes non quaslibet*, (so they render it,) *something above the common road of miracles*.

2. It was not Paul that wrought them, (*What is Paul, and what is Apollos?*) but it was God that wrought them *by the hand of Paul*. He was but the instrument, God was the principal Agent.

3. He not only cured the sick that were brought to him, or that he was brought to; but *from his body were brought to the sick handkerchiefs, or aprons*; they got Paul's handkerchiefs, or his aprons, (that is, say some,) the aprons he wore when he worked at his trade, and the applying of them to the sick cured them immediately. Or, they brought the sick people's handkerchiefs, or their girdles, or caps, or head-dresses, and laid them for a while to Paul's body, and then took them to the sick. The former is more probable. Now was fulfilled that word of Christ to his disciples, *Greater works than these shall ye do*. We read of one that was cured by the touch of Christ's garment, when it was upon him, and he perceived that *virtue went out of him*; but here were people cured by Paul's garments when they were taken from him. Christ gave his apostles power *against unclean spirits and against all manner of sickness*, Matt. 10. 1. And accordingly we find here, that those to whom Paul sent relief, had it in both these cases; *for the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them*; which were both significant of the great design and blessed effect of the gospel, which was to heal spiritual diseases, and to free the souls of men from the power and dominion of Satan.

13. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. 14. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. 15. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? 16. And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. 19. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20. So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.

The preachers of the gospel were sent forth to carry on a war against Satan, and therein Christ went forth *conquering, and to conquer*. The casting of evil spirits out of those that were possessed, was one instance of Christ's victory over Satan; but to shew how many ways Christ triumphed over that

great enemy, we have here in these verses two remarkable instances of the conquest of Satan, not only in those that were violently possessed by him, but in those that were voluntarily devoted to him.

1. Here is the confusion of some of Satan's servants, some *vagabond Jews*, that were *exorcists*, who made use of Christ's name profanely and wickedly in their diabolical enchantments, but were made to pay dear for their presumption. Observe,

1. The general character of those who were guilty of this presumption; they were Jews, but *vagabond Jews*; were of the Jewish nation and religion, but went about from town to town, to get money by conjuring; they strolled about to tell people their fortunes, and pretended by spells and charms to cure diseases, and bring people to themselves, that were melancholy or distracted. They called themselves *exorcists*, because in doing their tricks they used forms of adjuration, by such and such commanding names. The superstitious Jews, to put a reputation upon these magic arts, wickedly attributed the invention of them to Solomon. So Josephus (*Antiquit.* lib. 8. cap. 2.) says, that Solomon composed charms by which diseases are cured, and devils driven out so as never to return; and that these operations continued common among the Jews to this time. And Christ seems to refer to this, (Matt. 12. 27.) *By whom do your children cast them out?*

2. A particular account of some at Ephesus that led this course of life, and came thither in their travels; they were *seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests*, v. 14. It is sad to see the house of Jacob thus degenerated, much more the house of Aaron, the family that was in a peculiar manner consecrated to God; it is truly sad to see any of that race in league with Satan. Their Father was a *chief of the priests*, head of one of the twenty-four courses of priests. One would think the temple would find both employment and encouragement enough for the sons of a chief priest, if they had been twice as many. But, probably, it was a vain, rambling, rakish humour that took them all to turn mountebanks, and wander all the world over to cure mad folks.

3. The profaneness they were guilty of; *they took upon them to call over evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus*; not as those who had a veneration for Christ, and a confidence in his name, as we read of some who *cast out devils in Christ's name*, and yet did not follow with his disciples, (Luke 9. 49.) whom he would not have to be discouraged; but as those who were willing to try all methods to carry on their wicked trade, and, it should seem, had this design; if the evil spirits should yield to an adjuration in the name of Jesus by those that did not believe in him, they would say, it was no confirmation of his doctrine to those that did; for it was all one whether they believed it or no. If they should not yield to it, they would say, the name of Christ was not so powerful as the other names they used, which the devils had often by collusion yielded to. They said, *We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches*; not, "whom we believe in, or depend upon, or have any authority from;" but *whom Paul preaches*; as if they had said, "We will try what that name will do." The exorcists in the Romish church, who pretend to cast the devil out of melancholy people by spells and charms which they understand not, and which, not having any divine warrant, cannot be used in faith, are the followers of these vagabond Jews.

4. The confusion they were put to in their impious operations; let them not be deceived, God is not mocked, nor shall the glorious name of Jesus be prostituted to such a vile purpose as this; *what communion hath Christ with Belial?* (1.) The evil spirit gave them a sharp reply; (v. 15.) "*Jesus I*

know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" I know that Jesus has conquered principalities and powers, and that Paul has authority in his name to *cast out devils*; but what power have you to command us in his name, or who gave you any such power? *What have you to do to declare the power of Jesus, or to take his covenant and commands into your mouths, seeing you hate his instructions?*" Ps. 50. 16, 17.

This was extorted out of the mouth of the evil spirit by the power of God, to gain honour to the gospel, and to put those to shame, that made an ill use of Christ's name. Antichristian powers and factions pretend a mighty zeal for Jesus and Paul, and to have authority from them; but when the matter comes to be looked into, it is a mere worldly secular interest that is to be thus supported; nay, it is an enmity to true religion; *Jesus we know, and Paul we know; but who are ye?* (2.) The man in whom the evil spirit was, gave them a warm reception, fell foul upon them, *leaped upon them* in the height of his frenzy and rage, *overcame them* and all their enchantments, *prevailed against them*, and was every way too hard for them; so that *they fled out of the house, not only naked, but wounded*; their clothes pulled off their backs, and their heads broken. This is written for a warning to all those who name the name of Christ, but do not depart from iniquity. The same enemy that overcomes them with his temptations, will overcome them with his terrors; and their adjuring him in Christ's name to let them alone will be no security to them. If we resist the devil by a true and lively faith in Christ, he will flee from us; but if we think to resist him by the bare using of Christ's name, or any part of his word, as a spell or charm, he will prevail against us.

5. The general notice that was taken of this, and the good impression it made on many; (v. 17.) *This was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus*. It was the common talk of the town; and the effect of it was, (1.) That men were terrified: *fear fell on them all*. In this instance they saw the malice of the devil whom they served, and the power of Christ whom they opposed; and both were awful considerations. They saw that the name of Christ was not to be trifled with, nor his religion compounded with the pagan superstitions, (2.) That God was glorified; *the name of the Lord Jesus*, by which his faithful servants cast out devils, and cured diseases, without any resistance, *was the more magnified*; for now it appeared to be a name above every name.

II. Here is the conversion of others of Satan's servants, and the evidences of their conversion.

1. Those that had been guilty of wicked practices, confessed them, v. 18. *Many that had believed and were baptized, but had not then been so particular as they might have been in the confession of their sins*, were so terrified with these instances of the magnifying of the name of *Jesus Christ*, that they came to Paul, or some of the other ministers that were with him, and confessed what ill lives they had led, and what a great deal of secret wickedness their own consciences charged them with, which the world knew not of; secret frauds and secret filthinesses; *they shewed their deeds*; took shame to themselves, and gave glory to God and warning to others. These confessions were not extorted from them, but were voluntary, for the ease of their consciences, which the late miracles had struck a terror upon. Note, Where there is true contrition for sin, there will be an ingenuous confession of sin to God in every prayer, and to man whom we have offended, when the case requires it.

2. Those that had conversed with wicked books, burnt them; (v. 19.) *Many also of them which used curious arts, τα σμύκητα—impertinent things; multa nihil ad se pertinentia satagentes—busy-bodies,*

(so the word is used, 2 Thess. 3. 11. 1 Tim. 5. 13.) that traded in the study of magic and divination; in books of judicial astrology, casting of nativities, telling of fortunes, raising and laying of spirits, interpreting of dreams, predicting future events, and the like; to which some think are to be added *plays, romances, love-books, and unchaste and immodest poems—histrionica, amatoria, saltatoria*, Stres. These, having their consciences more awakened than ever to see the evil of those practices which these books instructed them in, *brought their books together, and burned them before all men*. Ephesus was notorious for the use of these curious arts; hence spells and charms were called *Literæ Ephesie*. Here people furnished themselves with all those sorts of books, and, probably, had tutors to instruct them in those *black arts*. It was therefore much for the honour of Christ and his gospel, to have such a noble testimony borne against those *curious arts*, in a place where they were so much in vogue. It is taken for granted, that they were convinced of the evil of these curious arts, and resolved to deal in them no longer; but they did not think that enough unless they *burnt their books*. (1.) Thus they shewed a *holy indignation* at the sins they had been guilty of; as the idolaters, when they were brought to repentance, *said to their idols, Get ye hence*; (Isa. 30. 22.) and cast even those of *silver and gold to the moles and to the bats*, Isa. 2. 20. They thus took a pious revenge on those things that had been the instruments of sin to them, and proclaimed the force of their convictions of the evil of it, and that those very things were now detestable to them, as much as ever they had been delectable. (2.) Thus they shewed their resolution never to return to the use of those arts, and the books which related to them, again. They were so fully convinced of the evil and danger of them, that they would not throw the book by, within reach of a recal, upon supposition that it was possible they might change their mind; but, being steadfastly resolved never to make use of them, they burnt them. (3.) Thus they put away a temptation to return to them again. Had they kept the books by them, there was danger lest, when the heat of the present conviction was over, they should have the curiosity to look into them, and so be in danger of liking them and loving them again, and therefore they burnt them. Note, Those that truly repent of sin, will keep themselves as far as possible from the occasions of it. (4.) Thus they prevented their doing mischief to others; if Judas had been by, he would have said, "Sell them, and give the money to the poor;" or, "Buy Bibles and good books with it." But then, who could tell into whose hands these dangerous books might fall, and what mischief might be done by them; it was therefore the safest course to commit them all to the flames. Those that are recovered from sin themselves, will do all they can to keep others from falling into it, and are much more afraid of laying an occasion of sin in the way of others. (5.) Thus they shewed a contempt of the *wealth of this world*; for the price of the books was cast up, probably by those that persuaded them not to burn them, and it was found to be *fifty thousand pieces of silver*; which some compute to be fifteen hundred pounds of our money. It is probable that the books were scarce, perhaps prohibited, and therefore dear. Probably, they had cost them so much; yet, being the *devil's books*, though they had been so foolish as to buy them, they did not think that would justify them in being so wicked as to sell them again. (6.) Thus they publicly testified their joy for their conversion from these wicked practices, as Matthew did by the great feast he made when Christ had called him from the receipt of custom. These converts *joined together* in making this bonfire, and made it *before all men*. They

might have burnt the books privately, every one in his own house, but they chose to do it together, by consent, and to do it at the high cross, (as we say,) that Christ and his grace in them might be the more magnified, and all about them the more edified.

III. Here is a general account of the progress and success of the gospel in and about Ephesus; (v. 20.) *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed*. It is a blessed sight to see the word of God growing and prevailing mightily, as it did here.

1. To see it grow extensively, by the addition of many to the church; when still more and more are wrought upon by the gospel, and wrought up into a conformity to it, then it grows; when those that were least likely to yield to it, and that had been most stiff in their opposition to it, are captivated and brought into obedience to it, then it may be said to *grow mightily*.

2. To see it prevail extensively, by the advancement of those in knowledge and grace, that are added to the church; when strong corruptions are mortified, vicious habits changed, ill customs, of long standing, broken off, and pleasant, gainful, fashionable sins are abandoned, then it prevails mightily; and Christ in it goes on conquering and to conquer.

21. After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. 22. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. 23. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. 24. For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; 25. Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. 26. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: 27. So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. 28. And when they heard *these sayings*, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. 29. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. 30. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. 31. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring *him* that he would not adventure himself

into the theatre. 32. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. 33. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. 34. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. 35. And when the town-clerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Jupiter? 36. Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. 37. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. 38. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. 39. But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. 40. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. 41. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

Paul is here brought into some trouble at Ephesus, just when he is forecasting to go thence, and to cut out him work elsewhere. See here,

1. How he laid his purpose of going to other places, *v.* 21, 22. He was a man of vast designs for God, and was for making his influences as far diffusive as might be. Having spent above two years at Ephesus,

(1.) He designed a visit to the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, especially of Philippi and Corinth, the chief cities of those provinces, *v.* 21. There he had planted churches, and now is concerned to visit them. He *purposed in the spirit*; either in his own spirit, not communicating his purpose as yet, but keeping it to himself; or by the direction of the Holy Spirit, who was his Guide in all his motions, and by whom he was led. He purposed to go and see how the work of God went on in those places, that he might rectify what was amiss, and encourage what was good.

(2.) Thence he designed to go to Jerusalem, to visit the brethren there, and give an account to them of the prospering of the good pleasure of the Lord in his hand; and thence he intended to go to Rome, to go *see Rome*; not as if he designed only the gratifying of his curiosity with the sight of that ancient famous city, but because it was an expression people commonly used, that they would go see Rome, would look about them there; when that which he designed, was, to see the christians there, and to do them some service, Rom. 1. 11. The good people

at Rome were the glory of the city which he longed for a sight of. Dr. Lightfoot supposes, it was upon the death of the emperor Claudius, who died the second year of Paul's being at Ephesus, that Paul thought of going to Rome, because while he lived the Jews were forbidden Rome, *ch.* 18. 2.

(3.) He sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, to give them notice of the visit he intended them, and to get their collection ready for the poor saints at Jerusalem. Soon after, he wrote the *first epistle to the Corinthians*, designing to follow it himself, as appears 1 Cor. 4. 17, 19. *I have sent to you Timothy; but I will myself come to you shortly, if the Lord will.* For the present, he stayed in Asia, in the country about Ephesus, founding churches.

2. How he was seconded in his purpose, and obliged to pursue it by the troubles which at length he met with at Ephesus. It was strange that he had been quiet there so long; yet it should seem he had met with trouble there, not recorded in this story; for in his epistle written at this time, he speaks of his having *fought with beasts at Ephesus*, (1 Cor. 15. 32.) which seems to be meant of his being put to fight with wild beasts in the theatre, according to the barbarous treatment they sometimes gave the christians. And he speaks of the trouble which came to them in Asia, near Ephesus, when he *despaired of life, and received a sentence of death within himself*, 2 Cor. 1. 8, 9.

But in the trouble here related, he was worse frightened than hurt. In general, *there arose no small stir about that way*, *v.* 23. Some historians say, that that famous impostor Apollonius Tyanæus, who set up for a rival with Christ, and gave out himself, as Simon Magus, to be *some great one*, was at Ephesus about this time that Paul was there. But it seems the opposition he gave to the gospel was so insignificant, that St. Luke did not think it worth taking notice of. The disturbance he gives an account of was of another nature: let us view the particulars of it. Here is,

1. A great complaint against Paul and the other preachers of the gospel, for drawing people off from the worship of Diana, and so spoiling the trade of the silversmiths that worked for Diana's temple.

1. The complainant is Demetrius, a silversmith, a principal man, it is likely, of the trade, and one that would be thought to understand and consult the interests of it more than others of the company. Whether he worked in other sort of plate or no, we are not told; but the most advantageous branch of his trade was *making silver shrines for Diana*, *v.* 24. Some think these were medals stamped with the effigies of Diana, or her temple, or both; others think they were representations of the temple, with the image of Diana in it in miniature; all of silver, but so small, that people might carry them about with them, as the papists do their crucifixes. These that came from far to pay their devotions at the temple of Ephesus, when they went home bought these little temples or shrines, to carry home with them, for the gratifying of the curiosity of their friends, and to preserve in their own minds the idea of that stately edifice. See how craftsmen, and crafty men too, above the rank of silversmiths, make an advantage to themselves of people's superstition, and serve their worldly ends by it.

2. The persons he appeals to are not the magistrates, but the mob; he called the *craftsmen* together, *with the workmen of like occupation*, (a company of mechanics, who had no sense of any thing but their worldly interest,) and these he endeavours to incense against Paul, who would be actuated as little by reason and as much by fury as he could desire.

3. His complaint and representation are very full. (1.) He lays it down for a principle, that *the art*

and mystery of making silver shrines for the worshippers of Diana, was very necessary to be supported and kept up; (v. 25.) "*Ye know that by this craft we have not only our subsistence, and our necessary food, but our wealth; we grow rich, and raise estates; we live great, and have wherewithal to maintain our pleasures; and therefore, whatever comes of it, we must not suffer this craft to grow into contempt.*" Note, It is natural for men to be jealous for that, whether right or wrong, by which they get their wealth: and many have, for this reason alone, set themselves against the gospel of Christ, because it calls men off from those crafts which are unlawful, how much wealth soever is to be gotten by them.

(2.) He charges it upon Paul, that he had dissuaded men from worshipping idols. The words, as they are laid in the indictment, are, that he had asserted, *They are no gods, which are made with hands*, v. 26. Could any truth be more plain and self-evident than this, or any reasoning more cogent and convincing than those of the prophets, *The workman made it, therefore it is not God?* The first and most genuine notion we have of God, is, that he has his being of himself, and depends upon none; but that all things have their being from him, and their dependence on him: and then it must follow, that *those are no gods, which are the creatures of men's fancy, and the work of men's hands*. Yet this must be looked upon as a heretical and atheistical notion, and Paul as a criminal for maintaining it; not that they could advance any thing against this doctrine itself, but that the consequence of it was, that not only at Ephesus, the chief city, but almost throughout all Asia, among the country people, who were their best customers, and whom they thought they were surest of, he had *persuaded and turned away much people* from the worship of Diana; so that there was not now such a demand for the silver shrines as had been, nor such good rates given for them. There are those who will stickle for that which is most grossly absurd and unreasonable, and which carries along with it its own conviction of falsehood, as this does, that *those are gods, which are made with hands*, if it have but human laws, and worldly interest and prescription, on its side.

(3.) He reminds them of the danger which their trade was in of going to decay. Whatever touches that, touches them in a sensible tender part; "If this doctrine gains credit, we are all undone, and may even shut up shop; *this our craft will be set at nought*, will be convicted, and put into an ill name as superstition, and a cheat upon the world, and every body will run it down. *This our part*," (so the word is,) "our interest or share of trade and commerce," *κινδυνεύει ἡμῶν τὸ μέρος*, "will not only come into danger of being lost, but it will bring us into danger, and we shall become not only beggars, but malefactors."

(4.) He pretends a mighty zeal for Diana, and a jealousy for her honour; *Not only this our craft is in danger; if that were all, he would not have you think that he would have spoken with so much warmth, but all his care is, lest the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed; and we would not, for all the world, see the diminution of the honour of that goddess, whom all Asia and the world worship.* See what the worship of Diana had to plead for itself, and what was the utmost which the most zealous bigots for it had to say in its behalf. [1.] That it had pomp on its side; the magnificence of the temple was the thing that charmed them, the thing that chained them; they could not bear the thoughts of any thing that tended to the diminution, much less to the destruction, of that. [2.] That it

had numbers on its side; *All Asia and the world worship it*; and therefore it must needs be the right way of worship, let Paul say what he will to the contrary. Thus, because *all the world wonders after the beast, the dragon, the devil, the god of this world, gives him his power, and his seat, and great authority*. Rev. 13. 2, 3.

II. The popular resentment of this complaint; the charge was managed by a craftsman, and was framed to incense the common people, and it had the desired effect; for on this occasion they shewed,

1. A great displeasure against the gospel and the preachers of it; *They were full of wrath*, (v. 28.) *full of fury and indignation*, so the word signifies. The craftsmen went stark mad, when they were told that their trade and their idol were both in danger.

2. A great jealousy for the honour of their goddess; *They cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians; and we are resolved to stand by her, and live and die in the defence of her. Are there any that expose her to contempt, or threaten her destruction? Let us alone to deal with them. Let Paul say ever so much to prove that those are no gods, which are made with hands, we will abide by it that, whatever comes of other gods and goddesses, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. We must and will stand up for the religion of our country, which we have received by tradition from our fathers."* Thus all people walked every one in the name of their god, and thought well of their own; much more should the servants of the true God do so, who can say, *This God is our God for ever and ever*.

3. A great disorder among themselves; (v. 29.) *The whole city was full of confusion*—the common and natural effect of an intemperate zeal for a false religion; it throws all into confusion, dethrones reason, and inthrones passion; and men run together, not only not knowing one another's minds, but not knowing their own.

III. The proceedings of the mob under the power of these resentments, and how far they were carried.

1. They laid hands on some of Paul's companions, and hurried them into the theatre, v. 29. Some think, with design there to make them fight with beasts, as Paul had sometimes done; or perhaps they intended only to abuse them, and to make them a spectacle to the crowd. Those they seized, were Gaius and Aristarchus, of both whom we read elsewhere; *Gaius was of Derbe*, ch. 20. 4. *Aristarchus*, is also there spoken of, and Col. 4. 10. They came with Paul from Macedonia, and that was their only crime, that they were Paul's companions in travel, both in services and sufferings.

2. Paul, who had escaped being seized by them, when he perceived his friends in distress for his sake, would have entered in unto the people, to sacrifice himself, if there were no other remedy, rather than his friends should suffer upon his account; and it was an evidence of a generous spirit, and that he loved his neighbour as himself.

3. He was dissuaded from it by the kindness of his friends, that overruled him. (1.) *The disciples suffered him not*, for it better became him to offer it than it would have become them to suffer it. They had reason to say to Paul, as David's servants did to him, when he was for exposing himself in a piece of public service, *Thou art worth ten thousand of us*, 2 Sam. 18. 3. (2.) Others of his friends interposed, to prevent his throwing of himself thus into the mouth of danger; they would treat him much worse than Gaius and Aristarchus, looking upon him as the ringleader of the party; and therefore better let them bear the brunt of the storm than that he should venture into it, v. 31. They were certain of the chief of Asia, the princes of Asia—*Ἀσισίαι*. The

critics tell us, they were the *chief* of their priests; or, as others, the *chief* of their players. Whether they were converts to the christian faith, (and some such there were even of their priests and governors,) or whether they were only well-wishers to Paul, as an ingenious good man, we are not told, only that they were *Paul's friends*. Dr. Lightfoot suggests, that they kept up a respect and kindness for him ever since he *fought with beasts in their theatre*, and were afraid he should be abused so again. Note, It is a friendly part to take more care of the lives and comforts of good men than they do themselves. It would be a very hazardous adventure for Paul to go into the theatre; it was a thousand to one that it would cost him his life; and therefore Paul was overruled by his *friends* to obey the law of self-preservation; and has taught us to keep out of the way of danger as long as we can, without going out of the way of duty. We may be called to *lay down* our lives, but not to *throw away* our lives. It would better become Paul to venture into a *synagogue* than into a *theatre*.

4. The mob was in a perfect confusion; (v. 32.) *Some cried one thing, and some another*, according as their fancies and passions, and perhaps the reports they received, led them; *some cried*, Down with the Jews; others, Down with Paul; but *the assembly was confused*, as not understanding one another's minds, they contradicted one another, and were ready to fly in one another's faces for it, but they did not understand their own; for the truth was, the *greater part knew not wherefore they were come together*; they knew not what began the riot, nor who; much less what business they had there; but, upon such occasions, the greatest part come only to inquire what the matter was: they follow the cry, follow the crowd, increase like a snow-ball, and where there are many there will be more.

5. The Jews would have interested themselves in this tumult; (in other places they had been the first movers of such riots; but now at Ephesus they had not interest enough to raise the mob, and yet, when it was raised, they had ill-will enough to set in with it; (v. 33.) *They drew Alexander out of the multitude*, called him out to speak on the behalf of the *Jews* against *Paul and his companions*; "You have heard what Demetrius and the silversmiths have to say against them, as enemies to their religion; give us leave now to tell you what we have to say against him as an enemy to our religion." *The Jews put him forward* to do this, encouraged him, and told him they would stand by him and second him; and this they looked upon as necessary in their own defence, and therefore what he designed to say is called his *apologizing to the people*, not for himself in particular, but for the Jews in general, whom the worshippers of Diana looked upon to be as much their enemies as Paul was; now they would have them know that they were as much Paul's enemies as they were; and they who are thus careful to distinguish themselves from the servants of Christ now, and are afraid of being taken for them, shall have their doom accordingly in the great day. *Alexander beckoned with the hand*, desiring to be heard against Paul; for it had been strange if a persecution were carried on against the Christians, and there were not Jews at one end or the other of it: if they could not begin the mischief, they would help it forward, and so make themselves *partakers of other men's sins*. Some think this Alexander had been a Christian, but had apostatized to Judaism, and therefore was drawn out as a proper person to accuse Paul; and that he was that *Alexander the coppersmith* that *did Paul so much evil*, (2 Tim. 4. 14.) and whom he had *delivered unto Satan*, 1 Tim. 1. 20.

6. This occasioned the prosecutors to drop the prosecution of Paul's friends, and to turn it into ac-

clamations in honour of their goddess; (v. 34.) *When they knew that he was a Jew*, and, as such, an enemy to the worship of Diana, (for the Jews had now an implacable hatred to idols and idolatry,) whatever he had to say for Paul or against him, they were resolved not to hear him, and therefore set the mob a shouting, "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*; whoever runs her down, be he Jew or Christian, we are resolved to cry her up; she *is Diana of the Ephesians*, our Diana; and it is our honour and happiness to have her temple with us; and she is *great*, a famous goddess, and universally adored; there are other Dianas, but *Diana of the Ephesians* is beyond them all, because her temple is more rich and magnificent than any of theirs." This was all the cry for *two hours* together; and it was thought a sufficient confutation of Paul's doctrine, that *they are not gods, which are made with hands*. Thus the most sacred truths are often run down with nothing else but noise and clamour and popular fury! It was said of old concerning idolaters, that *they were mad upon their idols*; and here is an instance of it. Diana made the Ephesians *great*, for the town was enriched by the vast concourse of people from all parts to Diana's temple there, and therefore they are concerned by all means possible to keep up her sinking reputation with, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*.

IV. The suppression and dispersion of these rioters, by the prudence and vigilance of the *town-clerk*; he is called, γραμματεὺς—the scribe, or secretary, or recorder; "the governor of the city," so some; "the register of their games," the Olympic games, so some; whose business it was to preserve the names of the victors, and the prizes they won. With much ado he, at length, stilled the noise, so as to be heard, and then made a pacific speech to them, and gave us an instance of that of Solomon, *The words of wise men are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that rules among fools*, as Demetrius did, Eccl. 9. 17.

1. He humours them with an acknowledgment, that *Diana was the celebrated goddess of the Ephesians*, v. 35. They needed not to be so loud and strenuous in asserting a truth which nobody denied, or could be ignorant of; every one *knew* that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana; is, *ἡ πόλις*; not only that the inhabitants were worshippers of this goddess, but the city, as a corporation, was, by its charter, intrusted with the worship of Diana, to take care of her temple, and to accommodate those who came thither to do her homage. Ephesus is the *ædificata*, (they say that is the most proper word,) or the *sacrist*, of the great goddess Diana. The city was more the patroness and protectress of Diana than Diana was of the city. Such care did idolaters take for the keeping up the worship of gods made with hands, while the worship of the true and living God is neglected, and few nations or cities glory in patronizing and protecting that! The temple of Diana at Ephesus was a very rich and sumptuous structure, but, it should seem, the *image* of Diana in the temple, because they thought it sanctified the temple, was had in greater veneration than the temple, for they persuaded the people that it *fell down from Jupiter*, and therefore *was none of the gods that were made with men's hands*. See how easily the credulity of superstitious people is imposed upon by the fraud of designing men! Because this image of Diana had been set up time out of mind, and nobody could tell who made it, they made the people believe it fell down from Jupiter.

"Now these things," says the town-clerk very gravely, (but whether seriously or no, and as one that did himself believe them, may be questioned,) "*cannot be spoken against*; they have obtained

such universal credit, that you need not fear contradiction, it can do you no prejudice." Some take it thus; "Seeing the image of Diana fell down from Jupiter, as we all believe, then what is said against gods made with hands, does not at all affect us."

2. He cautions them against all violent and tumultuous proceedings, which their religion did not need, nor could receive any real advantage from; (v. 36.) *Ye ought to be quiet and to do nothing rashly.* A very good rule this is to be observed at all times, both in private and public affairs; not to be hasty and precipitate in our motions, but to deliberate, and take time to consider; not to put ourselves or others into a heat, but to be calm and composed, and always keep reason in the throne, and passion under check. This word should be ready to us, to command the peace with, when ourselves or those about us are growing disorderly; *We ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly; to do nothing in haste, which we may repent of at leisure.*

3. He wipes off the odium that had been cast upon Paul and his associates, and tells them, they were not the men that they were represented to them to be; (v. 37.) "*Ye have brought hither these men, and are ready to pull them to pieces; but have you considered what is their transgression and what is their offence? What can you prove upon them? They are not robbers of churches, you cannot charge them with sacrilege, or the taking away of any dedicated thing; they have offered no violence to Diana's temple or the treasures of it; nor are they blasphemers of your goddess; they have not given any opprobrious language to the worshippers of Diana, nor spoken scurrilously of her or her temple. Why should you prosecute them with all this violence, who, though they are not of your mind, yet do not inveigh with any bitterness against you? Since they are calm, why should you be hot?*" It was the idol in the heart that they levelled all their force against, by reason and argument; if they can but get that down, the idol in the temple will fall of course. Those that preach against idolatrous churches, have truth on their side, and ought vigorously to maintain it, and press it on men's consciences; but let them not be robbers of those churches, (*on the prey laid they not their hand, Esther 9. 15, 16.*) nor blasphemers of those worshipers; *with meekness instructing, not with passion and foul language reproaching, those that oppose themselves; for God's truth, as it needs not man's lie, so it needs not man's intemperate heat. The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

4. He turns them over to the regular methods of the law, which ought always to supersede popular tumults, and in civilized well-governed nations will do so. A great mercy it is to live in a country where provision is made for the keeping of the peace, and the administration of public justice, and the appointing of a remedy for every wrong; and herein we of this nation are as happy as any people.

(1.) If the complaint was of a private injury, let them have recourse to the judges and courts of justice, which were kept publicly at stated times. If Demetrius, and the company of the silversmiths, that have made all this rout, find themselves aggrieved, or any privilege they are legally entitled to infringed or entrenched upon, let them bring their action, take out a process, and the matter shall be fairly tried, and justice done; *The law is open, and there are deputies; there is a proconsul and his delegate, whose business it is to hear both sides, and to determine according to equity; and in their determination all parties must acquiesce, and not be their own judges, nor appeal to the people.* Note, *The law is good if a man use it lawfully*, as the last remedy, both for the discovery of a right disputed, and the recovery of a right denied.

(2.) If the complaint was of a public grievance, relating to the constitution, it must be redressed, not by a confused rabble, but by a convention of the states; (v. 39.) *If ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, that are of a common concern, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly of the aldermen and common-council, called together in a regular way by those in authority.* Note, Private persons should not intermeddle in public matters, so as to anticipate the counsels of those whose business it is to take cognizance of them; we have enough to do to mind our own business.

5. He makes them sensible of the danger they were in, and of the premunire they had run themselves into by this riot; (v. 40.) "*It is well if we be not called in question for this day's uproar, if we be not complained of at the emperor's court, as a factious and seditious city, and if a quo warranto be not brought against us, and our charter taken away; for there is no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse, we have nothing to say in excuse of it; we cannot justify ourselves in breaking the peace, by saying, that others broke it first, and we only acted defensively; we have no colour for any such plea; and therefore let the matter go no further, for it has gone too far already.*" Note, Most people stand in awe of men's judgment more than of the judgment of God. How well were it if we would thus still the tumult of our disorderly appetites and passions, and check the violence of them, with the consideration of the account we must shortly give to the judge of heaven and earth for all these disorders! *We are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, in our hearts, in our houses; and how shall we answer it, there being no cause, no just cause, or no proportionable one, whereby we may give an account of this concourse, and of this heat and violence? As we must repress the inordinancy of our appetites, so also of our passions, with this, that for all these things God will bring us into judgment; (Eccl. 11. 9.) and we are concerned to manage ourselves, as those that must give account.*

6. When he had thus shewed them the absurdity of their riotous meeting, and the ill consequences that might follow from it, he advised them to separate with all speed; (v. 41.) he dismissed the assembly, ordered the crier perhaps to give notice that all manner of persons should peaceably depart and go about their own business, and they did so. See here, (1.) How the overruling providence of God preserves the public peace, by an unaccountable power over the spirits of men! Thus the world is kept in some order, and men are restrained from being as the fishes of the sea, where the greater devour the lesser. Considering what an impetuous, furious thing, what an ungovernable, untameable wild beast the mob is, when it is up, we shall see reason to acknowledge God's goodness, that we are not always under the tyranny of it. *He stills the noise of the sea, the noise of her waves, and (which is no less an instance of his almighty power) the tumult of the people, Ps. 65. 7.* (2.) See how many ways God has of protecting his people! Perhaps this town-clerk was no friend at all to Paul, or the gospel he preached, yet his human prudence is made to serve the divine purpose. *Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all.*

CHAP. XX.

In this chapter, we have, I. Paul's travels up and down about Macedonia, Greece, and Asia, and his coming at length to Troas, v. 1. 6. II. A particular account of his spending one Lord's-day at Troas, and his raising Eutychus to life there, v. 7. 12. III. His progress, or circuit, for the visiting of the churches he had planted, in his way toward Jerusalem, where he designed to be by the next feast of pentecost, v. 13. 16. IV. The farwell sermon he

preached to the presbyters of Ephesus, now that he was leaving that country, v. 17. .35. V. The very sorrowful parting between him and them, v. 36. .38. And in all these we find Paul very busy to serve Christ, and to do good to the souls of men, not only in the conversion of heathens, but in the edification of christians.

1. **A**ND after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto *him* the disciples, and embraced *them*, and departed for to go into Macedonia. 2. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, 3. And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. 4. And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. 5. These going before tarried for us at Troas. 6. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

These travels of Paul which are thus briefly related, if all in them had been recorded that was memorable, and worthy to be written in letters of gold, *the world would not have contained the books that should be written*; and therefore we have only some general hints of occurrences, which therefore ought to be the more precious. Here is,

I. Paul's departure from Ephesus; he had tarried there longer than he had done at any one place since he was ordained to the apostleship of the Gentiles; and now it was time to think of removing, for he must *preach in other cities also*; but after this, to the end of the scripture-history of his life, (which is all we can depend upon,) we never find him breaking up fresh ground again, nor preaching the *gospel there where Christ had not been named*, as hitherto he had done; (Rom. 15. 20.) for in the close of the next chapter we find him made a prisoner, and so continued, and so left, at the end of this book.

1. Paul left Ephesus soon after the uproar was ceased, looking upon the disturbance he met with there, to be an indication of Providence to him not to stay there any longer, v. 1. His remove might somewhat appease the rage of his adversaries, and gain better quarter for the christians there. *Currenti cede furor!—It is good to lie by in a storm.* Yet some think, that before he now left Ephesus, he wrote the *first epistle to the Corinthians*, and that his *fighting with beasts at Ephesus*, which he mentions in that epistle, was a figurative description of this uproar; but I rather take that literally.

2. He did not leave them abruptly and in a fright, but took leave of them solemnly; *He called unto him the disciples*, the principal persons of the congregation, and embraced them, *took leave of them* (saith the Syriac) *with the kiss of love*, according to the usage of the primitive church. Loving friends know not how well they love one another till they come to part, and then it appears how near they lay to one another's hearts.

II. His visitation of the Greek churches, which he had planted, and more than once watered, and which appear to have laid very near his heart.

1. He went first to *Macedonia*, (v. 1.) according to his purpose before the uproar; (*ch. 19. 21.*) there he visited the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica,

and gave them much exhortation, v. 2. Paul's visits to his friends were preaching visits, and his preaching was large and copious, *he gave them much exhortation*; he had a great deal to say to them, and did not stint himself in time; he exhorted them to many duties, in many cases, and (as some read it) *with many reasonings*. He enforced his exhortation with a great variety of motives and arguments.

2. He stayed *three months in Greece*, (v. 2, 3.) that is, in *Achaia*, as some think, for thither also he purposed to go, to Corinth, and thereabout, (*ch. 19. 21.*) and, no doubt, there also *he gave the disciples much exhortation*, to direct and confirm them, and engage them to cleave to the Lord.

III. The altering of his measures; for we cannot always stand to our purposes; accidents unforeseen put us upon new counsels, which oblige us to purpose with a proviso.

1. Paul was about to sail into Syria, to Antioch, whence he was first sent out into the service of the Gentiles, and which therefore in his journeys he generally contrived to take in his way; but he changed his mind, and resolved to return through Macedonia, the same way he came.

2. The reason was, because the Jews, expecting he would steer that course as usual, had way-laid him, designing to be the death of him; since they could not get him out of the way by stirring up both mobs and magistrates against him, which they had often attempted, they contrived to assassinate him. Some think, they laid wait for him, to rob him of the money that he was carrying to Jerusalem for the relief of the poor saints there; but considering how very spiteful the Jews were against him, I suppose they thirsted for his blood more than for his money.

IV. His companions in his travels when he went into Asia; they are here named, v. 4. Some of them were ministers, whether they were all so or no, is not certain; *Sopater of Berea*, it is likely, is the same with *Sossipater*, who is mentioned Rom. 16. 21. *Timothy* is reckoned among them, for though Paul, when he departed from Ephesus, (v. 1.) left Timothy there, and afterward wrote his first epistle to him thither, to direct him as an evangelist how to settle the church there, and in what hands to leave it; (see 1 Tim. 1. 3.—3. 14, 15. which epistle was intended for direction to Timothy what to do, not only at Ephesus where he now was, but also at other places where he should be in like manner left, or whither he should be sent to reside as an evangelist; and not to him only, but to the other evangelists that attended Paul, and were in like manner employed;) yet he soon followed him, and accompanied him, with others here named.

Now, one would think, that this was no good husbandry to have all these worthy men accompanying Paul, for there was more need of them where Paul was not, than where he was; but so it was ordered,

1. That they might assist him in instructing such as by his preaching were awakened and startled; wherever Paul came, *the waters were stirred*, and then there was need of many hands to help the *cripples in*. It was time to strike when the iron was hot.

2. That they might be trained up by him, and fitted for future service; *might fully know his doctrine, and manner of life*, 2 Tim. 3. 10. Paul's bodily presence was weak and despicable, and therefore these friends of his accompanied him, to put a reputation upon him, to keep him in countenance, and to intimate to strangers, who would be apt to judge by the sight of the eye, that he had a great deal in him truly valuable, which was not discovered upon the outward appearance.

V. His coming to Troas, where he had appointed a general rendezvous of his friends.

1. They went *before*, and stayed for him at *Troas*, (v. 5.) designing to go along with him to Jerusalem, as *Trophimus* particularly did, *ch.* 21. 29. We should not think it hard to stay a while for good company in a journey.

2. Paul made the best of his way thither; and, it should seem, Luke was now in company with him; for he says, *We sailed from Philippi*; (v. 6.) and the first time we find him in his company, was here at *Troas*, *ch.* 16. 11. *The days of unleavened bread* are mentioned only to describe the time, not to intimate that Paul kept the passover after the manner of the Jews; for just about this time he had written in his first epistle to the church of Corinth, and taught, that *Christ is our Passover*, and a christian life our *feast of unleavened bread*; (1 Cor. 5. 7, 8.) and when the *substance was come, the shadow was done away*. He came to them to *Troas*, by sea, in *five days*, and when he was there stayed but *seven days*. There is no remedy, but a great deal of time will unavoidably be lost, in travelling to and fro by those who go *about doing good*, yet it shall not be put upon the score of lost time. Paul thought it worth while to bestow *five days* in going to *Troas*, though it was but for an opportunity of *seven days* stay there; but he knew, and so should we, how to redeem even journeying time, and make it turn to some good account.

7. And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. 8. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. 9. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. 10. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. 11. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. 12. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

We have here an account of what passed at *Troas* the last of the seven days that Paul stayed there.

1. There was a solemn religious assembly of the christians that were there, according to their constant custom, and the custom of all the churches.

1. *The disciples came together*, v. 7. Though they read, and meditated, and prayed, and sung psalms, apart, and thereby kept up their communion with God, yet that is not enough; they must *come together* to worship God in concert, and so keep up their communion with one another, by mutual countenance and assistance, and testify their spiritual communion with all good christians. There ought to be stated times for the disciples of Christ to come together; though they cannot all come together in one place, yet as many as can.

2. *They came together upon the first day of the week*, which they called the *Lord's day*, (Rev. 1. 10.) the christian sabbath, celebrated to the honour of Christ and the Holy Spirit, in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ, and the pouring out of the Spirit, both on the *first day of the week*. This is here said to be *the day when the disciples came toge-*

ther, that is, when it was their practice to come together in all the churches. Note, The first day of the week is to be religiously observed by all the disciples of Christ; and it is a sign between Christ and them, for by this is known that they are his disciples; and it is to be observed in solemn assemblies, which are, as it were, the courts held in the name of our Lord Jesus, and to his honour, by his ministers, the stewards of his courts, and to which all that hold from and under him, owe suit and service, and at which they are to make their appearance, as tenants at their Lord's courts, and *the first day of the week* is appointed to be the court-day.

3. *They were gathered together in an upper chamber*; (v. 8.) they had no temple or synagogue to meet in, no capacious, stately chapel, but met in a private house, in a garret. As they were few, and did not need, so they were poor, and could not build, a large meeting-place; yet *they came together*, in that despicable, inconvenient place. It will be no excuse for our absenting ourselves from religious assemblies, that the place of them is not so decent or so commodious as we would have it to be.

4. *They came together to break bread*, that is, to celebrate the ordinance of the Lord's supper; that one instituted sign of breaking the bread, being put for all the rest. *The bread which we break, is the communion of the body of Christ*, 1 Cor. 10. 16. In the breaking of the bread, not only the breaking of Christ's body for us, to be a sacrifice for our sins, is commemorated, but the breaking of Christ's body to us, to be food and a feast for our souls, is signified. In the primitive times it was the custom of many churches to receive the Lord's supper every Lord's day, celebrating the memorial of Christ's death in the former, with that of his resurrection in the latter; and both in concert, in a solemn assembly, to testify their joint concurrence in the same faith and worship.

II. In this assembly Paul gave them a sermon, a long sermon, a farewell sermon, v. 7.

1. He gave them a sermon, *he preached to them*; though they were disciples already, yet it was very necessary they should have the word of God preached to them, in order to their increase in knowledge and grace. Observe, The preaching of the gospel ought to accompany the sacraments. *Moses read the book of the covenant in the audience of the people, and then sprinkled the blood of the covenant, which the Lord had made with them concerning all these words*, Exod. 24. 7, 8. What does the seal signify without a writing?

2. It was a farewell sermon, he being *ready to depart on the morrow*; when he was gone, they might have the same gospel preached, but not as he preached it; and therefore they must make the best use of him that they could while they had him. Farewell sermons are usually in a particular manner affecting both to the preacher and to the hearers.

3. It was a very long sermon, he *continued his speech until midnight*; for he had a great deal to say, and knew not that ever he should have another opportunity of preaching to them. After they had received the Lord's supper, he preached to them the duties they had thereby engaged themselves to, and the comforts they were interested in, and in this he was very large and full and particular. There may be occasion for ministers to preach, not only *in season, but out of season*. We know some that would have reproached Paul for this as a long-winded preacher, that tired his hearers; but they were willing to hear, he saw them so, and therefore *continued his speech, he continued it till midnight*; perhaps, they met in the evening, for privacy, or in conformity to the example of the disciples, who *came together on the first christian sabbath in the evening*. It is probable that he had preached to them in the morn-

ing, and yet thus lengthened out his evening sermon even till midnight; we wish we had the heads of this long sermon, but we may suppose it was for substance the same with his epistles. The meeting being continued till midnight, there were candles set up, *many lights*, (v. 8.) that the hearers might turn to the scriptures Paul quoted, and see whether these things were so; and that this might prevent the reproach of their enemies, who said they met in the night for works of darkness.

111. *A young man* in the congregation, that slept at sermon, was killed by a fall out of the window, but raised to life again; his name signifies one that had good fortune, *Eutychus, bene fortunatus*; and he answered his name. Observe,

1. The infirmity with which he was overtaken. It is probable that his parents brought him, though but a boy, to the assembly, out of a desire to have him well instructed in the things of God, by such a preacher as Paul. Parents should bring their children to hear sermons as soon as they can hear with understanding, (Neh. 8. 2.) even the little ones, Deut. 29. 11. Now this youth was to be blamed, (1.) That he presumptuously sat in the window, unglazed perhaps, and so exposed himself; whereas if he could have been content to sit on the floor, he had been safe. Boys that love to climb, or otherwise endanger themselves, to the grief of their parents, consider not how much it is also an offence to God. (2.) That he slept, nay he fell into a deep sleep when Paul was preaching; which was a sign he had not duly attended to the things that Paul spoke of, though they were weighty things. The peculiar notice taken of his sleeping, makes us willing to hope none of the rest slept, though it was sleeping time and after supper; but this youth fell fast asleep, he was carried away with it; so the word is; which intimates, that he strove against it, but was overpowered by it, and at last sunk down with sleep.

2. The calamity with which he was seized herein; *He fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead*. Some think that the hand of Satan was in it, by the divine permission, and that he designed it for a disturbance to this assembly, and a reproach to Paul and it. Others think that God designed it for a warning to all people to take heed of sleeping when they are hearing the word preached; and certainly we are to make that use of it. We must look upon it as an evil thing, as a bad sign of our low esteem of the word of God, and a great hindrance to our profiting by it: we must be afraid of it, do what we can to prevent our being sleepy, not compose ourselves to sleep, but get our hearts affected with the word we hear to such a degree as may drive sleep far enough; let us watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation; and by it into worse; let the punishment of Eutychus strike an awe upon us, and shew us how jealous God is in the matters of his worship; *Be not deceived; God is not mocked*. See how severely God visited an iniquity that seemed little, and but in a youth, and say, *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?* Apply to this story that lamentation, (Jer. 9. 20, 21.) *Hear the word of the Lord, for death is come up into the windows, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets*.

3. The miraculous mercy shewed him in his recovery to life again, v. 10. It gave a present distraction to the assembly, and an interruption to Paul's preaching; but it proved an occasion of that which was a great confirmation to his preaching, and helped to set it home, and make it effectual.

(1.) *Paul fell on the dead body and embraced it*, thereby expressing a great compassion to, and an affectionate concern for, this young man; so far was he from saying, "He was well enough served for minding so little what I said!" Such tender spirits

as Paul had, are much affected with sad accidents of this kind, and are far from judging and censuring those that fall under them, as if those on whom *the tower of Siloam fell, were sinners above all that dwell at Jerusalem; I tell you, nay*. But this was not all; his falling on him, and embracing him, were in imitation of Elijah, (1 Kings 17. 21.) and Elisha, (2 Kings 4. 34.) in order to the raising of him to life again; not that this could as a means contribute any thing to it, but as a sign it represented the descent of that divine power upon the dead body, for the putting of life into it again, which at the same time he inwardly, earnestly, and in faith, prayed for.

(2.) He assured them that he was returned to life, and it would appear presently. Various speculations, we may suppose, this ill accident had occasioned in the congregation, but Paul puts an end to them; "Trouble not yourselves, be not in any disorder about it, let it not put you into any hurry, for his life is in him; he is not dead, but sleepeth; lay him a while upon a bed, and he will come to himself, for he is now alive." Thus, when Christ raised Lazarus, he said, *Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me*.

(3.) He returned to his work immediately after this interruption; v. 11. *He came up again* to the meeting, they broke bread together in a love-feast, which usually attended the eucharist, in token of their communion with each other, and for the confirmation of friendship among them; and they talked a long while, even till break of day. Paul did not now go on in a continued discourse, as before, but he and his friends fell into a free conversation, the subject of which, no doubt, was good, and to the use of edifying. Christian conference is an excellent means of promoting holiness, comfort, and christian love. They knew not when they should have Paul's company again, and therefore made the best use they could of it when they had it, and reckoned a night's sleep well lost for that purpose.

(4.) Before they parted, they brought the young man alive into the congregation, every one congratulating him upon his return to life from the dead, and they were not a little comforted, v. 12. It was matter of great rejoicing among them, not only to the relations of the young man, but to the whole society, as it not only prevented the reproach that would otherwise have been cast upon them, but contributed very much to the credit of the gospel.

13. And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. 14. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. 15. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. 16. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of pentecost.

Paul is hastening towards Jerusalem, but strives to do all the good he can by the way, *ὡς ἐν παρῖδι*, "as it were by the by;" he had called at Troas, and done good there; and now, he makes a sort of a coasting voyage, the merchants would call a trading voyage, going from place to place, and no doubt endeavouring to make every place he came to the better for him, as every good man should do.

1. He sent his companions by sea to Assos, but he

himself was *mind*ed to go *afoot*, v. 13. He had decreed or determined within himself, that whatever importunity should be used with him to the contrary, urging either his case or his credit, or the convenience of a ship that offered itself, or the company of his friends, he would foot it to Assos: and if the land-way which Paul took was the shorter way, yet it is taken notice of by the ancients as a rough way; (Homer, *Iliad* 6. and Eustathius upon him, say, it was enough to *kill one to go on foot* to Assos, *Lorin. in locum*;) yet that way Paul would take;

1. That he might call on his friends by the way, and do good among them, either converting sinners or edifying saints; and in both he was serving his great Master, and carrying on his great work. Or,

2. That he might inure himself to hardship, and not seem to indulge his ease. Thus he would by voluntary instances of mortification and self-denial *keep under the body, and bring it into subjection*, that he might make his sufferings for Christ, when he was called out to them, the more easy, 2 Tim. 2. 3. We should use ourselves to deny ourselves.

II. At *Assos* he *went on board* with his friends, there they *took him in*; for by this time he had enough of his walk, and was willing to betake himself to the other way of travelling; or perhaps he could not go any further by land, but was obliged to go by water. When Christ sent his disciples away by ship, and tarried behind himself, yet he came to them, and they *took him in*, Mark 6. 45, 51.

III. He made the best of his way to Jerusalem; his ship passed by *Chios*, (v. 15.) touched at *Samos*; (these are places of note among the Greek writers, both poets and historians;) they *tarried* a while at *Trogyllium*, the sea-port next to *Samos*; and the *next day* they came to *Miletus*, the sea-port that lay next to *Ephesus*; for (v. 16.) he had determined not to go to *Ephesus* at this time, because he could not go thither but he would be urged by his friends, whose importunity he could not resist, to make some stay with them there; and because he was resolved not to stay, he would not put himself into a temptation to stay; *for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of pentecost*. He had been at Jerusalem, about four or five years ago, (ch. 18. 21, 22.) and now he was going thither again to pay his continued respects to that church, which he was careful to keep a good correspondence with, that he might not be thought alienated from it by his commission to preach among the Gentiles. He aimed to be there by the *feast of pentecost*, because it was a time of concourse, which would give him an opportunity of propagating the gospel among the Jews and proselytes, who came from all parts to worship at the feast: and the feast of pentecost had been particularly made famous among the christians, by the pouring out of the Spirit. Note, Men of business must fit themselves, and it will contribute to the expediting of it, to set time (with submission to Providence) and strive to keep it; contriving to do that first which we judge to be most needful, and not suffering ourselves to be diverted from it. It is a pleasure to us to be *with our friends*, it diverts us, nothing more; but we must not by it be diverted from our work. When Paul has a call to Jerusalem, he will not loiter away *the time in Asia*, though he had more and kinder friends there. This is not the world we are to be together in; we hope to be so in the other world.

17. And from *Miletus* he sent to *Ephesus*, and called the elders of the church. 18. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, 19.

Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: 20. And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, 21. Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23. Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 24. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. 25. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. 26. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all men. 27. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 28. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. 32. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. 33. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

It should seem, the ship Paul and his companions were embarked in for Jerusalem, attended him on purpose, and stayed or moved as he pleased; for when he came to *Miletus*, he went ashore, and tarried there so long as to *send for* the elders of *Ephesus* to come to him thither; for if he had gone up to *Ephesus*, he could never have got away from them. These elders, or presbyters, some think, were those

twelve who received the Holy Ghost by Paul's hands, *ch.* 19. 6. But beside those, it is probable that Timothy had ordained other elders there for the service of that church, and the country about; these Paul sent for, that he might instruct and encourage them to go on in the work to which they had laid their hands. And what instructions he gave to them, they would give to the people under their charge.

It is a very pathetic and practical discourse with which Paul here takes leave of these elders, and has in it much of the excellent spirit of this good man.

1. He appeals to them concerning both his life and doctrine, all the time he had been in and about Ephesus; (*v.* 18.) "*Ye know after what manner I have been with you, and how I have done the work of an apostle among you.*" He mentions this, (1.) As a confirmation of his commission, and consequently of the doctrine he had preached among them. They all knew him to be a man of a serious, gracious, heavenly spirit, that he was no designing self-seeking man, as seducers are; he could not have been carried on with so much evenness and constancy in his services and sufferings, but by the power of divine grace. The temper of his mind, and the tenour both of his preaching and conversation, were such as plainly spoke that God was with him of a truth, and that he was actuated and animated by a better spirit than his own. (2.) As an instruction to them in whose hands the work was now left, to follow his example; "*Ye know after what manner I have been with you, how I have conducted myself as a minister; in like manner be you with those that are committed to your charge when I am gone; (Phil. 4. 9.) What you have seen in me that is good, do.*"

1. His spirit and conversation were excellent and exemplary; they knew *after what manner he had been among them*, and how he had had his conversation *toward them, in simplicity, and godly sincerity*, 2 Cor. 1. 12. How *holily, justly, and unblamably he behaved himself*, and how *gentle he was toward them*, 1 Thess. 2. 7, 10.

(1.) He had conducted himself well *all along, from the very first day that he came into Asia; at all seasons*; the manner of his entering in among them was such as nobody could find fault with. He appeared from the first day they knew him, to be a man that aimed not only to do *well*, but to do *good*, wherever he came. He was a man that was consistent with himself, and all of a piece; take him where you would, he was the same at all seasons, he did not turn with the wind, nor change with the weather, but was uniform, like a die, which, throw it which way you will, lights on a square side.

(2.) He had made it his business to *serve the Lord*; to promote the honour of God, and the interest of Christ and his kingdom among them; he never served himself, nor made himself a *servant of men*, of their lusts and humours, nor was he a time-server; but he made it his business to serve the Lord. In his ministry, in his whole conversation, he *proved* himself what he *wrote* himself, Paul a *servant of Jesus Christ*, Rom. 1. 1.

(3.) He had done his work *with all humility of mind*—*μετὰ πάσης ταπεινότητος*, that is, in all works of condescension, modesty, and self-abasement. Though he was one that God had put a great deal of honour upon, and done a great deal of good by, yet he never took state upon him, nor kept people at a distance, but conversed as freely and familiarly with the meanest, for their good, as if he had stood upon a level with them. He was willing to stoop to any service, and to make himself and his labours as cheap as they could desire. Note, Those that would in any office serve the Lord acceptably

to him, and profitably to others, must do it with all *humility of mind*, Matt. 20. 26, 27.

(4.) He had always been very tender, affectionate, and compassionate, among them; he had *served the Lord with many tears*. Paul was herein like his Master, often in tears; in his praying, he *wept and made supplication*, Hos. 12. 4. In his preaching, what he had told them before, he told them again, *even weeping*, Phil. 3. 18. In his concern for them, though his acquaintance with them was but of a late standing, yet so near did they lie to his heart, that he *wept with them that wept*, and mingled his tears with theirs upon every occasion, which was very endearing.

(5.) He had struggled with many difficulties among them; he went on in his work in the face of much opposition, *many temptations*, trials of his patience and courage, such discouragements as perhaps were sometimes *temptations* to him, as to Jeremiah in a like case, to say, *I will not speak any more in the name of the Lord*, Jer. 20. 8, 9. These befell him *by the lying in wait of the Jews*, who still were plotting some mischief or other against him. Note, Those are the faithful servants of the Lord, that continue to serve him in the midst of troubles and perils; that care not what enemies they make, so that they can but approve themselves to their Master, and make him their friend. Paul's tears were owing to his temptations; his afflictions helped to excite his good affections.

2. His preaching was likewise such as it should be, *v.* 20, 21. He came to Ephesus to preach the gospel of Christ among them, and he had been faithful both to them, and to him that appointed him.

(1.) He was a *plain* preacher, and one that delivered his message so as to be understood; this is intimated in two words, *I have shewed you, and have taught you*; he did not amuse them with nice speculations, nor lead them into, and then lose them in, the clouds of lofty notions and expressions; but he *shewed* them the plain truths of the gospel, which were of greatest consequence and importance, and *taught* them as children are taught. "*I have shewed you the right way to happiness, and taught you to go in it.*"

(2.) He was a *powerful* preacher; intimated in his testifying to them; he preached as one upon oath, that was himself fully assured of the truth of what he preached, and was desirous to *convince* them of it, and to *influence and govern* them by it. He preached the gospel, not as a hawkler proclaims news in the street, (it is all one to him whether it be true or false,) but as a conscientious witness gives in his evidence at the bar, with the utmost seriousness and concern. Paul preached the gospel as a testimony to them if they received it; but as a testimony *against* them if they rejected it.

(3.) He was a *profitable* preacher; one that in all his preaching aimed at doing good to those he preached to; he studied that which was *profitable unto them*, which had a tendency to make them wise and good, wiser and better; to inform their judgments, and reform their hearts and lives. He preached *τὰ συμφέροντα*, such things as *brought with them* divine light and heat, and power to their souls. It is not enough not to preach that which is hurtful, which leads into error or hardens in sin, but we must preach that which is profitable. *We do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying*. Paul aimed to preach not that which was *pleasing*, but that which was *profitable*, and to please only in order to profit. God is said to *teach his people to profit*, Isa. 48. 17. Those teach for God, that teach people to profit.

(4.) He was a *painful* preacher, very industrious and indefatigable in his work; he preached *publicly, and from house to house*. He did not confine himself to a corner, when he had opportunity of preach-

ing in the great congregation; nor did he confine himself to the congregation, when there was occasion for private and personal instruction. He was neither afraid nor ashamed to preach the gospel publicly, nor did he grudge to bestow his pains privately, among a few, when there was occasion for it. He preached publicly to the flock that came together into the green pastures, and went from house to house to seek those that were weak, and had wandered; and did not think that the one would excuse him from the other. Ministers should in their private visits, and as they go from house to house, discourse of those things which they have taught *publicly*, repeat them, inculcate them, and explain them, if it be needful, asking, *Have you understood all these things?* And especially, they should help persons to apply it to themselves and their own case.

(5.) He was a *faithful* preacher; he not only preached that which was profitable, but he preached *every thing* that he thought might be profitable, and *kept back* nothing; though the preaching of it might either cost him more pains, or be disobliging to some, and expose him to their ill-will. He declined not preaching whatever he thought might be profitable, though it was not fashionable, nor to some acceptable. He did not keep back reproofs when they were necessary and would be profitable, for fear of offending; nor keep back the preaching of the cross, though he knew it was to the Jews a *stumbling-block*, and to the Greeks *foolishness*, as the Roman missionaries in China lately did.

(6.) He was a *catholic* preacher; he testified both to the *Jews*, and also to the *Greeks*. Though he was born and bred a Jew, and had an entire affection for that nation, and was trained up in their prejudices against the Gentiles, yet he did not therefore confine himself to the Jews, and avoid the Gentiles; but preached as readily to them as to the Jews; and conversed as freely with them. And, on the other hand, though he was called to be the apostle of the Gentiles, and the Jews had an implacable enmity against him upon that score, had done him many an ill turn, and here at Ephesus were continually plotting against him, yet he did not therefore abandon them as reprobates, but continued to deal with them for their good. Ministers must preach the gospel with impartiality; for they are ministers of Christ for the universal church.

(7.) He was a truly *christian, evangelical* preacher, he did not preach philosophical notions, or matters of doubtful disputation, nor did he preach politics, or intermeddle at all with affairs of state or the civil government; but he preached *faith* and *repentance*, the two great gospel-graces, the nature and necessity of them; these he urged upon all occasions.

[1.] *Repentance toward God*; that those who by sin had gone away from God, and were going further and further from him into a state of endless separation from him, should by true repentance look toward God, turn toward him, move toward him, and hasten to him. He preached repentance as God's great command, (*ch. 17. 30.*) which we must obey—*that men should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance*; (so he explains it, *ch. 26. 20.*) and he preached it as Christ's gift, in order to the *remission of sins*, (*ch. 5. 31.*) and directed people to look up to him for it.

[2.] *Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*. We must by repentance look toward God as our *End*; and by faith toward Christ as our *Way* to God. Sin must by repentance be abandoned and forsaken, and then Christ must by faith be relied on for the pardon of sin. Our repentance toward God is not sufficient, we must have a true faith in Christ as our Redeemer and Saviour, consenting to him as our *Lord* and our *God*. For there is no coming to

God, as penitent prodigals to a Father, but in the strength and righteousness of Jesus Christ as Mediator.

Such a preacher as this they all knew Paul had been; and if they will carry on the same work, they must walk in the same spirit, in the same steps.

II. He declares his expectation of *sufferings* and *afflictions* in his present journey to Jerusalem, *v. 22—24*. Let them not think that he quitted Asia now, for fear of persecution; no, he was so far from running away like a coward from the post of danger, that he was now like a hero hastening to the high places of the field, where the battle was likely to be hottest; *Now behold, I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem*; which may be understood either, (1.) Of the certain foresight he had of trouble before him. Though he was not yet bound in *body*, he was bound in *spirit*; he was in full expectation of trouble, and made it his daily business to prepare for it; he was bound in spirit, as all good christians are *free* in spirit, endeavouring to accommodate themselves to the will of God if they should be reduced to poverty. Or, (2.) Of the strong impulse he was under from the Spirit of God working upon his spirit to go this journey; *"I go bound in the spirit"*, that is, firmly resolved to proceed, and well assured that it is by a divine direction and influence that I am so, and not from any humour or design of my own. *I go led by the Spirit*, and bound to follow him, wherever he leads me."

1. He does not know *particularly* the things that shall befall him at Jerusalem; whence the trouble shall spring, what shall be the occasion of it, what the circumstances, and to what degree it shall arise; God had not thought fit to reveal that to him. It is good for us to be kept in the dark concerning future events, that we may be always waiting on God, and waiting for him. When we go abroad, it should be with this thought, we *know not the things that shall befall us*, nor what a day, or a night, or an hour, may bring forth; and therefore must refer ourselves to God, let him do with us as seemeth good in his eyes, and study to stand complete in his whole will.

2. Yet he does know in general that there is a storm before him; for the *prophets* in every city he passed through, told him by the *Holy Ghost*, that *bonds* and *afflictions* did abide him. Beside the common notice given to all christians and ministers to expect and prepare for sufferings, Paul had particular intimations of an extraordinary trouble, greater and longer than any he had yet met with, that was now before him.

3. He fixes a brave and heroic resolution to go on with his work, notwithstanding. It was a melancholy peal that was rung in his ears in every city, that *bonds* and *afflictions* did abide him; it was a hard case for a poor man to labour continually to do good, and to be so ill treated for his pains. Now it is worth while to inquire how he bore it? He was flesh and blood as well as other men; he was so, and yet by the grace of God he was enabled to go on with his work, and to look with a gracious and generous contempt upon all the difficulties and discouragements he met with in it. Let us take it from his own mouth here, (*v. 24.*) where he speaks not with obstinacy or ostentation, but with a holy humble resolution; *"None of these things move me"*, all my care is to proceed and to persevere in the way of my duty, and to finish well." Paul is here an example,

(1.) Of holy courage and resolution in our work, notwithstanding the difficulties and oppositions we meet with in it; he saw them before him, but he made nothing of them; *None of these things move me*; ἑνὸς λόγου εὐθιεύω—I make no account of them. He did not lay these things to heart, Christ and heaven lay there. None of these things moved him,

[1.] They did not drive him off from his work ; he did not tack about, and go back again, when he saw the storm rise ; but went on resolutely, preaching there where he knew how dear it would cost him.

[2.] They did not deprive him of his comfort, nor make him drive on heavily in his work ; in the midst of troubles he was as one unconcerned ; in his *patience* he possessed his soul, and when he was as *sorrowful*, yet he was *always rejoicing*, and in all things *more than a conqueror*. Those that have their *conversation in heaven*, can look down, not only upon the common troubles of this earth, but upon the threatening rage and malice of hell itself, and say, that *none of these things move them*, as knowing that none of these things can hurt them.

(2.) Of a holy contempt of life, and the continuance and comforts of it ; *Neither count I my life dear to myself*. Life is sweet, and is naturally dear to us, *all that a man has, will he give for his life* ; but all that a man has, and life too, will *he* give, who understands himself aright and his own interest, rather than lose the favour of God, and hazard eternal life. Paul was of this mind ; though to an eye of nature life is superlatively *valuable*, yet to an eye of faith it is comparatively *despicable* ; it is not *so dear*, but it can be cheerfully parted with for Christ. This explains Luke 14. 26. where we are required to *hate* our own lives, not in a hasty passion, as Job and Jeremiah, but in a holy submission to the will of God, and a resolution to *die* for Christ rather than to *deny* him.

(3.) Of a holy concern to go through with the work of life, which should be much more our care than to secure either the outward comforts of it or the continuance of it. Blessed Paul counts not his life *dear* in comparison with this, and resolves in the strength of Christ, *non propter vitam vivendi perdere causas—that he never will, to save his life, lose the ends of living*. He is willing to spend his life in labour, to hazard his life in dangerous services, to waste it in toilsome services ; nay, to lay down his life in martyrdom, so that he may but answer the great intentions of his birth, of his baptism, and of his ordination to the apostleship.

Two things this great and good man is in care about, and if he gain them it is no matter to him what comes of life.

[1.] That he may be *found faithful* to the trust reposed in him ; that he may *finish the ministry which he has received of the Lord Jesus*, may do the work which he was sent into the world about ; or rather, which he was sent into the church about ; that he might complete the service of his generation, might make *full proof of his ministry* ; that he might go through the business of it, and others might reap the advantage of it, to the utmost of what was designed ; that he might, as is said of the two witnesses, *finish his testimony*, (Rev. 11. 7.) and might not do his work by halves. Observe, *First*, The apostleship was a ministry both to Christ and to the souls of men ; and they that were called to it, considered more the *ministry* of it than the *dignity* or *dominion* of it ; and if the apostles did so, much more ought the pastors and teachers to do so, and to be in the church as those that serve. *Secondly*, This ministry was *received from the Lord Jesus* ; he intrusted them with it, and from him they received their charge ; for him they do their work, in his name, in his strength, and to him they must give up their account. It was Christ that put them into the *ministry* ; (1 Tim. 1. 12.) it is he that carries them on in their ministry, and from him they have strength to do their service, and bear up under the hardships of it. *Thirdly*, The work of this ministry was to *testify the gospel of the grace of God*, to publish it to the world, to prove it, and to recommend it ; and being the gospel of the grace of God, it has enough

in it to recommend itself ; it is a proof of God's good-will to us, and a means of his good work in us ; it shews him gracious towards us, and tends to make us gracious, and so is the gospel of the grace of God. Paul made it the business of his life to testify this, and desired not to live a day longer than he might be instrumental to spread the knowledge and savour and power of this gospel.

[2.] That he may finish well ; he cares not when the period of his life comes, nor how, be it ever so soon, ever so sudden, ever so sad, as to outward circumstances, so that he may but *finish his course with joy*. *First*, He looks upon his life as a *course, a race*, so the word is. Our life is a *race set before us*, Heb. 12. 1. This intimates that we have our labours appointed us, for we were not sent into the world to be idle ; and our limits appointed us, for we were not sent into the world to be here always ; but to pass through the world, nay to run through it ; and it is soon run through ; I may add, to *run the gauntlet* through it. *Secondly*, He counts upon the *finishing of his course*, and speaks of it as sure and near, and that which he had his thoughts continually upon. Dying is the end of our *race*, when we come off either with honour or shame. *Thirdly*, He is full of care to finish it well, which implies a holy desire of obtaining, and a holy fear of coming short. "Oh ! that I may but finish my course with joy ; and then all will be well, perfectly and eternally well." *Fourthly*, He thinks nothing too much to do, or too hard to suffer, so that he might but finish well, finish with joy. We must look upon it as the business of our life to provide for a joyful death ; that we may not only die safely, but die comfortably.

III. Counting upon it that this was the last time they should see him, he appeals to their consciences concerning his integrity, and demands of them a testimony to it.

1. He tells them, that he was now taking his last leave of them ; (v. 25.) *I know that ye all, among whom I have been conversant preaching the kingdom of God*, though ye may have letters from me, shall never *see my face* again. When any of us part with our friends, we may say, and should say, "We know not that ever we shall see one another again, our friends may be removed, or we ourselves may." But Paul here speaks it with assurance, by the Spirit of prophecy, that these Ephesians should *see his face no more* ; and we cannot think that he who spake so doubtfully of that which he was not sure of, (*not knowing the things that shall befall me there*, v. 22.) would speak this with so much confidence, especially when he foresaw what a trouble it would be to his friends here, unless he had had a special warrant from the Spirit to say it ; to whom I think they do wrong, who suppose that, notwithstanding this, Paul did afterward come to Ephesus, and see them again. He would never have said thus solemnly, *Now, behold, I know it*, if he had not known it *for certain*. Not but that he foresaw that he had a great deal of time and work yet before him, but he foresaw that his work would be cut out for him in other places, and in these parts he had no more to do. Here he had for a great while *gone about preaching the kingdom of God*, preaching down the kingdom of sin and Satan, and preaching up the authority and dominion of God in Christ ; preaching the kingdom of glory as the end, and the kingdom of grace as the way ; many a time they had been glad to see his face in the pulpit, and saw it as it had been the face of an angel. If the feet of these *messengers of peace* were beautiful upon the mountains, what were their faces ? But now they shall see his face no more. Note, We ought often to think of it, that those who now are *preaching to us the kingdom of God*, will shortly be removed, and we shall see their faces no more ; the prophets, do they live for

ever? Yet a little while is their light with us; it concerns us therefore to improve it while we have it, that when we shall see their faces no more on earth, yet we may hope to look them in the face with comfort in the great day.

2. He appeals to them concerning the faithful discharge of his ministry among them; (v. 26.) "Wherefore, seeing my ministry is at an end with you, it concerns both you and me to reflect, and look back;" and, (1.) He challenges them to prove him unfaithful, or to have said or done any thing by which he had made himself accessory to the ruin of any precious soul; *I am pure from the blood of all men, the blood of souls.* This plainly refers to that of the prophet, (Ezek. 33. 6.) where the *blood* of him that perishes by the sword of the enemy, is said to be required at the hand of the unfaithful *watchman* that did not give warning; "You cannot say but I have given warning, and therefore no man's blood can be laid at my door." If a minister has approved himself faithful, he may have this rejoicing in himself, *"I am pure from the blood of all men, and ought to have this testimony from others."* (2.) He therefore leaves the *blood* of them that perish, upon their own heads, because they had fair warning given them, but they would not take it. (3.) He charges these ministers to look to it, that they took care and pains, as he had done; *"I am pure from the blood of all men, see that you keep yourselves so too. I take you to record this day;"* ἡ τὴν ἑμυνομένην ἡμέραν, "I call this day to witness to you," so Stresa. As sometimes the heavens and earth are appealed to, so here this day shall be a witness; this parting day.

3. He proves his own fidelity with this; (v. 27.) *For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.* (1.) He had preached to them nothing but the counsel of God, and had not added any inventions of his own; it was pure gospel, and nothing else, the will of God concerning your salvation. The gospel is the *counsel of God*; it is admirably contrived by his wisdom, it is unalterably determined by his will, and it is kindly designed by his grace for our glory, 1 Cor. 2. 7. This *counsel of God* it is the business of ministers to declare as it is revealed, and not otherwise, nor any further. (2.) He had preached to them the whole counsel of God; as he had preached to them the gospel pure, so he had preached it to them entire; he had gone over a *body of divinity* among them, that, having the truths of the gospel opened to them methodically from first to last in order, they might the better understand them, by seeing them in their several connections with, and dependences upon, one another. (3.) He had not shunned to do it; had not wilfully or designedly avoided the declaring of any part of the counsel of God. He had not, to save his own pains, declined preaching upon the most difficult parts of the gospel, nor, to save his own credit, declined preaching upon the most plain and easy parts of it; he had not shunned preaching those doctrines which he knew would be provoking to the watchful enemies of christianity, or displeasing to the careless professors of it, but faithfully took his work before him, *whether they would hear or forbear.* And thus it was that he kept himself pure from the blood of all men.

IV. He charges them as ministers to be diligent and faithful in their work.

1. He commits the care of the church at Ephesus, that is, the saints, the christians that were there and thereabouts, (Eph. 1. 1.) to them; who, though doubtless they were so numerous that they could not all meet in one place, but worshipped God in several congregations, under the conduct of several ministers, are yet called here *one flock*, because they not only agreed in *one faith*, as they did with all christian churches, but in many instances they

kept up communion one with another. To these elders or presbyters the apostle here, upon the actual foresight of his own final leaving them, commits the government of this church, and tells them that not he, but the *Holy Ghost*, had made them *overseers*, ἐπισκόπους—*bishops of the flock*. "You that are presbyters are bishops of the Holy Ghost's making, that are to take the oversight of this part of the church of God," 1 Pet. 5. 1, 2. Tit. 1. 5, 7. While Paul was present at Ephesus, he presided in all the affairs of that church, which made the elders loath to part with him; but now this eagle *stirs up the nest, flutters over her young*; now that they begin to be fledged, they must learn to fly themselves, and to act without him, for the *Holy Ghost* had made them *overseers*. They took not this honour to themselves, nor was it conferred upon them by any prince or potentate, but the Holy Ghost in them qualified them for, and enriched them to, this great undertaking, the *Holy Ghost fell upon them*, ch. 19. 6. The Holy Ghost also directed them that *chose*, and called, and ordained, them to this work in answer to prayer.

2. He commanded them to mind the work to which they were called; dignity calls for duty; if the Holy Ghost has made them *overseers of the flock*, that is, shepherds, they must be true to their trust.

(1.) They must *take heed to themselves* in the first place, must have a very jealous eye upon all the motions of their own souls, and upon all they said and did; must *walk circumspectly*, and know how to *behave themselves aright in the house of God*, in which they were now advanced to the office of stewards; "You have many eyes upon you, some to take example by you, others to pick quarrels with you, and therefore you ought to *take heed to yourselves*." Those are not likely to be skilful or faithful keepers of the vineyards of others, that do not keep their own.

(2.) "Take heed to the flock, to all the flock, some to one part of it, others to another, according as your call and opportunity are, but see that no part of it be neglected among you." Ministers must not only take heed to their own souls, but must have a constant regard to the souls of those who are under their charge, as shepherds have to their sheep, that they may receive no damage; "Take heed to all the flock, that none of them either of themselves wander from the fold, or be seized by the beasts of prey; that none of them be missing, or miscarry, through your neglect.

(3.) They must *feed the church of God*, must do all the parts of the shepherd's office; must lead the sheep of Christ into the green pastures, must lay meat before them; must do what they can to heal those that are distempered, and have no appetite to their meat; must feed them with wholesome doctrine, with a tender evangelical discipline, and must see that nothing is wanting that is necessary in order to their being nourished up to eternal life. There is need of pastors, not only to *gather* the church of God by the bringing in of those that are without, but to *feed* it by building up those that are within.

(4.) They must *watch*, (v. 31.) as *shepherds* keep watch *over their flocks* by night; must be awake and watchful; must not give way to spiritual sloth and slumber, but must stir up themselves to their business, and closely attend it. *Watch thou in all things*, (2 Tim. 4. 5.) watch against every thing that will be hurtful to the flock, and watch to every thing that will be advantageous to it; improve every opportunity of doing it a kindness.

3. He gives them several good reasons why they should mind the business of their ministry.

(1.) Let them consider the interest of their Master, and his concern for the flock that was commit-

ted to their charge, v. 28. It is the church which he has purchased with his own blood. [1.] "It is his own; it is you are but his servants to take care of it for him. It is your honour, that you are employed for God, who will own you in his service; but then your carelessness and treachery are so much the worse, if you neglect your work, for you wrong God, and are false to him. From him you received the trust, and to him you must give up your account, and therefore *take heed to yourselves*. And if it be the church of God, he expects you should shew your love to him, by feeding his sheep and lambs." [2.] He has purchased it; the world is God's by right of creation, but the church is his by right of redemption, and therefore it ought to be dear to us, for it was dear to him, because it cost him dear, and we cannot better shew it than by feeding his sheep and his lambs. [3.] This church of God is what he has purchased; not as Israel of old, when he gave men for them, and people for their life, (Isa. 43. 3, 4.) but with his own blood. This proves that Christ is God, for he is called so here, where yet he is said to purchase the church with his own blood; the blood was his as Man, yet so close is the union between the divine and human nature, that it is here called the blood of God, for it was the blood of him who is God, and his being so, put such dignity and worth into it as made it both a valuable ransom of us from all evil, and a valuable purchase for us of all good, nay a purchase of us to Christ, to be to him a peculiar people; *Thine they were, and thou gavest them me*; in consideration of this, therefore feed the church of God, because it is purchased at so dear a rate. Did Christ lay down his life to purchase it, and shall his ministers be wanting in any care and pains to feed it? Their neglect of its true interest is a contempt of his blood that purchased it.

(2.) Let them consider the danger that the flock was in of being made a prey to its adversaries, v. 29, 30. "If the flock be thus precious upon the account of its relation to God, and its redemption by Christ, then you are concerned to take heed both to yourselves and to it." Here are reasons for both.

[1.] *Take heed to the flock*, for wolves are abroad, that seek to devour; (v. 29.) *I know this, that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you*. First, Some understand it of persecutors, that will inform against the christians, and incense the magistrates against them, and will have no compassion on the flock. They thought, because, while Paul was with them, the rage of the Jews was most against him, that, when he was gone out of the country, they should be quiet: "No," says he, "after my departing you will find the persecuting spirit still working, therefore take heed to the flock, confirm them in the faith, comfort and encourage them, that they may not either leave Christ for fear of suffering, or lose their peace and comfort in their sufferings." Ministers must take a more than ordinary care of the flock in times of persecution. Secondly, It is rather to be understood of seducers and false teachers; probably, he has an eye to those of the circumcision, that preached up the ceremonial law; these he calls *grievous wolves*, for though they came in sheep's clothing, nay, in shepherd's clothing, they made mischief in the congregations of christians, sowed discord among them, drew away many from the pure gospel of Christ, and did all they could to blenish and defame those that adhered to it; *not sparing* the most valuable members of the flock; stirring up those whom they could influence to bite and devour them; (Gal. 5. 15.) therefore they are called *dogs*, (Phil. 3. 2.) as here *wolves*. While Paul was at Ephesus, they kept away, for they durst not face him; but when he was gone, then they entered in among them, and sowed their tares where he had sown the good seed. "There-

fore take heed to the flock, and do all you can to establish them in the truth, and to arm them against the insinuations of the false teachers."

[2.] *Take heed to yourselves*, for some shepherds will apostatise; (v. 30.) "Also of your own selves, among the members, nay, perhaps, among the ministers of your own church, among you that I am now speaking to, (though I am willing to hope it does not go so far as that,) shall men arise speaking *herverse things*, things contrary to the right rule of the gospel, and destructive of the great intentions of it. Nay, they will pervert some sayings of the gospel, and wrest them to make them patronize their errors, 2 Pet. 3. 16. Even those that were well thought of among you, and that you had confidence in, will grow proud, and conceited, and opinionative, and will refine upon the gospel, and will pretend with more nice and curious speculations to advance you to a higher form; but it is to draw away disciples after them, to make a party for themselves, that shall admire them, and be led by them, and pin their faith upon their sleeve." Some read it, *to draw away the disciples after them*; those that are already disciples of Christ, draw them from him to follow them. "Therefore, take heed to yourselves; when you are told that some of you shall betray the gospel, you are each of you concerned to ask, *Is it I?* and to look well to yourselves." This was there fulfilled in Phygellus and Hermogenes, who turned away from Paul and the doctrine he had preached, (2 Tim. 1. 15.) and in Hymeneus and Philetus, who concerning the truth erred, and overthrew the faith of some, (2 Tim. 2. 18.) which explains this here. But though there were some such seducers in the church of Ephesus, yet it should seem by St. Paul's Epistle to that church, (wherein we do not find such complaints and reprehensions as we meet with in some other of his epistles,) that that church was not so much infested with false teachers, at least not so much infected with their false doctrine, as some other churches were; but its peace and purity were preserved by the blessing of God on the pains and vigilance of these presbyters, to whom the apostle, in the actual foresight and consideration of the rise of heresies and schisms, as well as of his own death, committed the government of this church.

(3.) Let them consider the great pains that Paul had taken in planting this church; (v. 31.) "Remember that by the space of three years" (for so long he had been preaching in Ephesus, and the parts adjacent) "I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears; and be not you negligent in building upon that foundation which I was so diligent to lay." [1.] Paul, like a faithful watchman, had warned them, and by the warnings he gave men of the danger of their continuing in their judaism and heathenism, he prevailed with them to embrace christianity. [2.] He warned every one; beside the public warnings he gave in his preaching, he applied himself to particular persons according as he saw their case called for it, which he had something to say peculiar to. [3.] He was constant in giving warning; he warned night and day, his time was filled up with his work; in the night, when he should have been reposing himself, he was dealing with those he could not yet to speak with in the day about their souls. [4.] He was indefatigable in it, he ceased not to warn; though they were ever so obstinate against his warnings, yet he did not cease to warn, not knowing but that at length they might, by the grace of God, be overcome; though they were ever so pliable to his warnings, yet he did not think that would be a sufficient excuse for him to desist, but still he warned them that were righteous, *not to turn from their righteousness*, as he had warned them when they were wicked, *to turn from their wickedness*, Ezek. 3. 18—21. [5.] He spake to

them about their souls with a great deal of affection and concern, he *warned them with tears*. As he had *served the Lord*, so he had served them, *with many tears*, v. 19. He warned them with tears of compassion, thereby shewing how much he was himself affected with their misery and danger in a sinful state and way, that he might affect them with it. Thus Paul had begun the good work at Ephesus, thus free had he been of his pains; and why then should they be sparing of their pains in carrying it on?

V. He recommends them to a divine conduct and influence; (v. 32.) "*And now, brethren*, having given you this solemn charge and caution, *I commend you to God*. Now that I have said what I have to say, *The Lord be with you*; I must leave you, but I leave you in good hands." They were in care what would become of them, how they should go on in their work, break through their difficulties, and what provision would be made for them and their families. In answer to all these perplexities, Paul directs them to look up to God with an eye of faith, and beseeches God to look down on them with an eye of favour.

1. See here to whom he commends them; he calls them *brethren*, not only as christians, but as ministers, and thereby encourages them to hope in God, as he had done; for they and he were brethren.

(1.) He commends them to God, begs of God to provide for them, to take care of them, and to supply all their needs, and encourages them to *cast all their care upon him*, with an assurance that he cared for them; "Whatever you want, go to God, let your eye be ever toward him, and your dependence upon him, in all your straits and difficulties; and let this be your comfort, that you have a God to go to, a God all-sufficient." *I commend you to God*, that is, to his providence, and to the protection and care of that. It is enough that, whomsoever we are separated from, still we have *God nigh unto us*, 1 Pet. 4. 19.

(2.) He commends them to the word of his grace, by which some understand Christ; he is the *Word*, (John 1. 1.) the *Word of life*, because life is treasured up for us in him; (1 John 1. 1.) and in the same sense he is here called the *Word of God's grace*, because *from his fulness we receive grace for grace*. He commends them to Christ, puts them into his hand, as being his servants, whom he would in a particular manner take care of. Paul commends them not only to God and to his providence, but to Christ and his grace, as Christ himself did his disciples when he was leaving them; *Ye believe in God, believe also in me*. It comes much to one, if by the word of his grace we understand the gospel of Christ, for it is Christ in the word that is *nigh unto us* for our support and encouragement, and his word is spirit and life; "You will find much relief by acting faith on the providence of God, but much more by acting faith on the promises of the gospel." He commends them to the word of Christ's grace, which he spake to his disciples when he sent them forth, the commission he gave them, with assurance that he would be with them *always to the end of the world*; "Take hold of that word, and God give you the benefit and comfort of it, and you need no more." He commends them to the word of God's grace, not only as the foundation of their hope, and the fountain of their joy, but as the rule of their walking; "*I commend you to God*, as your Master, whom you are to serve, and I have found him a good Master, and to the word of his grace, as cutting you out your work, and by which you are to govern yourselves; observe the precepts of this word, and then live upon the promises of it."

2. See here what he commends them to the word of God's grace for, not so much for a protection

from their enemies, or a provision for their families, as for the spiritual blessings which they most needed, and ought most to value. They had received, and were intrusted to preach, the gospel of the grace of God. Now he recommends them to that,

(1.) For their edification; "*It is able* (the Spirit of grace working with it and by it) *to build you up*, and you may depend upon that, while you keep close to it, and are deriving daily from it. Though you are already furnished with good gifts, yet that is able to build you up; there is that in it which you need to be better acquainted with, and more affected with." Note, Ministers, in preaching the word of grace, must aim at their own edification, as well as at the edification of others. The most advanced christians, while they are in this world, are capable of growing, and they will find the word of grace to have still more and more in it to contribute to their growth. It is still able to *build them up*.

(2.) For their glorification; *It is able to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*. The word of God's grace gives it, not only as it gives the knowledge of it, (for *life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel*;) but as it gives the promise of it, the promise of a God that cannot lie, and which is *yea and amen in Christ*; and by the word, as the ordinary vehicle, *the Spirit of grace is given*, (ch. 10. 44.) *to be the seal of the promise, and the earnest of the eternal life promised*; and thus it is the word of God's grace that gives us the inheritance. Note, [1.] Heaven is an inheritance which gives an indefeasible right to all the heirs; it is an inheritance like that of the Israelites in Canaan, which was by promise and yet by lot, but was sure to all the seed. [2.] This inheritance is entailed upon, and secured to, all those, and those only, that are sanctified; for as these cannot be welcome guests to the holy God, or the holy society above, that are un-sanctified; so really heaven would be no heaven to them; but to all that are sanctified, that are born again, and on whom the image of God is renewed, it is as sure as almighty power and eternal truth can make it. Those therefore that would make out a title to that inheritance, must make it sure that they are among the sanctified, are joined to them, and incorporated with them, and partake of the same image and nature; for we cannot expect to be among the glorified hereafter, unless we be among the sanctified here.

VI. He recommends himself to them as an example of indifference to this world, and to every thing in it; which, if they would walk in the same Spirit, and in the same steps, they would find to contribute greatly to their easy and comfortable passage through it. He had recommended them to God, and to the word of his grace, for spiritual blessings, which, without doubt, are the best blessings; but what shall they do for food for their families, an agreeable subsistence for themselves, and portions for their children? "As to these," Paul saith, "do as I did;" and how was that? He here tells them,

1. That he never aimed at worldly wealth; (v. 33.) "*I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel*; nor do you, and then you will be easy." There were many in Ephesus, and many of those that had embraced the christian faith, who were rich, had a great deal of money, and plate, and rich furniture, and wore very good clothes, and made a very good appearance. Now, (1.) Paul was not ambitious to live like them; we may take it in that sense; "*I never coveted to have so much silver and gold at command as I see others have*; nor to wear such rich clothes as I see others wear; I neither condemn them nor envy them; I can live comfortably and usefully, without living great." The false apostles desired to *make a fair show in the flesh*, (Gal. 6. 12.) to make a figure in the world; but

Paul did not do so; he *knew how to want, and how to be abased*. (2.) He was not greedily to receive from them, either silver, or gold, or apparel; so far from being always craving, that he was not so much as coveting, nor desired them to allow him so and so for his pains among them, but was content with such things as he had; he never made a gain of them, 2 Cor. 12. 14. He could not only say with Moses, (Numb. 16. 15.) and with Samuel, (1 Sam. 12. 3, 5.) *Whose ox have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded?* But, "Whose kindness have I coveted, or asked? Or to whom have I been burthen-some?" He protests against *desiring a gift*, Phil. 4. 17.

2. That he had worked for his living, and taken a deal of pains to get bread; (v. 34.) "*Ye, ye yourselves know*, and have been eye-witnesses of it, *that these hands of mine have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me*; you have seen me busy early and late, cutting out tents and making them up;" and they being commonly made of leather, it was very hard work. Observe, (1.) Paul was sometimes reduced to necessities, and the want of the common supports of life, though he was so great a favourite of Heaven, and so great a blessing to this earth. What an unthinking, unkind, and ungrateful world is this, that could let such a man as Paul be poor in it! (2.) He desired no more than to have his necessities supplied; he did not work at his calling to enrich himself, but to maintain himself with food and raiment. (3.) When he was to earn his bread, he did it by a manual occupation. Paul had a head and a tongue that he might have got money by, but they were *these hands*, saith he, *that ministered to my necessities*. What pity was it that *those hands, by the laying on of which the Holy Ghost had been so often conferred, those hands, by which God had wrought special miracles*, and both these at Ephesus too, (ch. 19. 6, 11.) should there be obliged to lay themselves to the needle and shears, the awl and tacking-end, in tent-making, purely to get bread! Paul puts these presbyters (and others in them) in mind of this, that they may not think it strange if they be thus neglected, and yet to go on in their work, and make the best shift they can to live; the less encouragement they have from men, the more they shall have from God. (4.) He worked not only for himself, but for the support of *them also that were with him*; that was hard indeed! It had better become them to have worked for him (to maintain him as their tutor) than he for them; but so it is; those that are willing to take the labouring oar, will find those about them willing they should have it. If Paul will work for the maintenance of his companions, he is welcome to do it.

3. That even *then* when he worked for the supply of his own necessities, yet he spared something out of what he got, for the relief of others; for this he here obliges them to do; (v. 35.) "*I have shewed you all things*, in all the parts of your duty I have set you your copy, and given you a good example, and particularly in this, *that so labouring you ought to support the weak*." Some understand it of their supporting the faith of weak believers, by removing the prejudices which some conceived against christianity, as if the preachers of it made a gainful trade of their preaching, and the gospel was only a trick to get money by, and pick people's pockets; "Now, that you may cut off occasion from those that seek occasion to reproach us, and so may support the weak among us, you would do well, for the present, to get your livelihood by the labour of your hands, and not to depend upon your ministry." But I rather understand it of their helping to support the sick, and the poor, and those that could not labour, because it agrees with Paul's exhortation, (Eph. 4. 28.) *Let him labour, working with his hands, that*

he may have to give to him that needeth. We must labour in an honest employment, not only that we may be able to live, but that we may be able to give.

This might seem a hard saying, and therefore Paul backs it with a saying of our Master's, which he would have them always to remember. These words our Lord Jesus said: it should seem, they were words he often used to his disciples; when he himself did so much good gratis, and bid them do so too, (Matt. 10. 8, 9.) he added this saying, which, though no where recorded by the evangelists, yet Paul had by word of mouth from Peter, or some other of the disciples; and an excellent saying it is, and has something of a paradox in it; *It is more blessed to give, than to receive*. "It is" (saith Dr. Tillotson) "a particular endearment of this admirable saying of our Saviour's to us, that, being omitted by the evangelists, and in danger of being lost and forgotten, it was thus happily retrieved by St. Paul, and recorded by St. Luke." *It is more blessed to give to others than to receive from others*; not only *more blessed to be rich*, and so on the giving hand, *than to be poor*, and so on the receiving hand; (every one will own that;) but *more blessed to do good with what we have, be it much or little, than to increase it and make it more*. The sentiment of the children of this world is contrary to this; they are afraid of giving; "This giving," they say, "undoes us all;" but they are in hope of getting, *every one for his gain from his quarter*, Isa. 56. 11. Clear gain is with them the most blessed thing that can be; but Christ tells us, *It is more blessed, more excellent in itself, an evidence of a more excellent disposition of mind, and the way to a better blessedness at last, to give, than to receive*. It makes us more like to God, who gives to all, and receives from none; and to the Lord Jesus, *who went about doing good*. *It is more blessed to give our pains than to receive pay for it*, and what we should delight to do, if the necessities of ourselves and families would admit it. It is more pleasant to do good to the grateful, but it is more honourable to do good to the ungrateful, for then we have God to be our paymaster, who will reward in the resurrection of the just, what has not otherwise been recompensed.

36. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. 37. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, 38. Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

After the parting sermon that Paul preached to the elders of Ephesus, which was very affecting, we have here the parting prayer and tears, which were yet more affecting; we can scarcely read the account here given of them, and meditate upon them, with dry eyes.

1. They parted with prayer; (v. 36.) *And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all*. And, no doubt, it was a prayer every way suited to the present mournful occasion. He committed them to God in his prayer, prayed that he would not leave them, but continue his presence with them.

1. It was a joint prayer; he not only *prayed for them*, but *prayed with them, prayed with them all*; that they might put up the same petitions for themselves and one another, that he put up to God for them all; and that they might learn, what to ask of God for themselves when he was gone. Public prayers are so far from being intended to supersede

our own secret prayers and make them needless, that they are designed to quicken and encourage them, and to direct us in them. When we are alone, we should pray over the prayers that our ministers have put up with us.

2. It was a humble reverent prayer; this was expressed by the posture they used; *he kneeled down, and prayed with them*: which is the most proper gesture in prayer, and significant both of adoration and of petition, especially petition for the forgiveness of sin. St. Paul used it much; *I bow my knees*, Eph. 3. 14.

3. It was a prayer after sermon; and, we may suppose, he prayed over what he had preached; he had committed the care of the church at Ephesus to those elders, and now he prays that God would enable them faithfully to discharge this great trust reposed in them, and would give them those measures of wisdom and grace which it required; he prayed for the flock, and all that belonged to it, *that the great Shepherd of the sheep* would take care of them all, and keep them from being a prey to the *grievous wolves*. Thus he taught those ministers to pray for those they preached to, *that they might not labour in vain*.

4. It was a parting prayer; which might be likely to leave lasting impressions, as the farewell sermon did. It is good for friends, when they part to part with prayer; that by praying together just at parting, they may be enabled to pray the more feelingly one for another when they are parted, which is one part of our christian duty, and an improvement of the communion of saints. *The Lord watch between us, and watch over us both, when we are absent one from the other*, is a good parting prayer; (Gen. 31. 49.) as also that our next meeting may be either nearer heaven, or in heaven. Paul here followed the example of Christ, who, when he took leave of his disciples, after he had *preached to them, prayed with them all*, John 17. 1.

II. They parted with tears, abundance of tears, and most affectionate embraces, v. 37, 38.

1. *They all wept sore*; we have reason to think that Paul himself began; though he was determined to go, and saw his call clear to other work, yet he was sorry in his heart to leave them, and many a tear it cost him; he that was so often in *tears* while he was with them, (v. 19, 31.) no doubt shed many at parting, so watering what he had sown among them. But the notice is taken of their tears, *they all wept sore*; there was not a dry eye among them; and, it is probable, the affectionate expressions Paul used in prayer, set them a-weeping. These were tears of love and mutual endearment, like those of Jonathan and David, when they were forced to part, and *wept one with another, until* (as if they wept for strife) *David exceeded*, 1 Sam. 20. 41.

2. *They fell upon Paul's neck, and kissed him*, all, one after another, each bewailing his own loss; "How can I part with this invaluable man, this blessed Paul," says one, "in whom my life is in a manner bound up?"—"Farewell, my dear friend," says another, "a thousand thanks to thee, and ten thousand to God for thee, and for all the pains thou hast taken with me for my good." "And must we part?" says another; "Must I lose my spiritual father, nurse, and guide?"—"What will become of us now," says another, "when we shall no more have him to apply to, and receive direction from? What shall I do, if the Lord take away my master from my head? *My father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof*." Note, Those that are most loving, are commonly best beloved. Paul, who was a most affectionate friend himself, had friends that were very affectionate to him. These tears at parting with Paul were a grateful return for all the tears he had shed in preaching to

them and praying with them. He that watereth, shall be watered also himself.

3. That which cut them to the heart thus, and made this place such a *Bochim*, such a *place of weepers*, was, *that word which Paul spake, that, he was certain, they should see his face no more*. If he had given them directions to follow him, as he did to those that were his usual companions, or any intimation that he would come hereafter and make them a visit, they could have borne this parting pretty well; but when they are told, *that they shall see his face no more* in this world, that it is a final farewell they are now giving and taking, this makes it a great mourning; it makes the farewell just like a funeral, and puts them into this passion of weeping. There were other things for which they sorrowed—that they should want the benefit of his public performances, and *see him no longer* presiding in their assemblies, should have none of his personal counsels and comforts; and, we hope, they sorrowed for their own sin, in not profiting more by his labours while they had him among them, and which had provoked God to order his remove; but that which gave the most sensible accent to their grief, was, *that they should see his face no more*. When our friends are separated from us by death, this is the consideration with which we raise up our mourning, that *we shall see their faces no more*; but we complain not of this *as those that have no hope*; for if our friends died in Christ, and we live to him, they are gone to see God's face, to behold his glory, with the reflection of which their faces shine, and we hope to be with them shortly. Though we shall *see their faces no more* in this world, we hope to see them again in a better world, and to be there together for ever, and with the Lord.

Lastly, They accompanied him unto the ship; partly to shew their respect to him, they would bring him on his way *as far as they could*; and partly that they might have a *little more* of his company and conversation; if it must be the last interview, they will have as much from him as they can, and see the last of him. And we have reason to think, when they came to the water-side, and he was to go on board, their tears and embraces were repeated; for loath to part bids off farewell. But this was a comfort to both sides, and soon turned this tide of passion, that the presence of Christ both went with him, and stayed with them.

CHAP. XXI.

We have, with a great deal of pleasure, attended the apostle in his travels throughout the Gentile nations to preach the gospel, and have seen a great harvest of souls gathered in to Christ; there we have seen likewise what persecutions he endured; yet still out of them all the Lord presently delivered him, 2 Tim. 3. 11. But now we are to attend him to Jerusalem, and there into lasting bonds; the days of his service now seem to be over, and nothing to remain but days of suffering, days of darkness, for they are many. It is a thousand pities that such a workman should be laid aside; yet so it is; and we must not only acquiesce, as his friends then did, saying, *The will of the Lord be done*; but we must believe, and shall find reason to do so, that Paul in the prison, and at the bar, is as truly glorifying God, and serving Christ's interest, as Paul in the pulpit was. In this chapter, we have, I. A journal of Paul's voyage from Ephesus to Cæsarea, the next sea-port to Jerusalem, some places he touched at, and his landing there, v. 1. . . 7. II. The struggles he had with his friends at Cæsarea, who mightily opposed his going up to Jerusalem, but could not prevail, v. 8. . . 14. III. Paul's journey from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, and the kind entertainment which the christians there gave him, v. 15. . . 17. IV. His compliance with the persuasions of the brethren there, who advised him so far to compliment the Jews, as to go purify himself with an offering in the temple, as if he had had a vow, that it might appear he was no such enemy to the Mosaic rites and ceremonies as he was reported to be, v. 18. . . 26. V. The turning of this very thing against him by the Jews, and the apprehending of him in the temple as a

criminal thereupon, v. 27. . 30. VI. The narrow escape he had of being pulled to pieces by the rabble, and the taking of him into a fair and legal custody by the chief captain, who permitted him to speak for himself to the people, v. 31. . 40. And so we have him made a prisoner, and shall never have him otherwise to the end of the history of this book.

1. **AND** it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: 2. And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. 3. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burthen. 4. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. 5. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. 6. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship: and they returned home again. 7. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

We may observe here,

I. How much ado Paul had to get clear from Ephesus, intimated in the first words of the chapter, *after we were gotten from them*, that is, were drawn from them as by violence. It was a force put upon both sides; Paul was loath to leave them, and they were as loath to part with him, and yet there was no remedy, but so it must be. When good people are taken away by death, they are, as it were, gotten from their friends here below, who struggled hard to have detained them if possible.

II. What a prosperous voyage they had from thence; without any difficulty, *they came with a straight course*, by direct sailing, to Coos, a famous Grecian island; *the next day to Rhodes*, talked of for the Colossus there; *thence to Patara*, a famous port, the metropolis of Lycia; (v. 1.) there they very happily found a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, the very course they were steering, v. 2. Providence must be acknowledged when things happen thus opportunely, and we are favoured by some little circumstances that contribute to the expediting of our affairs; and we must say, *It is God that maketh our way perfect*. This ship that was bound for Phenicia, that is, Tyre, they took the convenience of, *went on board, and set sail for Tyre*. In that voyage they discovered Cyprus, the island that Barnabas was of, and which he took care of, and therefore Paul did not visit it, but *we left it on the left hand*, (v. 3.) sailed upon the coasts of Syria, and at length landed at Tyre, that celebrated mart of the nations, so it had been, but was now reduced; yet something of a trade it had still, *for there the ship was to unlade her burthen*, and did so.

III. The halt that Paul made at Tyre; when he was got there, he was upon the coast of the land of Israel, and found now that he could compass the remainder of his journey within the time he had fixed.

1. *At Tyre he found disciples*, some that had embraced the gospel, and professed the christian faith. Observe, Wherever Paul came, he inquired what disciples were there, found them out, and associated with them; for we know what is the usage of birds of a feather. When Christ was upon earth, though he went sometimes into the coasts of Tyre, yet he never went thither to preach the gospel there; nor did he think fit to afford to Tyre and Sidon the advantages which Chorazin and Bethsaida had, though he knew that if they had had them they would have made a better improvement of them, Luke 10. 13, 14. But after the enlarging of the gospel-commission, Christ was preached at Tyre, and had disciples there; and to this, some think, that prophecy concerning Tyre had reference, (Isa. 23. 18.) *That her merchandise, and hire, should be holiness to the Lord*.

2. Paul finding those disciples at Tyre, tarried there seven days, they urging him to stay with them as long as he could. He stayed seven days at Troas, (ch. 20. 6.) and here so many days at Tyre, that he might be sure to spend one Lord's day with them, and so might have an opportunity of preaching publicly among them; for it is the desire of good men to do good wherever they come; and where we find disciples we may either benefit them, or be benefited by them.

3. The disciples at Tyre were endowed with such gifts, that they could by the Spirit foretell the troubles Paul would meet with at Jerusalem; for the Holy Ghost witnessed it in every city, ch. 20. 23. It being a thing that would be so much talked of when it came to pass, God saw fit, to have it much prophesied of before, that people's faith, instead of being offended, might be confirmed. And withal they were endowed with such graces, that, foreseeing his troubles, out of love to him, and concern for the church, especially the churches of the Gentiles, that could ill spare him, they begged of him that he would not go up to Jerusalem, for they hoped the decree was conditional; *If he go up, he will come into trouble there*; as the prediction to David, that the men of Keilah will deliver him up; that is, if he venture himself with them; and therefore they said to him by the Spirit, that he should not go up, because they concluded it would be most for the glory of God, that he should continue at liberty; and it was not at all their fault to think so; and consequently to dissuade him; but it was their mistake; for his trial would be for the glory of God, and the furtherance of the gospel, and he knew it; and the importunity that was used with him, to dissuade him from it, renders his pious and truly heroic resolution the more illustrious.

4. The disciples at Tyre, though they were none of Paul's converts, yet shewed a very great respect to Paul, whose usefulness in the church they had heard so much of; when he departed from Tyre, though they had had but seven days acquaintance with him, yet as if he had been some great man, they all came together, with their wives and children, solemnly to take leave of him, to beg his blessing, and to bring him as far on his way as the sea would permit them. Note, (1.) We should pay respect, not only to our own ministers that are over us in the Lord, and admonish us, and for their work's sake among us, esteem them highly in love, but we must, as there is occasion, testify our love and respect to all the faithful ministers of Christ, both for his sake whose ministers they are, and for their work's sake among others. (2.) We must, in a particular manner, honour those whom God hath singularly honoured, by making them eminently useful in their generation. (3.) It is good to train up children in a respect to good people and good ministers. This was particularly remarkable at Tyre, which we

have not met with any where else, *that they brought their wives and children to attend Paul*, to do him the more honour, and to receive benefit by his instructions and prayers; and, as angry notice was taken of the children of the idolaters of Bethel, that mocked a prophet, so, no doubt, gracious notice was taken of the *children of the disciples, at Tyre*, that honoured an apostle, as Christ accepted the *hosannas of the little children*. (4.) We should be good husbands of our opportunities, and make the utmost we can of them for the good of our souls. *They brought Paul on his way*, that they might have so much the more of his company, and his prayers. Some refer us to Ps. 45. 12. as a prediction of this. *The daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift*; for, it is probable that they made some presents to Paul at parting, as usual to our friends that are going to sea, *ch. 28. 10.*

5. *They parted with prayer*, as Paul and the Ephesian elders had done, *ch. 20. 36.* Thus Paul has taught us by example, as well as rule, *to pray always, to pray without ceasing.* *We kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.* Paul prayed for himself, prayed for them, prayed for all the churches; as he was much in prayer, so he was mighty in prayer. *They prayed upon the shore*, that their last farewell might be sanctified and sweetened with prayer. Those that are going to sea, should, when they quit the shore, commit themselves to God by prayer, and put themselves under his protection, as those that hope, even when they leave the *terra firma*, to find firm footing for their faith in the providence and promise of God. *They kneeled down on the shore*, though we may suppose it either stony or dirty, and *there prayed.* Paul would that men should pray every where, and so he did himself; and where he lifted up his prayer, he bowed his knees. Mr. George Herbert says, *Kneeling never spoiled silk stockings.*

6. *They parted at last: (v. 6.) When we had taken our leave one of another*, with the most affectionate embraces and expressions of love and grief, *we took ship to be gone, and they returned home again*, each complaining that this is a parting world. Observe how they disposed of themselves; We, that had a journey before us, *took ship*, thankful that we had a ship to carry us; and they, that had no occasions to call them abroad, *returned home again*, thankful that they had a home to go to. *Rejoice Zebulun, in thy going out, and Issachar in thy tents.* Paul left his blessing behind him with those that returned home, and they that stayed sent their prayers after them that went to sea.

IV. *Their arrival at Ptolemais*, which was not far from Tyre; (v. 7.) *We came to Ptolemais*, which some think is the same place with Accho, which we find in the *tribe of Asher*, Judg. 1. 31. Paul begged leave to go ashore there, to salute the brethren, to inquire of their state, and to testify his good-will to them; though he could not stay long with them, yet he would not pass by them without paying his respects to them, and he *abode with them one day*, perhaps it was a Lord's day; better a short stay than no visit.

8. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cæsarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. 9. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. 10. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judæa a certain prophet, named Aga-

bus. 11. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. 12. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart! For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. 14. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

We have here Paul and his company arrived at length at Cæsarea, where he designed to make some stay, it being the place where the gospel was first preached to the Gentiles, and the Holy Ghost fell upon them, *ch. 10. 1, 44.*

Now here we are told,

I. Who it was that entertained Paul and his company at Cæsarea; he seldom had occasion to go to a public house, but, wherever he came, some friend or other took him in, and bid him welcome. Observe, they that had sailed together, parted when the voyage was accomplished, according as their business was; they that were concerned in the cargo, stayed where the ship was, to unlade her burthen; (v. 3.) others, when they came to Ptolemais, went as their occasions led them; but we that were of Paul's company, went where he went, and came to Cæsarea. Those that travel together through this world, will separate at death, and then it will appear who are of Paul's company, and who are not. Now at Cæsarea,

1. They were entertained by Philip the evangelist, whom we left at Cæsarea many years ago, after he had baptized the eunuch, (*ch. 8. 40.*) and there we now find him again. (1.) He was originally a deacon, one of the seven, that were chosen to serve tables, *ch. 6. 5.* (2.) He was now, and had been long, an evangelist, one that went about to plant and water churches, as the apostles did, and gave himself, as they did, to the word and prayer; thus, having used the office of a deacon well, he purchased to himself a good degree; and having been faithful in a few things, was made ruler over many things. (3.) He had a house at Cæsarea, fit to entertain Paul and all his company, and he bid him and them very welcome to it; *We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, and we abode with him.* Thus does it become christians and ministers, according as their ability is, to use hospitality one to another, without grudging, 1 Pet. 4. 9.

2. This Philip had four maiden daughters, which did prophesy, v. 9. It intimates that they prophesied of Paul's troubles at Jerusalem, as others had done, and dissuaded him from going; or perhaps, they prophesied for his comfort and encouragement, in reference to the difficulties that were before him. Here was a further accomplishment of that prophecy, Joel 2. 28. of such a plentiful pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh, that their sons and their daughters should prophesy, that is, foretell things to come.

II. A plain and full prediction of the sufferings of Paul, by a noted prophet, v. 10, 11.

1. Paul and his company tarried many days at Cæsarea; perhaps Cornelius was yet living there, and (though Philip lodged them) yet might be many

ways kind to them, and induce them to stay there. What cause Paul saw to tarry so long there, and to make so little haste at the latter end of his journey to Jerusalem, when he seemed so much in haste at the beginning of it, we cannot tell; but we are sure he did not stay, either there, or any where else, to be idle; he measured his time by days, and numbered them.

2. *Agabus the prophet came to Cæsarea from Judea*; this was he that we read of before, who came from Jerusalem to Antioch, to foretell a general famine, *ch. 11. 27, 28.* See how God dispenseth his gifts variously! *To Paul was given the word of wisdom and knowledge, as an apostle, by the Spirit, and the gifts of healing; to Agabus, and to Philip's daughters, were given prophecy, by the same Spirit*—the foretelling of things to come, which came to pass according to the prediction, *See 1 Cor. 12. 8, 10.* So that that which was the most eminent gift of the Spirit under the Old Testament, the foretelling of things to come, was under the New Testament quite outshone by other gifts, and was bestowed upon those that were of less note in the church. It should seem as if *Agabus came on purpose to Cæsarea, to meet Paul with this prophetic intelligence.*

3. He foretold Paul's bonds at Jerusalem, (1.) By a sign, as the prophets of old did, *Isaiah, (ch. 20. 3.) Jeremiah, (ch. 13. 1.—27. 2.) Ezekiel, (ch. 4. 1.—12. 3.)* and many others. *Agabus took Paul's girdle, when he laid it by, or perhaps took it from about him, and with it bound first his own hands, and then his own feet, or perhaps bound his hands and feet together*; this was designed both to confirm the prophecy, (it was as sure to be done as if it were done already,) and to affect those about him with it, because that which we see usually makes a greater impression upon us than that which we only hear of. (2.) By an explication of the sign; *Thus saith the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of prophecy, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and, as they dealt with his Master, (Matt. 20. 18, 19.) shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles, as the Jews in other places had all along endeavoured to do, by accusing him to the Roman governors. Paul had this express warning given him of his troubles, that he might prepare for them, and, when they came, they might be no surprise or terror to him; the general notice given us, that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God, should be of the same use to us.*

III. The great importunity which his friends used with him to dissuade him from going forward to Jerusalem; (*v. 12.*) Not only they of that place, but we that were of Paul's company, and among the rest Luke himself, who had heard this often before, and seen Paul's resolution notwithstanding, besought him with tears that he would not go up to Jerusalem, but steer his course some other way.

Now, 1. Here appeared a commendable affection to Paul, and a value for him, upon the account of his great usefulness in the church. Good men that are very active, sometimes need to be dissuaded from over-working themselves; and good men that are very bold, need to be dissuaded from exposing themselves too far. *The Lord is for the body, and so must we be.*

2. Yet there was a mixture of infirmity, especially in those of Paul's company, who knew he undertook this journey by divine direction, and had seen with what resolution he had before broken through the like opposition; but we see in them the infirmity incident to us all; when we see trouble at a distance, and have only a general notice of it, we can make light of it; but when it comes near, we begin to shrink, and draw back. *Now that it toucheth thee, thou art troubled, Job 4. 5.*

IV. The holy bravery and intrepidity with which Paul persisted in his resolution, *v. 13.*

1. He reproves them for dissuading him; here is a quarrel of love on both sides, and very sincere and strong affections clashing with each other; they love him dearly, and therefore oppose his resolution; he loves them dearly, and therefore chides them for opposing it; *What mean ye to weep and to brake my heart?* They were an offence to him, as Peter was to Christ, when, in a like case, he said, *Master, spare thyself.* Their weeping about him break his heart, (1.) It was a temptation to him, it shocked him, it began to weaken and slacken his resolution, and made him to entertain thoughts of tacking about; "I know I am appointed to suffering, and you ought to animate and encourage me, and to say that which will strengthen my heart; but you, with your tears, break my heart, and discourage me. *What do you mean, to do thus?* Has not our Master bid us take up our cross? And would you have me to avoid mine?" (2.) It was a trouble to him, that they should so earnestly press him to that in which he could not gratify them without wronging his conscience. Paul was of a very tender spirit; as he was much in tears himself, so he had a compassionate regard to the tears of his friends; they made a great impression upon him, and would bring him almost to yield to any thing. But now it breaks his heart, when he is under a necessity of denying the request of his weeping friends. It was an unkind kindness, a cruel pity, thus to torment him with their dissuasions, and to add affliction to his grief. When our friends are called out to sufferings, we shall shew our love, rather by comforting them than by sorrowing for them. But observe, These christians at Cæsarea, if they could have foreseen the particulars of that event, the general notice of which they received with so much heaviness, they would have been better reconciled to it for their own sakes: for when Paul was made a prisoner at Jerusalem, he was presently sent to Cæsarea, the very place where he now was, (*ch. 23. 33.*) and there he continued at least two years, (*ch. 24. 27.*) and he was a prisoner at large, as appears *ch. 24. 23.* where orders were given, that he should have liberty to go among his friends, and his friends to come to him; so that the church at Cæsarea had much more of Paul's company and help when he was imprisoned, than they could have had if he had been at liberty. That which we oppose, as thinking it to make much against us, may be over-ruled by the providence of God to work for us, which is a reason why we should follow providence, and not fear it.

2. He repeats his resolution to go forward, notwithstanding; *"What mean ye to weep thus? I am ready to suffer whatever is appointed me. I am fully determined to go, whatever comes of it, and therefore it is to no purpose for you to oppose it. I am willing to suffer, and therefore why are you unwilling that I should suffer? Am not I nearest myself, and fittest to judge for myself? If the trouble found me unready, it would be a trouble indeed, and you might well weep at the thoughts of it. But, blessed be God, it does not. It is very welcome to me, and therefore should not be such a terror to you. For my part, I am ready,"* *ἑτοιμὸς εἶμι—I have myself in a readiness, as soldiers for an engagement.* (1.) "I expect trouble, I count upon it, it will be no surprise to me. I was told at first what great things I must suffer," *ch. 9. 16.* (2.) "I am prepared for it, by a clear conscience, a firm confidence in God, a holy contempt of the world and the body, a lively faith in Christ, and a joyful hope of eternal life." (3.) "I can bid it welcome, as we do a friend that we look for, and have made preparation for. I can, through grace, not only bear it, but rejoice in it." Now,

[1.] See how far his resolution extends: "You are told that I must be bound at Jerusalem, and you would have me keep away for fear of that. I tell you, *I am ready not only to be bound, but, if the will of God be so, to die at Jerusalem*; not only to lose my liberty, but to lose my life." It is our wisdom to think of the worst that may befall us, and to prepare accordingly, that we may *stand complete in all the will of God*.

[2.] See what it is that carries him out thus, that makes him willing to suffer and die; it is *for the name of the Lord Jesus*. All that a man has will he give for his life; but life itself will Paul give for the service and honour of the name of Christ.

V. The patient acquiescence of his friends in his resolution, v. 14.

1. They submitted to the wisdom of a good man; they had carried the matter as far as they could with decency; but *when he would not be persuaded, we ceased* our importunity. Paul knows best his own mind, and what he has to do, and it becomes us to leave it to his life; and not to censure him for what he does, or to say he is rash, and wilful, and humoursome, and has a spirit of contradiction, as some people are apt to judge of those that will not do just as they would have them do. No doubt, Paul has a good reason for his resolution, though he sees cause to keep it to himself, and God has gracious ends to serve in confirming him in it. It is good manners not to over-press those in their own affairs, that *will not be persuaded*.

2. They submitted to the will of a good God; *we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done*. They did not resolve his resolution into his stubbornness, but into his willingness to suffer, and *God's will* that he should. *Father in heaven, thy will be done*; as it is a rule to our prayers and to our practice, so it is to our patience. This may refer, (1.) To Paul's *present firmness*; he is inflexible, and unpersuadable, and in this they see *the will of the Lord done*. "It is he that has wrought his fixed resolution in him, and therefore we acquiesce in it." Note, In the turning of the hearts of our friends or ministers, this way or that way, (and it may be quite another way than we could wish,) we should eye the hand of God, and submit to that. (2.) To his *approaching sufferings*; "If there be no remedy, but Paul will run himself into bonds, *the will of the Lord Jesus be done*. We have done all that we could do on our parts to prevent it, and now we leave it to God, we leave it to Christ, to whom the Father has *committed all judgment*, and therefore we do, not as we will, but as he will." Note, When we see trouble coming, and particularly that of our ministers being silenced, or removed from us, it becomes us to say, *The will of the Lord be done*. God is wise, and knows how to make all work for good, and therefore *welcome his holy will*. Not only, "The will of the Lord must be done, and there is no remedy;" but, "*Let the will of the Lord be done, for his will is his wisdom*, and he doeth all *according to the counsel* of it; let him therefore do with us and our's as seemeth good in his eyes." When a trouble is come, this must allay our griefs, that the will of the Lord *is done*; when we see it coming, this must silence our fears, that the *will of the Lord* shall be done, to which we must say, *Amen*, let it be done.

15. And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. 16. There went with us also *certain* of the disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge. 17. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the bre-

thren received us gladly. 18. And the *day* following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. 19. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. 20. And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. 21. And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs. 22. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. 23. Do therefore this that we say to thee: we have four men which have a vow on them; 24. Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. 25. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written *and* concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from *things* strangled, and from fornication. 26. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

In these verses, we have,

I. Paul's journey to Jerusalem from Cæsarea, and the company that went along with him.

1. They *took up their carriages*, their bag and baggage, and, as it should seem, like poor travellers or soldiers, were their own porters; so little had they of change of raiment. *Omnia mea mecum porto*—*My property is all about me*. Some think they had with them the money that was collected in the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, for the poor saints at Jerusalem. If they could have persuaded Paul to go some other way, they would gladly have gone along with him; but if, notwithstanding their dissuasive, he will go to Jerusalem, they do not say, "Let him go himself then;" but as Thomas, in a like case, when Christ would go into danger at Jerusalem, *Let us go and die with him*, John 11. 16. Their resolution to cleave to Paul, was like that of Ittai to cleave to David, (2 Sam. 15. 21.) *In what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, there also will thy servant be*. Thus Paul's boldness imboldened them.

2. Certain of the disciples of Cæsarea went along with them. Whether they designed to go however, and took this opportunity of going with so much good company, or whether they went on purpose to see if they could do Paul any service, and if possible pre-

vent his trouble, or at least minister to him in it, does not appear. The less while Paul is likely to enjoy his liberty, the more industrious they are to improve every opportunity of conversation with him. Elisha kept close to Elijah, when he knew the time was at hand, that he should be taken up.

3. They brought with them an honest old gentleman that had a house of his own at Jerusalem, in which he would gladly entertain Paul and his company, *one Mnason of Cyprus, (v. 16.) with whom we should lodge*; such a great concourse of people there was to the feast, that it was a hard matter to get lodgings; the public houses would be taken up by those of the better sort; and it was looked upon as a scandalous thing for those that had private houses to hire their rooms out at those times, but they must freely accommodate strangers with them. Every one then would choose his friends to be his guests, and Mnason took Paul and his company to be his lodgers; though he had heard what trouble Paul was likely to come into, which might bring those that entertained him into trouble too, yet he shall be welcome to him, whatever comes of it. This Mnason is called an *old disciple*; a disciple from the beginning; some think, one of the seventy disciples of Christ, or one of the first converts after the pouring out of the Spirit, or one of the first that was converted by the preaching of the gospel in Cyprus, *ch. 13. 4.* However it was, it seems he had been long a christian, and was now in years. Note, It is an honourable thing to be an *old disciple* of Jesus Christ, to have been enabled by the grace of God to continue long in a course of duty, steadfast in the faith, and growing more and more prudent and experienced to a good old age. And with these old disciples one would choose to lodge; for the *multitude of their years shall teach wisdom.*

II. Paul's welcome at Jerusalem.

1. Many of the brethren there *received him gladly, v. 17.* As soon as they had notice that he was come to town, they went to his lodgings at Mnason's house, and congratulated him on his safe arrival, and told him, they were glad to see him, and invited him to their houses; and counted it an honour to be known to one that was such an eminent servant of Christ. Streso observes, that the word here used concerning the welcome they gave to the apostles, ἀποστόλων δόξαν, is used concerning the welcome of the apostles' doctrine, *ch. 2. 41.* They *gladly received his word.* We think, if we had Paul among us, we would gladly receive him; but it is a question whether we would or no, if having his doctrine, we do not gladly receive that.

2. They made a visit to James and the elders of the church, at a church meeting; (*v. 18.*) *The day following, Paul went in unto James, and took us with him, that were his companions, to introduce us into acquaintance with the church at Jerusalem.* It should seem that James was now the only apostle that was resident at Jerusalem; the rest had dispersed themselves, to preach the gospel in other places. But still they forecasted to have an apostle at Jerusalem, perhaps sometimes one, and sometimes another, because there was a great resort thither from all parts. James was now *upon the spot, and all the elders or presbyters*, that were the ordinary pastors of the church, both to preach and govern, were present. Paul saluted them all, paid his respects to them, inquired of their welfare, and *gave them the right hand of fellowship.* He *saluted them*, that is, he wished them all health and happiness, and prayed to God to bless them. The proper signification of salutation, is, wishing salvation to you; *salve, or salus tibi sit*: like, *peace be unto you.* And such mutual salutations, or good wishes, very well become christians, in token of their love to each other, and joint regard to God.

III. The account they had from him of his ministry among the Gentiles, and their satisfaction in it.

1. He gave them a narrative of the success of the gospel in those countries where he had been employed, knowing it would be very acceptable to them, to hear of the enlarging of Christ's kingdom. *He declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry, v. 19.* Observe, how modestly he speaks, not *what things he had wrought*, (he was but the instrument,) but *what God had wrought by his ministry.* It was not I, but the *grace of God which was with me.* He *planted and watered*, but God *gave the increase.* He declared it particularly, that the grace of God might appear the more illustrious in the circumstances of his success. Thus David will tell others what *God had done for his soul*, (Ps. 66. 16.) as Paul here what God had done *by his hand*, and both, that their friends might help them to be thankful.

2. Hence they took occasion to give praise to God; (*v. 20.*) *When they heard it, they glorified the Lord.* Paul ascribed it all to God, and to God they gave the praise of it. They did not break out into high encomiums of Paul, but leave it to his Master to say to him, *Well done, good and faithful servant*; but they gave glory to the grace of God, which was extended to the Gentiles. Note, The conversion of sinners ought to be the matter of our joy and praise, as it is of the angels. God had honoured Paul more than any of them, in making his usefulness more extensive, yet they do not envy him, nor are they jealous of his growing reputation, but, on the contrary, *glorified the Lord.* And they could not do more to encourage Paul to go on cheerfully in his work, than to glorify God for his success in it; for if God be praised, Paul is pleased.

IV. The request of James and the elders of the church at Jerusalem to Paul, or their advice rather, that he would gratify the believing Jews, by showing some compliance with the ceremonial law, and appearing publicly in the temple to offer sacrifice; which was not a thing in itself sinful; for the ceremonial law, though it was by no means to be imposed upon the Gentile converts, (as the false teachers would have it, and thereby endeavoured to subvert the gospel,) yet it was not become unlawful as yet to those that had been bred up in the observation of it, but were far from expecting justification by it. It was *dead*, but not *buried*; *dead*, but not yet *deadly*. And being not sinful, they thought it was a piece of prudence in Paul to conform thus far.

Observe the counsel they give to Paul herein, not as having authority over him, but an affection for him.

1. They desired him to take notice of the great numbers there were of Jewish converts; *Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of the Jews there are which believe.* They call him *brother*, for they looked upon him as a joint-commissioner with them in gospel-work, though they were of the circumcision, and he the apostle of the Gentiles, though they were conformists, and he a non-conformist; yet they were brethren, and owned the relation. Thou hast been in some of our assemblies, and seest how numerous they are; *how many myriads of Jews believe.* The word signifies, not *thousands*, but *ten thousands*. Even among the Jews, who were most prejudiced against the gospel, yet there were great multitudes that received it; for the grace of God can break down the strongest holds of Satan. The number of the names at first was but *one hundred and twenty*, yet now *many thousands*. Let none therefore despise the day of small things; for though the beginning be small, God can make the latter end greatly to increase. Hereby it appeared that God had not quite *cast away his people* the Jews, for among them there was a *remnant, an election, that obtained*; (see Rom. 11. 1, 5, 7.) *many thousands that believed.* And this

account which they could give to Paul of the success of the gospel among the Jews, no doubt, was as grateful to Paul as the account which he gave them of the conversion of the Gentiles was to them; for his heart's desire and prayer to God for the Jews, was, *that they might be saved*.

2. They inform him of a prevailing infirmity these believing Jews laboured under, which they could not yet be cured of; *They are all zealous of the law*. They believe in Christ as the true Messiah, they rest upon his righteousness, and submit to his government; but they know the law of Moses was of God, they have found spiritual benefit in their attendance on the institutions of it, and therefore they can by no means think of parting with it, no nor of growing cold to it; and perhaps they urged Christ's being made under the law, and observing it, (which was designed to be our deliverance from the law,) as a reason for their continuance under it. This was a great weakness and mistake, to be so fond of the shadows when the substance was come; to keep their necks under a *yoke of bondage*, when Christ was come to make them free. But sec, (1.) The power of education and long usage, and especially of a *ceremonial law*. (2.) The charitable allowance that must be made in consideration of these. These Jews that believed were not therefore disowned and rejected as no Christians, because they were *for the law*, nay, were zealous for it, while it was only in their own practice, and they did not impose it upon others. Their being *zealous of the law*, was capable of a good construction, which charity would put upon it; and it was capable of a good excuse, considering what they were brought up in, and whom they lived among.

3. They gave him to understand that these Jews who were so zealous of the law, were ill affected to him, v. 21. Paul himself, though as faithful a servant as any Christ ever had, yet could not get the good word of all that belonged to Christ's family; *"They are informed of thee, (and form their opinion of thee accordingly,) that thou not only dost not teach the Gentiles to observe the law, as some would have had thee, (we have prevailed with them to drop that,) but dost teach all the Jews which are dispersed among the Gentiles, to forsake Moses, not to circumcise their children, nor to walk after the customs of our nation, which were of divine appointment, so far as they might be observed even among the Gentiles, at a distance from the temple; not to observe the fasts and feasts of the church, not to wear their phylacteries, or abstain from unclean meats."* Now, (1.) It was true that Paul preached the abrogation of the law of Moses, and that it was impossible to be justified by it, and therefore we are not bound up any longer to the observation of it. But, (2.) It was false that he taught them to *forsake Moses*; for the religion he preached tended not to *destroy the law*, but to *fulfil* it. He preached Christ, the *End of the law* for righteousness, and *repentance and faith*, in the exercise of which we are to make great use of the law. The Jews among the Gentiles, whom Paul taught, were so far from *forsaking Moses*, that they never understood him better, nor ever embraced him so heartily as now when they were taught to make use of him as a *schoolmaster to bring them to Christ*. But even the *believing Jews*, having got this notion of Paul, that he was an enemy to Moses, and perhaps giving too much regard to the *unbelieving Jews* too, were much exasperated against him. Their ministers, the *elders here present*, loved and honoured him, and approved of what he did, and called him *brother*, but the people could hardly be got to entertain a favourable thought of him; for it is certain, the least judicious are the most censorious; the weak-headed are the hot-headed. They could not distinguish upon Paul's doctrine as they ought to have

done, and therefore condemned it in the gross, through ignorance.

4. They therefore desire Paul that he would by some public act, now that he was come to Jerusalem, make it to appear that the charge against him was false, and that he did not teach people to forsake Moses, and to break the customs of the Jewish church, for he himself retained the use of them.

(1.) They conclude that something of this kind must be done; *"What is it therefore? What must be done? The multitude will hear that thou art come to town."* This is an inconvenience that attends men of fame, that their coming and going are taken notice of more than other people's, and will be *talked of*, by some for *good-will*, and by others for *ill-will*; *"When they hear thou art come, they must needs come together, they will expect that we call them together, to advise with them, whether we should admit thee to preach among us as a brother, or no; or, they will come together of themselves expecting to hear thee."* Now something must be done to satisfy them that Paul does not teach people to *forsake Moses*, and they think it necessary, [1.] For Paul's sake, that his reputation may be cleared, and that so good a man may not lie under any blemish, nor so useful a man labour under any disadvantage which may obstruct his usefulness. [2.] For the people's sake, that they may not continue prejudiced against so good a man, nor lose the benefit of his ministry by those prejudices. [3.] For their own sake, that since they knew it was their duty to own Paul, their doing it might not be turned to their reproach among those that were under their charge.

(2.) They produce a fair opportunity which Paul might take to clear himself; *"Do this that we say unto thee, take our advice in this case. We have four men, Jews which believe, of our own churches, and they have a vow on them, a vow of Nazarite-ship for a certain time; their time is now expired, (v. 23.) and they are to offer their offering according to the law, when they shave the head of their separation, a he-lamb for a burnt-offering, an ewe-lamb for a sin-offering, and a ram for a peace-offering, with other offerings, appertinent to them, Numb. 6. 13—20. Many used to do this together, when their vow expired about the same time, either for the greater expedition, or for the greater solemnity. Now Paul having so far of late complied with the law as to take upon him the vow of a Nazarite, and to signify the expiration of it by shaving his head at Cenchrea, (ch. 18. 18.) according to the custom of those who lived at a distance from the temple, they desire him but to go a little further, and to join with these four in offering the sacrifices of a Nazarite; "Purify thyself with them according to the law; and be willing not only to take that trouble, but to be at charges with them, in buying sacrifices for this solemn occasion, and to join with them in the sacrifice."* This, they think, will effectually stop the mouth of calumny, and every one will be convinced that the report was false, that Paul was not the man he was represented to be, did not teach the Jews to forsake Moses, but that he himself, being originally a Jew, walked orderly, and kept the law; and then all would be well.

5. They enter a protestation, that this shall be no infringement at all of the decree lately made in favour of the Gentile converts, nor do they intend by this, in the least to derogate from the liberty allowed them; (v. 25.) *"As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded, and resolve to abide by it, that they observe no such things; we would not have them to be bound up by the ceremonial law by any means, but only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; but let not them be tied to the Jewish sacri-*

rites or purifications, or any of their rites and ceremonies." They knew how jealous Paul was for the preserving of the liberty of the converted Gentiles, and therefore expressly covenant to abide by that. Thus far is their proposal.

V. Here is Paul's compliance with it. He was willing to gratify them in this matter. Though he would not be persuaded not to go to Jerusalem, yet, when he was there, he was persuaded to *do as they there did*, v. 26. Then Paul took the men, as they advised, and the very next day, *purifying himself with them*, and not *with multitude or tumult*, as he himself pleads, (ch. 24. 18.) he *entered into the temple*, as other devout Jews that came upon such errands did, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification to the priests; desiring the priest would appoint a time when the offering should be offered for every one of them, one for each. Ainsworth on Numb. 6. 18. quotes out of Maimonides a passage which gives some light to this; *If a man say, Upon me be half the oblations of a Nazarite*, or, *Upon me be half the shaving of a Nazarite*, then he brings half the offerings by what Nazarite he will, and that Nazarite pays his offering out of that which is his; so Paul did here; he contributed what he vowed to the offerings of these Nazarites; and, some think, bound himself to the law of the Nazariteship, and to an attendance at the temple with fastings and prayers for seven days, not designing that the offering should be offered till then; which was that he signified to the priest.

Now it has been questioned, whether James and the elders did well to give Paul this advice, and whether he did well to take it.

1. Some have blamed this *occasional conformity* of Paul's, as indulging the Jews too much in their adherence to the ceremonial law, and a discouragement of those who stood fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free. Was it not enough for James and the elders of Jerusalem to connive at this mistake in the Jewish converts themselves, but must they whedle Paul to countenance them in it? Had it not been better when they had told Paul how zealous the believing Jews were for the law, if they had desired him, whom God had endued with such excellent gifts, to take pains with their people to convince them of their error, and to show them that they were made free from the law by their marriage to Christ? Rom. 7. 4. To urge him to encourage them in it by his example, seems to have more in it of fleshly wisdom than of the grace of God. Surely Paul knew what he had to do better than they could teach him. But,

2. Others think the advice was *prudent and good*, and Paul's following it was justifiable enough, as the case stood. It was Paul's avowed principle, *To the Jews, became I as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews*, 1 Cor. 9. 20. He had circumcised Timothy, to please the Jews; though he would not constantly observe the ceremonial law, yet, to gain an opportunity of doing good, and to show how far he could comply, he would occasionally go to the temple and join in the sacrifices there. Those that are *weak in the faith* are to be borne with, when those that undermine the faith must be opposed. It is true, this compliance of Paul's sped ill to him, for this very thing by which he hoped to pacify the Jews, did but provoke them, and bring him into trouble, yet that is not a sufficient ground to go upon in condemning it; Paul might do well, and yet suffer for it, but perhaps the wise God over-ruled both their advice and Paul's compliance with it, to serve a better purpose than was intended; for we have reason to think, that when the believing Jews, who had endeavoured by their zeal for the law to recommend themselves to the good opinion of those who believed not, saw how barbarously they used Paul, (who endeavoured

to oblige them,) they were by this more alienated from the ceremonial law, than they could have been by the most argumentative or affecting discourses. They saw it was in vain to think of pleasing men that would be pleased with nothing else but the rooting out of christianity. Integrity and uprightness will be more likely to preserve us than sneaking compliances. And when we consider what a great trouble it must needs be to James and the presbyters in the reflection upon it, that they had by their advice brought Paul into trouble, it should be a warning to us, not to press men to oblige us by doing any thing contrary to their own mind.

27. And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, 28. Crying out, Men of Israel, help: this is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and bath polluted this holy place. 29. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 30. And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. 31. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. 33. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. 34. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. 35. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. 36. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. 37. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? 38. Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? 39. But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. 40. And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And

when there was made a great silence, he spake unto *them* in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

We have here Paul brought into a captivity which we are not likely to see the end of: for after this he is either hurried from one bar to another, or lies neglected, first in one prison, and then in another, and can neither be tried nor bailed. When we see the beginning of a trouble, we know not either how long it will last, or how it will issue.

1. We have here Paul seized, and laid hold on.

1. He was seized in *the temple*, when he was there attending the days of his purifying, and the solemn services of those days, *v.* 27. Formerly he had been well known in *the temple*, but now he had been so long in his travels abroad, that he was become a stranger there; so that it was not till *the seven days were almost ended*, that he was taken notice of by those that had an evil eye toward him. In the temple, where he should have been protected as in a sanctuary, he was most violently set upon by those who did what they could to have mingled his blood with his sacrifices; in the temple, where he should have been welcomed as one of the greatest ornaments of it that ever had been there since the Lord of the temple left it. The temple which they themselves pretended such a mighty zeal for, yet did they themselves thus profane. Thus is the church polluted by none more than by popish persecutors, under the colour of the church's name and interest.

2. The informers against him were the *Jews of Asia*, not those of Jerusalem; the Jews of the dispersion, who knew him best, and who were most exasperated against him. Those who seldom came up to worship at the temple in Jerusalem themselves, but contentedly lived at a distance from it, in pursuit of their private advantages, yet appeared most zealous for the temple, as if thereby they would atone for their habitual neglect of it.

3. The method they took, was, to *raise the mob*, and to incense them against him. They did not go to the High Priest, or the magistrates of the city, with their charge, (probably, because they expected not to receive countenance from them,) but they *stirred up all the people*, who were at this time more than ever disposed to any thing that was tumultuous and seditious, riotous and routous. Those are fittest to be employed against Christ and christianity, that are governed least by reason, and most by passion; therefore Paul described the Jewish persecutors to be not only wicked, but absurd unreasonable men.

4. The arguments wherewith they exasperated the people against him were popular, but very false and unjust. They cried out, "*Men of Israel, help.* If ye are indeed *men of Israel*, true-born Jews, that have a concern for your church and your country, now is your time to shew it, by helping to seize an enemy to both." Thus they cried after him as after a thief, (*Job* 30. 5.) or after a mad dog. Note, The enemies of christianity, since they could never prove it to be an *ill thing*, have been always very industrious, right or wrong, to put it into an *ill name*, and so run it down by outrage and outcry. It had become *men of Israel* to help Paul, who preached up Him who was so much the *glory of his people Israel*; yet here the popular fury will not allow them to be *men of Israel*, unless they will *help against him*. This was like, *Stop thief*, or Athaliah's cry, *Treason, treason*; what is wanting in *right*, is made up in *noise*.

5. They charge upon him both ill doctrine and ill practice, and both against the *Mosaic ritual*.

(1.) They charged upon him *ill doctrine*; not only that he holds corrupt opinions himself, but that he *vents* and *publishes* them, though not here at Jerusalem, yet in other places, nay, in *all places*, he

teaches *all men, every where*; so artfully is he of me aggravated, as if because he was an *evangelist*, he was an ubiquitary; "He spreads to the utmost of his power certain damnable and heretical positions."

[1.] Against the *people of the Jews*. He had taught that Jews and Gentiles stand on the same level before God, and neither *circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision*; nay, he had taught against the *unbelieving Jews*, that they were *rejected*, (and therefore had *separated* from them and their synagogue,) and this is interpreted to be speaking against the whole nation, as if no doubt but they were *the people, and wisdom must die with them*; (*Job* 12. 2.) whereas God, though he had cast them off, yet had not *cast away his people*, *Rom.* 11. 1. They were *Lo-ammi, not a people*, (*Hos.* 1. 9.) and yet pretended to be the only people. Those commonly seem most jealous for the church's name, that belong to it in name only. [2.] Against the *law*. His teaching men to believe the gospel as the *end of the law*, and the *perfection* of it, was interpreted his preaching against the law; whereas it was so far from *making void the law*, that it established it, *Rom.* 3. 31. [3.] Against *this place*, the temple. Because he taught men to *pray every where*, he was reproached as an enemy to the temple, and perhaps because he sometimes mentioned the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and of the Jewish nation, which his Master had foretold. Paul had himself been active in persecuting Stephen, and putting him to death for words spoken against *this holy place*, and now the same thing is laid to his charge. He that was then made use of as the *tool*, is now set up as the *butt*, of Jewish rage and malice.

(2.) They charge upon him *ill practices*. To confirm their charge against him, as teaching people against *this holy place*, they charge it upon him, that he had himself *polluted it*, and by an overt-act shewed his contempt of it, and a design to make it common. He has brought Gentiles also into the temple; into the inner court of the temple, which none that were uncircumcised were admitted, under any pretence, to come into; there was written upon the wall that inclosed this inner court, in Greek and Latin, *It is a capital crime for strangers to enter*, *Joseph. Antiq. lib. 15. cap. 14.* Paul was himself a Jew, and had right to enter into the court of the Jews. And they, seeing some with him there that joined with him in his devotions, concluded that Trophimus an Ephesian, who was a Gentile, was one of them. Why? Did they see him there? Truly no; but they had seen him with Paul in the streets of the city, which was no crime at all, and therefore they affirm that he was with Paul in the inner court of the temple, which was a heinous crime. They had *seen him with him in the city*, and therefore they supposed that Paul had brought him with him into the temple, which was utterly false. See here, [1.] Innocency is no fence against calumny and false accusation. It is no new thing for those that mean honestly, and act regularly, to have things laid to their charge, which they know not, nor ever thought of. [2.] Evil men dig up mischief, and go far to seek proofs of their false accusations, as they did here, who, because they saw a Gentile with Paul in the city, will thence infer, that he was with him in the temple. This was a strained inference indeed, yet by such unjust and groundless suggestions have wicked men thought to justify themselves in the most barbarous outrages committed upon the *excellent ones of the earth*. [3.] It is common for malicious people to improve that against those that are wise and good, with which they thought to have obliged them, and ingratiated themselves with them. Paul thought to recommend himself to their good opinion by *going into the temple*, and thence they take an occasion to accuse him. If he had kept fur-

ther off them, he had not been so maligned by them. This is the genius of ill-nature; *for my love, they are my adversaries*, Ps. 109. 4.—69. 10.

11. We have Paul in danger of being pulled in pieces by the rabble. They will not be at the pains to have him before the High Priest, or the Sanhedrim; that is a round-about way, the execution shall be of a piece with the prosecution, all unjust and irregular. They cannot prove the crime upon him, and therefore dare not bring him upon a fair trial; nay, so greedily do they thirst after his blood, that they have not patience to proceed against him by a due course of law, though they were ever so sure to gain their point; and therefore as those who neither feared God nor regarded man, they resolved to knock him on the head immediately.

1. All the city was in an uproar, v. 30. *The people*, who though they had little holiness themselves, yet had a mighty veneration for the holy place, when they heard a hue-and-cry from the temple, were up in arms presently, being resolved to stand by that with their lives and fortunes. *All the city was moved*, when they were called to from the temple, *Men of Israel, help*, with as much violence as if the old complaint were to be revived, (Ps. 79. 1.) *O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance, thy holy temple have they defiled*. Just such a zeal the Jews here shew for *God's temple*, as the Ephesians did for Diana's temple, when Paul was informed against as an enemy to that; (ch. 19. 29.) *The whole city was full of confusion*. But God does not reckon himself at all honoured by those whose zeal for him transports them to such irregularities, and who, while they pretend to act for him, act in such a brutish barbarous manner.

2. They drew Paul out of the temple, and shut the doors between the outer and inner court of the temple, or perhaps the doors of the outer court. In dragging him furiously out of the temple, (1.) They shewed a real detestation of him as one not fit to be suffered in the temple; nor to worship there, nor to be looked upon as a member of the Jewish nation; as if his sacrifice had been an abomination. (2.) They pretended a veneration for the temple; like that of good Jehoiada, who would not have Athaliah to be slain in the house of the Lord, 2 Kings 11. 15. See how absurd these wicked men were; they condemned Paul for drawing people from the temple, and yet when he himself was very devoutly worshipping in the temple, they drew him out of it. The officers of the temple shut the doors, either, [1.] Lest Paul should find means to get back, and take hold of the horns of the altar, and so protect himself by that sanctuary from their rage. Or rather, [2.] Lest the crowd should by the running in of more to them be thrust back into the temple, and some outrage should be committed, to the profanation of that holy place. They that made no conscience of doing so ill a thing as the murdering of a good man for well-doing, yet would be thought to scruple doing it in a holy place, or at a holy time; *not in the temple, as, not on the feast-day*.

3. They went about to kill him; (v. 31.) for they fell a beating him, (v. 32.) resolving to beat him to death by blows without number: a punishment which the Jewish doctors allowed of in some cases, (not at all to the credit of their nation,) and called, *the beating of the rebels*. Now was Paul, like a lamb, thrown into a den of lions, and made an easy prey to them, and, no doubt, he was still of the same mind, as when he said, *I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem, to die so great a death*.

III. We have here Paul rescued out of the hands of his Jewish enemies by a Roman enemy.

1. Tidings were brought of the tumult, and that the mob was up, to the chief captain of the band, the governor of the castle, or, whoever he was, the now

commander in chief of the Roman forces that were quartered in Jerusalem. Somebody that was concerned, not for Paul, but for the public peace and safety, gave this information to the colonel, who had always a jealous and watchful eye upon those tumultuous Jews; and he is the man that must be instrumental to save Paul's life, when never a friend he had was capable of doing him any service.

2. The tribune, or chief captain, got his forces together with all possible expedition, and went to suppress the mob; *he took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them*. Now at the feast, as at other such solemn times, the guards were up, and the militia more within call than at other times, and so he had them near at hand, and *he ran down unto the multitude*; for at such times delays are dangerous. Sedition must be crushed at first, lest it grow headstrong.

3. The very sight of the Roman general frightened them from beating Paul; for they knew they were doing what they could not justify, and were in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, as the town-clerk told the Ephesians. They were deterred from that by the power of the Romans, from which they ought to have been restrained by the justice of God and the dread of his wrath. Note, God often makes the earth to help the woman, (Rev. 12. 16.) and those to be a protection to his people, who yet have no affection for his people; they have only a compassion for sufferers, and are zealous for the public peace. The shepherd makes use even of his dogs for the defence of his sheep. It is Streso's comparison here. See here how these wicked people were frightened away at the very sight of the chief captain; for the king that sitteth on the throne of judgment, scattereth away all evil with his eyes.

4. The governor takes him into custody; he rescued him, not out of a concern for him, because he thought him innocent, but out of a concern for justice, because he ought not to be put to death without trial; and because he knew not how dangerous the consequence might be to the Roman government, if such tumultuous proceedings were not timely suppressed; nor what such an outrageous people might do, if once they knew their own strength; he therefore takes Paul out of the hands of the mob, into the hands of the law; (v. 33.) *He took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains*; that the people might be satisfied he did not intend to discharge him, but to examine him, for *he demanded* of those that were so eager against him, *who he was, and what he had done*. This violent taking of him out of the hands of the multitude, though there were all the reason in the world for it, yet they laid to the charge of the chief captain as his crime; (ch. 24. 7.) *The chief captain Lysias came with great violence, and took him out of our hands*; which refers to this rescue, as appears by comparing ch. 23. 27, 28, where the chief captain gives an account of it to Felix.

IV. The provision which the chief captain made, with much ado, to bring Paul to speak for himself; one had almost as well enter into a struggle with the winds and the waves as with such a mob as was here got together; and yet Paul made a shift to get liberty of speech among them.

1. There was no knowing the sense of the people; for when the chief captain inquired concerning Paul, having perhaps never heard of his name before, (such strangers were the great ones to the excellent ones of the earth, and affected to be so,) *some cried one thing, and some another, among the multitude*; so that it was impossible for the chief captain to know their mind, when really they knew not either one another's mind or their own, when every one pretended to give the sense of the whole body. Those that will hearken to the clamours of the multitude,

will know *nothing for a certainty*, any more than the builders of Babel, when *their tongues were confounded*.

2. There was no quelling the rage and fury of the people; for when *the chief captain commanded that Paul should be carried into the castle*, the tower of Antonia, where the Roman soldiers kept garrison, near the temple, *the soldiers themselves had much ado to get him safe thither out of the noise*, the people were so violent; (*v. 35.*) *When he came upon the stairs, leading up to the castle, the soldiers were forced to take him up in their arms, and carry him*, (which they might easily do, for he was a little man, and his bodily presence weak,) *to keep him from the people, who would have pulled him limb from limb, if they could. When they could not reach him with their cruel hands, they followed him with their sharp arrows, even bitter words; they followed, crying, Away with him, v. 36.* See how the most excellent persons and things are often run down by a popular clamour! Christ himself was so, with, *Crucify him, crucify him*; though they could not say *what evil he had done. Take him out of the land of the living*; (so the ancients expounded it;) chase him out of the world.

3. Paul at length begged leave of *the chief captain to speak to him*; (*v. 37.*) *As he was to be led into the castle*, with a great deal of calmness and composedness in himself, and a great deal of mildness and deference to those about him, *he said unto the chief captain, "May I speak unto thee? Will it be no offence, or construed as a breach of rule, if I give thee some account of myself, since my persecutors can give no account of me?"* What a humble modest question was this! Paul knew how to speak to the greatest of men, and had many a time spoken to his betters, yet he humbly begs leave to speak to this commander, and will not speak till he has obtained leave; *May I speak unto thee?*

4. *The chief captain* tells him what notion he had of him; *Canst thou speak Greek?* I am surprised to hear thee speak a learned language; for, *Art not thou that Egyptian which madest an uproar?* The Jews made the uproar, and then would have it thought that Paul had given them occasion for it, by beginning first; for probably some of them whispered this in the ear of *the chief captain*. See what false mistaken notions of good people, and good ministers, many run away with, and will not be at the pains to have the mistake rectified!

It seems, there had lately been an insurrection somewhere in that country, headed by an *Egyptian*, who took on him to be a prophet; Josephus mentions this story, "That an Egyptian raised a seditious party, promised to shew them the fall of *the walls of Jerusalem from the mount of Olives*, and that they should enter the city upon the ruins." The captain here says, *that he led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers, desperadoes, banditti, raparees, cut-throats.* What a degeneracy was there in the Jewish nation, when there were found there so many that had such a character, and could be drawn into such an attempt upon the public peace! But Josephus says, "That Felix the Roman president went out against them, killed four hundred, and took two hundred prisoners, and the rest were dispersed." *Antiq. 20. 6. De Bello Jud. 2. 12.* And Eusebius speaks of it, *Hist. 2. 20.* It happened in the thirteenth year of Claudius, a little before those days, about three years ago. The ring-leader of this rebellion, it seems, had made his escape, and *the chief captain* concluded, that one who lay under so great an odium, as Paul seemed to lie under, and against whom there was so great an outcry, could not be a criminal of less figure than *this Egyptian*. See how good men are exposed to ill-will by mistake!

5. Paul rectifies his mistake concerning him, by informing him particularly what he was; not such a vagabond, a scoundrel, a rake, as *that Egyptian*, who could give no good account of himself; No; *I am a man who am a Jew*, originally, and no *Egyptian*; a Jew, both by nation and religion; *I am of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia*, of honest parents and a liberal education, (Tarsus was a university,) and, beside that, *a citizen of no mean city*; whether he means Tarsus or Rome is not certain; they were neither of them *mean cities*, and he was a freeman of both. Though *the chief captain* had put him under such an invidious suspicion, that he was *that Egyptian*, he kept his temper, did not break out into any passionate exclamations against the times he lived in, or the men he had to do with, did not render railing for railing, but mildly denied the charge, and owned what he was.

6. He humbly desired a permission from *the chief captain*, whose prisoner he now was, *to speak to the people*; he does not demand it as a debt, though he might have done it, but sues for it as a favour, which he will be thankful for; *I beseech thee, suffer me to speak to the people.* *The chief captain* rescued him with no other design than to give him a fair hearing; now, to shew that his cause needs no art to give it a plausible colour, he desires he may have leave immediately to defend himself; for it needed no more than to be set in a true light; nor did he depend only upon the goodness of his cause, but upon the goodness and fidelity of his Patron, and that promise of his to all his advocates, *that it should be given them in that same hour what they should speak.*

Lastly, He obtained leave to plead his own cause, for he needed not to have counsel assigned him, when *the Spirit of the Father was ready to dictate to him*, Matt. 10. 20. *The chief captain gave him license*, (*v. 40.*) so that now he could speak with a good grace, and with the more courage; he had, I will not say that favour, but that justice, done him by *the chief captain*, which he could not obtain from his countrymen the *Jews*; for they would not hear him, but the captain would, though it were but to satisfy his curiosity.

This license being obtained,

1. The people were attentive to hear; *Paul stood on the stairs*, which gave a little man, like *Zaccheus*, some advantage, and consequently, some boldness, in delivering himself; a sorry pulpit it was, and yet better than none; it served the purpose, though it was not, like Ezra's pulpit of wood, made for the purpose; there he *beckoned with the hand unto the people*, made signs to them to be quiet, and to have a little patience, for he had something to say to them; and so far he gained his point, that every one cried hush to his neighbour, and *there was made a profound silence*; probably *the chief captain* also intimated his charge to all manner of people to keep silence; if the people were not required to *give audience*, it was to no purpose at all that *Paul was allowed to speak.* When the cause of Christ and his gospel is to be pleaded, there ought to be a *great silence*, that we may give the more earnest heed; and all little enough.

2. Paul addressed himself to speak, well assured that he was serving *the interest of Christ's kingdom* as truly and effectually as if he had been preaching in the *synagogue*; he *spoke unto them in the Hebrew tongue*, that is, in their own vulgar tongue, which was the language of their country, to which he hereby owned not only an abiding relation, but an abiding respect.

CHAP. XXII.

In the close of the foregoing chapter, we had Paul bound, according to Agabus's prophecy of the hard usage he should

receive from the Jews at Jerusalem, yet he had his tongue set at liberty, by the permission the chief captain gave him to speak for himself: and so intent he is upon using that liberty of speech which was allowed him, to the honour of Christ and the service of his interest, that he forgets the bonds he is in, makes no mention of them, but speaks of the great things Christ had done for him, with as much ease and cheerfulness as if nothing had been done to ruffle him, or put him into disorder. We have here, 1. His address to the people, and their attention to it, v. 1, 2. 11. The account he gives of himself. 1. What a bigoted Jew he had been in the beginning of his time, v. 3. 5. 2. How he was miraculously converted and brought over to the faith of Christ, v. 6. 11. 3. How he was confirmed and baptized by the ministry of Ananias, v. 12. 16. 4. How he was afterward called, by an immediate warrant from heaven, to be the apostle of the Gentiles, v. 17. 21. 111. The interruption given upon this by the rabble, who could not bear to hear any thing said in favour of the Gentiles, and the violent passion they flew into upon it, v. 22, 23. IV. Paul's second rescue out of the hands of the rabble, and the further course which the chief captain took to find out the true reason of this mighty clamour against Paul, v. 24, 25. V. Paul's pleading his privilege as a Roman citizen, by which he was exempted from this barbarous method of inquisition, v. 25. 29. VI. The chief captain's removing the cause into the High Priest's court, and Paul's appearing there, v. 30.

1. **MEN**, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence *which I make* now unto you. 2. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,)

Paul had, in the last verse of the foregoing chapter, gained a great point, by commanding so profound a silence, after so loud a clamour. Now here observe,

I. With what an admirable composure and presence of mind he addresses himself to speak; never was poor man set upon in a more tumultuous manner, nor with more rage and fury; and yet, in what he said,

1. There appears no fright, but his mind is sedate and composed! Thus he makes his own words good, *None of these things move me*; and David's, (Ps. 3. 6.) *I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about*.

2. There appears no passion; though the suggestions against him were all frivolous and unjust, though it would have vexed any man alive, to be charged with profaning the temple, just then when he was contriving and designing to shew his respect to it, yet he breaks out into no angry expressions, but is *led as a lamb to the slaughter*.

II. What respectful titles he gives even to those who thus abused him, and how humbly he craves their attention; "*Men, brethren, and fathers*, v. 1. To you, O *men*, I call; *men*, that should hear reason, and be ruled by it; *men*, from whom one may expect humanity. You, *brethren*, of the common people; you, *fathers* of the priests." Thus he lets them know that he was one of them, and had not renounced his relation to the Jewish nation, but still had a kindness and concern for it. Note, Though we must not give flattering titles to any, yet we ought to give titles of due respect to all; and those we would do good to, we should endeavour not to provoke. Though he was got out of their hands, and was taken under the protection of the chief captain, yet he does not fall foul upon them, with, *Hear now, ye rebels*; but compliments them with, *Men, brethren, and fathers*.

And observe, he does not exhibit a charge against them, does not recriminate, *Hear now* what I have to say against you, but, *Hear now* what I have to say for myself, *hear ye my defence*; a just and reasonable request; for every man that is accused has

a right to answer for himself, and has not justice done him if his answer be not patiently and impartially heard.

III. The language he spake in, which recommended what he said to the auditory; *he spake in the Hebrew tongue*, that is, the vulgar language of the Jews; which, at this time, was not the pure Old Testament Hebrew, but the Syriac, a dialect of the Hebrew, or rather a corruption of it, as the Italian of the Latin. However,

1. It shewed his continued respect to his countrymen, *the Jews*; though he had conversed so much *with the Gentiles*, yet he still retained *the Jews'* language, and could talk it with ease; by this it appears he is a *Jew*, for *his speech bewrayeth him*.

2. What he said was the more generally understood, for that was the language every body spake, and therefore to speak in that language was indeed to appeal to the people, by which he might have somewhat to insinuate into their affections; and therefore, *when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue, they kept the more silence*. How can it be thought people should give any attention to that which is spoken to them in a language they do not understand? *The chief captain* was surprised to hear him *speak Greek*, (ch. 21. 37.) *the Jews* were surprised to hear him *speak Hebrew*, and both therefore think the better of him. But how would they have been surprised, if they had inquired, as they ought to have done, and had found in what variety of tongues *the Spirit gave him utterance*? 1 Cor. 14. 18. *I speak with tongues more than you all*. But the truth is, many wise and good men are *therefore* slighted, only because they are not known.

3. I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. 4. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. 5. As also the High Priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. 6. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. 7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 8. And I answered. Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. 9. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. 10. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. 11. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were

with me, I came into Damascus. 12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, 13. Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. 14. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. 15. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. 16. And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. 17. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; 18. And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. 19. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: 20. And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. 21. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

Paul here gives such an account of himself as might serve not only to satisfy the chief captain that he was *not that Egyptian* he took him to be, but the Jews also, that he was not that enemy to their church and nation, to their law and temple, they took him to be; and that what he did in preaching Christ, and particularly in preaching him to the Gentiles, he did by a divine commission. He here gives them to understand,

I. What his extraction and education were:

1. That he was one of *their own nation, of the stock of Israel, of the seed of Abraham, a Hebrew of the Hebrews*, not of any obscure family, or a renegade of some other nation; “No, I am verily a man who am a Jew, *ὁ γὰρ Ἰσραήλ*—a Jewish man: I am a man, and therefore ought not to be treated as a beast; a man who am a Jew, not a barbarian; I am a sincere friend to your nation; for I am one of it, and should defile my own nest, if I should unjustly derogate from the honour of your law and your temple.”

2. That he was born in a creditable reputable place, in *Tarsus, a city of Cilicia*, and was by his birth a freeman of that city; he was not born in servitude, as some of the Jews of the dispersion, it is likely, were; but he was a gentleman born, and perhaps could produce his certificate of his freedom in that ancient and honourable city. This was, indeed, but a small matter to make any boast of, and yet it was needful to be mentioned at this time to those who insolently trampled upon him, as if he were to be ranked with the children of fools, yea, the children of base men, Job 30. 8.

3. That he had a learned and liberal education; he was not only a Jew, and a gentleman, but a scholar; he was brought up in Jerusalem, the principal seat of the Jewish learning, and at the feet of Gamaliel, whom they all knew to be an eminent doctor

of the Jewish law, of which Paul was designed to be himself a teacher; and therefore he could not be ignorant of their law, nor be thought to slight it because he did not know it; his parents had brought him very young to this city, designing him for a Pharisee; and some think his being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, intimates, not only that he was one of his pupils, but that he was, above any other diligent and constant in attending his lectures, observant of him, and obsequious to him, in all he said, as Mary, that sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

4. That he was in his early days a very forward and eminent professor of the Jews' religion, his studies and learning were all directed that way. So far was he from being principled in his youth with any disaffection to the religious usages of the Jews, that there was not a young man among them had a greater or more entire veneration for them than he had, was more strict in observing them himself, nor more hot in enforcing them upon others.

(1.) He was an intelligent professor of their religion, and had a clear head; he minded his business at Gamaliel's feet, and was there taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers. What departures he had made from the law, were not owing to any confused or mistaken notions of it, for he understood it to a nicety, *κατὰ ἀκριβειαν*—according to the most accurate and exact method; he was not trained up in the principles of the latitudinarians, had nothing in him of a Sadducee, but was of that sect that was most studious in the law, kept most close to it, and, to make it more strict than it was, added to it the traditions of the elders, the law of the fathers, the law which was given to them, and which they gave to their children, and so was handed down to us. Paul had as great a value for antiquity, and tradition, and the authority of the church, as any of them had; and there was never a Jew of them all that understood his religion better than Paul did, or could better give an account of it, or a reason for it.

(2.) He was an active professor of their religion, and had a warm heart; I was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. Many that are very well skilled in the theory of religion, are willing to leave the practice of it to others; but Paul was as much a zealot as a Rabbini; he was zealous against every thing that the law prohibited, and for every thing the law enjoined; and this was zeal toward God, because he thought it was for the honour of God, and the service of his interests; and here he compliments his hearers with a candid and charitable opinion of them, that they all were this day zealous toward God; he bears them record, (Rom. 10. 2.) that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. In hating him, and casting him out, they said, Let the Lord be glorified; (Isa. 66. 5.) and though this did by no means justify their rage, yet it enabled those that prayed, Father, forgive them, to plead, as Christ did, For they know not what they do. And when Paul owns that he had been zealous for God, in the law of Moses, as they were this day, he intimates his hope that they might be zealous for God, in Christ, as he was this day.

II. What a fiery, furious persecutor he had been of the christian religion in the beginning of his time, &c. 4. 5. He mentions this, to make it the more plainly and evidently to appear, that the change which was wrought upon him, when he was converted to the christian faith, was purely the effect of a divine power; for he was so far from having any previous inclinations to it, or favourable opinions of it, that immediately before that sudden change was wrought in him, he had the utmost antipathy imaginable to christianity, and was filled with rage against it to the last degree! And perhaps he mentions it, to justify God in his present trouble; how unright-

teous soever they were, that persecuted him, *God was righteous*, who permitted them to do it, for time was when he *was a persecutor*; and he may have a further view in it, *to invite and encourage those people to repent*; for he himself had been a *blasphemer, and a persecutor, and yet obtained mercy*.

Let us view Paul's picture of himself when he was a persecutor.

1. He hated christianity *with a mortal enmity*; *I persecuted this way unto the death*, that is, "Those that walked in this way I aimed, if possible, to be the death of." He *breathed out slaughter against them*, ch. 9. 1. When they were *put to death*, he gave his voice *against them*, ch. 26. 10. Nay, he persecuted not only them that walked in this way, but the way itself, christianity, which was branded as a by-way, a sect, he aimed to *persecute this to the death*, to be the ruin of this religion; he *persecuted it to the death*, that is, he could have been willing himself to die in his opposition to christianity, so some understand it; he would contentedly have lost his life, and would have thought it well laid out, in defence of the *laws and traditions of the fathers*.

2. He did all he could to frighten people from *this way, and out of it*, by *binding and delivering into prisons both men and women*; he filled the jails with christians. Now that he himself *was bound*, he lays a particular stress upon this part of his charge against himself, *that he had bound the christians, and carried them to prison*; he likewise reflects upon it with a special regret, *that he had imprisoned not only the men, but the women*, the weaker sex, who ought to be treated with particular tenderness and compassion.

3. He was employed by the great Sanhedrim, *the High Priest*, and all the *estate of the elders*, as an agent for them, in suppressing this new sect; so much had he already signalized himself for his zeal against it! v. 5. The High Priest can witness for him, that he was ready to be employed in any service against the christians. When they heard that many of the *Jews at Damascus* had embraced the christian faith, to deter others from doing the like, they resolved to proceed against them with the utmost severity, and could not think of a fitter person to be employed in that business, nor one more likely to go through with it, than Paul. They *therefore sent him, and letters by him, to the Jews at Damascus*, here called the *brethren*, because they all descended from one common stock, and were of one family in religion too, ordering them to be assisting to Paul in seizing those among them *that had turned christians*, and bringing them *up prisoners to Jerusalem*, in order to their being punished as deserters from the *faith and worship of the God of Israel*; and so might either be compelled to retract, or be put to death for a terror to others. Thus did Saul make *havoc of the church*, and was in a fair way, if he had gone on a while, to ruin it, and root it out. "Such a one," says Paul, "I was at first, just such as you now are. I know the heart of a persecutor, and therefore pity you, and pray that you may know the heart of a convert, as God soon made me to do. *And who was I that I could withstand God?*"

III. In what manner he was converted, and made what he now was; it was not from any natural or external causes; he did not change his religion from an affectation of novelty, for he was then as well affected to antiquity as he used to be; nor did it arise from discontent because he was disappointed in his preferment, for he was now, more than ever, in the way of preferment in the Jewish church; much less could it arise from covetousness, or ambition, or any hope of mending his fortune in the world by turning christian, for it was to expose himself to all manner of disgrace and trouble; nor had he any conversa-

tion with the apostles or any other christians, by whose subtlety and sophistry he might be thought to have been wheedled into this change; no, *it was the Lord's doing*, and the circumstances of the doing of it were enough to justify him in the change, to all those who believe there is a supernatural power; and none can condemn him for it, without reflecting upon that divine energy by which he was herein over-ruled.

He relates the story of his conversion here very particularly, as we had it before, ch. 9. aiming to shew that it was purely the act of God.

1. He was as fully bent upon persecuting the christians just before Christ arrested him as ever; he *made his journey, and was come nigh to Damascus*, (v. 6.) and had no other thought than to execute the cruel design he was sent upon; he was not conscious of the least compassionate relentings toward the poor christians, but still represented them to himself as heretics, schismatics, and dangerous enemies both to church and state.

2. It was a *light from heaven* that first startled him, a *great light*, which *shone suddenly round about him*, and the Jews knew that *God is Light*, and his angels *angels of light*, and that *such a light as this shined at noon*, and therefore exceeding that of the sun, must be from God. Had it shone in upon him into some private room, there might have been a cheat in it, but it shone upon him in the open road, at high noon, and so strongly, *that it struck him to the ground*, (v. 7.) and all that *were with him*, ch. 26. 14. They could not deny but that *surely the Lord was in this light*.

3. It was a *voice from heaven* that first begat in him awful thoughts of Jesus Christ, whom before he had had nothing but hateful, spiteful thoughts of. The voice called to him by name, to distinguish him from those that *journeyed with him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* And when he asked, *Who art thou Lord?* it was answered, *I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest*, v. 8. By which it appeared, that this *Jesus of Nazareth* whom they also were now persecuting, was one that *spake from heaven*, and they knew it was dangerous resisting one that did so, Heb. 12. 25.

4. Lest it should be objected, "How came this light and voice to work such a change upon him, and not upon those that *journeyed with him?*" (though, it is very probable, it had a good effect upon them, and that they thereupon became christians,) he observes, that his *fellow-travellers saw indeed the light, and were afraid* they should be consumed *with fire from heaven*, their own consciences, perhaps, now telling them that the way they were in was not good, but like Balaam's when he was going to curse Israel, and therefore they might expect to *meet an angel with a flaming glittering sword*; but though the *light made them afraid, they heard not the voice of him that spake to Paul*, that is, they did not distinctly hear the words; now *faith comes by hearing*, and therefore that change was now presently wrought upon him that *heard the words*, and heard them directed to himself, which was not wrought upon them who only *saw the light*; and yet it might afterward be wrought upon them too.

5. He assures them, that when he was thus startled, he referred himself entirely to a divine guidance; he did not hereupon presently cry out, "Well, I will be a christian," but, "*What shall I do, Lord?*" Let the same voice from heaven, that has stopped me in the wrong way, guide me into the right way. v. 10. *Lord, tell me what I shall do, and I will do it.*" And immediately he had directions *to go to Damascus*, and there he should hear further from him that spake to him; "No more needs to be said from heaven, *there it shall be*

told thee, by a man like thyself, in the name of him that now speaks to thee, *all things which are appointed for thee to do.*" The extraordinary ways of divine revelation, by visions, and voices, and the appearance of angels, were designed, both in the Old Testament and in the New, only to introduce and establish the ordinary method by the scriptures, and a standing ministry, and therefore were generally superseded when those were settled. The angel did not preach to Cornelius himself, but bid him send for Peter; so the voice here tells not Paul what he shall do, but bids him go to Damascus, and *there it shall be told him.*

6. As a demonstration of the greatness of that light which fastened upon him, he tells them of the immediate effect it had upon his eye-sight; (v. 11.) *I could not see for the glory of that light.* It struck him blind for the present—*Nimium sensibile ledit sensum—Its radiance dazzled him.* Condemned sinners are struck blind, as the Sodomites and Egyptians were, by the power of darkness, and it is a lasting blindness, like that of the unbelieving Jews; but convinced sinners are struck blind, as Paul here was, not by darkness, but by *light*; they are for the present brought to be at a loss within themselves, but it is in order to their being enlightened; as the putting of clay upon the eyes of the blind man, was the designed method of his cure. Those that were with Paul, had not the light so directly darted into their faces, as Paul had into his, and therefore they were not blinded, as he was; yet, considering the issue, who would not rather have chosen his lot than theirs? They, having their sight, led Paul by the hand into the city. Paul, being a Pharisee, was proud of his spiritual eye-sight. The Pharisees said, *Are we blind also?* John 9. 40. Nay, they were confident that *they themselves were guides to the blind, and lights to them that were in darkness,* Rom. 2. 19. Now Paul was thus struck with bodily blindness, to make him sensible of his spiritual blindness, and his mistake concerning himself, when he was *alive without the law,* Rom. 7. 9.

IV. How he was confirmed in the change he had made, and further directed what he should do by Ananias who lived at Damascus. Observe,

1. The character here given of Ananias; he was not a man that was any way prejudiced against the Jewish nation or religion, but was himself a *devout man according to the law*; if not a Jew by birth, yet one that had been proselyted to the Jewish religion, and therefore called a *devout man*, and thence advanced further to the faith of Christ; and conducted himself so well, that he had a *good report of all the Jews that dwelt at Damascus*; this was the first christian that Paul had any friendly communication with, and it was not likely that he should instil into him any such notions as they suspected him to have espoused, injurious to the law or to this holy place.

2. The cure immediately wrought by him upon Paul's eyes; which miracle was to confirm Ananias's mission to Paul, and to ratify all that he should afterward say to him. *He came to him*; (v. 13.) and, to assure him that he came to him from Christ, the very same who had *torn*, and would *heal* him; had *smitten*, but would *bind him up*; had *taken away his sight*, but would *restore it again*, with advantage; he *stood by him, and said, Brother Saul, receive thy sight.* With which word power went along, and the *same hour* immediately he recovered his sight, and *looked up upon him*, ready to receive from him the instructions sent by him.

3. The declaration which Ananias makes to him of the favour, the peculiar favour, which the Lord Jesus designed him above any other.

(1.) In the present manifestation of himself to him; (v. 14.) *The God of our fathers has chosen thee.* This powerful call is the result of a particular choice;

his calling God *the God of our fathers*, intimates, that Ananias was himself a Jew by birth, that observed the *law of the fathers*, and lived upon the *promise made unto the fathers*; and he gives a reason why he said *Brother Saul*, when he spake of God, as *the God of our fathers*; *This God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest*, [1.] *Know his will*, the will of his precept that is to be done by thee, the will of his providence that is to be done concerning thee. *He hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know it* in a more peculiar manner; not of man or by man; but immediately by the *revelation of Christ*, Gal. 1. 1, 12. Those whom God hath chosen, he hath chosen to know his will, and to do it. [2.] *That thou shouldest see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth*, and so shouldest know his will immediately from himself. This was what Paul was, in a particular manner, chosen to above others; it was a distinguishing favour, that he should see Christ here upon earth after his ascension into heaven! Stephen saw him *standing at the right hand of God*, but Paul saw him standing at his right hand! This honour none had but Paul. Stephen saw him, but we do not find that he *heard the voice of his mouth*, as Paul did, who says, *he was lost of all seen of him, as of one born out of due time*, 1 Cor. 15. 8. Christ is here called that *Just One*; for he is *Jesus Christ the righteous*, and suffered wrongfully. Observe, Those whom God has chosen to know his will, must have an eye to Christ, and must see him, and *hear the voice of his mouth*; for it is by him that God has made known his will, his good-will to us, and he has said, *Hear ye him.*

(2.) In the after manifestation of himself by him to others; (v. 15.) *"Thou shalt be his witness*, not only a monument of his grace, as a pillar may be, but a witness *viva voce—by word of mouth*; thou shalt publish his gospel, as that which thou hast experienced the power of, and been delivered into the mould of; *thou shalt be his witness unto all men*, Gentiles as well as Jews, *of what thou hast seen and heard*, now at the very first." And finding Paul so particularly relating the manner of his conversion in his apologies for himself, here, and *ch. 26.* we have reason to think that he frequently made the same narrative in his preaching for the conversion of others; he told them *what God had done for his soul*, to encourage them to hope that he would do something for their souls.

4. The counsel and encouragement he gave him to join himself to the Lord Jesus by baptism; (v. 16.) *Arise, and be baptized.* He had in his circumcision been given up to God, but he must now by baptism be given up to God in Christ; must embrace the christian religion and the privileges of it, in submission to the precepts of it. This must now be done immediately upon his conversion, and so was added to his circumcision; but to the seed of the faithful it comes in the room of it; for it is, as that was to Abraham and his believing seed, a seal of the righteousness which is by faith. (1.) The great gospel privilege, which by baptism we have sealed to us, is the remission of sins. *Be baptized, and wash away thy sins*; that is, "Receive the comfort of the pardon of thy sins in and through Jesus Christ, and lay hold on his righteousness for that purpose; and receive power against sin, for the mortifying of thy corruption." For our being washed, includes our being both justified and sanctified, 1 Cor. 6. 11. *Be baptized, and rest not in the sign, but make sure of the thing signified, the putting away of the filth of sin.* (2.) The great gospel-duty, which by our baptism we are bound to, is, to call on the name of the Lord, the Lord Jesus; to acknowledge him to be our Lord and our God, and to apply ourselves to him accordingly; to give honour to him, to put all

our petitions in his hand. To *call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord*, (Son of David, have mercy on us,) is the periphrasis of a christian, 1 Cor. 1. 2. We must *wash away our sins, calling on the name of the Lord*; that is, we must seek for the pardon of our sins in Christ's name, and in dependence on him and his righteousness. In prayer, we must not any longer call God the *God of Abraham*, but the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and in him our *Father*; in every prayer, our eye must be to Christ. (3.) We must do this quickly. *Why tarriest thou?* Our covenanting with God in Christ is needful work, that must not be deferred. The case is so plain, that it is needless to deliberate; and the hazard so great, that it is folly to delay. Why should not that be done at the present time, that must be done some time, or we are undone?

V. How he was commissioned to go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. This was the great thing which they were so angry at him for, and therefore it was requisite he should for this, in a special manner, produce a divine warrant; and here he does it. This commission he did not receive presently upon his conversion, for this was at *Jerusalem*, whither he did not go till *three years after*, or more; (Gal. 1. 18.) and whether it was then, or afterward, that he had this vision here spoken of, we are not certain.

But, to reconcile them, if possible, to his preaching of the gospel among the *Gentiles*, he tells them,

1. That he received his orders to do it when he was at prayer, begging of God to appoint him his work, and to shew him the course he should steer; and (which was a circumstance that would have some weight with those he was now speaking to) he was at *prayer in the temple*, which was to be called a *house of prayer for all people*; not only in which all people should pray, but in which all people should be prayed for. Now as Paul's praying in the temple was an evidence, contrary to their malicious suggestion, that he had a veneration for the temple, though he did not make an idol of it as they did; so God's giving him this commission *there in the temple*, was an evidence, that the sending him to the *Gentiles* would be no prejudice to the temple, unless the Jews by their infidelity made it so. Now it would be a great satisfaction to Paul afterward, in the execution of this commission, to reflect upon it that he received it when he was at prayer.

2. He received it in a vision, he fell into a *trance*, (v. 17.) his external senses, for the present, locked up; he was in an ecstasy, as when he was *caught up into the third heaven*, and was not at that time sensible whether he was in the *body*, or out of the *body*. In this *trance* he saw Jesus Christ, not with the eyes of his body, as at his conversion, but represented to the eyes of his mind; (v. 18.) *I saw him saying unto me*. Our eye must be upon Christ, when we are receiving the law from his mouth; and we must not only *hear* him speaking, but *see* him speaking to us.

3. Before Christ gave him a commission to go to the *Gentiles*, he told him, it was to no purpose for him to think of doing any good at *Jerusalem*; so that they must not blame him, but themselves, if he were sent to the *Gentiles*. Paul came to *Jerusalem*, full of hopes, that, by the grace of God, he might be instrumental to bring those to the faith of Christ, who had stood it out against the ministry of the other apostles; and perhaps this was it he was now praying for, that he, having had his education at *Jerusalem*, and being well known there, might be employed in gathering the children of *Jerusalem* to Christ, that were not yet gathered; which he thought he had particular advantages for the doing of. But Christ crosses the measures he had laid; "Make haste," says he, "and get thee quickly out

of *Jerusalem*; for though thou thinkest thyself more likely to work upon them than others, thou wilt find they are more prejudiced against thee than against any other, and therefore will not receive thy testimony concerning me." As God knows before who will receive the gospel, so he knows who will reject it.

4. Paul, notwithstanding this, renews his petition that he might be employed at *Jerusalem*, because they knew, better than any did, what he had been before his conversion, and therefore must ascribe so great a change in him to the power of almighty grace, and, consequently, give the greater regard to his testimony; thus he reasoned, both with himself, and with the Lord, and thought he reasoned right; (v. 19, 20.) "Lord," says he, "they know, that I was once of their mind, that I was as bitter an enemy as any of them to such as believed on thee, that I irritated the civil power against them, and imprisoned them, and turned the edge of the spiritual power against them too, and beat them in every synagogue. And therefore they will not impute my preaching Christ to education, or any prepossession in his favour, (as they do that of other ministers,) but will the more readily regard what I say, because they know I have myself been one of them: particularly in Stephen's case; they know that when he was stoned, I was standing by, I was aiding and abetting and consenting to his death, and in token of that kept the clothes of them that stoned him. Now, Lord," says he, "If I appear among them, preaching the doctrine that Stephen preached and suffered for, they will no doubt receive my testimony." "No," (says Christ to him,) "they will not; but will be more exasperated against thee as a deserter from, than against others whom they look upon only as strangers to, their constitution."

5. Paul's petition for a warrant to preach the gospel at *Jerusalem* is over-ruled, and he has peremptory orders to go among the *Gentiles*; (v. 21.) *Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles*. Note, God often gives gracious answers to the prayers of his people, not in the thing itself that they pray for, but in something better. Abraham prays, *O that Ishmael may live before thee*; and God hears him for Isaac. So Paul here prays that he may be an instrument of converting souls at *Jerusalem*; "No," says Christ, "but thou shalt be employed among the *Gentiles*, and more shall be the children of the desolate than those of the married wife." It is God that appoints his labourers both their day and their place, and it is fit they should acquiesce in his appointment; though it may cross their own inclinations. Paul hankers after *Jerusalem*; to be a preacher there, was the top of his ambition; but Christ designs him greater preferment; he shall not enter into other men's labours, (as the other apostles did, John 4. 38.) but shall break up new ground, and preach the gospel there where Christ was not named, Rom. 15. 20. So often does Providence contrive better for us than we for ourselves; to the guidance of that we must therefore refer ourselves. *He shall choose our inheritance for us*. Observe, Paul shall not go to preach among the *Gentiles* without a commission: *I will send thee*. And if Christ send him, his Spirit shall go along with him, he will stand by him, will carry him on, and bear him out, and give him to see the fruit of his labours. Let not Paul set his heart upon *Judea* and *Jerusalem*, for he must be sent far hence, his call must be quite another way, and his work of another kind. And it might be a mitigation of the offence of this to the Jews, that he did not set up a Gentile church in the neighbouring nations; others did that in their immediate vicinity; he was sent to places at a distance, a vast way off, where what he did could not be thought an annoyance to them.

Now if they would lay all this together, surely they would see that they had no reason to be angry with Paul for preaching among the Gentiles, or construe it an act of ill-will to his own nation, for he was compelled to it, contrary to his own mind, by an over-ruling command from heaven.

22. And they gave him audience unto this word, and *then* lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a *fellow* from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

23. And as they cried out, and cast off *their* clothes, and threw dust into the air, 24.

The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. 25. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

26. When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. 27. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. 28. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was *free-born*.

29. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

30. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from *his* bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

Paul was going on with this account of himself, and had shewed them his commission to preach among the Gentiles, without any peevish reflections upon the Jews. We may suppose that he designed next to shew how he was afterward, by a special direction of the Holy Ghost at Antioch, separated to this service, how tender he was of the Jews, how respectful to them, and how careful to give them the precedence in all places whither he came, and to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body; and then to shew how wonderfully God had owned him, and what good service had been done to the interest of God's kingdom among men in general, without damage to any of the true interests of the Jewish church in particular. But whatever he designs to say, they resolve he shall say no more to them; *They gave him audience to this word*. Hitherto they had heard him with patience and some attention. But when he speaks of being *sent to the Gentiles*, though it was what Christ himself said to him, they cannot bear it, not so much as to hear the Gentiles named, such an enmity had they to them, and such a jealousy of them. Upon the mention of this, they have no manner of patience, but forget all rules of decency and equity; thus were they *provoked to jealousy by them that were no people*, Rom. 10. 19.

Now here we are told how *furios* and *outrageous*

the people were against Paul, for mentioning the Gentiles, as taken into the cognizance of divine grace, and so justifying his preaching among them.

I. *They interrupted him, by lifting up their voice*, to put him into confusion, and that nobody might hear a word he said. Galled consciences kick at the least touch; and those who are resolved not to be ruled by reason, commonly resolve not to hear it, if they can help it. And the spirit of enmity against the gospel of Christ commonly shews itself in silencing the ministers of Christ and his gospel, and stopping their mouths, as the Jews did Paul's here. Their fathers had said to the best of *seers*, *See not*, Isa. 30. 10. And so they to the best of *speakers*, *Speak not*. *Forbear, wherefore shouldst thou be smitten?* 2 Chron. 25. 16.

II. They clamoured against him as one that was unworthy of life, much more of liberty; without weighing the arguments he had urged in his own defence, or offering to make any answer to them, they cried out with a confused noise, "*Away with such a fellow as this from the earth*, who pretends to have a commission to preach to the Gentiles; why, it is not fit that he should live." Thus the men that have been the greatest blessings of their age, have been represented not only as the burthens of the earth, but the plague of their generation. He that was worthy of the greatest honours of life, is condemned as not worthy of life itself. See what different sentiments God and men have of good men, and yet they both agree in this, that they are not likely to live long in this world. Paul says of the godly Jews, that they were men *of whom the world was not worthy*, Heb. 11. 38. And therefore they must be removed, that the world may be justly punished with the loss of them. The ungodly Jews here say of Paul, that it was *not fit he should live*; and therefore he must be removed, that the world may be eased of the burthen of him, as of the *two witnesses*, Rev. 11. 10.

III. They went stark mad against Paul, and against the chief captain for not killing him immediately, at their request, or throwing him as a prey into their teeth, that they might devour him, (v. 23.) as men whose reason was quite lost in passion, they *cried out* like roaring lions or ranging bears, and howled like the evening wolves; they *cast off their clothes* with fury and violence, as much as to say, that thus they would tear him if they could but come at him. Or rather, they thus shewed how ready they were to stone him; they that stoned Stephen, threw off their clothes, v. 20. Or, they *rent their clothes*, as if he had spoken blasphemy; and *threw dust into the air*, in detestation of it; or, signifying how ready they were to throw stones at Paul, if the chief captain would have permitted them. But why should we go about to give a reason for these expressions of fury, which they themselves could not account for? All they intended, was, to make the chief captain sensible how much they were enraged and exasperated at Paul, so that he could not do any thing to gratify them more than to let them have their will against him.

IV. The chief captain took care for his safety, by ordering him to be *brought into the castle*, v. 24. A prison sometimes has been a protection to good men from popular rage. Paul's hour was not yet come, he had not finished his testimony, and therefore God raised up one that took care of him, when none of his friends durst appear on his behalf. *Grant not, O Lord, the desire of the wicked*.

V. He ordered him the torture, to force from him a confession of some flagrant crimes, which had provoked the people to such an uncommon violence against him. *He bade that he should be examined by scourging*, (as now in some countries by the rack,) that he might know wherefore they cried so against

him. Herein he did not proceed fairly; he should have singled out some of the clamorous, tumultuous complainants, and taken them into the castle, as breakers of the peace, and should have examined them, and by scourging too, what they had to lay to the charge of a man that could give so good an account of himself, and did not appear to have done any thing worthy of death or of bonds. It was proper to ask them, but not at all proper to ask Paul, *wherefore they cried so against him?* He could tell that he had given them no just cause to do it; if there were any cause, let them produce it. No man is bound to *accuse himself*, though he be *guilty*, much less ought he to be compelled to *accuse himself*, when he is *innocent*. Surely the chief captain did not know the Jewish nation when he concluded, that he must needs have done something very ill, whom they cried out against. Had they not just thus cried against our Lord Jesus, *Crucify him, crucify him*, when they had not one word to say in answer to the judge's question, *Why, what evil has he done?* Is this a fair or just occasion to scourge Paul, that a rude tumultuous mob cry out against him, but cannot tell why or wherefore, and therefore he must be forced to tell.

VI. Paul pleaded his privilege as a Roman citizen, by which he was exempted from all trials and punishments of this nature; (v. 25.) *As they bound him with thongs*, or leathern bands, to the whipping post, as they used the vilest of malefactors in bridewell from whom they would extort a confession, he made no outcry against the injustice of their proceedings against an innocent man, but very mildly let them understand the illegality of their proceedings against him as a citizen of Rome; which he had done once before at Philippi, after he had been scourged, (ch. 16. 37.) but here he makes use of it for prevention. He said to the centurion that stood by, "You know the law; pray is it lawful for you who are yourselves Romans, to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" The manner of his speaking, plainly speaks what a holy security and serenity of mind this good man enjoyed, not disturbed either with anger or fear in the midst of all those indignities that were done him, and the danger he was in. The Romans had a law, (it was called *lex Semproniana*), that if any magistrate did chastise or condemn a freeman of Rome, *indicta causa—without hearing him speak for himself, and deliberating upon the whole of his case*, he should be liable to the sentence of the people, who were very jealous of their liberties. It is indeed the privilege of every man not to have wrong done him, except it be proved he has done wrong; as it is of every Englishman by *Magna Charta*, not to be dis-seized of his life or freehold, but by a verdict of twelve men of his peers.

VII. The chief captain was surprised at this, and put into a fright; he had taken Paul to be a vagabond Egyptian, and wondered he could speak Greek, (ch. 21. 37.) but is much more surprised now he finds that he is as good a gentleman as himself. How many men of great worth and merit are despised because they are not known, are looked upon and treated as the *offscouring of all things*, when those that count them so, if they knew their true character, would own them to be of the *excellent ones of the earth!* The chief captain had centurions, under-officers attending him, ch. 21. 32. One of these reports this matter to the chief captain, (v. 26.) *Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman*, and what indignity is done to him, will be construed an offence against the majesty of the Roman people; as they loved to speak. They all knew what a value was put upon this privilege of the Roman citizens. Tully extols it in one of his orations against Verres, *O nomen dulce libertatis, O jus eximium nostræ civitatis! O lex Porcia! O leges Sempronice! facinus*

est vincere Romanum civem, scelus verberare—O Liberty, I love thy charming name! And these our Porcian and Sempronian laws, how admirable! It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen, but an unpardonable one to beat him. "Therefore" (says the centurion) "let us look to ourselves; if this man be a Roman, and we do him any indignity, we shall be in danger to lose our commissions at least." Now,

1. The chief captain would be satisfied of the truth of this from his own mouth; (v. 27.) "Tell me, art thou a Roman? Art thou entitled to the privileges of a Roman citizen?" "Yes," says Paul, "I am;" and perhaps produced some ticket or instrument which proved it; for otherwise, they would scarcely have taken his word.

2. The chief captain very freely compares notes with him upon this matter, and it appears, that the privilege Paul had as a Roman citizen, was of the two more honourable than the colonel's; for the colonel owns that his was purchased; "I am a freeman of Rome; but with a great sum obtained I this freedom, it cost me dear, how came you by it?" "Why truly," says Paul, "I was free-born." Some think he became entitled to this freedom by the *place of his birth*, as a native of Tarsus, a city privileged by the emperor with the same privileges that Rome itself enjoyed; others rather think, it was by his father or grandfather having served in the war between Cæsar and Antony, or some other of the civil wars of Rome, and being for some signal piece of service rewarded with a freedom of the city; and so Paul came to be free-born; and here he pleads it for his own preservation; for which end not only we may, but we ought, to use all lawful means.

3. This put an immediate stop to Paul's trouble; they that were appointed to examine him by scourging, quitted the spot; they departed from him, (v. 29.) lest they should run themselves into a snare. Nay, and the colonel himself, though we may suppose him to have a considerable interest, was afraid when he heard he was a Roman, because, though he had not beaten him, yet he had bound him in order to his being beaten. Thus many are restrained from evil practices by the *fear of man*, who would not be restrained from them by the *fear of God*. See here the benefit of human laws and magistracy, and what reason we have to be thankful to God for them; for even when they have given no countenance or special protection to God's people and ministers, yet by the general support of equity and fair dealing between man and man, they have served to check the rage of wicked and unreasonable illegal men, who otherwise would know no bounds, and to say, *Hitherto it shall come, but no further; here shall its proud waves be stayed.* And therefore this service we owe to all in authority—to pray for them, because this benefit we have reason to expect from them, whether we have it or no, as long as we are quiet and peaceable—to live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, 1 Tim. 2. 1, 2.

4. The governor, the next day, brought Paul before the Sanhedrim, v. 30. He first loosed him from his bands, that those might not prejudice his cause, and that he might not be charged with having pinioned a Roman citizen, and then summoned the chief priests and all their council to come together to take cognizance of Paul's case, for he found it to be a matter of religion, and therefore looked upon them to be the most proper judges of it. Gallio in this case discharged Paul; finding it to be a matter of their law, he drove the prosecutors from the judgment-seat, (ch. 18. 16.) and would not concern himself at all in it: but this Roman, who was a military man, kept Paul in custody, and appealed from the rabble to the general assembly. Now, (1.) We may hope that hereby he intended Paul's safety, as thinking, if he were an innocent and inoffensive man,

though the multitude might be incensed against him, yet the chief priests and elders would *do him justice*, and clear him; for they were, or should be, men of learning and consideration, and their court governed by rules of equity. When the prophet could find no good among the poorer sort of people, he concluded that it was because they *knew not the way of the Lord, nor the judgments of their God*, and promised himself that he should speed better among the *great men*, as the *chief captain* here did, but soon found himself disappointed there; these have *altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds*, Jer. 5. 4, 5. But, (2.) That which he is here said to aim at, is, the gratifying of his own curiosity. He *would have known the certainty whereof he was accused of the Jews*. Had he sent for Paul to his own chamber, and talked freely with him, he might soon have earned from him that which would have done more than satisfy his inquiry, and which might have persuaded him to be a christian. But it is too common for *great men* to affect to set that at a distance from them, which might awaken their consciences, and to desire to have no more of the *knowledge of God's ways* than may serve them to talk of.

CHAP. XXIII.

The close of the foregoing chapter left Paul in the High Priest's court, into which the chief captain (whether to his advantage or no, I know not) had removed his cause from the mob; and if his enemies act there against him with less noise, yet it is with more subtlety. Now here we have, I. Paul's protestation of his own integrity, and of a civil respect to the High Priest, however he had upon a sudden spoken warmly to him, and justly, v. 1. . 5. II. Paul's prudent contrivance to get himself clear of them, by setting the Pharisees and Sadducees at variance one with another, v. 6. . 9. III. The governor's seasonable interposal to rescue him out of their hands likewise, v. 10. IV. Christ's more comfortable appearing to him, to animate him against those difficulties that lay before him, and to tell him what he must expect, v. 11. V. A bloody conspiracy of some desperate Jews to kill Paul, and their drawing in the chief priests and the elders to be aiders and abettors with them in it, v. 12. . 15. VI. The discovery of this conspiracy to Paul, and by him to the chief captain, who perceived so much of their inveterate malice against Paul, that he had reason enough to believe the truth of it, v. 16. . 22. VII. The chief captain's care of Paul's safety, by which he prevented the execution of the design; he sent him away immediately under a strong guard from Jerusalem to Caesarea, which was now the residence of Felix, the Roman governor, and there he safely arrived, v. 23. . 35.

I. **AND** Paul earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. 2. And the High Priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. 3. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? 4. And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's High Priest? 5. Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the High Priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Perhaps, when Paul was brought, as he often was (*Corpus cum causa*—the person and the cause together) before heathen magistrates and councils, where he and his cause were slighted, because not at all understood, he thought, if he were brought before the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem, he should be able to deal with them to some good purpose, and

yet we do not find that he works at all upon them. Here we have,

I. Paul's protestation of his own integrity; whether the chief priest put any question to him, or the chief captain made any representation of his case to the court, we are not told; but Paul appeared here,

1. With a good courage; he was not at all put out of countenance upon his being brought before such an august assembly, which in his youth he had conceived such a veneration for; nor did he fear their calling him to an account about the letters they gave him to Damascus, to persecute the christians there, though (for aught we know) this was the first time he had ever seen them since; but he earnestly beheld the council. When Stephen was brought before them, they thought to have *faced him down*, but could not, such was his holy confidence; they *looked steadfastly on him, and his face was as that of an angel*, ch. 6. 15. Now that Paul was brought before them, he thought to have *faced them down*, but could not, such was their *wicked infidelity*. However, now was fulfilled in him what God promised to Ezekiel, (ch. 3. 8, 9.) *I have made thy face strong against their faces; fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks*.

2. With a good conscience, and that gave him: a good courage.

—Hic murus aleneus esto,
Nil conscire sibi—

Be this thy brazen bulwark of defence,
Still to preserve thy conscious innocence.

He said, "*Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God unto this day*. However I may be reproached, my heart does not reproach me, but witnesses for me." (1.) He had always been a man inclined to religion; he never was a man that lived at large, but always put a difference between moral good and evil; even in his unregenerate state, he was, as *touching the righteousness that was in the law, blameless*. He was no unthinking man, who never considered what he did, no designing man, who cared not what he did, so he could but compass his own ends. (2.) Even when he *persecuted the church of God*, he thought he ought to do it, and that he did God service in it. Though his conscience was *misinformed*, yet he acted according to the dictates of it. See ch. 26. 9. (3.) He seems rather to speak of the time since his conversion, since he left the service of the High Priest, and fell under their displeasure for so doing; he does not say, *From my beginning until this day*; but, "*All the time in which you have looked upon me as a deserter, an apostate, and an enemy to your church, even to this day, I have lived in all good conscience before God*; whatever you may think of me, I have in every thing approved myself to God, and lived honestly," Heb. 13. 18. He had aimed at nothing but to *please God, and do his duty*, in those things for which they were so incensed against him; in all he had done toward the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, and the setting of it up among the Gentiles, he had acted conscientiously. See here the character of an honest man; [1.] He set, *God before him*, and lives as in his sight, and under his eyes, and with an eye to him. *Walk before me, and be thou perfect*. [2.] He *makes conscience* of what he says and does, and though he may be under some mistakes, yet, according to the best of his knowledge, he abstains from that which is evil, and cleaves to that which is good. [3.] He is *universally conscientious*; and they that are not so, are not at all truly conscientious; is so in *all manner of conversation*; "*I have lived in all good conscience*; have had my *whole conversation* under the direction and dominion of conscience." [4.] He continues so, and perseveres in it; "*I have lived so until this*

day." Whatever changes pass over him, he is still the same, strictly conscientious. And those who thus live in all good conscience before God, may, like Paul here, lift up their face without spot; and if their hearts condemn them not, may have confidence both toward God and man, as Job had when he still held fast his integrity, and Paul himself whose rejoicing was this, the testimony of his conscience.

II. The outrage of which Ananias the High Priest was guilty; he commanded them that stood by, the beadles that attended the court, to smite him on the mouth, (v. 2.) to give him a dash on the teeth, either with a hand, or with a rod. Our Lord Jesus was thus despitefully used in this court, by one of the servants, (John 18. 22.) as was foretold, Mic. 5. 1. *They shall smite the Judge of Israel upon the cheek.* But here was an order of court for the doing of it, and, it is likely, it was done.

1. The High Priest was highly offended at Paul; some think, because he looked so boldly and earnestly at the council, as if he would face them down; others, because he did not address himself particularly to him as president, with some title of honour and respect, but spake freely and familiarly to them all, as men and brethren. His protestation of his integrity was provocation enough to one who was resolved to run him down, and make him odious. When he could charge him with no crime, he thought it was crime enough that he asserted his own innocence.

2. In his rage he ordered him to be smitten, so to put disgrace upon him, and to be smitten on the mouth, as having offended with his lips, and in token of his enjoining him silence. This brutish and barbarous method he had recourse to, when he could not answer the wisdom and spirit wherewith he spake. Thus Zedekiah smote Micaiah, (1 Kings 22. 24.) and Pashur smote Jeremiah, (Jer. 20. 2.) when they spake in the name of the Lord; if therefore we see such indignities done to good men; nay, if they be done to us for well doing and well saying, we must not think it strange; Christ will give those the kisses of his mouth, (Cant. 1. 2.) who for his sake receive blows on the mouth. And though it may be expected that, as Solomon says, *every man should kiss his lips that giveth a right answer*, (Prov. 24. 26.) yet we often see the contrary.

III. The denunciation of the wrath of God against the High Priest for this wickedness in the place of judgment; (Eccl. 3. 16.) it agrees with what follows there, v. 17. with which Solomon comforted himself, *I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; God shall smite thee, thou whitened wall*, v. 3. Paul did not speak this in any sinful heat or passion, but in a holy zeal against the High Priest's abuse of his power, and with something of a prophetic spirit, not at all with a spirit of revenge.

1. He gives him his due character; *Thou whitened wall*; thou hypocrite; a mud-wall, trash and dirt, and rubbish, underneath, but plastered over, or white-washed. It is the same comparison in effect with that of Christ, when he compares the Pharisees to whitened sepulchres, Matt. 23. 27. *They that daubed with untempered mortar*, failed not to daub themselves over with something that made them look not only clean, but gay.

2. He reads him his just doom; "*God shall smite thee*, shall bring upon thee his sore judgments, especially spiritual judgments; Grotius thinks this was fulfilled soon after, in his removal from the office of the High Priest, either by death or deprivation, for he finds another in that office a little while after this; probably, he was smitten by some sudden stroke of divine vengeance. Jeroboam's hand was withered when it was stretched out against a prophet.

3. He assigns a good reason for that doom; "For

sittest thou there as president in the supreme judicature of the church, pretending to judge me after the law, to convict and condemn me by the law, and yet commandest me to be smitten before any crime is proved upon me, which is contrary to the law?" No man must be beaten unless he was *worthy to be beaten*, Deut. 25. 2. It is against all law, human and divine, natural and positive, to hinder a man from making his defence, and to condemn him unheard. When Paul was beaten by the rabble, he could say, *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*; but it is inexcusable in a High Priest that is appointed to judge according to the law.

IV. The offence which was taken at this bold word of Paul's; (v. 4.) *They that stood by said, Revilest thou God's High Priest?* It is a probable conjecture, that those who blamed Paul for what he said, were believing Jews, who were zealous for the law, and consequently for the honour of the High Priest, and therefore took it ill that Paul should thus reflect upon him, and checked him for it. See here then,

1. What a hard game Paul had to play, when his enemies were abusive to him, and his friends were so far from standing by him, and appearing for him, that they were ready to find fault with his management.

2. How apt even the disciples of Christ themselves are to over-value outward pomp and power. As because the temple had been *God's temple*, and a magnificent structure, there were those who followed Christ, that could not bear to have any thing said that threatened the destruction of it; so because the High Priest had been *God's High Priest*, and was a man that made a figure, though he was an inveterate enemy to christianity, yet these were disgusted at Paul for giving him his due.

V. The excuse that Paul made for what he had said, because he found it was a stumbling-block to his weak brethren, and might prejudice them against him in other things. These Jewish christians, though weak, yet were brethren, so he calls them here, and, in consideration of that, is almost ready to recall his words; for *Who is offended*, said he, *and I burn not?* 2 Cor. 11. 29. His fixed resolution was rather to abridge himself in the use of his christian liberty than give offence to a weak brother; rather than do it, he will eat no flesh while the world stands, 1 Cor. 8. 13. And so here though he had taken the liberty to tell the High Priest his own, yet when he found it gave offence, he cried *Peccavi—I have done wrong*, he wished he had not done it; and though he did not beg the High Priest's pardon, nor excuse it to him, yet he begs their pardon, who took offence at it, because this was not a time to inform them better, nor to say what he could say to justify himself.

1. He excuses it with this, that he did not consider when he said it, whom he spake to; (v. 5.) *Iivist not brethren, that he was the High Priest; &c.* "I did not just then think of the dignity of his place, or else I would have spoken more respectfully to him." I see not how we can with any probability think that Paul did not know him to be the High Priest, for Paul had been seven days in the temple at the time of the feast, where he could not miss or see the High Priest; and his telling him that *he sat to judge him after the law*, shews that he knew who he was; but, says he, I did not consider it. Dr. Whitby puts this sense upon it; that the prophetic impulse that was upon him, and inwardly moved him to say what he did, did not permit him to advert that it was the High Priest, lest this law might have restrained him from complying with that impulse; but the Jews acknowledged that prophets might use a liberty in speaking of rulers, which others might not, as Isa. 1. 10, 23. Or, (as he quotes the sense

of Grotius and Lightfoot,) Paul does not go about to excuse what he had said in the least, but rather to justify it; "I own that *God's High Priest* is not to be reviled, but I do not own this Ananias to be High Priest, he is a usurper, he came to the office by bribery and corruption; and the Jewish rabbins say, that he who does so, is neither a Judge, nor to be honoured as such." Yet,

2. He takes care that what he had said should not be drawn into a precedent, to the weakening of the obligation of that law in the least; *For it is written*, and it remains a law in full force, *Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people*. It is for the public good, that the honour of magistracy should be supported, and not suffer for the miscarriages of those who are intrusted with it; and therefore that decorum be observed in speaking both of and to princes and judges; even in Job's time it was *not thought fit to say to a king, Thou art twicked, or to princes, Ye are ungodly*, Job 34. 18. Even when we do well, and suffer for it, we must *take it patiently*, 1 Pet. 2. 20. Not as if great men may not hear of their faults, and public grievances be complained of by proper persons, and in a decent manner, but there must be a particular tenderness for the honour and reputation of those in authority more than of other people, because the law of God requires a particular reverence to be paid to them, as God's viceregents; and it is of dangerous consequence to have those any way countenanced, who *despise dominions*, and *speak evil of dignities*, Jude 8. *Curse not the king, no not in thy thought*, Eccl. 10. 20.

6. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, *Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question*. 7. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. 8. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. 9. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were of the Pharisees' part*, arose, and strove, saying, *We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God*. 10. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. 11. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, *Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome*.

Many are the troubles of the righteous, but some way or other the Lord delivereth them out of them all. Paul owned he had experienced the truth of this in the persecutions he had undergone among the Gentiles; (see 2 Tim. 3. 11.) *Out of them all the Lord delivered me*. And now he finds that he who has delivered, does and will. He that delivered him in the foregoing chapter from the *tumult of the people*, here delivers him from that of the *elders*.

1. His own prudence and ingenuity stand him *in some stead*, and contribute much to his escape. Paul's greatest honour, and that upon which he most valued himself, was, that he was a christian, and an *apostle of Christ*; and all his other honours he despised and made nothing of, in comparison with those, *counting them but dung, that he might win Christ*; and yet he had sometimes occasion to make use of his other honours, and they did him service. His being a *citizen of Rome* saved him in the foregoing chapter from being whipt by the chief captain as a vagabond, and here his being a Pharisee saved him from being condemned by the Sanhedrim, as an apostate from the faith and worship of the God of Israel. It will consist very well with our willingness to suffer for Christ, to use all lawful methods, nay, and arts too, both to prevent suffering, and to extricate ourselves out of it.

The honest policy Paul used here for his own preservation, was, to divide his judges, and to *set them at variance* one with another about him; and by incensing *one part of them* more against him, to engage the contrary part for him.

1. The great council was made up of Sadducees and Pharisees, and Paul perceived it; he knew the characters of many of them ever since he lived among them, and saw those among them whom he knew to be Sadducees, and others whom he knew to be Pharisees; (v. 6.) *One part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees*, and perhaps nearly an equal part. Now these differed very much from one another, and yet they ordinarily agreed well enough to do the business of the council together.

(1.) The Pharisees were bigots; zealous for the ceremonies, not only those which God had appointed, but those which were enjoined by the tradition of the elders; they were great sticklers for the authority of the church, and enforcing obedience to its injunctions, which occasioned many quarrels between them and our Lord Jesus; but at the same time they were very orthodox in the faith of the Jewish church concerning the *world of spirits*, the *resurrection of the dead*, and the *life of the world to come*.

(2.) The Sadducees were deists; no friends to the scripture, or divine relation. The books of Moses they admitted as containing a good history, and a good law, but had little regard to the other books of the Old Testament; see Mat. 22. 23. The account here given of these Sadducees, is, [1.] That they *deny the resurrection*; not only the return of the body to life, but a *future state* of rewards and punishments; they had neither hope of eternal happiness, nor dread of eternal misery, nor expectation of any thing on the other side death; and it was upon these principles that they said, *It is in vain to serve God, and called the proud happy*, Mal. 3. 14, 15. [2.] That they denied the existence of angels and spirits, and allowed of no being but matter. They thought that God himself was corporeal, and had parts and members as we have. When they read of angels in the Old Testament, they supposed them to be messengers that God made and sent on his errands as there was occasion; or that they were impressions on the fancies of those they were sent to, and no real existences; that they were this, or that, or any thing rather than what they were. And as for the *souls of men*, they looked upon them to be nothing else but the temperament of the humours of the body, or the animal spirits, but denied their existence in a state of separation from the body, and any difference between the soul of a man and of a beast. These, no doubt, pretended to be free-thinkers, but really thought as *meanly, absurdly, and slavishly*, as possible. It is strange how men of such corrupt and wicked principles could come into office, and have a place in the great Sanhedrim; but many

of them were of quality and estate, and they complied with the public establishment, and so got in, and kept in. But they were generally stigmatized as heretics, were ranked with the Epicureans, and were prayed against, and excluded from eternal life. The prayer which the modern Jews use against christians, Witsius thinks, was designed by Gamaliel, who made it, against the Sadducees; and that they meant them in their usual imprecation, *Let the name of the wicked rot*. But how degenerate was the character, and how miserable the state, of the Jewish church, when such profane men as these were among their rulers!

2. In this matter of difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees, Paul openly declared himself to be on the Pharisees' side against the Sadducees; (v. 6.) He cried out, so as to be heard by all, "*I am a Pharisee*, was bred a Pharisee, nay, I was born one, in effect, for I was the son of a Pharisee, my father was one before me, and thus far I am still a Pharisee, that I hope for the resurrection of the dead, and I may truly say, that if the matter were rightly understood, it would be found that this was it for which I was now called in question." When Christ was upon earth, the Pharisees set themselves most against him, because he witnessed against their traditions and corrupt glosses upon the law; but after his ascension, the Sadducees set themselves most against his apostles, because they preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead, ch. 4. 1, 2. And it is said (ch. 5. 17.) that they were the sect of the Sadducees that were filled with indignation at them, because they preached that life and immortality which is brought to light by the gospel. Now here,

(1.) Paul owns himself a Pharisee; so far as the Pharisees were in the right. Though as Pharisaism was opposed to Christianity, he set himself against it, and against all its traditions that were set up in competition with the law of God, or in contradiction to the gospel of Christ, yet, as it was opposed to Sadducism, he adhered to it. We must never think the worse of any truth of God, nor be more shy of our owning it, for its being held by men otherwise corrupt. If the Pharisees will hope for the resurrection of the dead, Paul will go along with them in that hope, and be one of them, whether they will or no.

(2.) He might truly say, that, being persecuted, as a Christian, this was the thing he was called in question for; perhaps he knew that the Sadducees, though they had not such an interest in the common people as the Pharisees had, yet had underhand incensed the mob against him, under pretence of his having preached to the Gentiles, but really because he had preached the hope of the resurrection. However, being called in question for his being a Christian, he might truly say, he was called in question for the hope of the resurrection of the dead, as he afterward pleaded, ch. 24. 15. and ch. 26. 6, 7. Though Paul preached against the traditions of the elders, (as his Master had done,) and therein opposed the Pharisees, yet he valued himself more upon his preaching for the resurrection of the dead, and a future state, in which he concurred with the Pharisees.

3. This occasioned a division in the council; it is probable that the High Priest sided with the Sadducees, (as he had done ch. 5. 17. and made it to appear by his rage at Paul, v. 2.) which alarmed the Pharisees so much the more; but so it was, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; (v. 7.) for this word of Paul's made the Sadducees more warm, and the Pharisees more cool, in the prosecution of him; so that the multitude was divided; ἐσχίσθη—there was a schism, a quarrel among them, and the edge of their zeal began to turn from Paul against one another; nor could they go on

to act against him, when they could not agree among themselves, or prosecute him for breaking the unity of the church, when there was so little among them of the unity of the spirit. All the cry had been against Paul, but now there arose a great cry against one another; (v. 9.) so much did a fierce furious spirit prevail among all orders of the Jews at this time, that every thing was done with clamour and noise, and in such a tumultuous manner were the great principles of their religion stickled for, by which they received little service; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Gainsayers may be convinced by fair reasoning, but never by a great cry.

4. The Pharisees hereupon (would one think it!) took Paul's part; (v. 9.) *They strove, διαμάχοντο—they fought, saying, We find no evil in this man*. He had conducted himself decently and reverently in the temple, and had attended the service of the church; and though it was but occasionally, yet it shewed that he was not such an enemy to it as he was said to be; he had spoken very handsomely in his own defence, and given a good account of himself, and had now declared himself orthodox in the great principles of religion, as well as regular and conscientious in his conversation; and therefore they cannot see that he has done any thing worthy of death, or of bonds. Nay, they go further, "*If a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him* concerning Jesus, and put him upon preaching as he does, though we may not be so far satisfied as to give credit to him, yet we ought to be cautioned not to oppose him, lest we be found fighting against God;" as Gamaliel, who was himself a Pharisee, had argued, ch. 5. 39. Now here,

(1.) We may observe it, to the honour of the gospel, that it was witnessed to even by its adversaries, and confessions, not only of its innocency, but of its excellency, were extorted sometimes by the power of truth, even from those that persecuted it. Pilate found no fault in Christ, though he put him to death; nor Festus in Paul, though he continued him in bonds; and the Pharisees here supposed it possible, that Paul might have a commission sent him from heaven by an angel to do what he did; and yet it should seem, as elders, they after this joined with the High Priest in prosecuting him, ch. 24. 1. They sinned against the knowledge which they not only had, but sometimes owned, as Christ had said of them, *They have both seen and hated both me and my Father*, John 15. 24.

Yet, (2.) We will hope that some of them at least did from henceforward conceive a better opinion of Paul than they had had, and were favourable to him, having had such a satisfactory account, both of his conversation in all good conscience, and of his faith touching another world; and then it must be observed to their honour, that their zeal for the traditions of the elders, which Paul had departed from, was so far swallowed up in a zeal for the great and fundamental doctrines of religion, to which Paul still adhered, that if he will heartily join with them against the Sadducees, and adhere to the hope of the resurrection of the dead, they will not think his shaking off the ceremonial law to be any evil in him, but charitably hope that he walks according to the light God has given him by some angel or spirit, and are so far from persecuting him, that they are ready to patronise and protect him. The persecuting Pharisees of the church of Rome are not of this spirit; for let a man be ever so sincere and zealous for all the articles of the christian faith, yet, if he lay not his neck under the yoke of their church's authority, they find evil enough in him to persecute him unto the death.

II. The chief captain's care and conduct stand him in more stead; for when he had thrown this bone of contention between the Pharisees and Sadducees,

(which had set them together by the ears, and had gained a fair testimony from the Pharisees,) yet he is never the nearer, but is in danger of being *pulled in pieces by them*; the Pharisees pulling to have him set at liberty, and the Sadducees pulling to have him put to death, or thrown to the people, like Daniel into the den of lions; so that the *chief captain* was forced to come with his soldiers and rescue him, as he had done, *ch.* 21. 32. and *ch.* 22. 24.

1. See here Paul's danger; between his friends and his enemies he had like to have been *pulled to pieces*, the one hugging him to death, the other crushing him to death; such violences are they liable to, that are eminent, and that are become remarkable, as Paul was, who was by some so much beloved, and by others so much maligned!

2. His deliverance; *The chief captain* ordered his soldiers to go down from the upper wards, and to take him by force from among them, out of that apartment in the temple where he had ordered the council to meet, and to bring him into the castle, or tower of Antonia; for he saw he could make nothing of them, toward the understanding of the merits of his cause.

III. Divine consolations stood him in most stead of all; *the chief captain* had rescued him out of the hands of cruel men, but still he had him in custody, and what might be the issue he could not tell; *the castle* was indeed a protection to him, but withal it was a confinement; and as it was now his preservation from so great a death, it might be his reservation for a greater. We do not find that any of the apostles or elders at Jerusalem came to him; either they had not courage, or they had not admission. Perhaps, in the night following, Paul was full of thoughts and cares what should become of him, and how his present troubles might be turned to answer some good purpose. Then did the Lord Jesus make him a kind visit, and, though at midnight, yet a very seasonable one; (*v.* 11.) *The Lord stood by him*, came to his bed-side, though, perhaps, it was but a bed of straw, to shew him that he was all the day long with him really, as sure as he was in the night with him visibly. Note, Whoever is against us, we need not fear, if *the Lord stand by us*; if he undertake our protection, we may set those that seek our ruin at defiance. *The Lord is with those that uphold my soul*, and then nothing can come amiss.

1. Christ bids him have a good heart on it; "*Be of good cheer, Paul*; be not discouraged; let not what has happened sadden thee, nor let what may yet be before thee frighten thee." Note, It is the will of Christ, that his servants who are faithful, should be always cheerful. Perhaps, Paul, in the reflection, began to be jealous of himself, whether he had done well in what he said to the council the day before; but Christ, by his word, satisfies him, that God approved of his conduct. Or, perhaps, it troubled him that his friends did not come to him; but Christ's visit did itself speak, though he had not said, *Be of good cheer, Paul*.

2. It is a strange argument which he makes use of to encourage him; *As thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome*. One would think this was but cold comfort; "As thou hast undergone a great deal of trouble for me, so thou must undergo a great deal more;" and yet this was designed to hearten him; for hereby he is given to understand, (1.) That he had been serving Christ, as a witness for him, in what he had hitherto endured. It was for no fault that he was buffeted, and it was not his former persecuting of the church that was now remembered against him, however he might remember it against himself, but he was still going on with his work. (2.) That he had not yet finished his testimony, nor was, by his imprisonment, laid aside as useless, but was only reserved

for further service. Nothing disheartened Paul so much as the thought of being taken off from doing service to Christ, and good to souls; *Fear not*, says Christ, *I have not done with thee*. (3.) Paul seems to have had a particular fancy, and an innocent one, to go to Rome, to preach the gospel there, though it was already preached, and a church planted there; yet, being a citizen of Rome, he longed for a journey thither, and had designed it; (*ch.* 19. 21.) *After I have been at Jerusalem, I must also see Rome*. And he had written to the Romans some time ago, *that he longed to see them*, *Rom.* 1. 11. Now he was ready to conclude, that this had broken his measures, and he should never see Rome; but even in that Christ tells him he should be gratified, since he desired it for the honour of Christ, and to do good.

12. And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. 14. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. 16. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. 17. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18. So he took him and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. 19. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me! 20. And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. 22. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me. 23. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cæsarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hun-

dred, at the third hour of the night; 24. And provide *them* beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring *him* safe unto Felix the governor. 25. And he wrote a letter after this manner: 26. Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix *sendeth* greeting. 27. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. 28. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: 29. Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. 30. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what *they* had against him. Farewell. 31. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. 32. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: 33. Who, when they came to Cæsarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. 34. And when the governor had read the *letter*, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that *he* was of Cilicia; 35. I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment-hall.

We have here the story of a plot against the life of Paul; how it was laid, how it was discovered, and how it was defeated.

1. How this plot was laid; they found they could gain nothing by popular tumult, or legal process, and therefore have recourse to the barbarous method of assassination; they will come upon him suddenly, and stab him, if they can but get him within their reach; so restless is their malice against this good man, that when one design fails, they will turn another stone. Now observe here,

1. Who they were, that formed this conspiracy; they were *certain Jews* that had the utmost degree of indignation against him, because he was the *apostle of the Gentiles*, v. 12. *And they were more than forty* that were in the design, v. 13. *Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!*

2. When the conspiracy was formed; *when it was day*. Satan had filled their hearts in the night to purpose it, and, as soon as it was day, they got together to prosecute it; answering to the account which the prophet gives of some who *work evil upon their beds, and when the morning is light they practice it*, and are laid under a *woe* for it, Mic. 2. 1. *In the night* Christ appeared to Paul to protect him, and *when it was day*, here were *forty men* appearing against him to destroy him; they were not up so soon, but Christ was up before them. *God shall help her, and that right early*, Ps. 46. 5.

3. What the conspiracy was; these men *banded together* in a league, perhaps they called it a *holy*

league, they engaged to stand by one another, and every one, to his power, to be aiding and assisting to murder Paul. It was strange that so many could so soon be got together, and that in Jerusalem too, who were so perfectly lost to all sense of humanity and honour, as to engage in so bloody a design. Well might the prophet's complaint be renewed concerning Jerusalem; (Isa. 1. 21.) *Righteousness has lodged in it, but now murderers*. What a monstrous idea must these men have formed of Paul, before they could be capable of forming such a monstrous design against him; they must be made to believe that he was the worst of men, an enemy to God and religion, and the curse and plague of his generation; when really his character was the reverse of all this! What laws of truth and justice so sacred, so strong, which malice and bigotry will not break through!

4. How firm they made it, as they thought, that none of them might fly off, upon conscience of the horror of the fact, at second thoughts; *they bound themselves under an anathema*, imprecating the heaviest curses upon themselves, their souls, bodies, and families, if they did *not kill Paul*, and so quickly, *that they would not eat or drink till they had done it*. What a complication of wickedness is here! To design to kill an innocent man, a good man, a useful man, a man that had done them no harm, but was willing to do them all the good he could, was *going in the way of Cain*, and spoke them to be of *their father the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning*; yet, as if this had been a small matter, (1.) They *bound themselves* to it; to incline to do evil, and intend to do it, is bad; but to engage to do it is much worse. This is entering into covenant with the devil; it is swearing allegiance to the prince of darkness; it is leaving no room for repentance; nay, it is bidding defiance to it. (2.) They bound one another to it, and did all they could, not only to secure the damnation of their own souls, but of their's whom they drew into the association. (3.) They shewed a great contempt of the providence of God, and a presumption upon it, in that they bound themselves to do such a thing within so short a time as they could continue fasting, without any proviso or reserve for the disposal of an over-ruling Providence. When we say, *To-morrow we will do this or that*, be it ever so lawful and good, forasmuch as *we know not what shall be on the morrow*, we must add, *If the Lord will*. But with what face could they insert a proviso for the permission of God's providence, when they knew that what they were about was directly against the prohibitions of God's word? (4.) They shewed a great contempt of their own souls and bodies; of their own souls in imprecating a curse upon them if they did not proceed in this desperate enterprise; what a woeful dilemma did they throw themselves upon! God certainly meets them with his curse if they do go on in it, and they desire he would if they do not! They shewed also a contempt of their own bodies too, (for wilful sinners are the destroyers of both,) in tying themselves out from the necessary supports of life till they had accomplished a thing which they could never lawfully do, and perhaps not possibly do. Such language of hell they speak, that wish God to damn them, and the devil to take them, if they do not do so and so. *As they love cursing, so shall it come unto them*. Some think, the meaning of this curse was, they would either kill Paul, as an Achan, an accursed thing, a troubler of the camp; or, if they did not do it, they would make themselves accursed before God in his stead. (5.) They shewed a most eager desire to compass this matter, and an impatience till it was done: not only like David's enemies, *that were mad against him*, and *sworn against him*, (Ps. 102. 8.) but like the servants of

Job against his enemy ; *O that we had of his flesh, we cannot be satisfied !* Job 31. 31. Persecutors are said to eat up God's people as they eat bread ; it is as much a gratification to them as meat to one that is hungry, Ps. 14. 4.

5. What method they took to bring it about. There is no getting near Paul in the castle, he is there under the particular protection of the government, and is imprisoned, not, as others are, lest he should do harm, but lest he should have harm done him ; and therefore the contrivance is, that the *chief priests and elders* must desire the governor of the castle to let Paul come to them to the council-chamber, to be further examined, they have some questions to ask him, or something to say to him, and then, in his passage from the castle to the council they would put an end to all disputes about Paul, by killing him ; thus the plot was laid, v. 14, 15. Having been all day employed in engaging one another to this wickedness, towards evening they come to the principal members of the great Sanhedrim, and, though they might have concealed their main design, and yet might have moved them upon some other pretence to send for Paul, they are so confident of their approbation of this villany, that they are not ashamed or afraid to own to them, *that they have bound themselves under a great curse*, without consulting the priests first whether they might lawfully do it, *that they will eat nothing the next day till they have killed Paul* ; they design to breakfast the next morning upon his blood ; they doubt not but the *chief priests* will not only countenance them in the design, but will lend them a helping hand, and be their tools to get them an opportunity of killing Paul ; nay, and tell a lie for them too, pretending to the *chief captain* that they would inquire something more perfectly concerning him, when they meant no such thing. What a mean, what an ill opinion had they of their priests, when they could apply to them on such an errand as this ! And yet, vile as the proposal was which was made to them, (for aught that appears,) the *priests and elders* consented to it, and, at the first word, without boggling at it in the least, promised to gratify them. Instead of reproving them, as they ought, for their wicked conspiracy, they bolstered them up in it, because it was against Paul whom they hated ; and thus they made themselves partakers of the crime, as much as if they had been the first in the conspiracy.

II. How the plot was discovered. We do not find that the plotters, though they took an oath of fidelity, took an oath of secrecy, either because they thought it did not need it, (they would every one keep his own counsel,) or because they thought they could accomplish it, though it should take wind, and be known ; but Providence so ordered it, that *it was brought to light*, and so, as effectually to be brought to nought. See here,

1. How it was discovered to Paul, v. 16. There was a youth that was related to Paul, *his sister's son*, whose mother, probably, lived in Jerusalem, and some how or other, we are not told how, he heard of their lying in wait, either over-heard them talking of it among themselves, or got intelligence from some that were in the plot, and he went into the castle, probably, as he used to do, to attend on his uncle, and bring him what he wanted, which gave him a free access to him, and he told Paul what he heard. Note, God has many ways of bringing to light the hidden works of darkness ; though the contrivers of them dig deep to hide them from the Lord, he can make a bird of the air to carry the voice, (Eccl. 10. 20.) or the conspirators' own tongues to betray themselves.

2. How it was discovered to the *chief captain* by the young man that told it Paul. This part of the story is related very particularly, perhaps because the

penman was an eye-witness of the prudent and successful management of this affair, and remembered it with a deal of pleasure. (1.) Paul had got a good interest in the officers that attended, by his prudent, peaceable deportment ; he could call one of the *centurions* to him, though a *centurion* was one in authority that had soldiers under him, and used to call, not to be called to, and he was ready to come at his call ; (v. 17.) and he desired that he would introduce this young man to the *chief captain*, to give in an information of something that concerned the honour of the government. (2.) The *centurion* very readily gratified him, v. 18. He did not send a common soldier with him, but went himself to keep the young man in countenance, to recommend his errand to the *chief captain*, and to shew his respect to Paul ; "*Paul the prisoner* (that was his title now) *called me to him, and prayed me to bring this young man to thee* ; what his business is I know not, but he has something to say to thee." Note, It is true charity to poor prisoners, to act for them as well as to give them. "*I was sick, and in prison*, and you went on an errand for me," will pass as well in the account as, *I was sick and in prison, and you came unto me*, to visit me, or sent me a token." Those that have acquaintance and interest, should be ready to use them for the assistance of those that are in distress. This *centurion* helped to save Paul's life by this piece of civility, which should engage us to be ready to do the like when there is occasion. *Open thy mouth for the dumb*, Prov. 31. 8. Those that cannot give a good gift to God's prisoners, may yet speak a good word for them. (3.) The *chief captain* received the information with a great deal of condescension and tenderness, v. 19. He took the young man by the hand, as a friend or father, to encourage him, that he might not be dashed out of countenance, but might be assured of a favourable audience. The notice that is taken of this circumstance, should encourage great men to make themselves easy of access to the meanest, upon any errand which may give them an opportunity of doing good ; to condescend to them of low estate. This familiarity to which this Roman tribune or colonel admitted Paul's nephew, is here upon record to his honour. Let no man think he disparages himself by his humility or charity. He went with him aside privately, that none might hear his business, and asked him, "*What is it that thou hast to tell me ? Tell me wherein I can be serviceable to Paul.*" It is probable that the *chief captain* was the more obliging in this case, because he was sensible he had run himself into a preminure, in binding Paul, against his privilege as a Roman citizen, which he was willing now to atone for. (4.) The young man delivered his errand to the *chief captain* very readily and handsomely ; (v. 20, 21.) "*The Jews* (he does not say who, lest he should invidiously reflect upon the *chief priests and the elders*, and his business was to save his uncle's life, not to accuse his enemies) *have agreed to desire thee, that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council*, presuming, that, being so little a way, thou wilt send him without a guard ; but do not thou yield unto them, we have reason to believe thou wilt not when thou knowest the truth ; for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, who have sworn to be the death of him, and now are they ready looking for a promise from thee, but I have happily got the start of them. Lastly, The captain dismissed the young man with a charge of secrecy ; See that thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things unto me, v. 22. The favours of great men are not always to be boasted of ; and those that cannot keep counsel, are not fit to be employed in business. If it should be known that the *chief captain* had this information brought him, perhaps they would com-

pass and imagine the death of Paul some other way ; "therefore keep it private."

III. How the plot was defeated ; *The chief captain*, finding how implacable and inveterate the malice of *the Jews* was against Paul, how restless they were in their designs to do him a mischief, and how near he was to become himself accessory to it as a minister, resolves to send him away with all speed out of their reach ; he received the intelligence with horror and indignation at the baseness and bloody-mindedness of these Jews ; and seems afraid lest, if he should continue Paul in his castle here, under ever so strong a guard, they would find some way or other to compass their end notwithstanding, either beat the guards, or burn the castle ; and whatever came of it, he would, if possible, protect Paul, because he looked upon it that he did not deserve such treatment. What a melancholy observation is it, that the Jewish *chief priests*, when they knew of this assassination-plot, should countenance it, and assist in it, while a Roman *chief captain*, purely from a natural sense of justice and humanity, when he knows it, sets himself to baffle it, and puts himself to a deal of trouble to do it effectually !

1. He orders a considerable detachment of the Roman forces under his command to get ready to go to *Cæsarea* with all expedition, and to bring Paul thither to *Felix the governor*, where he might sooner expect to have justice done him than by the great Sanhedrim at Jerusalem. I see not but the *chief captain* might, without any unfaithfulness to the duty of his place, have set Paul at liberty, and given him leave to shift for his own safety, for he was never legally committed to his custody as a criminal, he himself owns, *that nothing was laid to his charge worthy of bonds*, (v. 29.) and he ought to have had the same tenderness for his liberty that he had for his life ; but he feared that would have incensed the *Jews* too much against him. Or perhaps, finding Paul to be a very extraordinary man, he was proud to have him his prisoner, and under his protection ; and the mighty parade with which he sent him off, intimates as much. *Two centurions*, or captains of the hundreds, are employed in this business, v. 23, 24. They must get ready two hundred soldiers, probably those under their own command, to go to *Cæsarea* ; and with these seventy horse, and two hundred shearmen beside, which some think were the *chief captain's* guards ; whether they were horse or foot is not certain, most probably foot, as pikemen for the protection of the horse. See how justly God brought the Jewish nation under the Roman yoke, when such a party of the Roman army was necessary to restrain them from the most execrable villanies ! There needed not all this force, there needed not any of it, to keep Paul from being rescued by his friends ; ten times this force would not have kept him from being rescued by an angel, if it had pleased God to work his deliverance that way, as he had sometimes done ; but, (1.) *The chief captain* designed hereby to expose the Jews, as a headstrong tumultuous people, that would not be kept within the bounds of duty and decency by the ordinary ministers of justice, but needed to be awed by such a train as this ; and hearing how many were in the conspiracy against Paul, he thought less would not serve to defeat their attempt. (2.) God designed hereby to encourage Paul ; for being thus attended, he was not only kept safe in the hands of his friends, but out of the hands of his enemies. Yet Paul did not desire such a guard, any more than *Ezra* did ; (*Ezra* 8. 22.) and for the same reason, because he trusted in God's all-sufficiency ; it was owing, however, to the governor's own care. But he was also made considerable ; thus his *bonds in Christ* were made manifest all the country over ;

(*Phil.* 1. 13.) and so great an honour having been put upon them before by the prediction of them, it was agreeable enough that they should be thus honourably attended, *that the brethren in the Lord might wax the more confident by his bonds*, when they saw him rather guarded as the patriot of his country, than guarded against as the pest of his country ; and so great a preacher made so great a prisoner.

When his enemies hate him, and I doubt his friends neglect him, then does a Roman tribune patronize him, and carefully provide, [1.] For his ease ; *Let them provide beasts that they may set Paul on*. Had his Jewish persecutors been to order his remove by *habeas corpus* to *Cæsarea*, they would have made him run on foot, or dragged him thither in a cart, or on a sledge, or have horsed him behind one of the troopers ; but the *chief captain* treats him like a gentleman, though he was his prisoner, and orders him a good horse to ride upon, not at all afraid that he should ride away. Nay, the order being *that they should provide, not a beast, but beasts, to set Paul on*, we must either suppose that he was allowed so great a piece of state as to have a led horse, or more, that if he did not like one, he might take to another ; or (as some expositors conjecture) *that he had beasts assigned him for his friends and companions*, as many as pleased to go along with him, to divert him in his journey, and to minister to him. [2.] For his security ; they have a strict charge given them by their commander in chief to *bring him safe to Felix the governor*, to whom he is consigned, and who was supreme in all civil affairs among the *Jews*, as this *chief captain* was in military affairs. The Roman historians speak much of this *Felix*, as a man of mean extraction, but that raised himself by his shifts to be governor of *Judea* ; in the execution of which office, *Tacitus, Hist.* 5. says this of him, *Per omnem severitatem ac libidinem jus regium servili ingenio exercuit—He used royal power with a servile genius, and in connexion with all the varieties of cruelty and lust*. To the judgment of such a man as this is poor Paul turned over ; and yet better so than in the hands of *Ananias the High Priest* ! Now a prisoner, thus upon his deliverance by course of law, ought to be protected as well as a prince.

The chief captain orders, for the greater security of Paul, that he be taken away at the third hour of the night, which some understand of three hours after sun-set, that, it being now soon after the feast of pentecost, (that is, in the midst of summer,) they might have the cool of the night to march in. Others understand it of three hours after midnight, in the third watch, about three in the morning, that they might have the day before them, and might get out of Jerusalem before Paul's enemies were stirring, and so might prevent any popular tumult, and leave them to roar when they rose, like a lion disappointed of his prey.

2. He writes a letter to *Felix the governor* of this province, by which he discharges himself from any further care about Paul, and leaves the whole matter with *Felix*. This letter is here inserted totidem verbis—verbatim, v. 25. It is probable that *Luke* the historian had a copy of it by him, having attended Paul in this remove.

Now in this epistle we may observe,

(1.) The compliments he passes upon the governor, v. 26. He is the most excellent governor *Felix*, this title being given him of course, his excellency, &c. He sends him greeting, wishes him all health and prosperity ; may he rejoice, may he ever rejoice.

(2.) The just and fair account which he gives him of Paul's case : [1.] That he was one that the *Jews* had a pique against, they had taken him, and would

have killed him; and perhaps Felix knew the temper of the *Jews* so well, that he did not think much the worse of him for that, v. 27. [2.] That he had protected him because *he was a Roman*; "When they were about to kill him, *I came with an army, a considerable body of men, and rescued him*;" which action for a citizen of Rome would recommend him to the Roman governor. [3.] That he could not understand the merits of his cause, nor what it was that made him so odious to the *Jews*, and obnoxious to their ill-will. He took the proper method to know, *he brought him forth into their council*, (v. 28.) to be examined there; hoping that, either from their complaints, or his own confessions, he should learn something of the ground of all this clamour, but he found that *he was accused of questions of their law*, (v. 29.) about the *hope of the resurrection of the dead*, v. 6. This chief captain was a man of sense and honour, and had good principles in him of justice and humanity; and yet see how slightly he speaks of *another world, and the great things of that world*, as if that were a question, which is of undoubted certainty, and which both sides agreed in, except the Sadducees; and as if that were a question only of *their law*, which is of the utmost concern to all mankind! Or perhaps he refers rather to the question about their rituals than about their doctrinals, and the quarrel he perceived they had with him, was for lessening the credit and obligation of their ceremonial law, which he looked upon as a thing not worth speaking of. The Romans allowed the nations they conquered the exercise of their own religion, and never offered to impose theirs upon them; yet, as conservators of the public peace, they would not suffer them, under colour of their religion, to abuse their neighbours. [4.] That thus far he understood that there was *nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds*, much less proved or made out against him. The *Jews* had, by their wickedness, made themselves odious to the world, had polluted their own honour, and profaned their own crown, had brought disgrace upon their church, their law, and their holy place, and then they cry out against Paul, as having diminished the reputation of them; and was this a crime *worthy of death or of bonds*?

(3.) His referring Paul's case to Felix; (v. 30.) "*When it was told me, that the Jews laid wait for the man, to kill him, without any legal process against him, I sent straightway to thee, who art the most proper person to hear the cause, and give judgment upon it, and let his accusers go after him, if they please, and say before thee what they have against him, for, being bred a soldier, I will never pretend to be a judge, and so farewell.*"

3. Paul is accordingly conducted to *Cæsarea*; the soldiers got him safe out of Jerusalem *by night*, and left the conspirators to consider whether they should eat and drink or no before they had killed Paul; and if they would not repent of the wickedness of their oath, as it was against Paul, they were now at leisure to repent of the rashness of it, as it was against themselves; if any of them did starve themselves to death, in conscience of their oath, and vexation at their disappointment, they fell unpitied. Paul was conducted to *Antipatris*, which was seventeen miles from Jerusalem, and about the mid-way to *Cæsarea*, v. 31. From thence the two hundred foot soldiers, and the two hundred spearmen, returned back to Jerusalem, to their quarters in the castle; for having brought Paul out of danger, there needed not so strong a guard, but the horsemen might serve to bring him to *Cæsarea*, and would do it with more expedition; this they did, not only to save their own labour, but their master's charge; and it is an example to servants, not only to act obediently according to their masters' orders, but

to act prudently, so as may be most for their masters' interest.

4. He was delivered into the hands of Felix, as his prisoner, v. 33. The officers presented the letter, and Paul with it, to Felix, and so discharged themselves of their trust. Paul had never affected acquaintance or society with great men, but with the disciples, wherever he came; yet Providence overrules his sufferings so as by them to give him an opportunity of witnessing to Christ before great men; and so Christ had foretold concerning his disciples, *that they should be brought before rulers and kings for his sake, for a testimony against them*, Mark 13. 9. The governor inquired of what province of the empire the prisoner originally was, and was told that *he was a native of Cilicia*, v. 34. and, (1.) He promises him a speedy trial; (v. 35.) "*I will hear thee when thine accusers are come, and will have an ear open to both sides, as becomes a judge.*" (2.) He ordered him into custody, that he should be kept a prisoner in *Herod's judgment-hall*, in some apartment belonging to that palace, which was denominated from *Herod the Great*, who built it. There he had opportunity of acquainting himself with the great men that attended the governor's court, and, no doubt, he improved what acquaintance he got there to the best purposes.

CHAP. XXIV

We left Paul a prisoner at *Cæsarea*, in *Herod's judgment-hall*, expecting his trial to come on quickly; for in the beginning of his imprisonment his affairs moved very quick, but afterward very slow. In this chapter, we have his arraignment and trial before Felix the governor at *Cæsarea*; here is, I. The appearing of the prosecutors against him, and the setting of the prisoner to the bar, v. 1, 2. II. The opening of the indictment against him by Tertullus, who was of counsel for the prosecutors, and the aggravating of the charge, with abundance of compliments to the judge, and malice to the prisoner, v. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. III. The corroborating of the charge by the testimony of the witnesses, or rather the prosecutors themselves, v. 9. IV. The prisoner's defence, in which, with all due deference to the governor, (v. 10.) he denies the charge, and challenges them to prove it, (v. 11, 12, 13.) owns the truth, and makes an unexceptionable profession of his faith, which he declares was it that they hated him for, (v. 14, 15, 16.) and gives a more particular account of what had passed from their first seizing of him, challenging them to specify any ill they had found in him, v. 17, 18, 19, 20, 21. V. The adjourning of the cause, and the continuing of the prisoner in custody, v. 22, 23. VI. The private conversation that was between the prisoner and the judge, by which the prisoner hoped to do good to the judge, and the judge thought to get money by the prisoner, but both in vain, v. 24, 25, 26. VII. The lengthening out of Paul's imprisonment for two years, till another governor came, (v. 27.) where he seems as much neglected, as there had been ado about him.

1. **AND** after five days Ananias the High Priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. 2. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence. 3. We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. 4. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. 5. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of

the sect of the Nazarenes: 6. Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. 7. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, 8. Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. 9. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so,

We must suppose that *Lysias, the chief captain*, when he had sent away Paul to *Cæsarea*, gave notice to the chief priests, and others, that had appeared against Paul, that if they had any thing to accuse him of, they must follow him to *Cæsarea*, and there they would find him, and a judge ready to hear them: thinking, perhaps, they would not have given themselves so much trouble; but what will not malice do?

I. We have here the cause followed against Paul, and it is vigorously carried on.

1. Here is no time lost, for they are ready for a hearing after five days; all other business is laid aside immediately, to prosecute Paul; so intent are evil men to do evil! Some reckon these five days from Paul's being first seized, and with most probability, for he says here, (v. 11.) that it was but twelve days since he came up to Jerusalem, and he had spent seven in his purifying in the temple, so that these five must be reckoned from the last of those.

2. Those that had been his judges, do themselves appear here as his prosecutors. *Ananias himself, the High Priest*, who had sitten to judge him, now stands to inform against him. One would wonder, (1.) That he should thus disparage himself, and forget the dignity of his place! Shall the High Priest turn informer, and leave all his business in the temple at Jerusalem, to go to be called as a prosecutor in Herod's judgment-hall? Justly did God make the priests contemptible and base, when they made themselves so, Mal. 2. 9. (2.) That he should thus discover himself and his enmity against Paul! If men of the first rank have a malice against any, they think it policy to employ others against them, and to play least in sight themselves, because of the odium that commonly attends it; but Ananias is not ashamed to own himself a sworn enemy to Paul. The elders attended him, to signify their concurrence with him, and to invigorate the prosecution; for they could not find any attorneys or solicitors that would follow it with so much violence as they would have it. The pains that evil men take in an evil matter, their contrivances, their condescensions, and their unwearied industry, should shame us out of our coldness and backwardness, and indifference in that which is good.

II. We have here the cause pleaded against Paul. The prosecutors brought with them a certain orator named *Tertullus*, a Roman, skilled in the Roman law and language, and therefore fittest to be employed in a cause before the Roman governor, and most likely to gain favour. The High Priest, and elders, though they had their own hearts spiteful enough, did not think their own tongues sharp enough, and therefore retained *Tertullus*, who, probably, was noted for a satirical wit, to be of counsel for them; and, no doubt, they gave him a good fee, probably out of the treasury of the temple, which they had the command of, it being a cause wherein

the church was concerned, and which therefore must not be starved.

Paul is set to the bar before Felix the governor. He was called forth; (v. 2.) *Tertullus's* business is, on the behalf of the prosecutors, to open the information against him, and he is a man that will say any thing for his fee; mercenary tongues will do so. No cause so unjust but can find advocates to plead it; and yet we hope many advocates so just as not knowingly to patronise an unrighteous cause; but *Tertullus* was none of those, his speech (or at least an abstract of it, for it appears, by Tully's orations, that the Roman lawyers, on such occasions, used to make long harangues) is here reported; and it is made up of flattery and falsehood; it calls evil good, and good evil.

1. One of the worst of men is here applauded as one of the best of benefactors, only because he was the judge. Felix is represented by the historians of his own nation, as well as by Josephus the Jew, as a very bad man, who, depending upon his interest in the court, allowed himself in all manner of wickedness, was a great oppressor, very cruel, and very covetous, patronising and protecting assassins, Joseph. Antiquit. lib. 20. cap. 6. And yet *Tertullus* here, in the name of the High Priest and elders, and probably by particular directions from them, and according to the instructions of his breviate, compliments him, and extols him to the sky, as if he were so good a magistrate as never was the like: and this comes the worse from the High Priest and the elders, because he had given a late instance of his enmity to their order; for Jonathan the High Priest, or one of the chief priests, having offended him by too free an invective against the tyranny of his government, he got him murdered by some villains whom he hired for that purpose, and who afterward did the like for others, as they were hired: *Cujus facinoris quia nemo ultor extitit, invitati hac licentia sicarii multos confodiebant, alios propter privatas inimicitias, alios conducti pecunia—etiam in ipso templo—No one being found to furnish such enormous wickedness, the assassins, encouraged by this impunity, stabbed several persons, some from personal malice, some for hire,—and that even in the temple itself.* And yet, to engage him to gratify their malice against Paul, and to return them that kindness for their kindness in overlooking all this, they magnify him as the greatest blessing to their church and nation that ever came among them.

(1.) They are very ready to own it; (v. 2.) "By thee we, of the church, enjoy great quietness, and we look upon thee as our patron and protector, and very worthy deeds are done, from time to time, to the whole nation of the Jews, by thy providence, thy wisdom and care and vigilance." To give him his due, he had been instrumental to suppress the insurrection of that Egyptian whom the chief captain spake of; (ch. 21. 38.) but will the praise of that screen him from the just reproach of his tyranny and oppression afterward? See here, [1.] The unhappiness of great men, and a great unhappiness it is, to have their services magnified beyond measure, and never to be faithfully told of their faults; and hereby they are hardened and encouraged in evil. [2.] The policy of bad men, by flattering princes in what they do amiss, to draw them in to do worse. The bishops of Rome got to be confirmed in their exorbitant church power, and have been assisted in persecuting the servants of Christ, by flattering and caressing usurpers and tyrants, and so making them the tools of their malice, as the High Priest, by his compliments, designed to make Felix here.

(2.) They promise to retain a grateful sense of it; (v. 3.) "We accept it always, and in all places, every where and at all times, we embrace it, we admire it, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness."

We will be ready, upon any occasion, to witness for thee, that thou art a wise and good governor, and very serviceable to the country." And if it had been true that he was such a governor, it had been just that they should thus *accept* his good offices *with all thankfulness*. The benefits which we enjoy by government, especially by the administration of wise and good governors, are what we ought to be thankful for, both to God and man. This is part of the honour due to magistrates, to acknowledge *the quietness we enjoy* under their protection, and *the worthy deeds done by their prudence*.

(3.) They therefore expect his favour in this cause, v. 4. They pretend a great care not to entrench upon his time; We will *not be further tedious to thee*, and yet to be very confident of his patience, *I pray thee, that thou wouldst hear us of thy clemency a few words*. All this address is only, *ad captandam benevolentiam*—to induce him to give countenance to their cause; and they were so conscious to themselves that it would soon appear to have more malice than matter in it, that they found it necessary thus to insinuate themselves into his favour. Every body knew that the High Priest and the elders were enemies to the Roman government, and were uneasy under all the marks of that yoke, and therefore, in their hearts, hated Felix; and yet, to gain their ends against Paul, they, by their counsel, shew him all this respect; as they did to Pilate and Cæsar, when they were persecuting our Saviour. Princes cannot always judge of the affections of their people by their applauses; flattery is one thing, and true loyalty is another.

2. One of the best of men is here accused as one of the worst of malefactors, only because he was the prisoner. After a flourish of flattery, in which you cannot see matter for words, he comes to his business, and it is to inform his excellency concerning the prisoner at the bar; and this part of his discourse is as nauseous for its rallery, as the former part is for its flattery. I pity the man, and believe he has no malice against Paul, nor does he think as he speaks in calumniating him, any more than he did in courting Felix; but as I cannot but be sorry that a man of wit and sense should have such a saleable tongue, (as one calls it,) so I cannot but be angry at those dignified men that had such malicious hearts as to put such words into his mouth.

Two things Tertullus here complains of to Felix, in the name of the High Priest and the elders.

(1.) That the peace of the nation was disturbed by Paul. They could not have baited Christ's disciples, if they had not first *dressed them up* in the skins of wild beasts, nor have given them as they did the vilest of treatment, if they had not first represented them as the vilest of men; though the characters they gave of them were absolutely false, and there was not the least colour or foundation for them. Innocence, nay excellence and usefulness, are no fence against calumny, no nor against the impressions of calumny upon the minds both of magistrates and multitudes, to excite their fury and jealousy; for be the representation ever so unjust, when it is enforced, as here it was, with gravity and pretence of sanctity, and with assurance and noise, something will stick. The old charge against God's prophets, was, that they were the *troublers of the land*, and against God's Jerusalem, that it was a *rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces*, (Ezra 4. 15, 19.) and against our Lord Jesus, that he *perverted the nation*, and *forbad to give tribute to Cæsar*; it is the very same against Paul here; and, though utterly false, is averred with all the confidence imaginable. They do not say, "We suspect him to be a dangerous man, and have taken him up upon that suspicion;" but, as if the thing were past dispute, *"We have found him to be so; we have*

often and long found him so;" as if he were a traitor and rebel already convicted. And yet, after all, there is not a word of truth in this representation; but, if Paul's just character be inquired into, it will be found directly the reverse of this here.

[1.] Paul was a useful man, and a great blessing to his country, a man of exemplary candour and goodness, obliging to all, and provoking to none; and yet he is here called a *pestilent fellow*; (v. 5.) *We have found him, εὐαὶν—pestem—the plague* of the nation, a walking pestilence; which supposes him to be a man of a turbulent spirit, malicious and ill-natured, and one that threw all things in disorder wherever he came. They would have it thought that he had done more mischief in his time than a plague could do; that the mischief he did was spreading and infectious, and that he made others as mischievous as himself; that it was of as fatal consequence as the plague is, killing and destroying, and laying all waste; that it was as much to be dreaded and guarded against as a plague is. Many a good sermon he had preached, and many a good work he had done, and for those he is called a *pestilent fellow*.

[2.] Paul was a peace-maker, was a preacher of that gospel which has a direct tendency to *slay all enemies*, and to establish true and lasting peace; he lived peaceably and quietly himself, and taught others to do so too, and yet is here represented as a *mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world*. The Jews were disaffected to the Roman government; those of them that were most bigoted, were most so. This Felix knew, and had therefore a watchful eye upon them; now they would fain make him believe that this Paul was the man that made them so, whereas they themselves were the men that sowed the seeds of faction and sedition among them; and they knew it; and the reason why they hated Christ and his religion, was, because he did not go about to head them in an opposition to the Romans. The Jews were every where much set against Paul, and stirred up the people to clamour against him; they moved sedition in all places where he came, and then cast the blame unjustly upon him, as if he had been the mover of the sedition; as Nero not long after set Rome on fire, and said that the christians did it.

[3.] Paul was a man of catholic charity, who did not affect to be singular, but made himself the servant of all for their good; and yet he is here charged to be a *ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes*; a standard-bearer of that sect, so the word signifies. When Cyprian was condemned to die for being a christian, this was inserted in his sentence, that he was *auctor iniqui nominis et signifer*—The author and standard-bearer of a wicked cause. Now it was true that Paul was an active leading man in propagating christianity. But, *First*, it was utterly false that that was a sect; he did not draw people to a party or private opinion, nor did he make his own opinions their rule. True christianity establishes that which is of common concern to all mankind, publishes good-will to men, and shews us God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and therefore cannot be thought to take its rise from such narrow opinions and private interests as sects owe their original to. True christianity has a direct tendency to the uniting of the children of men, and the gathering of them together in one; and, as far as it obtains its just power and influence upon the minds of men, will make them *meek and quiet*, and peaceable and loving, and every way easy, acceptable and profitable one to another, and therefore is far from being a sect, which is supposed to lead to division, and to sow discord. True christianity aims at no worldly benefit or advantage, and therefore must by no means be called a *sect*. Those that espouse a sect,

are governed in it by their secular interest, they aim at wealth and honour; but the professors of christianity are so far from this, that they expose themselves thereby to the loss and ruin of all that is dear to them in this world. *Secondly*, It is invidiously called *the sect of the Nazarenes*, by which Christ was represented as of Nazareth, whence no good thing was expected to arise; whereas he was of Bethlehem, where the Messiah was to be born. Yet he was pleased to call himself, *Jesus of Nazareth*, *ch. 22. 8.* And the scripture has put an honour on the name, *Matt. 2. 23.* And therefore, though intended for a reproach, the christians had no reason to be ashamed of sharing with their Master in it. *Thirdly*, It was false that Paul was the author or standard-bearer of this sect; for he did not draw people to himself, but to Christ; did not preach himself, but Christ Jesus.

[4.] Paul had a veneration for the temple, as it had been the place which God chose, to put his name there, and had lately himself with reverence attended the temple-service; and yet it is here charged upon him, that he went about to *profane the temple*, and that he designedly put contempt upon it, and violated the laws of it, *v. 6.* Their proof of this failed; for the matter of fact they alleged was utterly false, and they knew it, *ch. 21. 29.*

(2.) That the *course of justice* against Paul was obstructed by the chief captain.

[1.] They pleaded that they *took him, and would have judged him according to their law.* This was false; they did not go about to judge him according to their law, but, contrary to all law and equity, went about to *beat him to death, or to füll him to pieces*, without hearing what he had to say for himself; went about, under pretence of having him into their court, to throw him into the hands of ruffians that lay in wait to destroy him. Was this *judging him according to their law*? It is easy for men, when they know what they *should have done*, to say, that they *would have done*, when they meant nothing less.

[2.] They reflected upon the chief captain as having done them an injury in rescuing Paul out of their hands; whereas he therein not only did him justice, but them the greatest kindness that could be, in preventing the guilt they were bringing upon themselves. *The chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence* (but really no more than was necessary) *took him out of our hands, v. 7.* See how persecutors are enraged at their disappointments, which they ought to be thankful for. When David in a heat of passion was going upon a bloody enterprize, he thanked Abigail for stopping him, and God for sending her to do it, so soon did he correct and recover himself. But these cruel men justify themselves, and reckon him their enemy, who kept them (as David there speaks) *from shedding blood with their own hands.*

[3.] They referred themselves to Felix and his judgment, yet seeming uneasy that they were under a necessity of doing so, the chief captain having obliged them to it; (*v. 8.*) "It was he that forced us to give your excellency this trouble, and ourselves too; for," *First*, "He commanded his accusers to come to thee, that thou mightest hear the charge, when it might as well have been ended in the inferior court." *Secondly*, "He has left it to thee to examine him, and try what thou canst get out of him, and whether thou canst by his confession come to the knowledge of those things which we lay to his charge."

III. The assent of the Jews to this charge which Tertullus exhibited; (*v. 9.*) *They confirmed it, saying, that those things were so.*

1. Some think this speaks the proof of their charge by witnesses upon oath, that were examined

as to the particulars of it, and attested them. And no wonder, if when they had found an orator that would say it, they found witnesses that would *swear it*, for money.

2. It rather seems to intimate the approbation which the High Priest and the elders gave to what Tertullus said. Felix asked them, "Is this your sense, and is it all that you have to say?" and they answered, "Yes, it is;" and so they made themselves guilty of all the falsehood that was in his speech. Those that have not the wit and parts to do mischief with, that some others have, that cannot make speeches and hold disputes against religion yet make themselves guilty of the mischiefs that others do, by assenting to that which others do, and saying, *Those things are so*; repeating, and standing by what is said, to *pervert the right ways of the Lord*. Many that have not learning enough to *plead* for Baal, yet have wickedness enough to *vote* for Baal.

10. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: 11. Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. 12. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: 13. Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. 14. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: 15. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. 16. And herein do I always exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. 17. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. 18. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. 19. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. 20. Or else let these same *here* say, if they have found any evil-doing in me, while I stood before the council, 21. Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

We have here Paul's defence of himself, in answer to Tertullus's charge, and there appears in it a great deal of the spirit of wisdom and holiness, and an accomplishment of Christ's promise to his followers, that when they were before governors and kings, for his sake, it should be given them in that same hour what they should speak. Though Tertullus had said a great many provoking things, yet Paul did not interrupt him, but let him go on to the end of his

speech, according to the rules of decency, and the method in courts of justice, that the plaintiff be allowed to finish his evidence before the defendant begins his plea. And when he had done, he did not presently fly out into passionate exclamations against the iniquity of the times and the men, (*O tempora, O mores—Oh, the degeneracy of the times!*) but he waited for a permission from the judge to speak in his turn, and had it. The governor beckoned to him to speak, v. 10. And now he also may have leave to speak out, under the protection of the governor, which was more than he could obtain yet. And when he did speak, he made no reflections at all upon Tertullus; he knew he spoke for his fee, and therefore despised what he said, and levelled his defence against those that employed him. And here,

I. He addresses himself very respectfully to the governor, and with a confidence that he would do him justice. Here are no such flattering compliments as Tertullus soothed him up with, but, which was more truly respectful, a profession that he *answered for himself cheerfully*, and with good assurance before him, looking upon him, though not as one that was his friend, yet as one that would be fair and impartial. He thus expresses his expectation that he *would be so*, to engage him to be so. It was likewise the language of one that was conscious to himself of his own integrity, and whose heart did not reproach him, whoever did. He did not stand trembling at the bar; on the contrary, he was very cheerful when he had one to be his judge, that was not a party, but an indifferent person. Nay, when he considers who his judge is, he *answers the more cheerfully*; and why so? he does not say, "Because I know thee to be a judge of inflexible justice and integrity, that hatest bribes, and in giving judgment *fearst God, and regardst not man*;" for he could not justly say this of him, and therefore would not say it, though it were to gain his favour ever so much; but, *I the more cheerfully answer for myself*, because *I know thou hast been many years a judge to this nation*; and that was very true. And being so,

1. He could say of his own knowledge, that there had not formerly been any complaints against Paul; such clamours as they raised, are generally against old offenders; but though he had long sitten judge there, he never had Paul brought before him yet, till now; and therefore he was not so dangerous a criminal as he was represented to be.

2. He was well acquainted with the Jewish nation, and with their temper and spirit; he knew how bigoted they were to their own way, what furious zealots they were against all that did not comply with them, how peevish and perverse they generally were, and therefore would make allowances for that in their accusation of him, and not regard that which he had reason to think came so much from party-malice. Though he did not know him, he knew his prosecutors, and by that might guess what manner of man he was.

II. He denies the facts that he was charged with, upon which their character of him was grounded. *Moving sedition, and profaning the temple*, were the crimes for which he stood indicted; crimes which they knew the Roman governors were not accustomed to inquire into, and therefore they hoped that the governor would return him back to them to be judged by their law, and that was all they wished for. But Paul desires that though he would not inquire into the crimes, he would protect one that was unjustly charged with them, from those whom he knew to be spiteful and ill-natured enough. Now he would have him to understand, (and what he said, he was ready, if required, to make out by witnesses,)

1. That he came up to Jerusalem on purpose to worship God in peace and holiness, so far was he

from any design to *move sedition among the people*, or to *profane the temple*. He came to keep up his communion with the Jews, not to put any affront upon them.

2. That it was but twelve days since he came up to Jerusalem, and he had been six days a prisoner; he was alone, and it could not be supposed that in so short a time he could do the mischief they charged upon him. And as for what he had done in other countries, they knew nothing of it but by uncertain report, by which the matter was very unfairly represented.

3. That he had demeaned himself at Jerusalem very quietly and peaceably, and had made no manner of stir. If it had been true, (as they alleged,) that he was a *mover of sedition among all the Jews*, surely he would have been industrious to make a party at Jerusalem; but he did not do so. He was in the temple, attending the public service there; he was in the synagogues where the law was read and opened; he went about in the city among his relations and friends, and conversed freely in the places of concourse, and he was a man of a great genius and an active spirit; and yet they could not charge him with offering any thing either against the faith, or against the peace of the Jewish church. (1.) He had nothing in him of a contradicting spirit, as the movers of sedition have; he had no disposition to quarrel or oppose; they never found him *disputing with any man*, either affronting the learned with captious cavils, or perplexing the weak and simple with curious subtleties; he was ready, if asked, to *give a reason* of his own hope, and to give instruction to others, but he never picked a quarrel with any man about his religion, nor made that the subject of debate and controversy and perverse dispute, which ought always to be treated of with humility and reverence, with meekness and love. (2.) He had nothing in himself of a turbulent spirit; "They never found me *raising up the people*, by incensing them against their governors in church or state, or suggesting to them fears and jealousies concerning public affairs, or by setting them at variance one with another, or sowing discord among them." He behaved as became a christian and minister, with love and quietness, and due subjection to lawful authority. The weapons of his warfare were not carnal, nor did he ever mention or think of such a thing as taking up arms for the propagating of the gospel, or the defence of the preachers of it; though he could have made, perhaps, as strong a party among the common people as his adversaries, yet he never attempted it.

4. That as to what they had charged him with, of *moving sedition* in other countries, he was wholly innocent, and they could not make good the charge; (v. 13.) *Nather can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me*. Hereby, (1.) He maintains his own innocency; for when he says, *They cannot prove it*, he means, *The matter is not so*. He was no enemy to the public peace, he had done no real prejudice, but a great deal of real service, and would gladly have done more, to the nation of the Jews. He was so far from having any antipathy to them, that he had the strongest affection imaginable for them, and a most passionate desire of their welfare, Rom. 9. 1—3. (2.) He bemoans his own calamity, that he was accused of those things which could not be proved against him. And it has often been the lot of very worthy good men to be thus injured, to have things laid to their charge, which they are at the greatest distance from, and abhor the thought of. But while they are lamenting this calamity, this may be their rejoicing, even the *testimony of their consciences* concerning their integrity. (3.) He shows the *iniquity of his prosecutors*, who said that which they knew they could not prove, and thereby did

him wrong in his name, liberty, and life, and did the judge wrong too, in imposing upon him, and doing what in them lay to pervert his judgment. (4.) He *appeals to the equity of his judge*, and awakens him to look about him that he might not be drawn into a snare by the violence of the prosecution. The judge must give sentence *secundum allegata et probata*—according to that which is not only alleged, but proved, and therefore must inquire, and make search, and ask diligently, whether the thing be true and certain; (Deut. 13. 14.) he cannot otherwise give a right judgment.

III. He gives a fair and just account of himself, which does at once both clear him from crime, and likewise intimate what was the true reason of their violence in prosecuting him.

1. He acknowledges himself to be one whom they looked upon as a heretic, and that was the reason of their spleen against him. The chief captain had observed, and the governor now cannot but observe, an uncommon violence and fury in his prosecutors, which they know not what to make of, but, guessing at the crime by the cry, conclude he must needs have been a very bad man, only for that reason: now Paul here unriddles the matter; I confess, that in the way which they call heresy, or a sect, so worship I the God of my fathers. The controversy is in a matter of religion, and such controversies are commonly managed with most fury and violence. Note, It is no new thing for the right way of worshipping God to be called heresy; and for the best of God's servants to be stigmatized and run down as sectaries. The reformed churches are called heretical ones by those who themselves hate to be reformed, and are themselves heretics. Let us therefore never be driven off from any good way by its being put into an ill name; for true and pure christianity is never the worse, nor to be the worse thought of for its being called heresy; no, not though it be called so by the High Priest and the elders.

2. He vindicates himself from this imputation. They call Paul a heretic, but he is not so; for,

(1.) He worships the God of his fathers, and therefore is right in the Object of his worship; he does not say, *Let us go after other gods, which we have not known, and let us serve them*, as the false prophet is supposed to do, Deut. 13. 2. If so, they might justly call his way heresy, a drawing of them aside into a by-path, and a dangerous one; but he worships the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not only the God whom they worshipped, but the God who took them into covenant with himself, and was, and would be, called their God. Paul adheres to that covenant, and sets up no other in opposition to it. The promise made unto the fathers, Paul preached as fulfilled to the children, (ch. 13. 32, 33.) and so directed both his own devotions, and those of others, to God, as the God of their fathers. He also refers to the practice of all his pious ancestors; I worship the same God that all my fathers worshipped; his religion was so far from being chargeable with novelty, that it gloried in its antiquity, and in an uninterrupted succession of its professors. Note, It is very comfortable in our worshipping God, to have an eye to him, as the God of our fathers. Our fathers trusted in him, and were owned by him, and he engaged to be their God, and the God of their seed. He approved himself their's, and therefore if we serve him as they did, he will be our's; what an emphasis is laid upon that, *He is my father's God, and I will exalt him*, Exod. 15. 2.

(2.) He believes all things which are written in the law and the prophets, and therefore is right in the rule of his worship; his religion is grounded upon, and governed by, the holy scriptures; they are his oracle and touchstone, and he speaks and acts according to them. He receives the scriptures entire,

and believes all things that are there written; and he receives them pure, for he says no other things than what are contained in them; as he explains himself, ch. 26. 22. He sets not up any other rule of faith or practice but the scriptures—not tradition, nor the authority of the church, or the infallibility of any man or company of men on earth, nor the light within, or human reason; but divine revelation, as it is in the scripture, is that which he resolves to live and die by, and therefore he is not a heretic.

(3.) He has his eye upon a future state, and is a believing expectant of that, and therefore is right in the end of his worship. They that turn aside to heresy, have a regard to this world, and some secular interest, but Paul aims to make heaven of his religion, and neither more nor less; (v. 15.) “I have hope toward God, all my expectation is from him, and therefore all my desire is toward him, and all my dependence upon him; my hope is toward God, and not toward the world; toward another world, and not toward this. I depend upon God and upon his power, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead at the end of time, of all, both the just and unjust; and the great thing I aim at in my religion, is, to obtain a joyful and happy resurrection, a share in the resurrection of the just.” Observe here,

[1.] That there shall be a resurrection of the dead, the dead bodies of men, of all men from the beginning to the end of time; it is certain, not only that the soul does not die with the body, but that the body itself shall live again; we have not only another life to live when our present life is at an end, but there is to be another world, which shall commence when this world is at an end, into which all the children of men must enter at once by a resurrection from the dead, as they entered into this, one after another, by their birth.

[2.] It shall be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust; the sanctified and the unsanctified; of those that did well, and to them our Saviour has told us, that it will be a resurrection of life; and of those that did evil, and to them that it will be a resurrection of condemnation, John 5. 29. See Dan. 12. 2. This implies that it will be a resurrection to a final judgment, by which all the children of men will be determined to everlasting happiness or misery in a world of retribution, according to what they were, and what they did, in this state of probation and preparation. The just shall rise by virtue of their union with Christ as their Head; the unjust shall rise by virtue of Christ's dominion over them as their Judge.

[3.] God is to be depended upon for the resurrection of the dead; I have hope toward God, and in God, that there shall be a resurrection; it shall be effected by the almighty power of God, in performance of the word which God hath spoken; so that they who doubt of it, betray their ignorance both of the scriptures and of the power of God, Matt. 22. 29.

[4.] The resurrection of the dead is a fundamental article of our creed, as it was also of that of the Jewish church; it is what they themselves also allow; nay, it was the expectation of the ancient patriarchs, witness Job's confession of his faith; but it is more clearly revealed and more fully confirmed by the gospel, and therefore they who believed it, should have been thankful to the preachers of the gospel for their explications and proofs of it, instead of opposing them.

[5.] In all our religion we ought to have an eye to the other world, and to serve God in all instances, with a confidence in him, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, doing all in preparation for that, and expecting our recompense in that.

(4.) His conversation is of a piece with his devo-

tion; (v. 16.) *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.* Prophets and their doctrine were to be tried by their fruits. Paul was far from having made shipwreck of a good conscience, and therefore it is not likely he has made shipwreck of the faith, the mystery of which is best held in a pure conscience. This protestation of Paul, is to the same purport with that which he made before the High Priest; (ch. 23. 1.) *I have lived in all good conscience; and this was his rejoicing.*

Observe,

[1.] What was Paul's aim and desire; to *have a conscience void of offence.* Either, *First*, "A conscience not offending; not informing me wrong, or flattering me, or dealing deceitfully with me, or in any thing misleading me." Or, *Secondly*, A conscience not offended; it is like Job's resolution, *'My heart shall not reproach me; I will never give it any occasion to do so.* This is what I am ambitious of, to keep upon good terms with my own conscience, that it may have no cause either to question the goodness of my spiritual state, or to quarrel with me for any particular action. I am as careful not to offend my conscience as I am not to offend a friend whom I daily converse with; nay, as I am not to offend a magistrate whose authority I am under, and to whom I am accountable; for conscience is God's deputy in my soul."

[2.] What was his care and endeavour, in pursuance of this; "*I exercise myself—ἀσκῶ.* I make it my constant business, and govern myself by this intention, I discipline myself, and live by rule," (those that did so were called *ascetics*, from the word here used,) "abstain from many a thing which my inclination leads me to, and abound in all the exercises of religion that are most spiritual, with this in my eye, that I may keep peace with my own conscience."

[3.] The extent of this care; *First*, *To all times;* to have always a conscience void of offence, always void of *gross offence;* for though Paul was conscious to himself that he *had not yet attained perfection*, and the evil that he *would not do* yet he did; yet he was *innocent from the great transgression.* Sins of infirmity are uneasy to conscience, but they do not wound it, and waste it, as presumptuous sins do; and though offence may be given to conscience, yet care must be taken that it be not an abiding offence, out that by the renewed acts of faith and repentance the matter may be taken up again quickly. This however we must *always exercise ourselves in*, and though we *come short*, we must *follow after.* *Secondly*, *To all things;* both toward God, and toward man. His conscientious care extended itself to the whole of his duty, and he was afraid of breaking the law of love, either to God or his neighbour; conscience, like the magistrate, is *custos utriusque tabulae—the guardian of each table.* We must be very cautious that we do not think, or speak, or do any thing amiss, either against God or man, 2 Cor. 8. 21.

[4.] The inducement to it; *herein, ἐν τούτῳ, for this cause;* so it may be read. "Because I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, therefore I thus exercise myself." The consideration of the *future state* should engage us to be universally conscientious in our present state.

IV. Having made confession of his faith, he gives a plain and faithful account of his case, and of the wrong done him by his persecutors. Twice he had been rescued by the chief captain out of the hand of the Jews, when they were ready to pull him to pieces, and he challenges them to prove him guilty of any crime either time.

1. In the temple; there they fell furiously upon

him as an enemy to their nation and the temple, ch. 21. 28. But was there any colour for the charge? No, but evidence sufficient against it. (1.) It was very hard to accuse him as an *enemy to their nation*, when after long absence from Jerusalem he came to bring alms to his nation, money which (though he had need enough himself of, yet) he had collected among his friends, for the relief of the poor at Jerusalem. He not only had no malice to that people, but he had a very charitable concern for them, and was ready to do them all good offices; and were they his *adversaries for his love?* Ps. 109. 4. (2.) It was very hard to accuse him of having profaned the temple, when he brought offerings to the temple, and was himself at charges therein, (ch. 21. 24.) and was found *purifying himself in the temple*, according to the law, (v. 18.) and that in a very quiet decent manner, *neither with multitude, nor with tumult;* though he was a man so much talked of, he was far from coveting to shew himself when he came to Jerusalem, or of being crowded after, but went to the temple, as much as was possible, *incognito;* they were Jews from Asia, his enemies, that made him to be taken notice of; they had no pretence to make a tumult and raise a multitude against him, for he had neither multitude nor tumult for him. And as for what was perhaps suggested to Felix, that he had brought Greeks into the temple, contrary to their law, and the governor ought to reckon with him for that, the Romans having stipulated with the nations that submitted to them, to preserve them in their religion, he challenges them to prove it; (v. 19.) "Those Jews of Asia ought to have been *here before thee*, that they might have been examined, whether they had aught against me, that they would stand by and swear to;" for some that will not scruple to tell a lie, have such *heavings of conscience*, that they scruple confirming it with an oath.

2. In the council; "Since the Jews of Asia are not here to prove any thing upon me done amiss in the temple, let these same that are here, the High Priest and the elders, say, whether they have found any evil doing in me, or if I were guilty of any misdemeanor when I stood before the council, when also they were ready to pull me in pieces, v. 20. When I was there, they could not take offence at any thing I said; for all I said, was, *Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day*, (v. 21.) which gave no offence to any but the Sadducees. This, I hope, was no crime, that I stuck to that which is the faith of the whole Jewish church, excepting those whom they themselves call *heretics.*"

22. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

23. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. 24. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for

thee. 26. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him : wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. 27. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room : and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

We have here the result of Paul's trial before Felix, and what was the consequence of it.

I. Felix adjourned the cause, and took further time to consider of it ; (v. 22.) He *had a more perfect knowledge of that way* which the Jews called *heresy*, than the High Priest and the elders thought he had ; he understood something of the christian religion ; for, living at Cæsarea, where Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was, who was a christian, from him and others he had got a notion of christianity, that it was not such an evil thing as it was represented ; he himself knew some of *that way* to be honest good men, and very conscientious, and therefore he put off the prosecutors with an excuse, "*When the chief captain shall come down hither, I will know the uttermost of your matter, or I shall know the truth, whether this Paul did go about to raise sedition or no ; you are parties, he is an indifferent person. Either Paul deserves to be punished for raising the tumult, or you do for doing it yourselves, and then charging it upon him ; and I will hear what he says, and determine accordingly between you.*" Now,

1. It was a disappointment to the High Priest and the elders, that Paul was not *condemned, or remitted to their judgment*, which they wished for and expected. But thus sometimes God restrains the wrath of his people's enemies by the agency, not of their friends, but of such as are strangers to them. And though they be so, if they have but some *knowledge of their way*, they cannot but appear for their protection.

2. It was an injury to Paul, that he was not released, Felix ought to have *avenged him of his adversaries*, when he so plainly saw there was nothing but malice in the prosecution, and to have *rid him out of the hand of the wicked*, according to the duty of a judge, Ps. 82. 4. But he was a judge that neither *feared God nor regarded man*, and what good could be expected from him ? It is a wrong not only to deny justice, but to delay it.

II. He continued the prisoner in custody, and would not take bail for him ; else here at Cæsarea Paul had a sufficient number of friends that would gladly have been his security. Felix thought a man of such a public character as Paul was, had many friends, as well as many enemies, and he might have an opportunity of obliging them, or making a hand of them, if he did not presently release him, and yet did shew him countenance ; and therefore,

1. He continued him a prisoner, commanded a centurion or captain to keep him, v. 23. He did not commit him to the common jail, but being first made an army-prisoner, he shall still be so.

2. Yet he took care he should be a *prisoner at large*—*in libera custodia* ; his keeper must *let him have liberty, not bind him, or lock him up*, but make his confinement as easy to him as possible ; let him have the liberty of the castle, and, perhaps, he means liberty to take the air, or go abroad upon his parole ; and Paul was such an honest man, that they might take his word for his return. The High Priest and the elders grudged him his life, but Felix generously allows him a sort of liberty ; for he had not those prejudices against him and his way that they had ; he also gave orders that none of his friends should

be hindered from *coming to him* ; the centurion must not forbid any of *his acquaintance from ministering to him* ; and a man's prison is as it were his own house, if he has but his friends about him.

III. He had frequent conversation with him afterward in private, once particularly, not long after his public trial, v. 24, 25. Observe,

1. With what design *Felix sent for Paul* ; he had a mind to have some talk with him *concerning the faith in Christ*, the christian religion ; he had some *knowledge of that way*, but he desired to have an account of it from Paul, who was so celebrated a preacher of *that faith*, above the rest. Those that would enlarge their *knowledge*, must discourse with men of their own profession, and those that would be acquainted with any profession, should consult those that excel in *the knowledge* of it ; and therefore Felix has a mind to talk with Paul more freely than he could in open court, where he observed Paul upon his guard, *concerning the faith of Christ* : and this only to satisfy his curiosity, or rather the curiosity of *his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess*, daughter of Herod Agrippa, that was eaten of worms ; being educated in the Jewish religion, she was more inquisitive concerning the Christian religion, which pretended to be the perfection of that, and desired to hear Paul discourse of it. But it was no great matter what religion she was of ; for, whatever it was, she was a reproach and scandal to it ; a Jewess, but an adulteress ; she was another man's wife when Felix took her to be his wife, and she lived with him in whoredom, and was noted for an impudent woman, yet she desires to hear *concerning the faith of Christ*. Many are fond of new notions and speculations in religion, and can hear and speak of them with pleasure, who yet hate to come under the power and influence of religion ; can be content to have their judgments informed, but not their lives reformed.

2. What the account was which Paul gave him of the christian religion ; by the idea he had of it, he expected to be amused with a *mystical divinity*, but as Paul represents it to him, he is alarmed with a *practical divinity*. Paul being asked *concerning the faith in Christ, reasoned* (for Paul was always a rational preacher) *concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*. It is probable that he mentioned to him the peculiar doctrines of christianity concerning the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and his being *the Mediator between God and man* ; but he hastened to his application, in which he designed to come home to the consciences of his hearers, and he discoursed with clearness and warmth of *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come* : and there he shewed,

(1.) That *the faith in Christ* is designed to enforce upon the children of men the great laws of justice and temperance. *The grace of God teacheth us to live soberly and righteously*, Tit. 2. 12. Justice and temperance were celebrated virtues among the heathen moralists ; if the doctrine Paul preaches, which Felix has heard of as proclaiming liberty, will but free him from an obligation to these, he will readily embrace it ; "No," says Paul, "it is so far from doing so, that it strengthens the obligations of those sacred laws ; it binds all under the highest penalties to be *honest in all their dealings*, and to *render to all their due ; to deny themselves, and to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection.*" *The world, and the flesh*, being in our baptism renounced, all our pursuits of the world, and all our gratifications of the desires of the body, are to be under the regulations of religion. *Paul reasoned of righteousness and temperance*, to convince Felix of his *unrighteousness and intemperance*, which he had been notoriously guilty of ; that, seeing the odiousness of them, and his obnoxiousness to the

wrath of God for them, (Eph. 5. 6.) he might inspire *concerning the faith of Christ*, with a resolution to embrace it.

(2.) That by the doctrine of Christ is discovered to us the *judgment to come*, by the sentence of which the everlasting state of all the children of men will be finally and irreversibly determined. Men have their day now, Felix hath his; but *God's day is coming, when every one shall give account of himself to God, the Judge of all*. Paul reasoned concerning this; he shewed what reason we have to believe *that there is a judgment to come*, and what reason we have, in consideration thereof, to be religious.

Now, from this account of the heads of Paul's discourse, we may gather, [1.] That Paul in his preaching had no respect of persons, for the word of God, which he preached, has not: he urges the same convictions and instructions upon the *Roman governor*, that he did upon other people. [2.] That Paul in his preaching aimed at the consciences of men, and came close to them; sought not to please their fancy, or gratify their curiosity, but led them to a sight of their sins, and a sense of their duty and interest. [3.] That Paul preferred the serving of Christ, and the saving of souls, before his own safety. He lay at the mercy of Felix, who had power (as Pilate said) *to crucify him*, (or, which was as bad, to deliver him back to the Jews,) and *he had power to release him*. Now when Paul had his ear, and had him in a good humour, he had a fair opportunity of ingratiating himself with him, and obtaining a release, nay, and of incensing him against his prosecutors; and, on the contrary, if he disobliged him, and put him out of humour, he may do himself a great diskindness by it; but he is wholly negligent of these considerations, and is intent upon *doing good*, at least discharging his duty. [4.] That Paul was willing to take pains, and run hazards, in his work, even there where there was little probability of *doing good*. Felix and Drusilla were such hardened sinners, that it was not at all likely they should be *brought to repentance* by Paul's preaching, especially under such disadvantages; and yet Paul deals with them, as one that did not despair of them. *Let the watchman give fair warning, and then they have delivered their own souls*, though they should not prevail to deliver the souls they watch for.

3. What impressions Paul's discourse made upon this great but bad man; *Felix trembled, ἐκφοβήθη*—being put into a fright, or made a terror to himself, a *magor-missabih*, as Pashur, Jer. 20. 3. 4. Paul never trembled before him, but he was made to tremble before Paul. "If this be so, as Paul says, what will become of me in another world? If the unrighteous and intemperate will be condemned in the judgment to come, I am undone, for ever undone, unless I lead a new course of life." We do not find that Drusilla trembled, though she was equally guilty, for she was a Jewess, and depended upon the ceremonial law, which she adhered to the observance of, to justify her; but Felix for the present could fasten upon nothing to pacify his conscience, and therefore trembled. See here,

(1.) The power of the word of God, when it comes with commission; it is searching, it is startling, it can strike a terror into the heart of the most proud and daring sinner, by *setting his sins in order before him*, and shewing him *the terrors of the Lord*.

(2.) The workings of natural conscience, when it is startled and awakened; it will fill the soul with horror and amazement at its own deformity and danger. Those that are themselves *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, have hereby been made a terror to themselves. A prospect of the judgment to come is enough to make the stoutest heart to tremble; as when it comes indeed, it will make

the mighty men, and the chief captains, to call in vain to rocks and mountains to shelter them.

4. How Felix struggled to get clear of these impressions, and to shake off the terror of his convictions; he did by them as he did by Paul's prosecutors, (v. 25.) *he deferred them*; he said, *Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee*. (1.) *He trembled*, and that was all. Paul's trembling, (ch. 9. 6.) and the jailer's, (ch. 16. 29.) ended in their conversion, but this of Felix did not. Many are startled by the word of God, who are not effectually changed by it. Many are in fear of the consequences of sin, and yet continue in love and league with sin. (2.) He did not fight against his convictions, nor fly in the face of the word, or of the preacher of it, to be revenged on them for making his conscience fly in his face; he did not say to Paul, as Amaziah to the prophet, *Forbear, why shouldst thou be smitten?* He did not threaten him with a closer confinement, or with death, for touching him (as John Baptist did Herod) in the sore place. But (3.) He artfully shifted off his convictions, by putting off the prosecution of them to another time; he has nothing to object against what Paul had said, it is weighty and worth considering, but, like a sorry debtor, he begs a day; Paul has spent himself, and has tired him and his lady, and therefore, *"Go thy way for this time, break off here, business calls me away; but when I have a convenient season, and have nothing else to do, I will call for thee, and hear what thou hast further to say."* Note, [1.] Many lose all the benefit of their convictions, for want of striking while the iron is hot. If Felix, now that he trembled, had but asked, as Paul and the jailer did, when they trembled, *What shall I do?* he might have been brought to the faith of Christ, and have been a Felix indeed, happy for ever; but by dropping his convictions now, he lost them for ever, and himself with them. [2.] In the affairs of our souls, delays are dangerous; nothing is of more fatal consequence than men's putting off their conversion from time to time. They will repent, and turn to God, but not yet; the matter is adjourned to some more convenient season, when such a business or affair is compassed, when they are so much older; and then convictions cool and wear off, good purposes prove to no purpose, and they are more hardened than ever in their evil way. Felix put off this matter to a more convenient season, but we do not find that that more convenient season ever came; for the devil cozens us of all our time, by cozening us of the present time. The present season is, without doubt, the most convenient season. Behold, now is the accepted time. To-day, if ye will hear his voice.

IV. After all, he continued him a prisoner, and left him so, when two years after he was removed from the government, v. 26, 27. He was convinced in his conscience that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds, and yet had not the honesty to release him. To little purpose had Paul reasoned with him about righteousness, though he then trembled at the thought of his own iniquity, who could thus persist in such a palpable piece of injustice. But here we are told what principles he was governed by herein; and they were such as make the matter yet much worse:

1. The love of money. He would not release Paul, because he hoped to make his markets of him, and that at length his friends would make a purse to purchase his liberty, and then he would satisfy his conscience by releasing him, when he could withal satisfy his covetousness by it; but he cannot find in his heart to do his duty as a judge, unless he can get money by it. He hoped that money would have been given him of Paul, or somebody for him, and then he would have loosed him, and set him at liberty; in

hopes of that, he continues him a prisoner, and *sends for him the oftener, and communes with him*; not any more about *the faith of Christ*, (he had had enough of that, and of *the judgment to come*, Paul must not return to those subjects, or go on with them,) but about his discharge, or ransom rather, out of his present captivity. He cannot for shame ask Paul what he will give him to release him, but he sends for him to feel his pulse, and gives him an opportunity to ask what he would take to release him. And now we see what became of his promise both to Paul and to himself, that he would hear more of Christ *at some other convenient season*. Here were many seasons convenient enough to have talked that matter through, but nothing is done in it; all his business now is to *get money* by Paul, not to *get the knowledge of Christ* by him. Note, It is just with God, to say concerning those who trifle with their convictions, and think they can have the *grace of God* at command when they please, *My Spirit shall no more strive with them*. When men will not *hear God's voice to-day, while it is called to-day*, the heart is commonly *hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*.

Paul was but a poor man himself, *silver and gold he had none* to give, to purchase his liberty; but Felix knew there were those who wished well to him, who were able to assist him; he having lately collected a deal of money for the poor saints to relieve them, it might also be expected that the rich saints should contribute some to release him, and I wonder it was not done. Though Paul is to be commended that he would not bid money to Felix, nor beg money of the churches, (his great and generous soul disdained both,) yet I know not whether his friends are to be commended, nay, whether they can be justified, in not doing it for him; they ought to have solicited the governor *as pressingly for him as his enemies did against him*; and if a gift was necessary to make room for them, (as Solomon speaks,) and to bring them before great men, they might lawfully have brought it. I ought not to bribe a man to do an unjust thing, but if he will not do me justice without a fee, it is but doing myself justice to give it him; and if they might do it, it was a shame they did not do it; I blush for them, that they would let such an eminent and useful man as Paul lie in the jail, when a little money would have fetched him out, and restored him to his usefulness again. The Christians here at Cæsarea, where he now was, had parted with their tears to prevent his going to the prison, (ch. 21. 13.) but could not find in their hearts to part with their money to help him out.* Yet there might be a providence of God in it; Paul's bonds must be for the furtherance of the gospel of Christ, and therefore he must continue in bonds. However, this will not excuse Felix, who ought to have released an innocent man, without demanding or accepting any thing for it: the judge that will not do right without a bribe, will, no doubt, do wrong for a bribe.

2. Men pleasing. Felix was recalled from his government about *two years after this*, and Porcius Festus was put in his place, and one should have expected he would have at least concluded his government with this act of justice, the release of Paul; but he did not, he *left Paul bound*, and the reason here given, is, because he was *willing to do the Jews a pleasure*; though he would not deliver him to death, to please them, yet he would continue him a prisoner rather than offend them; and he did it in hope hereby to atone for the many offences he had done against them. He did not think Paul had either interest or inclination to complain of him at court, for detaining him so long in custody, against

all law and equity; but he was jealous of the *High Priest and elders*, that they would be his accusers to the emperor for the wrongs he had done them, and therefore hopes by gratifying them in this matter to stop their mouths. Thus they who do some base things, are tempted to do more to screen themselves and bear them out. If Felix had not injured the Jews, he needed not to have done this to please them; but when he had done it, it seems he did not gain his point; the Jews, notwithstanding this, accused him to the emperor, and some historians say he was sent bound to Rome by Festus; and if so, surely his remembering how light he had made of Paul's bonds, would help to make his own chain heavy. Those that aim to please God by *doing good*, will have what they aim at; but so will not they that seek to please men by *doing evil*.

CHAP. XXV.

Some think that Felix was turned out, and Festus succeeded him, quickly after Paul's imprisonment; and that the two years, mentioned in the close of the foregoing chapter, are to be reckoned from the beginning of Nero's reign; but it seems more natural to compute it from Paul's being delivered into the hands of Felix; however, we have here much the same management of Paul's case, as we had in the foregoing chapter; cognizance is here taken of it, I. By Festus the governor; it is brought before him by the Jews, v. 1. 3. The hearing of it is appointed to be, not at Jerusalem, as the Jews desired, but at Cæsarea, v. 4. 6. The Jews appear against Paul and accuse him, (v. 7.) but he stands upon his own innocency; (v. 8.) and to avoid the removing of the cause to Jerusalem, which he was pressed to consent to, he at length appealed to Cæsar, v. 9. 12. II. By king Agrippa, to whom Festus relates his case; (v. 13. 21.) and Agrippa desires he might have the hearing of it himself, v. 22. The court is accordingly set, and Paul brought to the bar, (v. 23.) and Festus opens the cause, (v. 24. 27.) to introduce Paul's defence in the next chapter.

1. NOW when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem. 2. Then the High Priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, 3. And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. 4. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. 5. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. 6. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment-seat commanded Paul to be brought. 7. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. 8. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended any thing at all. 9. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? 10. Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat.

where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. 11. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar. 12. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? Unto Cæsar shalt thou go.

We commonly say, "New lords, new laws, new customs;" but here was a new governor, and yet Paul had the same treatment with him that he had with the former, and no better. Festus, like Felix, is not so just to him as he should have been, for he does not release him; and yet not so unjust to him as the Jews would have had him to be, for he will not condemn him to die, nor expose him to their rage. Here is,

I. The pressing instance which the High Priests and other Jews used with the governor to persuade him to abandon Paul; for to send him to Jerusalem was in effect to abandon him.

1. See how speedy they were in their applications to Festus concerning Paul. As soon as ever he was come into the province, and had taken possession of the government, into which, probably, he was installed at Cæsarea, within three days he went up to Jerusalem, to shew himself there, and presently the priests were upon him to proceed against Paul; he stayed three days at Cæsarea, where Paul was a prisoner, and we do not find that in that time Paul made any application to him to release him, though, no doubt, he could have made good friends, that he might hope to have prevailed by; but as soon as ever he comes up to Jerusalem, the priests are in all haste to make an interest with him against Paul. See how restless a thing malice is! Paul more patiently bears the lengthening out of his imprisonment, than his enemies do the delay of his prosecution even to the death.

2. See how spiteful they were in their application. They informed the governor against Paul, (v. 2.) before he was brought upon a fair trial, that so they might, if possible, prejudge the cause with the governor, and make him a party, who was to be the judge. But this artifice, though base enough, they could not confide in; for the governor would be sure to hear him himself, and then all their informations against him would fall to the ground; and therefore they form another project much more base, and that is, to assassinate Paul before he came upon his trial. These inhuman hellish methods, which all the world profess at least to abhor, have these persecutors recourse to, to gratify their malice against the gospel of Christ; and this too under colour of zeal for Moses. *Tantum religio potuit suadere majorum—Such was their dire religious zeal.*

3. See how specious the pretence was: Now that the governor was himself at Jerusalem, they desired he would send for Paul thither, and try him there, which would save the prosecutors a great deal of labour, and looked most reasonable, because he was charged with having profaned the temple at Jerusalem, and it is usual for criminals to be tried in the court where the fact was committed; but that which they designed, was, to way-lay him as he was brought up, and to murder him upon the road, supposing that he would not be brought up under so strong a guard as he was sent down with; or, that the officers that were to bring him up might

be bribed to give them an opportunity for their wickedness. It is said, *They desired favour against Paul.* The business of prosecutors is to demand justice against one that they suppose to be a criminal, and, if he be not proved so, it is as much justice to acquit him as it is to condemn him if he be. But to desire favour against a prisoner, and from the judge too, who ought to be of counsel for him, is a very impudent thing. The favour ought to be for the prisoner, in *favorem vite—to favour his life*, but here they desire it against him. They will take it as a favour if the governor will but condemn Paul, though they can prove no crime upon him.

II. The governor's resolution that Paul shall take his trial at Cæsarea, where he now is, v. 4, 5. See how he manages the prosecutors.

1. He will not do them the kindness to send for him to Jerusalem; no, he gave orders that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea. It does not appear that he had any suspicion, much less any certain information, of their bloody design to murder him by the way, as the chief captain had when he sent him to Cæsarea; (ch. 23. 30.) but perhaps he was not willing so far to oblige the High Priest and his party, or he would maintain the honour of his court at Cæsarea, and require their attendance there; or he was not willing to be at the trouble or charge of bringing Paul up: whatever was his reason for refusing it, God made use of it as a means of preserving Paul out of the hands of his enemies. Perhaps now they were more careful to keep their conspiracy secret than they had been before, that the discovery of it might not be now, as it was then, the defeat of it. But though God does not, as then, bring it to light, yet he finds another way, as effectual, to bring it to nought, by inclining the heart of the governor, for some other reasons, not to remove Paul to Jerusalem. God is not tied to one method, in working out salvation for his people; he can suffer the designs against them to be conceded, and yet not suffer them to be accomplished; and can make even the carnal policies of great men to serve his gracious purposes.

2. Yet he will do them the justice to hear what they have to say against Paul, if they will go down to Cæsarea, and appear against him there. "Let them among you who are able, able in body and purse for such a journey, or able in mind and tongue to manage the prosecution; let those among you, who are fit to be managers, go down with me, and accuse this man; or, those who are competent witnesses, who are able to prove any thing criminal upon him, let them go and give in their evidence, if there be any such wickedness in him as you charge upon him." Festus will not take it for granted, as they desire he should, that there is wickedness in him, till it is proved upon him, and he has been heard in his own defence; but if he be guilty, it lies upon them to prove him so.

III. Paul's trial before Festus; he stayed at Jerusalem about ten days, and then went down to Cæsarea, and the prosecutors, it is likely, in his retinue; for he said, they should go down with him; and since they are so eager in the prosecution, he is willing this cause should be first called; and, that they may hasten home, he will dispatch it the next day. Expedition in administering justice is very commendable, provided more haste be not made than good speed. Now here we have,

1. The court set, and the prisoner called to the bar. Festus sat in the judgment-seat, as he used to do when any cause was brought before him, that was of consequence, and he commanded Paul to be brought, and make his appearance, v. 6. Christ, to encourage his disciples, and keep up their spirits under such awful trials of their courage as this was to Paul, promised them, that the day should come

when they should sit on thrones, judging the tribes of Israel.

2. The prosecutors exhibiting their charge against the prisoner; (v. 7.) *The Jews stood round about, which intimates that they were many. Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!* It intimates also that they were unanimous, they stood by one another, and resolved to hold together; and that they were intent upon the prosecution, and eager in clamouring against Paul; they stood round about, if possible, to frighten the judge into a compliance with their malicious design; however, to frighten the prisoner, and at least to put him out of countenance; but in vain; he had too just and strong an assurance to be dashed by them. *They compassed me about like bees, but they are quenched as the fire of thorns*, Ps. 118. 12. *When they stood round about him, they brought many and grievous accusations against Paul*, so it should be read; they charged him with high crimes and misdemeanors; the articles of impeachment were many, and contained things of a very heinous nature; they represented him to the court as black and odious as their wit and malice could contrive; but when they had opened the cause as they thought fit, and came to the evidence, there they failed; they could not prove what they alleged against him, for it was all false, and the complaints groundless and unjust; either the fact was not as they opened it, or there was no fault in it; they laid to his charge things that he knew not, nor they neither. It is no new thing for the most excellent ones of the earth to have all manner of evil said against them falsely, not only in the song of the drunkards, and upon the seat of the scornful, but even before the judgment-seat.

3. The prisoner's insisting upon his own vindication, v. 8. *Whoever reproaches him, his own heart does not, and therefore his own tongue shall not; though he die, he will not remove his integrity from him.* When it came to his turn to speak for himself, he insisted upon this general plea, Not guilty; *Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended any thing at all.* (1.) He had not violated the law of the Jews, nor taught any doctrine destructive of it. *Did he make void the law by faith? No, he established the law.* Preaching Christ, the end of the law, was no offence against the law. (2.) He had not profaned the temple, nor put any contempt at all upon the temple-service; his helping to set up the gospel-temple, did not at all offend against that temple, which was a type of it. (3.) He had not offended against Cæsar, or his government. By this it appears, that, now his cause being brought before the government, to curry favour with the governor, and that they might seem friends to Cæsar, they had charged him with some instances of disaffection to the present higher powers, which obliged him to purge himself as to that matter, and to protest that he was no enemy to Cæsar, not so much as they were, who charged him with being so.

IV. Paul's appeal to the emperor, and the occasion of it; this gave the cause a new turn; whether he had before designed it, or whether it was a sudden resolve upon the present provocation, does not appear; but God puts it into his heart to do it, for the bringing about of that which he had said to him, that he must bear witness to Christ at Rome, for there the emperor's court was, ch. 23. 11. We have here,

1. The proposal which Festus made to Paul, to go and take his trial at Jerusalem, v. 9. *Festus was willing to do the Jews a pleasure*, inclined to gratify the prosecutors rather than the prisoner, as far as he could go with safety against one that was a citizen of Rome, and therefore asked him, whether he would be willing to go up to Jerusalem, and clear

himself there where he had been accused, and where he might have his witnesses ready to vouch for him, and confirm what he said. He would not offer to turn him over to the High Priest and the Sanhedrim, as the Jews would have had him; but, *Wilt thou go thither, and be judged of these things before me?* The president, if he had pleased, might have ordered him thither, but he would not do it without his own consent, which, if he could have wheedled him to give it, would have taken off the odium of it. In suffering times, the prudence of the Lord's people is tried as well as their patience; being sent forth therefore as sheep in the midst of wolves, they have need to be wise as serpents.

2. Paul's refusal to consent to it, and his reasons for it. He knew, if he were removed to Jerusalem, notwithstanding the utmost vigilance of the president, the Jews would find some means or other to be the death of him; and therefore desires to be excused, and pleads,

(1.) That, as a citizen of Rome, it was most proper for him to be tried, not only by the president, but in that which was properly his court, which sat at Cæsarea; *I stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged*, in the city which is the metropolis of the province. The court being held in Cæsar's name, and by his authority and commission, before one that was delegated by him, it might well be said to be his judgment-seat, as, with us, all writs run in the name of the sovereign, in whose name all courts are held. Paul's owning that he ought to be judged at Cæsar's judgment-seat, plainly proves that Christ's ministers are not exempted from the jurisdiction of the civil powers, but ought to be subject to them, as far as they can with a good conscience; and, if they be guilty of a real crime, to submit to their censure; if innocent, yet to submit to their inquiry, and to clear themselves before them.

(2.) That, as a member of the Jewish nation, he had done nothing to make himself obnoxious to them; *To the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.* It very well becomes those that are innocent, to plead their innocence, and to insist upon it; it is a debt we owe to our own good name, not only not to bear false witness against ourselves, but to maintain our own integrity against those who bear false witness against us.

(3.) That he was willing to abide by the rules of the law, and to let that take its course, v. 11. *If he be guilty of any capital crime that deserves death, he will not offer, either to make resistance, or to make his escape; will neither flee from justice, nor fight with it; I refuse not to die, but will accept of the punishment of mine iniquity.* Not that all who have committed any thing worthy of death, are obliged to accuse themselves, and offer themselves to justice; but when they are accused and brought to justice, they ought to submit, and to say, both God and the government are righteous; it is necessary that some should be made examples.

But if he be innocent, as he protests he is, *"If there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, if the prosecution be malicious, and they are resolved to have my blood right or wrong, no man may deliver me unto them, no, not the governor himself, without palpable injustice; for it is his business as much to protect the innocent, as to punish the guilty;"* and he claims his protection.

3. His appealing to court; since he is continually in danger of the Jews, and one attempt is made after another to get him into their hands, whose tender mercies were cruel, he flies to the dernier resort—the last refuge of oppressed innocence, and takes sanctuary there, since he cannot have justice done him in any other way; *"I appeal unto Cæsar.* Rather than be delivered to the Jews," (which Festus

seems inclined to consent to,) "let me be delivered to Nero." When David had divers times narrowly escaped the rage of Saul, and concluded he was such a restless enemy that he should *one day perish by his hands*, he came to this resolution, being in a manner compelled to it, *There is nothing better for me than to take shelter in the land of the Philistines*, 1 Sam. 27. 1. So Paul here. But it is a hard case that a son of Abraham must be forced to appeal to a Philistine, to a Nero, from those who call themselves *the seed of Abraham*, and shall be safer in Gath or Rome than in Jerusalem! *How is the faithful city become a harlot!*

V. The judgment given upon the whole matter. Paul is neither released nor condemned, his enemies hoped the cause would be ended in his death, his friends hoped it would be ended in his deliverance; but it proved neither so nor so, they are both disappointed, the thing is left as it was. It is an instance of the slow steps which Providence sometimes takes, not bringing things to an issue so soon as we expect, by which we are often made ashamed both of our hopes and of our fears, and are kept still waiting on God. The cause had before been adjourned to another time, now to another place, to another court, that Paul's *tribulation might work patience*.

1. The president advises upon the matter; *he conferred with the council*—*μετὰ τὸ συμβόλιον*, not with the council of the Jews, that is called *συνδριμεν*; but with his own counsellors, who were always ready to assist the governor with their advice. *In multitude of counsellors there is safety*; and judges should consult both with themselves and others before they pass sentence.

2. He determines to send him to Rome; some think, Paul meant not an *appeal to Cæsar's* person, but only to his court, the sentence of which he would abide by, rather than be remitted to the Jews' council, and that Festus might have chosen whether he would have sent him to Rome, or, at least, whether he would have joined issue with him upon the appeal; but, it should seem, by what Agrippa said, (*ch. 26. 32.*) *he might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Cæsar*; that, by the course of the Roman law, a Roman citizen might appeal at any time to a superior court, even to the supreme; as causes with us are removed by *certiorari*, and criminals by *habeas corpus*, and as appeals are often made to the house of peers. Festus therefore, either of choice or of course, comes to this resolution; *Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? Unto Cæsar thou shalt go*. He found there was something very extraordinary in the case, which he was therefore afraid of giving judgment upon, either one way or other; and the knowledge of which he thought would be an entertainment to the emperor, and therefore he transmitted it to his cognizance. In our judgment before God, those that by justifying themselves, *appeal to the law, to the law they shall go*, and it will condemn them; but those that by repentance and faith *appeal to the gospel, to the gospel they shall go*, and it will save them.

13. And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea to salute Festus. 14. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: 15. About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. 16. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to de-

liver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. 17. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment-seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. 18. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: 19. But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. 20. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. 21. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cæsar. 22. Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. 23. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. 24. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. 25. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. 26. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. 27. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

We have here the preparation that was made for another hearing of Paul before king Agrippa, not in order to his giving judgment upon him, but in order to his giving advice concerning him, or rather only to gratify his curiosity. Christ had said, concerning his followers, *that they should be brought before governors and kings*; in the former part of this chapter Paul was brought before Festus the governor, here before Agrippa the king, for a testimony to both. Here is,

I. The kind and friendly visit which king Agrippa made to Festus, now upon his coming into the government in that province; (*v. 13.*) *After certain days, king Agrippa came to Cæsarea*. Here is a royal visit; kings usually think it enough to send

their ambassadors to congratulate their friends, but here was a king that came himself, that made the majesty of a prince yield to the satisfaction of a friend; for personal converse is the most pleasant among friends. Observe,

1. Who the visitants were; (1.) *King Agrippa*, the son of that Herod, (surnamed *Agrippa*), who killed James the apostle, and was himself eaten of worms, and great grandson of Herod the Great, under whom Christ was born. Josephus calls this *Agrippa the younger*; Claudius the emperor made him *king of Chalcis, and tetrarch of Trachonitis and Abylene*, mentioned Luke 3. 1. The Jewish writers speak of him, and (as Dr. Lightfoot tells us) among other things relate this story of him, "That reading the law publicly, in the latter end of the year of release, as was enjoined, the king, when he came to those words, (Deut. 17. 15.) *Thou shalt not set a stranger king over thee, which is not of thy brethren*, the tears ran down his cheeks, for he was *not of the seed of Israel*, which the congregation observing, cried out, *Be of good comfort, king Agrippa, thou art our brother*; for he was of their religion, though not of their blood." (2.) *Bernice* came with him, she was his own sister, now a widow, the widow of his uncle Herod, king of Chalcis, after whose death she lived with this brother of her's, who was suspected to be too familiar with her, and after she was a second time married to Polemon king of Cilicia, she got to be divorced from him, and returned to her brother *king Agrippa*. Juvenal, *Sat.* 6. speaks of a diamond ring which Agrippa gave to Bernice, his incestuous sister;

—Berenices

In dedit factus pretiosior; hunc dedit olim
Barbarus incestae, dedit hunc Agrippa sorori.
That far-famed gem which on the finger glow'd
Of Berenice, (dearer thence,) bestow'd
By an incestuous brother. — GIFFORD.

And both Tacitus and Suetonius speak of a criminal intimacy afterward between her and Titus Vespasian. Drusilla, the wife of Felix, was another sister. Such lewd people were the great people generally in those times! *Say not that the former days were better.*

2. What the design of this visit was; they came to salute *Festus*, to give him joy of his new promotion, and to wish him joy in it; they came to commend him upon his accession to the government, and to keep up a good correspondence with him, that *Agrippa*, who had the government of Galilee, might act in concert with *Festus*, who had the government of Judea; but, it is probable they came as much to divert themselves, as to shew respect to him, and to share in the entertainments of his court, and to shew their fine clothes, which would do vain people no good, if they did not go abroad.

II. The account which *Festus* gave to *king Agrippa* of Paul, and his case; which he gave,

1. To entertain him, and give him some diversion; it was a very remarkable story, and worth any man's hearing, not only as it was surprising and entertaining, but, if it were truly and fully told, very instructive and edifying; and it would be particularly acceptable to *Agrippa*, not only because he was a judge, and there were some points of law and practice in it well worth his notice, but much more as he was a Jew, and there were some points of religion in it much more deserving his cognizance.

2. To have his advice. *Festus* was but newly come to be a judge, at least to be a judge in these parts, and therefore is diffident of himself and of his own ability, and willing to have the counsel of those that were older and more experienced, especially in a matter that had so much difficulty in it as Paul's case seemed to have, and therefore he declared it to the king.

Let us now see the particular account he gives to *king Agrippa* concerning Paul, v. 14—21.

(1.) He found him a prisoner when he came into the government of this province; and therefore could not of his own knowledge give an account of his cause from the beginning; *There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix*; and therefore if there were any thing amiss in the first taking of him into custody, *Festus* is not to answer for that, for he found him in bonds. When *Felix*, to do the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound; though he knew him to be innocent, he knew not what he did, knew not but he might have fallen into worse hands than he did fall into, though they were none of the best.

(2.) That the Jewish Sanhedrim were extremely set against him; "The chief priests and the elders informed me against him as a dangerous man, and not fit to live, and desired he might therefore be condemned to die." These being great pretenders to religion, and therefore to be supposed men of honour and honesty, *Festus* thinks he ought to give credit to; but *Agrippa* knows them better than he does, and therefore he desires his advice in this matter.

(3.) That he had insisted upon the Roman law in favour of the prisoner, and would not condemn him unheard; (v. 16.) "It is not the manner of the Romans, who herein govern themselves by the law of nature and the fundamental rules of justice, to deliver any man to die, to grant him to destruction," (so the word is,) "to gratify his enemies with his destruction, before the accused has the accusers face to face, to confront their testimony, and have both licence and time given him to answer for himself." He seems to upbraid them as if they reflected upon the Romans and their government in asking such a thing, or expecting that they would condemn a man without trying him; "No," says he, "I would have you to know, whatever you may allow of among yourselves, the Romans allow not of such a piece of injustice among them." *Audi et alteram partem* — *Hear the other side*, was become a proverb among them. This rule we ought to be governed by in our private censures in common conversation; we must not give men ill characters, nor condemn their words and actions, till we have heard what is to be said in their vindication. See John 7. 51.

(4.) That he had brought him upon his trial, according to the duty of his place, v. 17. That he had been expeditious in it, and the prosecutors had no reason to complain of his being dilatory, for as soon as ever they were come, (and we are sure they lost no time,) without any delay, on the morrow, he had brought on the cause. He had likewise tried him in the most solemn manner; he sat on the judgment-seat, as they used to do in weightier causes, while those that were of small moment, they judged *de plano*—upon even ground. He called a great court on purpose for the trial of Paul, that the sentence might be definitive, and the cause ended.

(5.) That he was extremely disappointed in the charge they brought against him; (v. 18, 19.) *When the accusers stood up against him, and opened their indictment, they brought no accusations of such things as I supposed.* He supposed by the eagerness of their prosecution, and their urging of it thus upon the Roman governors one after another, [1.] That they had something to accuse him of that was dangerous either to private property or the public peace; that they would undertake to prove him a robber, or a murderer, or a rebel against the Roman power; that he had been in arms to head a sedition; that if he were not that Egyptian who lately made an uproar, and commanded a party of cut-throats, as the chief captain supposed him to be, yet that he was one of the same kindred. Such were the outcries against the primitive christians, so loud, so fierce,

that the standers-by, who judged of them by those outcries, could not but conclude them the worst of men; and to represent them so was the design of that clamour, as it was against our Saviour. [2.] That they had something to accuse him of, that was cognizable in the Roman courts, and which the governor was properly the judge of, as Gallio expected; (*ch.* 18. 14.) otherwise it was absurd and ridiculous to trouble him with it, and really an affront to him.

But, to his great surprise, he finds the matter is neither so nor so: they had *certain questions against him*, instead of proofs and evidences against him; the worst they had to say against him, was disputable whether it was a crime or no; moot-points, that would bear an endless debate, but had no tendency to fasten any guilt upon him; questions fitter for the schools than for the *judgment-seat*. And they were questions of *their own superstition*, so he calls their religion; or rather, so he calls that part of their religion which Paul was charged with doing damage to. The Romans protected their religion according to their law, but not their superstition, nor the tradition of their elders. But the great question, it seems, was concerning *one Jesus that was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*. Some think the superstition he speaks of was the christian religion, which Paul preached, and that he had the same notion of it that the Athenians had, that it was the introducing of a new *dæmon*, even Jesus. See how slightly this Roman speaks of Christ, and of his death and resurrection; and of the great controversy between the Jews and the Christians, whether he were the Messiah promised or no; and the great proof of his being the Messiah, his resurrection from the dead, as if it were no more than this, There was one Jesus that was dead, and *Paul affirmed he was alive*. In many causes issue is joined upon this question, whether such a person that has been long absent be living or dead, and proofs are brought on both sides; and Festus will have it thought that this is a matter of no more moment. Whereas this Jesus, whom he prides himself in being thus ignorant of, as if he were below his notice, is he that *was dead, and is alive, and lives for evermore, and has the keys of hell and of death*, Rev. 1. 18. What Paul affirmed concerning Jesus, that he is alive, is a truth of such importance, that if it be not true we are all undone.

(6.) That therefore he had moved it to Paul, that the cause might be adjourned to the Jewish courts, as best able to take cognizance of an affair of this nature; (*v.* 20.) "*Because I doubted of such manner of questions, and thought myself unfit to judge of things I did not understand, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, appear before the great Sanhedrim, and there be judged of these matters?*" He would not force him to it, but should be glad he would consent to it, that he might not have his conscience burthened with a cause of this nature.

(7.) That Paul had chosen rather to remove his cause to Rome than to Jerusalem, as expecting fairer play from the emperor than from the priests; "*He appeared to be reserved to the hearing of Augustus*, (*v.* 21.) having no other way to stop proceedings here in this inferior court; and therefore I have commanded him to be kept a close prisoner till I might send him to Cæsar; for I did not see cause to refuse his appeal, but rather was pleased with it."

III. The bringing of him before Agrippa, that he might have the hearing of his cause.

1. The king desired it; (*v.* 22.) "*I thank you for your account of him, but I would also hear the man myself.*" Agrippa knows more of this matter than Festus does of the cause, and of the person; he has heard of Paul, and knows of what vast concern this

question is, which Festus makes such a jest of, whether Jesus be alive or no? And nothing would oblige him more than to hear Paul. Many great men think it below them to take cognizance of the matters of religion, except they can hear them *like themselves*, in the judgment-seat. Agrippa would not for all the world have gone to a meeting to hear Paul preach, any more than Herod to hear Jesus; and yet are both glad to have them brought before them, only to satisfy their curiosity. Perhaps Agrippa desired to *hear him himself*, that he might be in a capacity to do him a kindness, and yet did him none, only put some credit upon him.

2. Festus granted it; *To-morrow thou shalt hear him*. There was a good providence in this, for the encouragement of Paul, who seemed buried alive in his imprisonment, and deprived of all opportunities of doing good; we know not of any of his epistles that bore date from his prison at Cæsarea; what opportunity he had of doing good to his friends that visited him, and perhaps to a little congregation of them that might visit him every Lord's day, was but a low and narrow sphere of usefulness, so that he seemed to be thrown by as a *despised broken vessel, in which there was no pleasure*; but this gives him an opportunity of preaching Christ to a great congregation, and (which is more) to a congregation of great ones. Felix heard him in private concerning the faith of Christ. But Agrippa and Festus agree he shall be heard in public. And we have reason to think that his sermon in the next chapter, though it might not be so instrumental as some other of his sermons for the conversion of souls, redounded as much to the honour of Christ and christianity as any sermon he ever preached in his life.

3. Great preparation was made for it; (*v.* 23.) *The next day there was a great appearance in the place of hearing, Paul and his cause being much talked of, and the more for their being much talked against.*

(1.) Agrippa and Bernice took this opportunity to shew themselves in state, and to make a figure, and perhaps for that end desired the occasion, that they might see and be seen; for *they came with great pomp*, richly dressed with gold and pearls, and costly array; with a great retinue of footmen in rich liveries, which made a splendid show, and dazzled the eyes of the gazing crowd. They came *μετα πολλῆς σπουδῆς*—*with great fancy*, so the word is. Note, Great pomp is but great fancy; it neither adds any real excellency, nor gains any real respect, but feeds a vain humour, which wise men would rather mortify than gratify. It is but a shew, a dream, a fantastical thing, so the word signifies; superficial, and it *passeth away*. And the pomp of this appearance, would put one for ever out of conceit with pomp, when the pomp which Agrippa and Bernice appeared in, was, [1.] Stained by their lewd characters, and all the beauty of it sullied, and all virtuous people that knew them could not but condemn them in the midst of all this pomp as vile persons, Ps. 15. 4. [2.] Outshone by the real glory of the poor prisoner at the bar. What was the honour of their fine clothes, compared with that of his wisdom, and grace, and holiness; his courage and constancy in suffering for Christ! His bonds in so good a cause were more glorious than their *chains of gold*; and his guards than their equipage. Who would be fond of worldly pomp, that here sees so bad a woman *loaded with it*, and so good a man loaded with the reverse of it?

(2.) The *chief captain and principal men of the city* took this opportunity to pay their respects to Festus and to his guests; it answered the end of a ball at court, it brought the fine folks together in their fine clothes, and served for an entertainment

It is probable that Festus sent Paul notice of it over-night, to be ready for a hearing the next morning before Agrippa. And such confidence had Paul in the promise of Christ, that it should be *given him in that same hour what he should speak*, that he complained not of the short warning, nor was put into confusion by it. I am apt to think that they who were to appear in pomp, perplexed themselves more with care about *their clothes* than Paul who was to appear as a prisoner, did with care about his cause; for he knew whom he had believed, and who stood by him.

IV. The speech with which Festus introduced the cause, when the court, or rather the audience, was set; which is much to the same purport with the account he had just now given to Agrippa.

1. He addresses himself respectfully to the company; "*King Agrippa, and all men who are here present with us.*" He speaks to *all the men*—*πάντας ἀνδρας*, as if he intended a tacit reflection upon Bernice, a woman, for appearing in a meeting of this nature; he does not refer any thing to her judgment, or desire her counsel; but, "*All you that are present, that are men,* (so the words are placed,) *I desire you to take cognizance of this matter.*" The word used is that which signifies men in distinction from women; what had Bernice to do here?

2. He represents the prisoner as one that the Jews had a very great spite against; not only the rulers, but the *multitude of them, both at Jerusalem, and here at Cæsarea*, cry out, *that he ought not to live any longer*, for they think he has lived too long already; and if he lived any longer it would be to do more mischief. They could not charge him with any capital crime, but they want to have him out of the way.

3. He confesses the prisoner's innocency; and it was much for the honour of Paul and his bonds, that he had such a public acknowledgment as this from the mouth of his judge; (*v. 25.*) *I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death*; upon a full hearing of the cause, it appeared that there was no evidence at all to support the indictment; and therefore though he was inclinable enough to favour the prosecutors, yet his own conscience brought in Paul *not guilty*. And why did he not discharge him then, for he stood upon his deliverance? Why truly, because he was so much clamoured against, and he feared the clamour would turn upon himself if he should release him. It is pity but every man that has a conscience, should have courage to act according to it. Or perhaps because there was *so much smoke*, he concluded there could not but be some fire, which would appear at last, and he would continue him a prisoner, in expectation of it.

4. He acquaints them with the present state of the case; that the prisoner had *appealed to the emperor himself*; (whereby he put an honour upon his own cause, as knowing it not unworthy the cognizance of the greatest of men;) and that he had admitted his appeal; *I have determined to send him*. And thus the cause now stood.

5. He desires their assistance in examining the matter calmly and impartially, now that there was no danger of their being interrupted, as he had been with the noisiness and outrage of the prosecutors; that he might have at least such an insight into the cause as was necessary to his stating of it to the emperor, *v. 26, 27.* (1.) He thought it *unreasonable to send a prisoner*, especially so far as Rome, and *not withal to signify the crimes laid against him*, that the matter might be prepared as much as possible, and put in a readiness for the emperor's determination; for he is supposed to be a man of great business, and therefore every affair must be laid before him in as little compass as possible. (2.) He could not as yet write *any thing certain* concerning Paul;

so confused were the informations that were given in against him, and so inconsistent, that he could make nothing at all of them. He therefore desired he might be thus publicly examined, that he might be advised by them what to write. See what a great deal of trouble and vexation they are put to, and to what delay, nay and to what hazard, in the administration of public justice, who lived at such a distance from Rome, and yet were subject to the emperor of Rome; the same was this nation of our's put to, (which is about as far distant from Rome the other way,) when it was in ecclesiastical affairs subject to the pope of Rome, and appeals were upon all occasions made to his court; and the same mischiefs, and a thousand worse, would they bring upon us, who would again entangle us in that *yoke of bondage*.

CHAP. XXVI.

We left Paul at the bar, and Festus, and Agrippa and Bernice, and all the great men of the city of Cæsarea, upon the bench, or about it, waiting to hear what he had to say for himself. Now in this chapter, we have, 1. The account he gives of himself, in answer to the calumnies of the Jews. And in that, 1. His humble address to king Agrippa, and the compliment he passed upon him, *v. 1. 3.* 2. His account of his original, and education, his profession as a Pharisee, and his adherence still to that which was then the main article of his creed, in distinction from the Sadducees, the resurrection of the dead; however in rituals he had since departed from it, *v. 4. 8.* 3. Of his zeal against the christian religion, and the professors of it, in the beginning of his time, *v. 9. 11.* 4. Of his miraculous conversion to the faith of Christ, *v. 12. 16.* 5. Of the commission he received from heaven to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, *v. 17, 18.* 6. Of his proceedings pursuant to that commission, which had given this mighty offence to the Jews, *v. 19. 21.* 7. Of the doctrine which he had made it his business to preach to the Gentiles; which was so far from destroying the law and the prophets, that it shewed the fulfilling of both, *v. 22, 23.* 8. The remarks that were made upon his apology. 1. Festus thought he never heard a man talk so madly, and slighted him as crazed, *v. 24.* In answer to him, he denies the charge, and appeals to king Agrippa, *v. 25, 26.* 2. King Agrippa, being more close and particularly dealt with, thinks he never heard a man talk more rationally and convincingly, and owns himself almost his convert; (*v. 28.*) and Paul heartily wishes him so, *v. 29.* 3. They all agree that he was an innocent man, that he ought to be set at liberty, and that it was pity he was provoked to put a bar in his own door by appealing to Cæsar, *v. 30. 32.*

1. **T**HEN Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself; 2. I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: 3. Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. 4. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, 5. Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. 6. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: 7. Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come: for which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. 8. Why should

it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? 9. I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. 11. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Agrippa was the most honourable person in the assembly, having the title of king bestowed upon him, though otherwise having only the power of the other governors under the emperor; and though not here superior, yet senior, to Festus, and therefore Festus having opened the cause, he, as the mouth of the court, intimates to Paul a license given him to *speaking for himself*, v. 1. Paul was silent till he had that liberty allowed him; for those are not the most forward to speak, that are best prepared to speak, and speak best. This was a favour which the Jews would not allow him, or not without difficulty; but Agrippa freely gives it him. And Paul's cause was so good, that he desired no more than to have liberty to *speaking for himself*; he needed no advocate, no *Tertullus*, to speak for him.

Notice is taken of his gesture; he *stretched forth his hand*, as one that was under no consternation at all, but had perfect freedom and command of himself; it also intimates that he was in earnest, and expected their attention while he *answered for himself*. Observe, He did not insist upon his having appealed to Cæsar as an excuse for being silent; did not say, "I will be examined no more till I come to the emperor himself;" but cheerfully embraces the opportunity of doing honour to the cause he suffered for. If we must be ready to give to *every man that asketh us*, much more to every man in authority, *a reason of the hope that is in us*, 1 Pet. 3. 15.

Now in this former part of the speech,

I. Paul addresses himself with a very particular respect to Agrippa, v. 2, 3. He answered cheerfully before Felix, because he knew he had been *many years a judge to that nation*, ch. 24. 10. But his opinion of Agrippa goes further. Observe,

1. Being *accused of the Jews*, and having many ill things laid to his charge, he is glad he has an opportunity of *clearing himself*; so far is he from imagining that his being an apostle exempted him from the jurisdiction of the civil powers. Magistracy is an ordinance of God, which we have all benefit by, and therefore must all be subject to.

2. Since he is forced to *answer for himself*, he is glad it is before king Agrippa, who, being himself a proselyte to the Jewish religion, understood all matters relating to that, better than the other Roman governors did; *I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews*. It seems, Agrippa was a scholar, and had been particularly conversant in the Jewish learning; was *expert in the customs of the Jewish religion*, and knew the nature of them, and that they were not designed to be either *universal or perpetual*. He was expert also in the questions that arose upon those customs, in determining of which the Jews themselves were not all of a mind. Agrippa was well versed in the scriptures of the Old Testament, and therefore could make a better judgment upon the controversy between him and the Jews concerning Jesus being the Messiah, than another could. It is an encourage-

ment to a preacher, to have those to speak to, that are intelligent, and can discern things that differ. When Paul says, *Judge ye what I say*, yet he *speaks as to wise men*, 1 Cor. 10. 15.

3. He therefore begs that he would *hear him patiently*, *μακροθυμας*—*with long-suffering*. Paul designed a long discourse, and begs he would hear him out, and not be weary; he designs a plain discourse, and begs he would hear him with mildness, and not be angry. Paul had some reason to fear that as Agrippa, being a Jew, was well versed in the Jewish customs, and therefore the more competent judge of his cause, so he, was soured in some measure with the Jewish leaven, and therefore prejudiced against Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles; he therefore says this to sweeten him, *I beseech thee, hear me patiently*. Surely the least we can expect, when we preach the faith of Christ, is, to be heard patiently.

II. He professes that though he was hated and branded as an apostate, yet he still adhered to all that good which he first educated and trained up in; his religion was always built upon the *promise of God made unto the fathers*; and this he still *built upon*.

1. See here *what his religion was* in his youth; his *manner of life was well known*, v. 4, 5. He was not indeed born *among his own nation*, but he was bred among them at Jerusalem. Though he had of late years been conversant with the Gentiles, (which had given great offence to the Jews,) yet at his setting out in the world he was intimately acquainted with the Jewish nation, and entirely in their interests. His education was neither foreign nor obscure, it was *among his own nation at Jerusalem*, where religion and learning flourished. *All the Jews knew it*, all that could remember so long, for Paul made himself remarkable betimes. They that *knew him from the beginning*, could testify for him that he was a Pharisee; that he was not only of the Jewish religion, and an observer of all the ordinances of it, but that he was of the *most strict sect of that religion*, most nice and exact in observing the institutions of it himself, and most rigid and critical in imposing them upon others. He was not only called a Pharisee, but he *lived a Pharisee*. All that knew him, knew very well that never any Pharisee conformed more punctually to the rules of his order than he did. Nay, and he was of the better sort of Pharisees; for he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, who was an eminent rabbin of the school or house of Hillel, which was in much greater reputation for religion than the school or house of Samai.

Now if Paul was a Pharisee, and lived a Pharisee,

(1.) Then he was a scholar, a man of learning, and not an ignorant, illiterate, mechanic; the Pharisees knew the law, and were well versed in it, and in the traditional expositions of it. It was a reproach to the other apostles, that they had not had academical education, but were bred fishermen, ch. 4. 13. Therefore, that the unbelieving Jews might be left without excuse, here is an apostle raised up, that had sat at the feet of their most eminent doctors.

(2.) Then he was a moralist, a man of virtue, and not a rake, or a loose debauched young man; if he lived like a Pharisee, he was no drunkard or fornicator; and being a young Pharisee, we may hope he was no extortioner, nor had yet learned the arts which the crafty, covetous, old Pharisees had of devouring the houses of poor widows; but he was, *as touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*; he was not chargeable with any instances of open vice and profaneness; and therefore as he could not be thought to have deserted his religion because he did not know it, for he was a learned man; so he could not be thought to have deserted it because he did not love it, or was disaffected to the obligations

of it, for he was a virtuous man, and not inclined to any immorality.

(3.) Then he was orthodox, sound in the faith, and not a deist or sceptic, or a man of corrupt principles that led to infidelity; he was a Pharisee, in opposition to a Sadducee; he received those books of the Old Testament which the Sadducees rejected, believed a world of spirits, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and the rewards and punishments of the future state, all which the Sadducees denied. They could not say, He quitted his religion for want of a principle, or for want of a due regard to divine revelation; no, he always had a veneration for the ancient *promise made of God unto the fathers*, and built his hope upon it.

Now though Paul knew very well that all this would not justify him before God, nor make a righteousness for him, yet he knew it was for his reputation among the Jews, and an argument *ad hominem*—such as *Agrippa would feel*, that he was not such a man as they represented him to be. Though he counted it but loss, that he might win Christ; yet he mentioned it when it might serve to honour Christ. He knew very well that all this while he was a stranger to the spiritual nature of the divine law, to heart-religion, and that except his righteousness exceeded this, he should never go to heaven; yet he reflects upon it with some satisfaction that he had not been before his conversion an atheistical, profane, vicious man, but, according to the light he had, had *lived in all good conscience before God*.

2. See here *what his religion is*; he has not indeed such a zeal for the ceremonial law as he had in his youth; the sacrifices and offerings appointed by that, he thinks, are superseded by the great sacrifice which they typified; ceremonial pollutions and purifications from them he makes no conscience of, and thinks the Levitical priesthood is honourably swallowed up in the priesthood of Christ; but, for the main principles of his religion he is as zealous for them as ever, and more so, and resolves to live and die by them.

(1.) His religion is built upon the *promise made of God unto the fathers*; it is built upon *divine revelation*, which he receives and believes, and ventures his soul upon; it is built upon divine grace, and that grace manifested and conveyed by promise. The promise of God is the guide and ground of his religion; the promise *made to the fathers*, which was more ancient than the ceremonial law, *that covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ, and which the law, that was not till four hundred and thirty years after, could not disannul*, Gal. 3. 17. *Christ and heaven* are the two great doctrines of the gospel—that *God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*. Now these two are the matter of the *promise made unto the fathers*; it may look back as far as the promise made to father Adam, concerning the Seed of the woman, and those discoveries of a future state which the first patriarchs acted faith upon, and were saved by that faith; but it respects chiefly the promise made to father Abraham, that *in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed*, and, that *God would be a God to him, and to his seed after him*. The former meaning Christ, the latter heaven; for if God had not *prepared for them a city*, he would have been ashamed to have called himself *their God*, Heb. 11. 16.

(2.) His religion consists in the *hopes of this promise*; he places it not, as they did, in *meats and drinks*, and the observation of *carnal ordinances*; (God had often shewed what little account he made of them;) but in a believing dependence upon God's grace in the covenant, and upon the promise, which was the great charter by which the church was first incorporated. [1.] He had *hope in Christ* as the

promised Seed; he hoped to be *blessed in him*; to receive the blessing of God, and to be truly blessed. [2.] He had *hopes of heaven*; this is expressly meant, as appears by comparing ch. 24. 15. *That there shall be a resurrection of the dead*. Paul had no confidence in the flesh, but in Christ; no expectation at all of great things in this world, but of greater things in the other world, than any this world can pretend to; he had his eye upon a future state.

(3.) Herein he concurred with all the pious Jews; his faith was not only according to the scripture, but according to the testimony of the church, which was a support to it. Though they set him up as a mark, he was not singular; "*Our twelve tribes*, the body of the Jewish church, *instantly serving God day and night*, hope to come to this *promise*, to the good promised." "The people of Israel are called *the twelve tribes*, because so they were at first; and though we read not of the return of the ten tribes in a body, yet we have reason to think many particular persons, more or less of every tribe, returned to their own land; perhaps, by degrees, the *greater part* of them that were carried away. Christ speaks of the *twelve tribes*, Matt. 19. 28. Anna was of the tribe of Asher, Luke 2. 36. James directs his epistle to the *twelve tribes scattered abroad*, Jam. 1. 1. "Our twelve tribes, which make up the body of our nation, to which I and others belong. Now all the Israelites profess to believe in this promise, both of Christ and heaven, and *hope to come* to the benefits of them. They all hope for a Messiah to come, and we that are christians, hope in a *Messiah already come*; so that we all agree to build upon the same promise. They look for the *resurrection of the dead*, and the *life of the world to come*, and that is what I look for. Why should I be looked upon as advancing something dangerous and heterodox, or as an apostate from the faith and worship of the Jewish church, when I agree with them in this fundamental article? I hope to come to the same heaven at last that they hope to come to; and if we expect to meet so happily in our end, why should we fall out so unhappily by the way?"

Nay, the Jewish church not only hoped to come to this promise, but, in the hope of it, they *instantly served God day and night*. The temple-service, which consisted in a continual course of religious duties, morning and evening, day and night, from the beginning of the year to the end of it, and was kept up by the priests and Levites, and the *stationary men*, as they called them, who continually attended there to lay their hands upon the public sacrifices, as the representatives of all the twelve tribes, this service was kept up in the profession of faith in the promise of eternal life, and, in expectation of it, *Paul instantly serves God day and night in the gospel of his Son*; the *twelve tribes* by their representatives do so in the law of *Moses*, but he and they do it in *hope* of the same promise; "Therefore they ought not to look upon me as a deserter from their church, so long as I hold by the same promise that they hold by." Much more should christians, who hope in the same Jesus for the same heaven, though differing in the modes and ceremonies of worship, hope the best one of another, and live together in holy love. Or it may be meant of particular persons who continued in the communion of the Jewish church, and were very *devout in their way, serving God* with great intenseness, and a close application of mind, and constant in it, *night and day*, as Anna, who *departed not from the temple, but served God* (it is the same word here used) *in fastings and prayers night and day*, Luke 2. 37. "In this way they *hope to come to the promise*, and I hope they will." Note, Those only can upon good grounds *hope for eternal life*, that are diligent and constant

in the service of God; and the prospect of that eternal life should engage us to diligence and constancy in all religious exercises. We should go on with our work with heaven in our eye. And those that *instantly serve God day and night*, though not in our way, we ought to judge charitably of.

(4.) This was it that he was now *suffering for*; for preaching that doctrine which they themselves, if they did but understand themselves aright, must own; *I am judged for the hope of the promise made unto the fathers*. He stuck to the promise, against the ceremonial law, while his persecutors stuck to the ceremonial law, against the promise; "*It is for this hope's sake, king Agrippa, that I am accused of the Jews*; because I do that which I think myself obliged to do by the hope of that promise." It is common for men to hate and persecute the power of that religion in others, which yet they pride themselves in the form of. Paul's hope was, what *they themselves also allowed*, (ch. 24. 15.) and yet they were thus enraged against him for practising according to that hope. But it was his honour, that when he suffered as a christian, he suffered *for the hope of Israel*, ch. 28. 20.

This was it which he would persuade all that heard him cordially to embrace; (v. 8.) *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?* This seems to come in somewhat abruptly; but, it is probable, Paul said much more than is here recorded; and that he explained the *promise made to the fathers*, to be the promise of the *resurrection and eternal life*; and proved that he was in the right way of pursuing his hope of that happiness, because he believed in Christ who was *risen from the dead*, which was a pledge and earnest of that resurrection which the fathers hoped for. Paul is *therefore earnest to know the power of Christ's resurrection*, that by it he might attain to the *resurrection of the dead*; see Phil. 3. 10, 11. Now many of his hearers were Gentiles, most of them, perhaps Festus particularly, and we may suppose, when they heard him speak so much of *Christ's resurrection*, and of the *resurrection from the dead*, which the twelve tribes hoped for, that they *mocked*, as the Athenians did, began to *smile* at it, and whispered to one another what an absurd thing it was; which occasioned Paul thus to reason with them, *What! is it thought incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?* So it may be read. *If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it be marvellous in mine eyes, saith the Lord of hosts?* Zech. 8. 6. If it be above the power of nature, yet it is not above the power of the God of nature. Note, There is no reason why we should think it at all *incredible that God should raise the dead*. We are not required to believe any thing that is *incredible*, any thing that *implies a contradiction*. There are motives of credibility sufficient to carry us through all the doctrines of the christian religion, and this particularly of the resurrection of the dead. Has not God an infinite, almighty power, to which nothing is impossible? Did not he make the world at first out of nothing, with a word's speaking? Did he not form our bodies, form them out of the *clay*, and breathe into us the breath of life at first; and cannot the same power form them again out of their own clay, and put life into them again? Do we not see a kind of resurrection in nature, at the return of every spring? Has the sun such a force to raise dead plants, and should it seem incredible to us, that God should raise dead bodies.

III. He acknowledges, that while he continued a Pharisee, he was a bitter enemy to christians and christianity, and thought he ought to be so, and continued so to the moment that Christ wrought that wonderful change in him. This he mentions,

1. To shew that his becoming a christian and a

preacher, was not the product and result of any previous disposition or inclination that way, or any gradual advance of thought in favour of the christian doctrine; he did not reason himself into christianity by a chain of arguments, but was brought into the highest degree of an assurance of it, immediately from the highest degree of prejudice against it: by which it appeared, that he was made a christian and a preacher by a supernatural power; so that his conversion in such a miraculous way, was not only to himself, but to others also, a convincing proof of the truth of christianity.

2. Perhaps he designs it for such an excuse of his persecutors as Christ made for him, when he said, *They know not what they do*. Paul himself once thought he did what he ought to do when he persecuted the disciples of Christ, and he charitably thinks they laboured under the like mistake. Observe,

(1.) What a fool he was in his opinion, v. 9. *He thought with himself that he ought to do many things*, every thing that lay in his power, *contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*, contrary to his doctrine, his honour, his interest. That name did no harm; yet, because it agreed not with the notion he had of the kingdom of the Messiah, he was for doing all he could against it. He thought he did God good service, in persecuting those who called on the name of Jesus Christ. Note, It is possible for those to be confident they are in the right, who yet are evidently in the wrong; and for those to think they are doing their duty, who are wilfully persisting in the greatest sin. They that hated their brethren, and cast them out, said, *Let the Lord be glorified*, Isa. 66. 5. Under colour and pretext of religion, the most barbarous and inhuman villanies have been not only justified, but sanctified and magnified, John 16. 2.

(2.) What a fury he was in his practice, v. 10, 11. There is not a more violent principle in the world than conscience misinformed; when Paul thought it his duty to do all he could against the name of Christ, he spared no pains or cost in it. He gives an account of what he did of that kind, and aggravates it as one that was truly penitent for it; *I was a blasphemer, a persecutor*, 1 Tim. 1. 13.

[1.] He filled the jails with christians, as if they had been the worst of criminals, designing hereby not only to terrify them, but to make them odious to the people. He was the devil that *cast some of them into prison*, (Rev. 2. 10.) took them into custody, in order to their being prosecuted; *Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, both men and women*, ch. 8. 3.

[2.] He made himself the tool of the chief priests; herein from them he *received authority*, as an inferior officer, to put their laws in execution, and proud enough he was to be a man in authority for such a purpose.

[3.] He was very officious to vote, unasked, for the putting of christians to death, particularly Stephen, to whose death Saul was consenting, (ch. 8. 1.) and so made himself *particeps criminis*—*partaker of the crime*. Perhaps he was, for his great zeal, though young, made a member of the Sanhedrim, and there voted for the condemning of christians to die; or, after they were condemned, he justified what was done, and commended it, and so made himself guilty, *ex post facto*—*after the deed was committed*, as if he had been a judge or jury-man.

[4.] He brought them under punishments of an inferior nature, *in the synagogues*, where they were *scourged*, as transgressors of the rules of the synagogue; he had a hand in the punishing of divers; nay, it should seem the same persons were by his means *often punished*; as he himself was five times, 2 Cor. 11. 24.

[5.] He not only punished them for their religion, but, taking a pride in triumphing over men's consciences, he forced them to abjure their religion, by putting them to the torture; "*I compelled them to blaspheme Christ, and to say he was a deceiver, and they were deceived in him; compelled them to deny their Master, and renounce their obligations to him.*" Nothing will lie heavier upon persecutors than forcing men's consciences, how much soever they may now triumph in the proselytes they have made by their violences.

[6.] His rage swelled so against christians and christianity, that Jerusalem itself was too narrow a stage for it to act upon, but being *exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them even to strange cities.* He was mad at them, to see how much they had to say for themselves, notwithstanding all he did against them; mad to see them multiply the more for their being afflicted; he was *exceedingly mad*; the stream of his fury would admit no banks, no bounds, but he was as much a terror to himself as he was to them; so great was his vexation within himself that he could not prevail, as well as his indignation against them. Persecutors are mad men, and some of them *exceedingly mad.* Paul was mad to see that those in other cities were not so outrageous against the christians, and therefore made himself busy there where he had no business, and persecuted the christians even in strange cities. There is not a more restless principle than malice, especially which pretends conscience.

This was Paul's character, and this his manner of life in the beginning of his time; and therefore he could not be presumed to be a christian by education or custom, or that he was drawn in by hope of preferment, for all imaginable external objections lay against his being a christian.

12. Whereupon as I went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priests; 13. At mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. 14. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* 15. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. 16. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; 17. Delivering thee from the people, and *from the Gentiles*, unto whom now I send thee, 18. To open their eyes, and to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from the power of Satan* unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. 19. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20. But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts

of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. 21. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. 22. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: 23. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

All who believe a God, and have a reverence for his sovereignty, must acknowledge that they who speak and act by his direction, and by warrant from him, are not to be opposed; for that is *fighting against God.* Now Paul here, by a plain and faithful narrative of matters of fact, makes it out to this august assembly, that he had an immediate call from heaven to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentile world, which was the thing that exasperated the Jews against him. He here shews,

1. That he was *made a christian by a divine power*; notwithstanding all his prejudices against *that way*, he was brought into it on a sudden by the hand of Heaven; not compelled to confess Christ by outward force, as he had compelled others to blaspheme him, but by a divine and spiritual energy, by a revelation of Christ from above, both *to him and in him*: and this when he was in the full career of his sin, going to Damascus, to suppress christianity by persecuting the christians there; as hot as ever in the cause, his persecuting fury not in the least spent or tired, now was he tempted to give it up by the failing of his friends, for he had at this time as ample an *authority and commission from the chief priests*, as ever he had to persecute christianity, when he was obliged by a superior power to give up that, and accept another commission to preach up christianity. Two things bring about this surprising change; a *vision* from heaven, and a *voice* from heaven, which conveyed the knowledge of Christ to him, by the two learning senses of *seeing and hearing.*

1. He *saw a heavenly vision*; the circumstances of which were such that it could not be a *delusion*—*deceptio visus*, but it was without doubt, a *divine appearance.*

(1.) He *saw a great light, a light from heaven*, such as could not be produced by any art, for it was not in the night, but at *mid-day*; it was not in a house where tricks might have been played with him, but it was in the *way*, in the open air; it was such a light as was *above the brightness of the sun*, outshone and eclipsed that, (Isa. 24. 23.) and this could not be the product of Paul's own fancy, for it *shone round about them that journeyed with him*: they were all sensible of their being surrounded with this inundation of light, which made the sun itself to be in their eyes a *lesser light.* The force and power of this light appeared in the effects of it; they *all fell to the earth*, upon the sight of it, such a mighty consternation did it put them into; this light was lightning for its force, yet did not pass away as lightning, but continued to *shine round about them.* In Old Testament times God commonly manifested himself in the thick darkness, and made that his pavilion, 2 Chron. 6. 1. He spake to Abraham in a great darkness, (Gen. 15. 12.) for that was a dispensation of darkness; but now *life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel*, Christ appeared in a *great light.* In the creating of grace, as of the world, the first thing created is *light*, 2 Cor. 4. 6.

(2.) Christ himself *appeared* to him; (v. 16.) *I have appeared to thee for this purpose.* Christ was in this light, though they that travelled with Paul *saw the light only*, and not Christ in the light. It is not every knowledge that will serve to make us christians, but it must be the knowledge of Christ.

2. He heard a heavenly voice, an articulate one, *speaking to him*; it is here said to be in the Hebrew tongue, (which was not taken notice of before,) his native language, the language of his religion; to intimate to him, that though he must be sent among the Gentiles, yet he must not forget that he was a Hebrew, nor make himself a stranger to the Hebrew language. In what Christ said to him, we may observe, (1.) That he called him by his name, and repeated it, *Saul, Saul*; which would surprise and startle him; and the more, because he was now in a strange place, where he thought nobody knew him. (2.) That he convinced him of sin, of that great sin which he was now in the commission of, the sin of persecuting the christians, and shews him the absurdity of it. (3.) That he interested himself in the sufferings of his followers; *Thou persecutest me*, (v. 14.) and again, *It is Jesus whom thou persecutest*, v. 15. Little did Paul think, when he was trampling upon those that he looked upon as the burthens and blemishes of this earth, that he was insulting one that was so much the glory of heaven. (4.) That he checked him for his wilful resisting of those convictions; *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*, or goads, *as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.* Paul's spirit at first perhaps began to rise, but he is told it is at his peril, and then he yields. Or, it was spoken by way of caution; "Take heed lest thou resist convictions, for they are designed to affect thee, not to affront thee." (5.) That, upon his inquiry, he made himself known to him; Paul asked, (v. 15.) "*Who art thou, Lord?*" Let me know who it is that speaks to me from heaven, that I may answer him accordingly?" And he said, "*I am Jesus*; he whom thou hast despised, and hated, and vilified; I bear that name which thou hast made so odious, and the naming of it criminal." Paul thought Jesus was buried in the earth, and though stolen out of his own sepulchre, yet laid in some other; all the Jews were taught to say so, and therefore he is amazed to hear him speak from heaven, to see him surrounded with all this glory, whom he had loaded with all possible ignominy. This convinced him that the doctrine of Jesus was divine and heavenly, and not only not to be opposed, but to be cordially embraced; *that Jesus is the Messiah*, for he is not only risen from the dead, but he has received from God the Father honour and glory; and this is enough to make him a christian immediately, to quit the society of the persecutors, whom the Lord from heaven thus appears for.

II. That he was made a minister by a divine authority; *that the same Jesus that appeared to him in that glorious light*, ordered him to go preach the gospel to the Gentiles; he did not run without sending, nor was he sent by men like himself, but by him whom the Father sent, John 20. 21. What is said of his being an apostle, is here joined immediately to that which was said to him by the way, but it appears by ch. 9. 15. and 22. 15, 17, &c. that it was spoken to him afterward; but he puts the two together for brevity's sake; *Rise, and stand upon thy feet.* Those whom Christ, by the light of his gospel, casts down in humiliation for sin, shall find that it is in order to their rising and standing upon their feet, in spiritual grace, strength, and comfort. If Christ has torn, it is that he might heal; if he has cast down, it is that he may raise up. *Rise then, and shake thyself from the dust*; (Isa. 52. 2.) help thyself, and Christ shall help thee. He must stand up, for Christ has work for him to do; has an errand,

and a very great errand, to send him upon; *I have appeared to thee, to make thee a minister.* Christ has the making of his own ministers, they have both their qualifications and their commissions from him. *Paul thanks Christ Jesus who put him into the ministry*, 1 Tim. 1. 12. *Christ appeared to him to make him a minister.* One way or other, *Christ will manifest himself to all those whom he makes his ministers; for how can they preach him, who do not know him? And how can they know him, to whom he does not by his Spirit make himself known?* Observe,

1. The office to which Paul is appointed; he is made a minister, to attend on Christ, and act for him, as a witness; to give evidence in his cause, and attest the truth of his doctrine; he must testify the gospel of the grace of God; Christ appeared to him, that he might appear for Christ before men.

2. The matter of Paul's testimony; he must give an account to the world, (1.) *Of the things which he had seen*, now at this time; must tell people of Christ's manifesting himself to him by the way, and what he said to him; he saw these things, that he might publish them, and he did take all occasions to publish them, as here, and before, ch. 22. (2.) *Of those things in which he would appear to him.* Christ now settled a correspondence with Paul, which he designed afterward to keep up, and only told him now that he should hear further from him. Paul at first had but confused notions of the gospel, till Christ appeared to him, and gave him fuller instructions. *The gospel he preached he received from Christ immediately*; (Gal. 1. 12.) but he received it gradually, some at one time, and some at another, as there was occasion. Christ often appeared to Paul, oftener, it is likely, than is recorded, and still taught him, *that he might still teach the people knowledge.*

3. The spiritual protection he was taken under, while he was thus employed as Christ's witness; *all the powers of darkness could not prevail against him till he had finished his testimony*; (v. 17.) *delivering thee from the people of the Jews, and from the Gentiles.* Note, Christ's witnesses are under his special care, and though they may fall into the hands of their enemies, yet he will take care to deliver them out of their hands, and he knows how to do it. Christ had shewed Paul at this time *what great things he must suffer*, (ch. 9. 16.) and yet tells him here he will deliver him from the people. Note, Great sufferings are reconcilable to the promise of the deliverance of God's people, for it is not promised that they shall be kept from trouble, but kept through it; and sometimes God delivers them into the hands of their persecutors, that he may have the honour of delivering them out of their hands.

4. The special commission given him to go among the Gentiles, and the errand upon which he is sent to them; it was some years after Paul's conversion, before he was sent to the Gentiles, or (for aught appears) knew any thing of his being designed for that purpose; (see ch. 22. 21.) but at length he is ordered to steer his course that way.

(1.) There is great work to be done among the Gentiles, and Paul must be instrumental in doing it. Two things must be done, which their case calls for the doing of:

[1.] *A world that sits in darkness* must be enlightened; those must be brought to know the things that belong to their everlasting peace, who are yet ignorant of them; to know God as their End, and Christ as their Way, who as yet know nothing of either. He is sent to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light. His preaching shall not only make known to them those things which they had not before heard of, but shall be the vehicle of the divine grace and power by which their understandings shall be enlightened to receive those things, and

bid them welcome. Thus he shall *open their eyes*, which before were *shut against the light*, and they shall be willing to understand themselves, their own case, and interest. Christ *opens the heart by opening the eyes*; does not lead men blindfold, but gives them to see their own way. He is sent not only to *open their eyes* for the present, but to keep them open, to *turn them from darkness to light*, from following false and blind guides, their oracles, divinations, and superstitious usages received by tradition from their fathers, and the corrupt notions and ideas they had of their gods, to follow a divine revelation of unquestionable certainty and truth. This was turning them *from darkness to light*, from the ways of darkness to those on which the light shines. The great design of the gospel is, to instruct the ignorant, and to rectify the mistakes of those who are in error, that things may be set and seen in a true light.

[2.] A world that lies in wickedness, in the wicked one, must be sanctified and reformed; it is not enough for them to have *their eyes opened*, they must have their hearts renewed; not enough to be *turned from darkness to light*, but they must be *turned from the power of Satan unto God*; which will follow of course; for Satan rules by the power of darkness, and God by the convincing evidence of light. Sinners are under the *power of Satan*; idolaters were so in a special manner, they paid their homage to devils. All sinners are under the influence of his temptations, yield themselves captives to him, are at his beck; converting grace *turns them from under the dominion of Satan*, and brings them into subjection to God; to conform to the rules of his word, and comply with the dictates and directions of his Spirit, *translates them out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son*. When gracious dispositions are strong in the soul, (as corrupt and sinful dispositions had been,) it is then *turned from the power of Satan unto God*.

(2.) There is a great happiness designed for the Gentiles by this work—that *they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified*; they are *turned from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, from the slavery of Satan to the service of God*; not that God may be a gainer by them, but that they may be gainers by him.

[1.] That they may be restored to his favour, which by sin they have forfeited and thrown themselves out of; that *they may receive forgiveness of sins*. They are delivered from the dominion of sin, that they may be saved from that death which is the wages of sin. Not that they may merit forgiveness as a debt or reward, but that *they may receive it as a free gift*; that they may be qualified to receive the comfort of it. They are persuaded to lay down their arms, and return to their allegiance, that they may have the benefit of the act of indemnity, and may plead it in arrest of the judgment to be given against them.

[2.] That they may be happy in the fruition of him; not only that *they may have their sins pardoned*, but that *they may have an inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me*. Note, First, Heaven is an inheritance, it descends to all the children of God; for if children, then heirs. That they may have, *κληρον*—a lot, (so it might be read,) alluding to the inheritances of Canaan, which were appointed by lot, and that also is the act of God, the disposal thereof is of the Lord. That they may have a right, so some read it; not by merit, but purely by grace. Secondly, All that are effectually turned from sin to God, are not only pardoned, but preferred; have not only their attainder reversed, but a patent of honour given them, and a grant of a rich inheritance. And the forgiveness of sins makes way for this inheritance, by taking that out of the way, which alone hindered. Thirdly, All that shall be

saved hereafter, are sanctified now; those that have the heavenly inheritance, must have it in this way, they must be prepared and made meet for it; none can be happy, that are not holy; nor shall any be saints in heaven, that are not first saints on earth. Fourthly, We need no more to make us happy than to have our lot among them that are sanctified, to fare as they fare, that is having our lot among the chosen, for they are chosen to salvation through sanctification; they who are sanctified shall be glorified; let us therefore now cast in our lot among them, by coming into the communion of saints, and be willing to take our lot with them, and share with them in their afflictions, which (how grievous soever) our lot with them in the inheritance will abundantly make amends for. Fifthly, We are sanctified and saved by faith in Christ; some refer it to the word next before, sanctified by faith, for faith purifies the heart, and applies to the soul those precious promises, and subjects the soul to the influence of that grace, by which we partake of a divine nature; others refer it to the receiving both pardon and the inheritance; it is by faith accepting the grant, it comes all to one; for it is by faith that we are justified, sanctified, and glorified; by faith, *ἡ ἡμεῖς*—that faith which is in me; it is emphatically expressed; that faith which not only receives divine revelation in general, but which in a particular manner fastens upon Jesus Christ, and his mediation; by which we rely upon Christ as the Lord our Righteousness, and resign ourselves to him as the Lord our Ruler; this is that by which we receive the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and eternal life.

III. That he had discharged his ministry, pursuant to his commission, by divine aid, and under divine direction and protection. God, who called him to be an apostle, owned him in his apostolical work, and carried him on in it with enlargement and success.

1. God gave him a heart to comply with the call; (v. 19.) *I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision*, for any one would say he ought to be obedient to it; heavenly visions have a commanding power over earthly counsels, and it is at our peril if we be disobedient to them; yet if Paul had conferred with flesh and blood, and been swayed by his secular interest, he would have done as Jonah did, gone any whither rather than upon this errand; but God opened his ear, and he was not rebellious; he accepted the commission, and having with it received his instructions, he applied himself to act accordingly.

2. He enabled him to go through a great deal of work, though in it he grappled with a great deal of difficulty, v. 20. He applied himself to the preaching of the gospel with all vigour. (1.) He began at Damascus, where he was converted, for he resolved to lose no time, ch. 9. 20. (2.) When he came to Jerusalem, where he had his education, he there witnessed for Christ, where he had most furiously set himself against him, ch. 9. 28. (3.) He preached throughout all the coasts of Judea, in the country towns and villages, as Christ had done; he made the first offer of the gospel to the Jews, as Christ had appointed, and did not leave them till they had wilfully thrust the gospel from them; and then, (4.) He turned to the Gentiles, and laid out himself for the good of their souls, labouring more abundantly than any of the apostles, nay perhaps than all put together.

3. His preaching was all practical; he did not go about to fill people's heads with airy notions, did not amuse them with nice speculations, nor set them together by the ears with matters of doubtful disputation, but he shewed them, declared it, demonstrated it, that they ought, (1.) To repent of their sins, to be sorry for them, and to confess them, and

enter into covenant against them; they ought to *be-think themselves*, so the word *μετανοῶν* properly signifies; they ought to change their mind, and change their way, and undo what they had done amiss. (2.) *To turn to God*; they must not only conceive an antipathy to sin, but they must come into a conformity to God; must not only *turn from that which is evil, but turn to that which is good*; they must *turn to God*, in love and affection, and *return to God* in duty and obedience, and turn and return from *the world and the flesh*; this is that which is required from the whole revolted degenerate race of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, *ἐπιστρέφοντες ἑαυτοὺς ὑπὸ τῷ Θεῷ*—*to turn back to God, even to him; to turn to him as our chief Good and highest End, as our Ruler and Portion, turn our eye to him, turn our heart to him, and turn our feet unto his testimonies.* (3.) *To do works meet for repentance.* This was what John preached, who was the first gospel preacher, Matt. 3. 8. Those that profess repentance, must practise it, must live a life of repentance, must in every thing carry it as becomes penitents. It is not enough to speak penitent words, but we must do works agreeable to those words. As true faith, so true repentance, will work. Now what fault could be found with such preaching as this? Had it not a direct tendency to reform the world, and to redress its grievances, and to revive natural religion?

4. The Jews had no quarrel with him but upon this account, that he did all he could to persuade people to be religious, and to bring them to God, by bringing them to Christ; (v. 21.) It was for those causes, and no other, *that the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me*; and let any one judge whether those were crimes *worthy of death or of bonds.* He suffered ill, not only for doing well himself, but for doing good to others. They attempted to kill him, it was his *precious life that they hunted for*, and hated, because it was a useful life; *they caught him in the temple, worshipping God, and there they set upon him, as if the better place the better deed.*

5. He had no help but from heaven; supported and carried on by that, he went on in this great work; (v. 22.) *“Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue unto this day; ἵστημι—I have stood, my life has been preserved, and my work continued; I have stood my ground, and have not been beaten off; I have stood to what I said, and have not been afraid or ashamed to persist in it.”* It was now above twenty years since Paul was converted, and all that time he had been very busy preaching the gospel in the midst of hazards; and what was it that bore him up? Not any strength of his own resolutions, but *having obtained help of God*; for therefore, because the work was so great, and he had so much opposition, he could not otherwise have gone on in it, but *by help obtained of God.* Note, Those who are employed in work for God, shall *obtain help from God*; for he will not be wanting in necessary assistances to his servants. And our *continuance to this day*, must be attributed to *help obtained of God*; we had sunk, if he had not borne us up; had fallen off, if he had not carried us on; and it must be acknowledged, with thankfulness to his praise. Paul mentions it as an evidence that he had his commission from God, that from him he had ability to execute it. The preachers of the gospel could never have done, and suffered, and prospered, as they did, if they had not had immediate help from heaven, which they would not have had, if it had not been the cause of God that they now were pleading.

6. He preached no doctrine but what agreed with the scriptures of the Old Testament; he *witnessed both to small and great, to young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, obscure and illustrious,*

all being concerned in it; it was an evidence of the *condescending grace of the gospel*, that it was witnessed to the meanest, and the poor were welcome to the knowledge of it; and of the incontestable truth and power of it, that it was neither afraid nor ashamed to shew itself to the greatest. The enemies of Paul objected against him, that he preached something more than that *men should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance*; those indeed were but what the prophets of the Old Testament had preached; but, beside these, he had preached Christ, and his death, and his resurrection, and that was what they quarrelled with him for, as appears by ch. 25. 19. *that he affirmed Jesus to be alive*; “And so I did,” says Paul, “and so I do, but therein also I say no other than that which Moses and the prophets said should come; and what greater honour can be done to them, than to shew that what they foretold is accomplished, and in the appointed season too; that what they said should come is come, and at the time they prefixed?”

Three things they prophesied, and Paul preached: (1.) *That Christ should suffer*; that the Messiah should be a *Sufferer*—*παθόντις*; not only a Man, and capable of suffering, but that, as Messiah, he should be appointed to sufferings; that his ignominious death should be not only consistent with, but pursuant of, his undertaking. *The cross of Christ was a stumbling-block to the Jews*, and Paul’s preaching that was the great thing that exasperated them; but Paul stands to it, that, in preaching that, he preached the fulfilling of the Old Testament predictions, and therefore they ought not only not to be offended at what he preached, but to embrace it, and subscribe to it.

(2.) *That he should be the first that should rise from the dead*; not the first in time, but the first in influence; that he should be the *Chief of the resurrection, the Head, or principal One*, *πρωτὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν*, in the same sense that he is called the *First-born from the dead*, (Rev. 1. 5.) and the *First-born from the dead*, Col. 1. 18. He opened the *womb of the grave*, as the first-born are said to do, and made way for our resurrection; and he is said to be the *first-fruits of them that slept*, (1 Cor. 15. 20.) for he sanctified the harvest. He was the *first that rose from the dead, to die no more*; and to shew that the resurrection of all believers is in virtue of his, just when he arose, *many dead bodies of saints arose, and went into the holy city*, Matt. 27. 53.

(3.) *That he should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles; to the people of the Jews* in the first place, for he was *to be the glory of his people Israel*, to them he shewed light by himself; and then to the *Gentiles*, by the ministry of his apostles, for he was *to be a Light to lighten them who sat in darkness.* In this Paul refers to his commission, (v. 18.) *To turn them from darkness to light.* He rose from the dead, on purpose that he might shew light to the people, that he might give a convincing proof of the truth of his doctrine, and might send it with so much the greater power, both among Jews and Gentiles. This also was foretold by the Old Testament prophets, that the *Gentiles should be brought to the knowledge of God by the Messiah*; and what was there in all this, that the Jews could justly be displeased at?

24. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. 25. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus. but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. 26. For

the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. 27. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. 28. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. 29. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. 30. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: 31. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death, or of bonds. 32. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.

We have reason to think that Paul had a great deal more to say in defence of *the gospel* he preached, and for the honour of it, and to recommend it to the good opinion of this noble audience; he was just fallen upon that which was the life of the cause—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and here he is in his element; now he warms more than before, his mouth is opened towards them, his heart is enlarged; lead him but to this subject, and let him have leave to go on, and he will never know when to conclude; for the power of Christ's death, and the fellowship of his sufferings, are with him inexhaustible subjects. It was a thousand pities then that he should be interrupted, as he is here, and that, *being permitted to speak for himself*, (v. 1.) he should not be *permitted* to say all he designed. But it was a hardship often put upon him, and is a disappointment to us too, who read his discourse with so much pleasure.

But there is no remedy, the court thinks it is time to proceed to give in their judgment upon his case.

I. Festus, the Roman governor, is of opinion, that the poor man is crazed, and that Bedlam was the fittest place for him. He is convinced that he is no criminal, no bad man, that should be punished, but he takes him to be a lunatic, a distracted man, that should be pitied, but at the same time should not be heeded, nor a word he says regarded; and thus he thinks he has found out an expedient to excuse himself, both from condemning Paul as a prisoner, and from believing him as a preacher; for if he be not *compos mentis—in his senses*, he is not to be either condemned or credited. Now here observe,

1. What it was that Festus said of him, v. 24. *He said it with a loud voice*, he did not whisper it to those that sat next him; if so, it had been the more excusable, but (without consulting *Agrippa*, to whose judgment he had seemed to pay profound deference, ch. 25. 26.) *said aloud*, that he might oblige Paul to break off his discourse, and might divert the auditors from attending to it, “*Paul, thou art beside thyself*, thou talkest like a madman, like one with a heated brain, that knowest not what thou sayest,” yet he does not suppose that a guilty conscience had disturbed his reason, or that his sufferings, and the rage of his enemies against him, had given any shock to it; but he puts the most candid construction that could be upon his delirium; *Much learning hath made thee mad*, thou hast cracked thy brains with

studying. This he speaks, not so much in anger, as in scorn and contempt; he did not understand what Paul said, it was above his capacity, it was all a riddle to him; and therefore he imputes it all to a heated imagination. *Si non vis intelligi, debes negligi—If thou art not willing to be understood, thou oughtest to be neglected.* (1.) He owns Paul to be a scholar, and a man of learning, because he could so readily refer to what *Moses and the prophets* wrote, books that he was a stranger to; and even this is *turned to his reproach*. The apostles who were fishermen, were despised because they had no learning; Paul, who was a university-man, and bred a Pharisee, is despised as having *too much learning*, more than did him good. Thus the enemies of Christ's ministers will always have something or other to upbraid them with! (2.) He reproaches him as a madman. The prophets of the Old Testament were thus stigmatized, to prejudice people against them by putting them into an ill name; *Wherefore came this mad fellow unto thee?* Said the captains of the prophet, 2 Kings 9. 11. Hos. 9. 7. John Baptist and Christ were represented as *having a devil*, as being crazed. It is probable that Paul now spake with more life and earnestness than he did in the beginning of his discourse, and used some gestures that were expressive of his zeal, and therefore Festus put this invidious character upon him, which perhaps never a one in the company but himself thought of. It is not so harmless a suggestion as some make it, to say concerning them that are zealous in religion above others, that they are crazed.

2. How Paul cleared himself from this invidious imputation, which whether he had ever lain under before is not certain; it should seem, it had been said of him by the false apostles, for he says, (2 Cor. 5. 13.) *If we be beside ourselves*, as they say we are, *it is to God*; but he was never charged with this before *the Roman governor*, and therefore he must say something to this.

(1.) He denies the charge, with due respect indeed to *the governor*, but with justice to himself, protesting that there was neither ground nor colour for it; (v. 25.) “*I am not mad, most noble Festus*, nor ever was, nor any thing like it; the use of my reason, thanks be to God, has been all my days continued to me, and at this time I do not ramble, *but speak the words of truth and soberness*, and know what I say.” Observe, Though Festus gave Paul this base and contemptuous usage, not becoming a gentleman, much less a judge, yet Paul is so far from resenting it, and being provoked by it, that he gives him all possible respect, compliments him with his title of honour, *most noble Festus*, to teach us *not to render railing for railing*, nor one invidious character for another, but to speak civilly to those who speak slightly of us. It becomes us, upon all occasions, *to speak the words of truth and soberness*, and then we may despise the unjust censures of men.

(2.) He appeals to *Agrippa* concerning what he spake; (v. 26.) *For the king knows of these things*, concerning Christ, and his death and resurrection, and the prophecies of the Old Testament, which had their accomplishment therein; he therefore *spake freely before him*, who knew those were no fancies, but matters of fact, knew something of them, and therefore would be willing to know more; *for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him*; no, not that which he had related concerning his own conversion, and the commission he had received to *preach the gospel*. *Agrippa* could not but have heard of it, having been so long conversant among the Jews. *This thing was not done in a corner*; all the country rang of it; and any of the Jews present might have witnessed for him, that they had heard it many a time from others, and therefore it was unreasonable to censure him as a distract

ed man for relating it, much more for speaking of *the death and resurrection of Christ*, which was so universally spoken of. Peter tells Cornelius and his friends, (ch. 10. 37.) *That word you know which was published throughout all Judea concerning Christ*; and therefore Agrippa could not be ignorant of it, and it was a shame for Festus that he was so.

II. Agrippa is so far from thinking him a madman, that he thinks he never heard a man argue more strongly, nor talk more to the purpose.

1. Paul applies himself closely to Agrippa's conscience. Some think Festus was displeased at Paul because he kept his eye upon Agrippa, and directed his discourse to him all along, and that therefore he gave him that interruption, v. 24. But if that was the thing that affronted him, Paul regards it not; he will speak to those who understand him, and whom he is likely to fasten something upon, and therefore applies himself still to Agrippa; and because he had mentioned *Moses and the prophets*, as confirming the *gospel he preached*, he refers Agrippa to them; (v. 27.) "*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? Dost thou receive the scriptures of the Old Testament as a divine revelation, and admit them as foretelling good things to come?*" He does not stay for an answer, but, in compliment to Agrippa, takes it for granted; *I know that thou believest*; for every one knew that Agrippa professed the Jews' religion, as his fathers had done, and therefore both knew the writings of the prophets, and gave credit to them. Note, It is good dealing with those who have acquaintance with the scriptures, and believe them; for such one has some hold of.

2. Agrippa owns there was a great deal of reason in what Paul said; (v. 28.) *Almost thou persuadest me to be a christian*. Some understand this as spoken ironically, and read it thus, *Wouldest thou in so little a time persuade me to be a christian?* But taking it so, it is an acknowledgment that Paul spoke very much to the purpose, and that, whatever others thought of it, to his mind there came a convincing power along with what he said; "Paul, thou art too hasty, thou canst not think to make a convert of me all of a sudden." Others take it as spoken seriously, and as a confession that he was in a manner, or within a little, convinced that *Christ was the Messiah*; for he could not but own, and had many a time thought so within himself, that the prophecies of the Old Testament had had their accomplishment in him; and now that it is urged thus solemnly upon him, he is ready to yield to the conviction, he begins to sound a parley, and to think of surrendering, he is as near persuaded to believe in Christ, as Felix, when he trembled, was to leave his sins; he sees a great deal of reason for christianity, the proofs of it, he owns, are strong, and such as he cannot answer, the objections against it trifling, and such as he cannot for shame insist upon; so that if it were not for his obligations to the ceremonial law, and his respect to the religion of his fathers and of his country, or his regard to his dignity as a king, and to his secular interests, he would turn christian immediately. Note, Many are almost persuaded to be religious, who are not quite persuaded; they are under strong convictions of their duty, and of the excellency of the ways of God, but yet are overruled by some external inducements, and do not pursue their convictions.

3. Paul, not being allowed time to pursue his argument, concludes with a compliment, or rather a pious wish, that *all his hearers were christians*, and this wish turned into prayer, *ὡς εἰπαὶ ὑμῖν τὸ θεῶν—I pray to God for it*; (v. 29.) it was his heart's desire and prayer to God for them all, that they might be saved, Rom. 10. 1. *That not only thou, but all*

that hear me this day, (for he has the same kind design upon them all,) *were both almost, and altogether, such as I am, except these bonds*. Hereby,

(1.) He professes his resolution to cleave to his religion, as that which he was entirely satisfied in, and determined to live and die by. In wishing that they were all as he was, he does in effect declare against ever being as they were, whether Jews or Gentiles, how much soever it might be to his worldly advantage. He adheres to the instruction God gave to the prophet, (Jer. 15. 19.) *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them*. (2.) He intimates his satisfaction not only in the truth, but in the benefit and advantage, of christianity; he had so much comfort in it for the present, and was so sure it would end in his eternal happiness, that he could not wish better to the best friend he had in the world, than to wish him such a one as he was, a faithful zealous disciple of Jesus Christ. *Let mine enemy be as the wicked*, says Job, ch. 27. 7. Let my friend be as the christian, says Paul. (3.) He intimates his trouble and concern that Agrippa went no further than being almost such a one as he was, almost a christian, and not altogether one; for he wishes that he and the rest of them might be not only almost, (what good would that do?) but altogether such as he was, sincere thorough-paced christians. (4.) He intimates that it was the concern, and would be the unspeakable happiness, of every one of them to become true christians; that there is grace enough in Christ for all, be they ever so many; enough for each, be they ever so craving. (5.) He intimates the hearty good-will he bore to them all; he wishes them, [1.] As well as he wished his own soul, that they might be as happy in Christ as he was. [2.] Better than he was now as to his outward condition, for he excepts these bonds; he wishes they might all be comforted christians, as he was, but not persecuted christians, as he was; that they might taste as much as he did of the advantages that attended religion, but not so much of its crosses. They had made light of his imprisonment, and were in no concern for him; Felix continued him in bonds to gratify the Jews; now this would have tempted many a one to wish them all in his bonds, that they might know what it was to be confined as he was, and then they would know the better how to pity him: but he was so far from this, that, when he wished them in bonds to Christ, he desired they might never be in bonds for Christ. Nothing could be said more tenderly, nor with a better grace.

III. They all agree that Paul was an innocent man, and was wronged in this prosecution.

1. The court broke up with some precipitation; (v. 30.) *When he had spoken that obliging word*, (v. 29.) which moved them all, the king was afraid, if he were permitted to go on, he would say something yet more moving, which might work upon some of them to appear more in his favour than was convenient, and perhaps might prevail with them to turn christians; the king himself found his own heart begin to yield, and durst not trust himself to hear more, but, like Felix, dismissed Paul for this time. They ought in justice to have asked the prisoner whether he had any more to say for himself; but they think he has said enough, and therefore the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with him, concluding the case was plain, and with that they contented themselves, when Paul had more to say, which would have made it plainer.

2. They all concurred in an opinion of Paul's innocence, v. 31. The court withdrew to consult of the matter, to know one another's minds upon it, and they talked among themselves, all to the same purport, that this man doeth nothing worthy of

death; he is not a criminal that deserves to die; nay he *doeth nothing worthy of bonds*; he is not a dangerous man, whom it is prudence to confine. After this, Nero made a law for the putting of those to death who professed the christian religion, but as yet there was *no law* of that kind among the Romans, and therefore *no transgression*; and this judgment of their's, is a testimony against that wicked law which Nero made not long after this; that Paul the most active zealous christian that ever was, was adjudged, even by those that were no friends to his way, to have *done nothing worthy of death, or of bonds*. Thus was he made manifest in the consciences of those who yet would not receive his doctrine; and the clamours of the hot-headed Jews, who cried out, *Away with him, it was not fit he should live*, were shamed by the moderate counsels of this court.

3. Agrippa gave his judgment, *that he might have been set at liberty, if he had not himself appealed to Cæsar*, (v. 32.) but by that appeal he had put a bar in his own door. Some think that by the Roman law this was true, that, when a prisoner had appealed to the supreme court, the inferior courts could no more discharge him than they could condemn him; and we suppose the law was so, if the prosecutors joined issue upon the appeal, and consented to it. But it does not appear that in Paul's case the prosecutor did so; he was forced to do it, to screen himself from their fury, when he saw the governor did not take the care he ought to have done for his protection. And therefore others think that Agrippa and Festus, being unwilling to disoblige the Jews by setting him at liberty, made this serve for an excuse of their continuing him in custody, when they themselves knew they might have justified the discharging of him. Agrippa, who was but almost persuaded to be a christian, proves no better than if he had not been at all persuaded.

And now I cannot tell, (1.) Whether Paul repented of his having appealed to Cæsar, and wished he had not done it, blaming himself for it as a rash thing, now he saw that was the only thing that hindered his discharge. He had reason perhaps to reflect upon it with regret, and to charge himself with imprudence and impatience in it, and some distrust of the divine protection. He had better have appealed to God than to Cæsar. It confirms what Solomon says, (Ecc. 6. 12.) *Who knows what is good for man in this life?* What we think is for our welfare often proves to be a trap; such short-sighted creatures are we, and so ill-advised in leaning, as we do, to *our own understanding*. Or, (2.) Whether, notwithstanding this, he was satisfied in what he had done, and was easy in his reflections upon it; his appealing to Cæsar was lawful, and what became a Roman citizen, and would help to make his cause considerable; and forasmuch as when he did it, it appeared to him, as the case then stood, to be *for the best*, though afterward it appeared otherwise, he did not vex himself with any self-reproach in the matter, but believed there was a providence in it, and it would issue well at last. And besides, he was told in a vision, that he must *bear witness to Christ at Rome*, ch. 23. 11. And it is all one to him, whether he goes thither a prisoner or at his liberty; he knows *the counsel of the Lord shall stand*, and says, *Let it stand. The will of the Lord be done*.

CHAP. XXVII.

This whole chapter is taken up with an account of Paul's voyage toward Rome, when he was sent thither a prisoner by Festus the governor, upon his appeal to Cæsar. I. The beginning of the voyage was well enough, it was calm and prosperous, v. 1. . 8. II. Paul gave them notice of a storm coming, but could not prevail with them to lie by, v. 9 .

11. III. As they pursued their voyage, they met with a great deal of tempestuous weather, which reduced them to such extremity, that they counted upon nothing but being cast away, v. 12. . 20. IV. Paul assured them, that though they would not be advised by him to prevent their coming into this danger, yet by the good providence of God they should be brought safely through it, and none of them should be lost, v. 21. . 26. V. At length they were at midnight thrown upon an island, which proved to be Malta, and then they were in the utmost danger imaginable, but were assisted by Paul's counsel to keep the mariners in the ship, and encouraged by his comforts to eat their meat, and have a good heart on it, v. 27. . 36. VI. Their narrow escape with their lives, when they came to shore, when the ship was wrecked, but all the persons wonderfully preserved, v. 37. . 44.

1. **A**ND when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. 2. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian, of Thessalonica, being with us. 3. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. 4. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. 6. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. 7. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; 8. And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. 9. Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, 10. And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but, also of our lives. 11. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

It does not appear *how long* it was after Paul's conference with Agrippa that he was sent away for Rome, pursuant to his appeal to Cæsar; but it is likely they took the first convenience they could hear of to do it; in the mean time Paul is in the midst of his friends at Cæsarea—they comforts to him, and he a blessing to them.

But here we are told,

I. How Paul was shipped off for Italy; a long voyage, but there is no remedy. He has appealed to Cæsar, and to Cæsar he must go. *It was determined that we should sail into Italy*, for to Rome they must go by sea; it would have been a vast way about to go by land. Hence when the Roman conquest of the Jewish nation is foretold, it is said, (Numb. 24. 24.) *Ships shall come from Shittim*, that is, *Italy*,

and shall afflict Eber, that is, the Hebrews. *It was determined* by the counsel of God, before it was determined by the counsel of Festus, that Paul should go to Rome; for whatever man intended, God had work for him to do there. Now here we are told,

1. Whose custody he was committed to; to *one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band*; as Cornelius was of the Italian band, or legion, *ch. 10.*

1. He had *soldiers under him*, who were a guard upon Paul, that he might not make his escape, and likewise to protect him, that he might have no mischief done him.

2. What bottom he embarked in; they went on board a ship of Adramyttium, (*v. 2.*) a sea-port of Africa, whence this ship brought African goods, and, as it should seem, made a coasting voyage for Syria, where those goods come to a good market.

3. What company he had in this voyage; there were some prisoners that were committed to the custody of the same centurion, who, probably, had appealed to Cæsar too, or were upon some other account removed to Rome, to be tried there, or to be examined as witnesses against some prisoners there; perhaps some notorious offenders, like Barabbas, who were therefore ordered to be brought before the emperor himself. Paul was linked with these, as Christ with the thieves that were crucified with him, and was obliged to take his lot with them in this voyage; and we find in this chapter (*v. 42.*) that for their sakes he had like to have been killed, but for his sake they were preserved. Note, It is no new thing for the *innocent to be numbered among the transgressors*. But he had also some of his friends with him, Luke particularly, the penman of this book, for he puts himself in all along, *He sailed into Italy*, and, *He launched*, *v. 2.* Aristarchus a Thessalonian is particularly named, as being now in his company. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that Trophimus the Ephesian went off with him, but that he left him sick at Miletum, (*2 Tim. 4. 20.*) when he passed by those coasts of Asia mentioned here, (*v. 2.*) and that there likewise he left Timothy. It was a comfort to Paul to have the society of some of his friends in this tedious voyage, with whom he might converse freely, though he had so much loose profane company about him. Those that go long voyages at sea, are commonly necessitated to sojourn, as it were, in Mesek and Kedar, and have need of wisdom, that they may do good to the bad company they are in, may make them better, or at least be made never the worse by them.

II. What course they steered, and what places they touched at; which are particularly recorded for the confirming of the truth of the history to those who lived at that time, and could by their own knowledge tell of their being at such and such a place.

1. They touched at Sidon, not far off from where they went on board; thither they came *the next day*. And that which is observable there, is, that *Julius the centurion* was extraordinarily civil to Paul; it is probable that he knew his case, and was one of the *chief captains or principal men* that heard him plead his own cause before Agrippa, (*ch. 25. 23.*) and was convinced of his innocency, and the injury done him; and therefore, though he was committed to him as a prisoner, he treated him as a friend, as a scholar, as a gentleman, and as a man that had an interest in heaven; he *gave him liberty*, while the business of the ship stayed at Sidon, to *go among his friends* there, to *refresh himself*; and it would be a great refreshment to him. Julius herein gives an example to those in power to be respectful to those whom they find worthy of their respect, and in using their power to make a difference. A Joseph, a Paul, are not to be used as common pri-

soners. God herein encourages those that suffer for him, to trust in him; for he can put it into the hearts of those to befriend them, from whom they least expect it; can make them to be pitied, may can make them to be prized and valued, even in the eyes of those that *carry them captive*, Ps. 106. 46. And it is likewise an instance of Paul's fidelity; he did not go about to make his escape, which he might have easily done. But being out upon his parole of honour, he faithfully returns to his imprisonment; if the centurion be so civil as to *take his word*, he is so just and honest as to *keep his word*.

2. They thence sailed under Cyprus, *v. 4.* If the wind had been fair, they had gone forward by direct sailing, and had left Cyprus on the right hand; but, the wind not favouring them, they were driven to *oblique sailing with a side wind*, and so compass the island, in a manner, and left it on the left hand. Sailors must do as they can, when they cannot do as they would, and make the best of their wind, whatever point it is in; so must we all in our passage over the ocean of this world. When the *winds are contrary*, yet we must be getting forward as well as we can.

3. At a port of Myra they changed their ship; that which they were in, it is probable, having business no further, they went on board a vessel of Alexandria bound for Italy, *v. 5, 6.* Alexandria was now the chief city of Egypt, and great trading there was between that city and Italy; from Alexandria they carried corn to Rome; and the East-India and Persian goods which they imported at the Red-sea, they exported again to all parts of the Mediterranean, and especially to Italy. And it was a particular favour shewed to the Alexandrian ships in the ports of Italy, that they were not obliged to strike sail, as other ships were, when they came into port.

4. With much ado they made the *Fair havens*, a port of the island of Crete, *v. 7, 8.* They sailed *slowly many days*, being becalmed, or having the wind against them. It was a great while before they made the point of Cnidus, a port of Caria, and were forced to sail under Crete, as before under Cyprus; much difficulty they met with in passing by Salmone, a promontory on the eastern shore of the island of Crete. Though the voyage hitherto was not tempestuous, yet it was very tedious. Thus many that are not *driven backward* in their affairs, by *cross providences*, yet sail *slowly*, and do not get *forward* by *favourable providences*. And many good christians make this complaint in the concerns of their souls, that they do not rid ground in their way to heaven, but have much ado to *keep their ground*; they move with many stops and pauses, and lie a great while wind-bound. Observe, The place they came to was called the *Fair havens*. Travellers say that it is known to this day by the same name, and that it answers the name from the pleasantness of its situation and prospect. And yet, (1.) It was not the harbour they were bound for; it was a *fair haven*, but it was not *their haven*. Whatever agreeable circumstances we may be in in this world, we must remember we are not at home, and therefore we must arise and depart; for though it be a *fair haven*, it is not the *desired haven*, Ps. 107. 30. (2.) It was not a *commodious haven to winter in*, so it is said, *v. 12.* It had a fine prospect, but it lay exposed to the weather. Note, Every fair haven is not a safe haven; nay, there may be most danger where there is most pleasure.

III. What advice Paul gave them with reference to that part of their voyage they had before them; it was, to be content to winter where they were, and not to think of stirring till a better season of the year.

1. It was now a bad time for sailing; they had

lost a deal of time while they were struggling with contrary winds. Sailing was now dangerous, because *the fast was already past*; that is, the famous yearly fast of the Jews, the day of atonement, which was on the tenth day of the seventh month, *a day to afflict the soul* with fasting; it was about the 20th of our September. That yearly fast was very religiously observed; but (which is strange) we never have any mention made in all the scripture-history of the observation of it, unless it be meant here, where it serves only to describe the season of the year. Michaelmas is reckoned by mariners as bad a time of the year to be at sea in as any other; they complain of their Michaelmas-blasts; it was that time now with these distressed voyagers; the *harvest was past, the summer was ended*; they had not only lost time, but lost the opportunity.

2. Paul put them in mind of it, and gave them notice of their danger; (v. 10.) "*I perceive*," (either by notice from God, or by observing their wilful resolution to prosecute the voyage, notwithstanding the peril of the season,) "*that this voyage will be with hurt and damage*; you that have effects on board are likely to lose them, and it will be a miracle of mercy if our lives be given us for a prey." Here were some good men in the ship, and many more bad men; but in things of this nature *all things come alike to all, and there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*. If both be in the same ship, they both are in the same danger.

3. They would not be advised by Paul in this matter, v. 11. They thought him impertinent in interposing in an affair of this nature, who did not understand navigation, and the centurion to whom it was referred to determine it, though himself a passenger, yet, being a man in authority, he takes upon him to over-rule, though he had not been oftener at sea perhaps than Paul, nor was better acquainted with these seas; for Paul had planted the gospel in Crete (Tit. 1. 5.) and knew the several parts of the island well enough. But the centurion gave more regard to the opinion of the *master and owner of the ship* than to Paul's; for every man is to be credited in his own profession ordinarily: but such a man as Paul, who was so intimate with Heaven, was rather to be regarded in seafaring matters than the most celebrated sailors. Note, Those know not what dangers they run themselves into, who will be governed more by human prudence than by divine revelation. The centurion was very civil to Paul, (v. 3.) and yet would not be governed by his advice. Note, Many will shew respect to good ministers, that will not take their advice, Ezek. 33. 31.

12. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, *and there* to winter; *which is* a haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south-west and north-west. 13. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* purpose, loosing *thence*, they sailed close by Crete. 14. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon. 15. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let *her* drive. 16. And running under a certain island which is called Claudia, we had much work to come by the boat: 17. Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and fearing lest they should

fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. 18. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next *day* they lightened the ship; 19. And the third *day* we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. 20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on *us*, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

In these verses, we have,

I. The ship putting to sea again, and pursuing her voyage at first with a promising gale. Observe,

1. What induced them to leave the fair havens; it was because they thought the harbour not *commodious to winter in*; it was pleasant enough in the summer, but in the winter they lay bleak. Or perhaps it was upon some other account incommodious; provisions perhaps were scarce and dear there; and they ran upon a mischief to avoid an inconvenience, as we often do. Some of the ship's crew, or of the council that was called to advise in this matter, were for staying there, rather than venturing to sea now that the weather was so uncertain. It is better to be safe in an incommodious harbour, than to be lost in a tempestuous sea; but they were outvoted when it was put to the question, and the *more part advised to depart thence also*; yet they aimed not to go far, but only to another port of the same island, here called *Phenice*, and some think it was so called because the Phenicians frequented it much, the merchants of Tyre and Sidon. It is here described to lie toward the south-west and north-west. Probably, the haven was between two promontories or juttings out of land into the sea, one of which pointed to the north-west and the other to the south-west, by which it was guarded against the east winds. Thus hath the wisdom of the Creator provided for the relief and safety of them who *go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters*. In vain had nature provided for us the waters to sail on, if it had not likewise provided for us natural harbours to take shelter in.

2. What encouragement they had at first to pursue their voyage; they set out with a fair wind, (v. 13.) the *south wind blew softly*, upon which they flattered themselves with hope that they should *gain their point*, and so they *sailed close* by the coast of Crete, and were not afraid of running upon the rocks or quicksands, because the wind blew so gently. Those who put to sea with ever so fair a gale, know not what storms they may yet meet with; and therefore must not be secure, nor take it for granted that they have *obtained their purpose*, when so many accidents may happen to *cross their purpose*. *Let not him that girdeth on the harness, boast as though he had put it off*.

II. The ship in a storm presently, a dreadful storm. They looked at second causes, and took their measures from the favourable hints they gave, and imagined that because the south wind now blew softly, it would always blow so; in confidence of that, they ventured to sea, but are soon made sensible of their folly in giving more credit to a smiling wind than to the word of God in Paul's mouth, by which they had fair warning given them of a storm. Observe,

1. What their danger and distress was, (1.) There *arose against them a tempestuous wind*, which was not only contrary to them, and directly in their teeth, so that they could not get forward, but a violent wind, which raised the waves, like that which was sent forth in pursuit of Jonah; though Paul was

following God, and going on in his duty, and not as Jonah running away from God and his duty. This wind the sailors called *Euroclydon*, a north-east wind, which upon those seas perhaps was observed to be in a particular manner troublesome and dangerous. It was a sort of a whirlwind, for the ship is said to be caught by it, v. 15. It was God that *commanded this wind to rise*, designing to bring glory to himself, and reputation to Paul, out of it; stormy winds being brought *out of his treasures*, (Ps. 135. 7.) they *fulfil his word*, Ps. 148. 8. (2.) The ship was *exceedingly tossed*; (v. 18.) it was kicked like a football from wave to wave; its passengers, (as it is elegantly described, Ps. 107. 26, 27.) *mount up to the heavens, go down again to the depths, reel to and fro, stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits'-end*. The ship could not possibly bear up into the wind, could not make her way in opposition to the wind; and therefore they folded up their sails, which in such a storm would endanger them rather than do them any service, and so *let the ship drive, Not whither it would, but whither it was impelled by the impetuous waves*—*Non quo voluit, sed quo rapit impetus undæ*. Ovid. Trist. It is probable that they were very near the haven of Phenice when this tempest arose, and thought they should presently be in a quiet haven, and were pleasing themselves with the thought of it, and of wintering there, and lo, of a sudden, they are in this distress. Let us therefore always rejoice with trembling, and never expect a perfect security, nor a perpetual serenity, till we come to heaven. (3.) They saw neither sun nor stars for many days; this made the tempest the more terrible, that they were *all in the dark*; and the use of the loadstone for the directing of sailors not being then found out, (that they had no guide at all, when they could see neither sun nor stars,) made the case the more hazardous. Thus melancholy sometimes is the condition of the people of God upon a spiritual account; they *walk in darkness, and have no light*. Neither sun nor stars appear; they cannot dwell, nay, they cannot fasten, upon any thing comfortable, or encouraging; thus it may be with them, and yet *light is shown* for them. (4.) They had abundance of *winter-weather*; *no small tempest*—*χιμῶν ἐκ ὀμβρῶς*, cold rain, and snow, and all the rigours of that season of the year; so that they were ready to perish for cold; and all this continued many days. See what hardships those often undergo, who are much at sea, beside the hazards of life they run; and yet to get gain there are still those who make nothing of all this; and it is an instance of the wisdom of Divine Providence, that it disposes some to this employment, notwithstanding the difficulties that attend it, for the keeping up of commerce among the nations, and the *isles of the Gentiles* particularly; and Zebulun can as heartily rejoice in his going out as Issachar in his tents. Perhaps Christ *therefore* chose ministers from among sea-faring men, because they had been used to endure hardness.

2. What means they used for their own relief; they betook themselves to all the poor shifts (for I can call them no better) that sailors in distress have recourse to. (1.) When they could not *make head* against the wind, they let the ship run adrift, finding it was to no purpose to ply either the oar or the sail. When it is fruitless to struggle, it is wisdom to yield. (2.) They nevertheless did what they could to avoid the present danger; there was a little island called *Clauda*, and when they were near that, though they could not pursue their voyage, they took care to prevent their shipwreck, and therefore so ordered their matters, that they did not run against the island, but quietly run under it, v. 16. (3.) When they were afraid they should scarcely save the ship, they were busy to save the boat,

which they did with much ado. They had *much work to come by the boat*, (v. 16.) but at last they took it up, v. 17. That might be of use in any exigence, and therefore they made hard shift to get it into the ship to them. (4.) They used means which were proper enough in those times, when the art of navigation was far short of the perfection it is now come to; they *undergirded the ship*, v. 17. They bound the ship under the bottom of it with strong cables, to keep it from bulging in the extremity of the tempest. (5.) For fear of falling into the *quicksands*, they *struck sail*, and then let the ship go as it would. It is strange how a ship will *live at sea*, (so they express it,) even in very stormy weather, if it have but sea-room; and when the sailors cannot *make the shore*, it is their interest to keep as far off it as they can. (6.) The next day they *lightened the ship* of its cargo, threw the goods and merchandises overboard, (as Jonah's mariners did, ch. 1. 5.) being willing rather to be poor without them than to perish with them. *Skin for skin, and all that a man has, will he give for his life*. See what the wealth of this world is; how much soever it is courted as a blessing, the time may come when it will be a burthen, not only too heavy to be carried safe of itself, but heavy enough to sink him that has it. Riches are often *kept by the owners thereof to their hurt*, (Eccl. 5. 13.) and parted with to their good. But see the folly of the children of this world, they can be thus prodigal of their goods when it is for the *saving of their lives*, and yet how sparing of them in works of piety and charity, and in suffering for Christ, though they are told by eternal Truth itself, that those shall be recompensed more than a thousand fold in the *resurrection of the just*. They went upon a principle of faith, who *took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and a more enduring substance*, Heb. 10. 34. Any man will rather make shipwreck of his goods than of his life; but many will rather make *shipwreck of faith and a good conscience* than of their goods. (7.) The third day they *cast out the tacklings of the ship*; the utensils of it, *Armamenta*, (so some render it,) as if it were a ship of force. With us it is common to heave the guns over-board in the extremity of a storm; but what heavy artillery they had then which it was necessary to lighten the ship of, I do not know; and question whether it were not then a vulgar error among seamen thus to throw every thing into the sea, even that which would be of great use in a storm, and *no great weight*.

3. The despair which at last they were brought to; (v. 20.) *All hope that we should be saved was then taken away*. The storm continued, and they saw no symptoms of its abatement; we have known very blustering weather to continue for some weeks. The means they had used were ineffectual, so that they were at their *wits'-end*; and such was the consternation that this melancholy prospect put them into, that they had no heart either to eat or drink. They had provision enough on board, (v. 38.) but such *bondage* were they under, *through fear of death*, that they could not admit the supports of life. Why did not Paul, by the power of Christ, and in his name, lay this storm? Why did he not say to the winds and waves, *Peace, be still*, as his Master had done? Surely it was because the apostles wrought miracles for the confirmation of their doctrine, not for the serving of a turn for themselves or their friends.

21. But after long abstinence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, *Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained*

this harm and loss. 22. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of *any man's* life among you, but of the ship. 23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24. Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. 25. Wherefore, Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. 26. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island. 27. But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; 28. And sounded, and found *it* twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found *it* fifteen fathoms. 29. Then fearing lest they should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. 30. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, 31. Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. 32. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. 33. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought *them* all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried, and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34. Wherefore I pray you to take *some* meat; for this is for your health: for there shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you. 35. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all; and when he had broken *it*, he began to eat. 36. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took *some* meat. 37. And we were all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. 38. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. 39. And when it was day they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. 40. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed *themselves* unto the sea, and loosed the rudder-bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. 41. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the

waves. 42. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape. 43. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose; and commanded that they which could swim, should cast *themselves* first *into the sea*, and get to land: 44. And the rest, some on boards, and some on *broken pieces* of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

We have here the issue of the distress of Paul and his fellow-travellers; they escaped with their lives, and that was all; and that was for Paul's sake. We are here told, (v. 37.) what number there were on board—mariners, merchants, soldiers, prisoners and other passengers, in all two hundred seventy-six souls; this is taken notice of to make us the more concerned for them in reading the story, that they were such a considerable number, whose lives were now in the utmost jeopardy, and one Paul among them worth more than all the rest. We left them in despair, giving up themselves for gone; whether they *called every man on his God*, as Jonah's mariners did, we are not told; it is well if the laudable practice in a storm was not gone out of fashion, and made a jest of. However, Paul among these seamen was not, like Jonah among his, the cause of the storm, but the comforter in the storm, and as much a credit to the profession of an apostle as Jonah was a blemish to his character as a prophet.

Now here we have,

I. The encouragement Paul gave them, by assuring them, in the name of God, that their lives should all be saved, then when, in human appearance, all hope that they should be saved was taken away. Paul rescued them from their despair first, that they might not die of that, and starve themselves in that, and then they were in a fair way to be rescued from their distress. *After long abstinence*, as if they were resolved not to eat, till they knew whether they should live or die, *Paul stood forth in the midst of them*. During distress hitherto Paul hid himself among them, was one of the crowd, helped with the rest to *throw out the tackling*; (v. 19.) but now he distinguished himself, and, though a prisoner, undertook to be their counsellor and comforter.

1. He reproves them for not taking his advice, which was to stay where they were, in the road of Lasea; (v. 8.) "*Ye should have hearkened to me, and not have loosed from Crete*, where we might have made a shift to winter well enough, and then we should not have *gained this harm and loss*, we should have escaped them. *Harm and loss* in the world, if sanctified to us, may be truly said to be *gain*, for if they wean us from present things, and awaken as to think of a future state, we are truly gainers by them. Observe, They did not *hearken to Paul* when he warned them of their danger, and yet if they will but acknowledge their folly, and repent of it, he will speak comfort and relief to them now that they are in danger; so compassionate is God to those that are in misery, though they bring themselves into it by their own incogitancy, nay by their own wilfulness, and contempt of admonition. Paul, before administering comfort, will first make them sensible of their sin in not hearkening to him, by upbraiding them with their rashness, and probably, when he tells them of their *gaining harm and loss*, he reflects upon what they promised themselves by proceeding in their voyage, that they should gain so much time, gain this and the other point; "But," says he, "you have gained nothing but harm and loss; how will you answer it?" That which they are blamed for, is, their loosing from

Crete, where they were safe. Note, Most people bring themselves into inconvenience, because they do not know when they are well off, but gain harm and loss by aiming, against advice, to mend themselves.

2. He assures them that though they should lose the ship, yet they should none of them lose their lives; "You see your folly in not being ruled by me?" he does not say, "Now therefore expect to fare accordingly, you may thank yourselves if you be all lost, they that will not be counselled, cannot be helped." No, "Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing; your case is sad, but it is not desperate, now I exhort you to be of good cheer." Thus we say to sinners that are convinced of their sin and folly, and begin to see and bewail their error, "You should have hearkened unto us, and should have had nothing to do with sin; yet now we exhort you to be of good cheer; though you would not take our advice when we said, *Do not presume*, yet take it now when we say, *Do not despair*." They had given up the cause, and would use no further means, because all hope that they should be saved was taken away. Now Paul quickens them to bestir themselves yet in working for their own safety, by telling them that if they would resume their vigour they should secure their lives. He gives them this assurance when they were brought to the last extremity, for now it would be doubly welcome to them to be told that not a life should be lost, when they were ready to conclude they must inevitably be all lost. He tells them, (1.) That they must count upon the loss of the ship. Those who were interested in that and the goods, were, probably, those greater part that were for pushing forward the voyage, and running the venture, notwithstanding Paul's admonition, and they are made to pay for their rashness. Their ship shall be wrecked. Many a stately, strong, rich, gallant ship is lost in the mighty waters in a little time, for vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. But, (2.) Not a life shall be lost. This would be good news to those that were ready to die for fear of dying, and whose guilty consciences made death look very terrible to them.

3. He tells them what ground he had for this assurance; that it is not a banter upon them, to put them into humour, nor a human conjecture, but he has a divine revelation for it, and is as confident of it as that God is true, being fully satisfied that he has his word for it. An angel of God appeared to him in the night, and told him that for his sake they should all be preserved, (v. 23—25.) which would double the mercy of their preservation, that they should have it not only by providence, but by promise, and as a particular favour to Paul. Now observe here,

(1.) The solemn profession Paul makes of relation to God, the God from whom he had this favourable intelligence; It is he, whose I am, and whom I serve. He looks upon God, [1.] As his rightful Owner; who has a sovereign incontestable title to him, and dominion over him; whose I am. Because God made us, and not we ourselves, therefore we are not our own, but his. His we are by creation, for he made us; by preservation, for he maintains us; by redemption, for he bought us. We are more his than our own. [2.] As his sovereign Ruler and Master, who, having given him being, has right to give him law; whom I serve. Because his we are, therefore we are bound to serve him, to devote ourselves to his honour, and employ ourselves in his work. It is Christ that Paul here has an eye to; he is God, and the angels are his, and go on his errands; Paul often calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ; he is his, and him he serves, both as a christian, and as an apostle; he does not say, "Whose we are, and whom we serve," for the most that

were present were strangers to him, but, "Whose I am, and whom I serve, whatever others do; nay, whom I am now in the actual service of, going to Rome, not as you are, upon worldly business, but to appear as a witness for Christ." Now this he tells the company, that, seeing their relief coming from his God, whose he was, and whom he served, they might thereby be drawn in to take him for their God, and to serve him likewise; for the same reason Jonah said to his mariners, I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who has made the sea and the dry land, Jonah 1. 9.

(2.) The account he gives of the vision he had; There stood by me this night an angel of God, a divine messenger, who had used formerly to bring him messages from heaven; he stood by him, visibly appeared to him, probably, when he was awake upon his bed. Though he was afar off upon the sea, (Ps. 65. 5.) in the uttermost parts of the sea, (Ps. 139. 9.) yet that cannot intercept his communion with God, nor deprive him of the benefit of divine visits. Thence he can direct a prayer to God, and thither God can direct an angel to him. He knows not where he is himself, yet God's angel knows where to find him out. The ship is tossed with winds and waves, hurried to and fro with the utmost violence, and yet the angel finds a way into it. No storms or tempests can hinder the communications of God's favour to his people, for he is a very present Help, a Help at hand, even when the sea roars, and is troubled, Ps. 46. 1, 3. We may suppose that Paul, being a prisoner, had not a cabin of his own in the ship, much less a bed in the captain's cabin, but was put down into the hold, (any dark or dirty place was thought good enough for him in common with the rest of the prisoners,) and yet there the angel of God stood by him. Meanness and poverty set none at a distance from God and his favour. Jacob, when he has no pillow but a stone, no curtains but the clouds, yet has a vision of angels. Paul had this vision but this last night. He had himself been assured by a former vision, that he should go to Rome, (ch. 23. 11.) from which he might infer that he himself should be safe; but he has this fresh vision to assure him of the safety of those with him.

(3.) The encouragements that were given him in the vision, v. 24. [1.] He is forbidden to fear. Though all about him are at their wits' end, and lost in despair, yet, Fear not, Paul; fear not their fear, nor be afraid, Isa. 8. 12. Let the sinners in Zion be afraid, but let not the saints be afraid, no not at sea, in a storm; for the Lord of hosts is with them, and their place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks, Isa. 33. 14—16. [2.] He is assured that for his part he shall come safe to Rome; thou must be brought before Caesar. As the rage of the most potent enemies, so the rage of the most stormy sea, cannot prevail against God's witnesses till they have finished their testimony. Paul must be preserved in this danger, for he is reserved for further service. This is comfortable to the faithful servants of God in straits and difficulties, that, as long as God has any work for them to do, their lives shall be prolonged. [3.] That for his sake all that were in the ship with him should be delivered too, from perishing in this storm. God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. This angel that was ordered to bring him this message, could have singled him out from this wretched crew, and those that were his friends too, and have carried them safe to shore, and have left the rest to perish, because they would not take Paul's counsel. But God chooses rather, by preserving them all for his sake, to shew what great blessings good men are to the world, than by delivering him only to shew how good men are distinguished from the world. God has given thee all them that sail with thee, that is, spares them in an-

swer to thy prayers, or for thy sake. Sometimes good men deliver *neither sons nor daughters, but their own souls only*, Ezek. 14. 18. But Paul here delivers a whole ship's crew, almost three hundred souls. Note, God often spares wicked people for the sake of the godly; as Zoar for Lot's sake, and as Sodom might have been, if there had been *ten righteous persons* in it. The good people are hated and persecuted in the world as if they were not worthy to live in it, yet really it is for their sakes that the world stands. If Paul had thrust himself needlessly into bad company, he might justly have been cast away with them, but God calling him into it, they are preserved with him. And it is intimated, that it was a great favour to Paul, and he looked upon it to be so, that others were saved for his sake, *They are given thee*; there is no greater satisfaction to a good man, than to know that he is a public blessing.

4. *He comforts them with the same comforts wherewith he himself was comforted*; (v. 25.) "*Wherefore, Sirs, be of good cheer, you shall see even this will end well; for I believe God, and depend upon his word, that it shall be even as it was told me.*" He would not require them to give credit to that which he did not himself give credit to; and therefore solemnly professes that he *believes it himself*, and the belief of it makes him easy; "I doubt not but it shall be as it was told me." Thus he *stagners not at the promise of God through unbelief*. *Hath God spoken, and shall he not make it good?* No doubt he can, no doubt he will; for *he is not a man that he should lie*. And shall it be as God hath said? *Then be of good cheer, be of good courage*. God is ever faithful, and therefore let all that have an interest in his promise be ever cheerful. If with God saying and doing are not two things, then with us believing and enjoying should not.

5. He gives them a sign, telling them particularly what this tempestuous voyage would issue in; (v. 26.) "*We must be cast upon a certain island, and that will both break the ship, and save the passengers; and so the prediction in both respects will be fulfilled.*" The pilot had quitted his post, the ship was left to run at random, they knew not what latitude they were in, much less how to steer their course, and yet Providence undertakes to *bring them to an island* that shall be a refuge for them. When the church of God, like this ship, is *tossed with tempests, and not comforted*; when *there is none to guide her of all her sons*; yet God can bring her safe to shore, and will do it.

II. Their coming at length to an anchor upon an unknown shore, v. 27—29.

1. They had been a full *fortnight in the storm*, continually expecting death; *the fourteenth night*, and not sooner, *they came near land*; they were that *night driven up and down in Adria*, not in the Adriatic gulph on which Venice stands, but in the Adriatic sea, a part of the Mediterranean, containing both the Sicilian and Ionian seas, and extending to the African shore; in this sea they were tossed, and knew not whereabouts they were.

2. *About midnight the mariners apprehended that they drew near to some shore*, which confirmed what Paul had told them, *that they must be driven upon some island*; to try whether it was so or no, they *sounded*, in order to their finding the depth of the water, for the water would be shallower as they drew nearer to shore; by the first experiment they *found they drew twenty fathom deep of water*, and by the next *fifteen fathom*; which was a demonstration that they were near some shore; God has wisely ordered such a natural notice to sailors in the dark, that they may be cautious.

3. They took the hint, and fearing rocks near the shore, *they cast anchor, and wished for the day*; they durst not go forward for fear of rocks, and yet

would not go back in hope of shelter, but *they would wait for the morning, and heartily wished for it*; who can blame them when the affair came to a crisis? When they had light, there was no land to be seen; now that there was land near them, they had no light to see it by; no marvel then *they wished for day*. When those that fear God, *walk in darkness, and have no light*, yet let them not say, *The Lord has forsaken us*, or, *Our God has forgotten us*; but let them do as *these mariners did, cast anchor, and wish for the day*, and be assured that *the day will dawn*. *Hope is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, entering into that within the veil*. Hold fast by that, think not of *putting to sea again*, but abide by Christ, and *wait till the day break, and the shadows flee away*.

III. The defeating of the sailors' attempt to quit the ship; here was a new danger added to their distress, which they narrowly escaped. Observe,

1. The treacherous design of the shipmen, and that was to leave the *sinking ship*; which, though a piece of wisdom in others, yet in those that were intrusted with the care of it, was the basest fraud that could be; (v. 30.) *They were about to flee out of the ship, concluding no other than that when it run ashore it must be broken all to pieces; having the command of the boat, the project was to get all of them into that, and so save themselves, and leave all the rest to perish*. To cover this vile design, they pretended they would *cast anchors out of the fore-ship, or carry them further off*, and in order to that *they let down the boat*, which they had taken in, (v. 16, 17.) and were *going into it*, having agreed among themselves, when they were in to make straight for the shore. The treacherous seamen are like the treacherous shepherd, who flees when he sees the danger coming, and there is most need of his help, John 10. 12. Thus true is that of Solomon, *Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble, is like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint*. Let us therefore *cease from man*. Paul had, in God's name, assured them *that they should come safe to land*, but they will rather trust their own refuge of lies than God's word of truth.

2. Paul's discovery of it, and protestation against it, v. 31. They all saw them preparing to *go into the boat*, but were deceived by the pretence they made; only Paul saw through it, and gave notice to the *centurion and the soldiers* concerning it, and told them plainly, *Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved*. The skill of a mariner is seen in a storm, and in the distress of the ship, then is the proper time for him to exert himself; now the greatest difficulty of all was before them, and therefore the shipmen are now more necessary than ever yet; it was indeed not by any skill of their's *that they were brought to land*, for it was quite beyond their skill, but now that they are near land, they must use their art to bring the ship to it. When God has done that for us which we could not, we must then in his strength help ourselves. Paul speaks humanely, when he says, *Ye cannot be saved except these abide in the ship*; and he does not at all weaken the assurances he had divinely given, *that they should infallibly be saved*. God, who appointed the end, *that they should be saved*, appointed the means, *that they should be saved by the help of these shipmen*; though if they had gone off, no doubt God would have made his word good, some other way. Paul speaks as a prudent man, not as a prophet, when he says, *These are necessary to your preservation*. Duty is our's, events are God's; and we do not trust God, but tempt him, when we say, "We put ourselves under his protection," and do not use proper means, such as are within our power, for our own preservation.

3. The effectual defeating of it by the soldiers, v.

32. It was no time to stand arguing the case with the shipmen, and therefore they made no more ado, but cut the ropes of the boat, and though it might otherwise have done them service in their present distress, they chose rather to let it fall off, and lose it, than suffer it to do them this dis-service. And now the shipmen, being forced to stay in the ship whether they would or no, are forced likewise to work for the safety of the ship as hard as they could, because if the rest perish they must perish with them.

IV. The new life which Paul put into the company, by his cheerful inviting them to take some refreshment, and the repeated assurances given them, that they should all of them have their lives given them for a prey. Happy they who had such a one as Paul in their company, who not only had correspondence with Heaven, but was of a hearty lively spirit with those about him, that sharpened the countenance of his friend, as iron sharpens iron. Such a friend in distress, when without are fightings, and within are fears, is a friend indeed. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel, Prov. 27. 10. Such was Paul's here to his companions in tribulation. The day was coming on; they that wish for the day, let them wait awhile, and they shall have what they wish for; the dawning of the day revived them a little, and then Paul got them together.

1. He chid them for their neglect of themselves, that they had so far given way to fear and despair, as to forget or not to mind their food; *This is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried, and continued fasting, having taken nothing*; and that is not well, v. 33. Not that they had all, or any of them, continued fourteen days without any food, but they had not had any set meal, as they used to have, all that time; they ate very little, next to nothing. Or, "You have continued fasting, you have lost your stomach; you have had no appetite at all to your food, nor any relish of it, through prevailing fear and despair." A very disconsolate state is thus expressed, (Ps. 102. 4.) *I forget to eat my bread*. It is a sin to starve the body, and to deny it its necessary supports; he is an unnatural man indeed, that hateth his own flesh, and doth not nourish and cherish it; and it is a sore evil under the sun, to have a sufficiency of the good things of this life, and not to have power to use them, Eccl. 6. 2. If this arise from the sorrow of the world, and from any inordinate fear or trouble, it is so far from excusing it, that it is another sin, it is discontent, it is distrust of God, it is all wrong. What folly is it to die for fear of dying! But thus the sorrow of the world works death, while joy in God is life and peace in the greatest distresses and dangers.

2. He courts them to their food; (v. 34.) "Wherefore I pray you to take some meat. We have a hard struggle before us, must get to shore as well as we can; if our bodies be weak through fasting, we shall not be able to help ourselves." The angel bid Elijah, *Arise and eat*, for otherwise he would find the journey too great for him, 1 Kings 19. 7. So Paul will have these people eat, or otherwise the waves will be too hard for them; *I pray you, τρώετε*, "I exhort you, if you will be ruled by me, take some nourishment; though you have no appetite to it, though you have fasted away your stomach, yet let reason bring you to it, for this is for your health; or rather your preservation, or safety, at this time; it is for your salvation, you cannot without nourishment have strength to shift for your lives." As he that will not labour, let him not eat; so he that means to labour, must eat. Weak and trembling christians, that give way to doubts and fears about their spiritual state, continue fasting from the Lord's supper, and fasting from divine consolations,

and then complain they cannot go on in their spiritual work and warfare, and it is owing to themselves; if they would feed and feast as they ought, upon the provision Christ has made for them, they would be strengthened, and it would be for their souls' health and salvation.

3. He assures them of their preservation; *There shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you*. It is a proverbial expression, denoting a complete indemnity. It is used 1 Kings 1. 52. Luke 21. 18. "You cannot eat for fear of dying; I tell you, you are sure of living, and therefore eat. You will come to shore wet and cold, but sound wind and limb; your hair wet, but not a hair lost."

4. He himself spread their table for them; for none of them had any heart to do it, they were all so dispirited; *When he had thus spoken, he took bread*, fetched it from the ship's stores, to which every one might safely have access, when none of them had an appetite. They were not reduced to short allowance, as sailors sometimes are, when they are kept longer at sea than they expected by distress of weather; they had plenty, but what good did that do them, when they had no stomach? We have reason to be thankful to God, that we have not only food to our appetite, but appetite to our food; that our soul abhors not even dainty meat, (Job 33. 20.) through sickness or sorrow.

5. He was chaplain to the ship, and they had reason to be proud of their chaplain; *he gave thanks to God in presence of them all*. We have reason to think he had often prayed with Luke and Aristarchus, and what others there were among them, that were christians, that they prayed daily together; but whether he had before this prayed with the whole company promiscuously, is not certain; now he gave thanks to God in presence of them all, that they were alive, and had been preserved hitherto, and that they had a promise that their lives should be preserved in the imminent peril now before them; he gave thanks for the provision they had, and begged a blessing upon it. *We must in every thing give thanks*; and must particularly have an eye to God in receiving our food, for it is sanctified to us by the word of God and prayer, and is to be received with thanksgiving. Thus the curse is taken off from it, and we obtain a covenant-right to it, and a covenant-blessing upon it, 1 Tim. 4. 3—5. And it is not by bread alone that man lives, but by the word of God, which must be met with prayer. He gave thanks in presence of them all, not only to shew that he served a Master he was not ashamed of, but to invite them into his service too. If we crave a blessing upon our meat, and give thanks for it in a right manner, we shall not only keep up a comfortable communion with God ourselves, but credit our profession, and recommend it to the good opinion of others.

6. He set them a good example; *When he had given thanks, he brake the bread*, (it was sea-biscuit,) and he began to eat; whether they would be encouraged or no, he would; if they would be sullen, and, like froward children, refuse their victuals, because they had not every thing to their mind, he would eat his meat, and be thankful. Those that teach others, are inexcusable, if they do not themselves as they teach; and the most effectual way of preaching is by example.

7. It had a happy influence upon them all; (v. 36.) *Then were they all of good cheer*. They then ventured to believe the message God sent them by Paul, when they plainly perceived that Paul believed it himself, who was in the same common danger with them. Thus God sends good tidings to the perishing world of mankind, by those who are of themselves, and in the same common danger with themselves, who are sinners too, and must be saved, if

ever they be saved, in the same way in which they persuade others to venture; for it is a common salvation which they *bring the tidings of*; and it is an encouragement to people to commit themselves to Christ as their Saviour, when those who invite them to do so, make it to appear that they do so themselves; and it is here upon this occasion that the number of the persons is set down, which we took notice of before; *they were in all two hundred threescore and sixteen souls*. See how many may be influenced by the good example of one! *They did all eat, nay they did all eat enough, (v. 38.) they were satiated with food, or filled with it; they made a hearty meal*; which explains the meaning of their *fasting before for fourteen days*; not that they did not eat of all that time, but they never had enough all that time, as they had now.

8. They once more *lightened the ship*, that it might escape the better in the shock it was now to have; they had before thrown the *wares and the tackle overboard*, and now the *wheat*, the victuals and provisions they had; better they should sink it, than that it should sink them. See what good reason our Saviour had to call our bodily food *meat that perishes*! We may ourselves be under a necessity of throwing that away to save our lives, which we had gathered and laid up for the support of our lives. It is probable that the *ship* was over-loaded with the multitude of the passengers, (for this comes in just after the account of the number of them,) and that obliged them so often to *lighten the ship*.

V. Their *putting to shore, and the starving of the ship* in the adventure. It was *about break of day when they ate their meat*, and when it was fair day they began to look about them; and here we are told,

1. *That they knew not where they were*; they could not tell what country it was they were now upon the coast of, whether it was Europe, Asia, or Africa, for each had shores washed by the Adriatic sea. It is probable that these shipmen had often sailed this way, and thought they knew every country they came near, perfectly well, and yet here they were at a loss. *Let not the wise man then glory in his wisdom*, since it may perhaps fail him thus egregiously even in his own profession.

2. *They observed a creek with a level shore, into which they hoped to thrust the ship, v. 39*. Though they knew not what country it was, nor whether the inhabitants were friends or foes, civil or barbarous, they determined to cast themselves upon their mercy; it was dry land, which would be very welcome to those that had been so long *at sea*. It was pity but they had had some help from the shore, a pilot sent them, that knew the coast, who might steer *their ship in*, or another second ship, to take some of the men on board. Those who live on the sea-coast, have often opportunity of succouring those *who are in distress at sea*, and of saving precious lives, and they ought to do their utmost in order to it, with all readiness and cheerfulness; for it is a great sin, and very provoking to God, *to forbear to deliver them that are driven unto death, and are ready to be slain*; and it will not serve for an excuse to say, *Behold, we knew it not*; when either we did, or might, and should, have *known it*, Prov. 24. 11, 12. I have been told there are some, and in our own nation too, who, when from the *sea-coast they see a ship in distress, and at a loss*, will, by misguiding fires or otherwise, purposely lead *them into danger, that the lives may be lost, and they may have the plunder of the ship*. One can scarce believe that any of the human nature could possibly be so wicked, so barbarously inhuman, and should have so much of the Devil in them; if there be, let them know of a truth, *that they shall have judgment without mercy, who have shewed no mercy*.

3. They made straight to the shore with wind and tide; (v. 40.) *They took up the anchors, the four anchors which they cast out of the stern, v. 29*. Some think that they took pains to weigh them up, hoping they should have use for them again at the shore; others, that they did it with such precipitation, that they were forced to *cut the cables, and leave them*; the original will admit either; *they then committed themselves to the sea*, the wind standing fair to carry them into the port, and *they loosed the rudder-bands*, which were fastened during the storm, for the greater steadiness of the ship, but, now that they were *putting into the port, were loosed*, that the pilot might steer with the greater freedom; *they then hoisted up the main-sail to the wind, and made towards shore*. The original words here used for the *rudder-bands, and the main-sail*, find the critics a great deal of work to accommodate them to the modern terms; but they need not give us any difficulty, who are content to know that when they saw the shore, they hastened to it as fast as they could; and perhaps made more haste than good speed. And should not a poor soul that has long been struggling with winds and tempests in this world, long to put into the safe and quiet haven of everlasting rest? Should it not get clear from all that which fastens it to this earth, and straitens the out-goings of its pious and devout affections heavenward? And should it not *hoist up the main-sail of faith to the wind of the Spirit, and so with longing desires make to shore*.

4. They made a shift among them to *run the ship aground*, in a shelf, or bed of sand, as it should seem, or an *isthmus*, or neck of land, washed with the sea on both sides, and therefore *two seas* are said to *meet* upon it, and *there the fore part stuck fast*; and then, when it had no liberty to play, as a ship has when it rides at anchor, but remained unmovable, the *hinder part* would soon be *broken of course by the violence of the waves*. Whether the shipmen did not do their part, being angry that they were disappointed in their design to escape, and therefore wilfully *ran the ship aground*, or whether we may suppose that they did their utmost to save it, but God in his providence over-ruled, for the fulfilling of Paul's word, *that the ship must be lost, (v. 22.)* I cannot say; but this we are sure of, *that God will confirm the word of his servants, and perform the counsel of his messengers*, Isa. 44. 26. The ship, that had strangely weathered the storm in the vast ocean, where it had room to roll, is dashed to pieces when it sticks fast. Thus if the heart fixes in the world, in love and affection, and adherence to it, it is lost; Satan's temptations beat against it, and it is gone; but as long as it keeps above the world, though it be tost with its cares and tumults, there is hope of it. They had the shore in view, and yet suffered shipwreck in the harbour, to teach us never to be secure.

VI. A particular danger that Paul and the rest of the prisoners were in, beside their share in the common calamity, and their deliverance from it.

1. In this critical moment, when every man hung in doubt of his life, the *soldiers advised the killing of the prisoners* that were committed to their custody, and whom they were to give account of, *lest any of them should swim out, and escape, v. 42*. There was no great danger of that, for they could not escape far, weak and weary as they were; and under the eye of so many soldiers that had the charge of them, it was not likely they should attempt it; and if it should so happen, though they might be obnoxious to the law for a permissive escape, yet in such a case as this, equity would certainly relieve them. But it was a brutish barbarous motion, and so much the worse, that they were thus prodigal of other people's lives, when without a miracle of mercy they must lose their own.

2. *The centurion*, for Paul's sake, quashed this motion presently. Paul had found favour with him, whose prisoner he was, as *Joseph with the captain of the guard*. Julius, though he despised Paul's advice, (v. 11.) yet he afterwards saw a great deal of cause to respect him, and therefore being *willing to save Paul*, he stayed the execution of that bloody project, and in *favorem vite*—from a regard to his life, he kept them from their purpose. It does not appear that they were any of them malefactors convicted, but only suspected, and waiting their trial, and in such a case as this, better ten guilty ones should escape than one that was innocent be slain. As God had saved all in the ship for Paul's sake, so here the centurion saves all the prisoners for his sake; such a diffusive good is a good man!

VII. The saving of the lives of all the persons in the ship, by the wonderful providence of God. When *the ship broke* under them, surely *there was but a step between them and death*; and yet infinite mercy interposed, and that step was not stepped.

1. Some were saved by swimming; *The centurion commanded his own soldiers in the first place, as many of them as could swim, to get to land first*, and to be ready to receive the prisoners, and prevent their escape. The Romans trained up their youth, among other exercises, *to that of swimming*, and it was often of service to them in their wars: Julius Cæsar was a famous swimmer. It may be very useful to those who deal much at sea, but otherwise perhaps more lives have been lost by swimming in sport, and learning to swim, than have been saved by swimming for need.

2. The rest with much ado scrambled to the shore, some on boards that they had loose with them in the ship, and others on the *broken pieces of the ship*, every one making the best shift he could for himself and his friends, and the more busy because they were assured their labour should not be in vain; but *so it came to pass*, that through the good providence of God none of them miscarried, none of them were by accident turned off, but they *escaped all safe to land*. See here an instance of the special providence of God in the preservation of people's lives, and particularly in the deliverance of many from *perils by waters*; ready to sink, and yet kept from sinking, *the deep from swallowing them up*, and the *water-floods from overflowing them*; the storm turned into a calm, they rescued from the dreaded sea, and brought to the desired haven. *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!* Ps. 107. 30, 31. Here was an instance of the performance of a particular word of promise which God gave, *that all the persons in this ship should be saved for Paul's sake*. Though there be great difficulty in the way of the promised salvation, yet it shall without fail be accomplished; and even the wreck of the ship may furnish out means for the saving of the lives; and when all seems to be gone, all proves to be safe; though it be *on boards, and broken pieces of the ship*.

CHAP. XXVIII.

We are the more concerned to take notice of, and to improve, what is here recorded concerning blessed Paul, because, after the story of this chapter, we hear no more of him in the sacred history, though we have a great deal of him yet before us in his epistles; we have attended him through several chapters from one judgment-seat to another, and could at last have taken leave of him with the more pleasure, if we had left him at liberty; but in this chapter we are to condescend with him, and yet congratulate him. I. We condescend with him as a poor shipwrecked passenger, stript of all: and yet congratulate him, 1. As singularly owned by his God in his distress, preserved himself from receiving hurt by a viper that fastened on his hand, (v. 1. 6.) and being made an instrument of much good in the island on which they were cast, in healing many that were sick, and particularly the father of Publius, the chief man of

the island, v. 7. 9. 2. As much respected by the people there, v. 10. 11. We condescend with him as a poor confined prisoner, carried to Rome under the notion of a criminal removed by habeas corpus; (v. 11. 16.) and yet we congratulate him, 1. Upon the respect shewed him by the christians at Rome, who came a great way to meet him, v. 15. 2. Upon the favour he found with the captain of the guard, into whose custody he was delivered, who suffered him to dwell by himself, and did not put him in the common prison, v. 16. 3. Upon the free conference he had with the Jews at Rome, both about his own affair, (v. 17. 22.) and upon the head of the christian religion in general; (v. 23.) the issue of which was, that God was glorified, many were edified, the rest left inexcusable, and the apostles justified in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, v. 24. 29. 4. Upon the undisturbed liberty he had to preach the gospel to all comers in his own house for two years together, v. 30, 31.

I. **A**ND when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. 2. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. 3. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt, this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. 5. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. 6. Howbeit, they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. 7. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. 8. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux; to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. 9. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: 10. Who also honoured us with many honours: and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

What a great variety of places and circumstances do we find Paul in! He was a planet, and not a fixed star. Here we have him in an island, to which in all probability he had never come, if he had not been thrown upon it by a storm; and yet it seems God has work for him to do here. Even *stormy winds fulfil* God's counsel; and an ill wind indeed it is, that blows nobody any good; this ill wind blew good to the island of Melita; for it gave them Paul's company for three months, who was a blessing to every place he came to. *This island was called Melita*, lying between Sicily and Africa; twenty miles long, and twelve broad; it lies farthest from the continent of any island in the Mediterranean; it is about sixty miles from Sicily. It has been famous since for the

knights of Malta, who, when the Turks over-ran that part of Christendom, made a noble stand, and gave some check to the progress of their arms.

Now here we have,

1. The kind reception which the inhabitants of this island gave to the distressed strangers that were shipwrecked on their coast; (*v. 2.*) *The barbarous people shewed us no little kindness.* God had promised that there should be no loss of any man's life; and as for God, *his work is perfect*; if they had escaped the sea, and, when they came ashore, had perished for cold or want, it had been all one; therefore Providence continues its care of them, and what benefits we receive by the hand of man must be acknowledged to come from the hand of God; for every creature is that to us, and no more, than he makes it to be; and when he pleases, as he can *make enemies to be at peace*, so he can make strangers to be friends, friends in need, and those are friends indeed; friends in *adversity*, and that is the *time that a brother is born for*. Observe,

1. The general notice taken of the kindness which the natives of Malta shewed to Paul and his company; they are called *barbarous people*, because they did not, in language and customs, conform either to the Greeks or Romans, who looked (superciliously enough) upon all but themselves as barbarians, though otherwise civilized enough, and perhaps in some cases more civil than they. These *barbarous people*, however they were called so, were full of humanity; they *shewed us no little kindness*. So far were they from making a prey of this shipwreck, as many, I fear, who are called Christian people, would have done, that they laid hold on it as an opportunity of shewing mercy! *The Samaritan* is a better neighbour to the poor wounded man, than the priest or Levite. And verily we have not found greater humanity among Greeks or Romans, or Christians, than among those *barbarous people*; and it is written for our imitation, that we may hence learn to be compassionate to those that are in distress and misery, and to relieve and succour them to the utmost of our ability, as those *that know we ourselves are also in the body*; we should be ready to *entertain strangers, as Abraham, who sat at his tent door to invite passengers in*, (*Heb. 13. 2.*) but especially *strangers in distress*, as these were. *Honour all men*. If Providence hath so appointed the bounds of our habitations, as to give us an opportunity of being frequently serviceable to persons at a loss, we should not place it among the inconveniences of our lot, but the advantages of it; because *it is more blessed to give than to receive*. Who knows but these barbarous people had their lot cast in this island for such a time as this!

2. A particular instance of their kindness; *They kindled a fire*, in some large hall or other, and they *received us every one*; made room for us about the fire, and bid us all welcome, without asking either what country we were of, or what religion. In swimming to the shore, and coming on the broken pieces of the ship, we must suppose that they were sadly wet, that they had not a dry thread on them; and, as if that were not enough, to complete the deluge, waters from above met those from below, and it rained so hard, that that would wet them to the skin presently; and *it was a cold rain too*; so that they wanted nothing so much as a good fire, (for they had eaten heartily but just before on ship-board,) and that they got for them presently, *to warm them, and dry their clothes*. It is sometimes as much a piece of charity to poor families, to supply them with fuel, as with food or raiment. *Be ye warmed*, is as necessary as, *Be ye filled*. When in the extremities of bad weather we find ourselves fenced against the rigours of the season, by the accommodations of a warm house, bed, clothes and a

good fire, we should think how many lie exposed to the present rain, and to the cold, and pity them, and pray for them, and help them if we can.

II. The further danger that Paul was in by a *viper's fastening on his hand*, and the unjust construction that the people put upon it. Paul is among strangers, and appears one of the meanest and most contemptible of the company, therefore God distinguishes him, and soon makes him to be taken notice of.

1. When the fire was to be made, and to be made bigger, that so great a company might all have the benefit of it, Paul was as busy as any of them in gathering sticks, *v. 3.* Though he was free from all, and of greater account than any of them, yet he made himself servant of all. Paul was an industrious active man, and loved to be doing when any thing was to be done, and never contrived to take his ease. Paul was a humble self-denying man, and would stoop to any thing by which he might be serviceable, even to the gathering of sticks to make a fire of. We should reckon nothing below us but sin, and be willing to condescend to the meanest offices, if there be occasion, for the good of our brethren. The people were ready to help them; yet Paul, wet and cold as he is, will not throw it all upon them, but will help himself. They that receive benefit by the fire, should help to carry fuel to it.

2. The sticks being old dry rubbish, it happened there was a viper among them, that lay as dead till it came to the heat, and then revived, or lay quiet till it felt the fire, and then was provoked, and flew at him that unawares threw it into the fire, and fastened upon his hand, *v. 3.* Serpents and such venomous creatures commonly lie among sticks; hence we read of him that leans on the wall, and a serpent bites him, *Amos 5. 19.* It was so common, that people were by it frightened from tearing hedges; (*Ecc. 10. 8.*) *Whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.* As there is a snake under the green grass, so there is often under the dry leaves. See how many perils human life is exposed to, and what danger we are in from inferior creatures, which are many of them become enemies to men, since men became rebels to God; and what a mercy it is, that we are preserved from them as we are! We often meet with that which is mischievous, where we expect that which is beneficial; and many come by hurt when they are honestly employed, and in the way of their duty.

3. The barbarous people concluded, that Paul, being a prisoner, was certainly a murderer, who had appealed to Rome, to escape justice in his own country, and that this viper was sent by divine justice, to be the avenger of blood; or, if they were not aware that he was a prisoner, they supposed that he was in his fight; and when they saw the venomous animal hang on his hand, which, it seems, he could not, or would not, immediately throw off, but let it hang, they concluded, "*No doubt, this man is a murderer, has shed innocent blood, and therefore, though he has escaped the sea, yet divine vengeance pursues him, and fastens upon him now that he is pleasing himself with the thoughts of that escape, and will not suffer him to live.*" Now in this we may see,

(1.) Some of the discoveries of natural light; they were barbarous people, perhaps had no books of learning among them, and yet they knew naturally, [1.] That there is a God that governs the world, and a providence that presides in all occurrences; that things do not come to pass by chance, no not such a thing as this, but by divine direction. [2.] That evil pursues sinners; that there are good works which God will reward, and wicked works which he will punish; there is a divine nemesis—a vengeance, which sooner or later will reckon for enormous crimes. They believe not only

that there is a God, but that this God has said, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay even to death.* [3.] That murder is a heinous crime, and which shall not long go unpunished; that *whoso sheds man's blood, if his blood be not shed by man, by the magistrate, as it ought to be, it shall be shed by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, who is the Avenger of wrongs.* Those that think they shall go unpunished in any evil way, will be judged out of the mouth of these barbarians, who could say, without book, *We to the wicked, for it shall be ill with them, for the reward of their hands shall be given them.* Those who, because they have escaped many judgments, are secure, and say, *We shall have peace, though we go on; and have their hearts so much the more set to do evil, because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily;* may learn from these illiterate people, that, though malefactors have escaped the vengeance of the sea, yet there is no outrunning divine justice; *vengeance suffers not to live.* In Job's time you might ask them that go by the way, ask the next body you met, and they would tell you, *that the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction.*

(2.) Some of the mistakes of natural light, which needed to be rectified by divine revelation; in two things their knowledge was defective: [1.] That they thought all wicked people are punished in this life; that divine vengeance never suffers great and notorious sinners, such as murderers are, to live long; but that if they come up out of the pit, they shall be taken in the snare, (Jer. 48. 43, 44.) if they flee from a lion, a bear shall meet them, (Amos 5. 19.) if they escape being drowned, a viper shall fasten upon them: whereas it is not so; the wicked, even murderers, sometimes live, become old, yea are mighty in power; for the day of vengeance is to come in the other world, the great day of wrath; and though some are made examples of in this world, to prove that there is a God and a providence; yet many are left unpunished, to prove that there is a judgment to come. [2.] That they thought all who were remarkably afflicted in this life, were wicked people; that a man on whose hand a viper fastens, may from thence be judged to be a murderer; as if these on whom the tower in Siloam fell, must needs be greater sinners than all in Jerusalem. This mistake Job's friends went upon, in their judgment upon his case; but divine revelation sets this matter in a true light—that all things come ordinarily alike to all; that good men are oftentimes greatly afflicted in this life, for the exercise and improvement of their faith and patience.

4. When he shook off the viper from his hand, yet they expected that divine vengeance would ratify the censure they had passed, and that he would have swollen and burst, through the force of the poison, or that he should have fallen down dead suddenly. See how apt men are, when once they have got an ill opinion of a man, though ever so unjust, to abide by it, and to think that God must necessarily confirm and ratify their peevish sentence! It was well they did not knock him down themselves, when they saw he did not swell and fall down; but so considerate they are, as to let Providence work, and to attend the motions of it.

III. Paul's deliverance from the danger, and the undue construction the people put upon that; *The viper's fastening on his hand, was a trial of his faith; and it was found to praise, and honour, and glory: for,*

1. It does not appear that it put him into any fright or confusion at all; he did not shriek or start, nor, as it would be natural for us to do, throw it off with terror and precipitation; for he suffered it to hang on so long, that the people had time to take notice of it, and to make their remarks upon it. Such a wonderful presence of mind he had, and such a composure, as no man could have upon such a sudden

accident, but by the special aids of divine grace, and the actual belief and consideration of that word of Christ concerning his disciples, (Mark 16. 18.) *They shall take up serpents.* This is to have the heart fixed, trusting in God.

2. He carelessly shook off the viper into the fire, without any difficulty, calling for help, or any means used to loosen its hold; and it is probable that it was consumed in the fire. Thus in the strength of the grace of Christ, believers shake off the temptations of Satan, with a holy resolution, saying, as Christ did, *Get thee behind me, Satan; the Lord rebuke thee;* and thus they keep themselves, that the wicked one toucheth them not, so as to fasten upon them, 1 John 5. 18. When we despise the censures and reproaches of men, and look upon them with a holy contempt, having the testimony of conscience for us, then we do, as Paul here, *shake off the viper into the fire.* It does us no harm, except we ci her fret at it, or be deterred by it from our duty, or be provoked to render railing for railing.

3. He was never the worse. They that thought it would have been his death, looked a great while, but saw no harm at all come to him. God hereby intended to make him remarkable among these barbarous people, and so to make way for the entertainment of the gospel among them. It is reported that after this, no venomous creature would live in that island, any more than in Ireland; but I do not find that the matter of fact is confirmed, though the Popish writers speak of it with assurance.

4. They then magnified him as much as before they had vilified him; *They changed their minds, and said that he was a god;* an immortal god; for they thought it impossible that a mortal man should have a viper hang on his hand so long, and be never the worse. See the uncertainty of popular opinion, how it turns with the wind, and how apt it is to run into extremes both ways; from *sacrificing to Paul and Barnabas, to stoning of them;* and here, from condemning him as a murderer, to idolizing him as aged!

IV. The miraculous cure of an old gentleman that was ill of a fever, and of others that were otherwise diseased, by Paul. And with these confirmations of the doctrine of Christ, no doubt there was a faithful publication of it. Observe,

1. The kind entertainment which Publius, the chief man of the island, gave to these distressed strangers; he had a considerable estate in the island, and, some think, was governor, and he received them, and lodged them three days very courteously, that they might have time to furnish themselves in other places at the best hand. It is happy when God gives a large heart to those to whom he has given a large estate. It became him who was the chief man of the island, to be most hospitable and generous; who was the richest man, to be rich in good works.

2. The illness of the father of Publius; he lay sick of a fever and a bloody flux; which often go together, and, when they do, are commonly fatal. Providence ordered that he should be ill just at this time, that the cure of him might be a present recompense to Publius for his generosity, and the cure of him by miracle a recompense particularly for his kindness to Paul, whom he received in the name of a prophet, and had this prophet's reward.

3. His cure; Paul took cognizance of his case, and though we do not find he was urged to it, for they had no thought of any such thing, yet he entered in, not as a physician to heal him by medicines, but as an apostle to heal him by miracle; and he prayed to God, in Christ's name, for his cure, and then laid his hands on him, and he was perfectly well in an instant. Though he must needs be in years, yet he recovered his health, and the lengthening out of life yet longer would be a mercy to him.

4. The cure of many others, who were invited by this cure to apply themselves to Paul; if he can heal diseases so easily, so effectually, he shall soon have an abundance of patients; and he *bid them all welcome*, and sent them away with what they came for. He did not plead that he was a stranger there, thrown accidentally among them, under no obligations to them, and waiting to be gone by the first opportunity, and therefore might be excused from receiving their applications. No, a good man will endeavour to do good, wherever the providence of God casts him. Paul reckoned himself a debtor, not only to the Greeks, but to the barbarians, and thanked God for an opportunity of being useful among them. Nay, he was particularly obliged to these inhabitants of Malta for the seasonable shelter and supply they had afforded him, and hereby he did in effect discharge his quarters; which should encourage us to *entertain strangers*, forsome thereby have entertained *angels*, and some *apostles*, unawares; God will not be behind-hand with any for kindness shewn to his people in distress. We have reason to think, that Paul with these cures, preached the gospel to them, and that, coming thus confirmed and recommended, it was generally embraced among them. And if so, never were any people so enriched by a shipwreck on their coasts as these Maltese were.

V. The grateful acknowledgment which even these barbarous people made of the kindness Paul had done them, in preaching Christ unto them. They were civil to him, and to the other ministers that were with him, who, it is likely, were assisting to him in preaching among them, v. 10.

1. They *honoured us with many honours*; they shewed them all possible respect; they saw God honoured them, and therefore they justly thought themselves obliged to honour them; and thought nothing too much by which they might testify the esteem they had for them. Perhaps, they made them free of their island by naturalizing them, and admitted them members of their guilds and fraternities. The faithful preachers of the gospel are worthy of a double honour, then especially when they succeed in their labours.

2. *When we departed, they loaded us with such things as were necessary*; or, they put on board such things as we had occasion for. Paul could not labour with his hands here, for he had nothing to work upon, and therefore accepted the kindness of the good people of Melita, not as a fee for his cures, (freely he had received, and freely he gave,) but as the relief of his wants, and their's that were with him. And having reaped of their spiritual things, it was but just they should make them those returns, 1 Cor. 9. 11.

11. And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. 12. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. 13. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: 14. Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. 15. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii-forum, and the Three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. 16. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the

captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

We have here the progress of Paul's voyage towards Rome, and his arrival there at length; a rough and dangerous voyage he had had hitherto, and narrowly escaped with his life, but after a storm comes a calm, the latter part of his voyage was easy and quiet;

Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum,
Tendimus in Latium—————

Through various hazards and events we move
To Latium.

Tendimus ad cælum.

We make for heaven.

—————Dabit Deus his quoque finem.

To these a period will be fix'd by Heaven.

We have here,

I. Their leaving of Malta; that island was a happy shelter to them, but it was not their home; when they are refreshed they must to sea again. The difficulties and discouragements we have met with in our christian course must not hinder us from pressing forward. Notice is here taken,

1. Of the time of their departure; *after three months*, the three *winter-months*. Better lie by, though they lay upon charges, than go forward while the season was dangerous. Paul had warned them against venturing to sea in winter-weather, and they would not take the warning; but now that they had learned it by the difficulties and dangers they had gone through, he needed not to warn them: their learning did them good when they had paid dear for it. Experience is *therefore* called *the mistress of fools*, because they are fools that will not learn till experience has taught them.

2. Of the ship in which they departed; it was in a ship of Alexandria; so was that which was cast away, *ch. 27. 6*. This ship had *wintered in that isle*, and was safe. See what different issues there are of men's undertakings in this world. Here were two ships, both of Alexandria, both bound for Italy, both thrown upon the same island, but one is wrecked there, and the other is saved; such occurrences may often be observed. Providence sometimes favours those that deal in the world, and prospers them, that people may be encouraged to *set their hands* to worldly business; at other times Providence crosses them, that people may be warned not to *set their hearts* upon it. Events are thus varied, that we may learn both *how to want*, and *how to abound*. The historian takes notice of the sign of the ship, which, probably, gave it its name, it was *Castor and Pollux*; those little foolish pagan deities, that the poets had made to preside over storms, and to protect seafaring men, as *gods of the sea*, were painted or graven upon the fore-part of the ship, and thence the ship took its name. I suppose this is observed for no other reason than for the better ascertaining of the story; that ship being well known by that name and sign, by all that dealt between Egypt and Italy. Dr. Lightfoot thinks, that Luke mentions this circumstance, to intimate the men's superstition, that they hoped they should have better sailing under this badge than they had had before.

II. Their landing in or about Italy, and the pursuing of their journey toward Rome.

1. They landed first at Syracuse in Sicily, the chief city of that island; there they *tarried three days*, probably having some goods to put ashore, or some merchandise to make there; for it seems to have been a trading voyage that this ship made. Paul had now his curiosity gratified with the sight of places he had often heard of, and wished to see; particularly Syracuse, a place of great antiquity and

note ; and yet, it should seem, there were no christians there.

2. From Syracuse they came to Rhegium, a city in Italy, directly opposite to Messina in Sicily, belonging to the kingdom of Calabria or Naples ; there, it seems, they stayed one day. And a very formal story the Romish legends tell of Paul's preaching here at this time, and the fish coming to the shore to hear him ; that with a candle he set a stone pillar on fire, and by that miracle convinced the people of the truth of his doctrine, and they were many of them baptized, and he ordained Stephen, one of his companions in this voyage, to be their bishop ; and all this, they tell you, was done in this one day ; whereas it does not appear that they did so much as go ashore, but only came to an anchor in the road.

3. From Rhegium they came to Puteoli, a sea-port town not far from Naples, now called *Pozzolana* ; the ship of Alexandria was bound for that part, and therefore there Paul, and the rest that were bound for Rome, were put ashore, and went the remainder of their way *by land*. At Puteoli they found brethren, christians. Who brought the knowledge of Christ hither, we are not told, but here it was, so wonderfully did the leaven of the gospel diffuse its savour. God has many that serve and worship him in places where we little think he has. And, observe, (1.) Though it is probable there were but few brethren in Puteoli, yet Paul found them out ; either they heard of him, or he inquired them out, but as it were by instinct they got together. Brethren in Christ should find out one another, and keep up communion with each other, as those of the same country do in a foreign land. (2.) They desired Paul and his companions to *tarry with them seven days*, that is, to forecast to stay at least *one Lord's day* with them, and to assist them in their public worship that day. They knew not whether ever they should see Paul at Puteoli again, and therefore he must not go, but he must give them a sermon or two, or more. And Paul was willing to allow them so much of his time ; and the centurion under whose command Paul now was, perhaps having himself friends or business at Puteoli, agreed to stay one week there, to oblige Paul.

4. From Puteoli they went forward toward Rome ; whether they travelled on foot, or whether they had beasts provided for them to ride on, (as *ch.* 23. 24.) does not appear ; but to Rome they must go ; and this is their last stage.

III. The meeting which the christians at Rome gave to Paul ; it is probable that notice was sent them by the christians at Puteoli, as soon as ever Paul was come thither, how long he intended to stay there, and when he would set forward for Rome, which gave an opportunity for this interview. Observe,

1. The great honour they did to Paul ; they had heard much of his fame, what use God had made of him, and what eminent service he had done to the kingdom of Christ in the world, and to what multitudes of souls he had been a spiritual father ; they had heard of his sufferings, and how God had owned him in them, and therefore they not only longed to see him, but thought themselves obliged to shew him all possible respect, as a glorious advocate for the cause of Christ. He had some time ago written a long epistle to them, and a most excellent one, *the epistle to the Romans*, in which he had not only expressed his great kindness for them, but had given them a great many useful instructions, and in return for that they shew him this respect. They went to meet him, that they might bring him in state, as ambassadors and judges make their public entry, though he was a prisoner. Some of them went as far as *Aphii-forum*, which was fifty-one miles from Rome ; others, to a place called the *Three taverns*, which was twenty-eight miles (some reckon thirty-

three miles) from Rome. They are to be commended for it, that they were so far from being ashamed of him, or afraid of owing him, because he was a prisoner, that for that very reason they counted him *worthy of double honour*, and were the more careful to shew him respect.

2. The great comfort Paul had in this ; now that he was drawing near to Rome, and, perhaps, heard at Puteoli what character the emperor Nero now had, and what a tyrant he was of late become, he began to have some melancholy thoughts about his appeal to Cæsar, and the consequences of it ; he was drawing near to Rome, where he had never been, where there were few that knew him, or that he knew, and *what things may befall him* here he cannot tell ; but he begins to grow dull upon it, till he meets with these good people that came from Rome, to shew him respect ; and *when he saw them*, (1.) He *thanked God* ; we may suppose he thanked them for their civility, told them again and again how kindly he took it ; but that was not all, he *thanked God*. Note, If our friends be kind to us, it is God that makes them so, that puts it into their hearts, and into the power of their hands, to be so, and we must give him the glory of it. He *thanked God*, no doubt, for the civility and generosity of the barbarous people at Melita, but much more for the pious care of the christian people at Rome for him. When he saw so many christians that were of Rome, he *thanked God* that the gospel of Christ had had such wonderful success there in the metropolis of the empire. When we go abroad, or but look abroad, into the world, and meet with those, even in strange places, that bear up Christ's name, and fear God, and serve him, we should lift up our hearts to heaven in thanksgiving ; blessed be God that there are so many excellent ones on this earth, bad as it is. Paul had thanked God for the christians at Rome before he had ever seen them, upon the report he had heard concerning them ; (Rom. 1. 8.) *I thank my God for you all*. But now that he saw them, (and perhaps they appeared more fashionable and genteel people than most he had conversed with, or more grave, serious, and intelligent, than most,) he *thanked God*. But that was not all ; (2.) He *took courage* ; it put new life into him, cheered up his spirits, and banished his melancholy, and now he can enter Rome a prisoner, as cheerfully as ever he had entered Jerusalem at liberty. He finds there are those there who love and value him, and whom he may both converse with and consult with as his friends, which will take off much of the tediousness of his imprisonment, and the terror of his appearing before Nero. Note, It is an encouragement to those who are travelling toward heaven, to meet with their fellow-travellers, who are their companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. When we see the numerous and serious assemblies of good christians, we should not only give thanks to God, but take courage to ourselves. And this is a good reason why respect should be shewn to good ministers, especially when they are in sufferings, and have contempt put upon them, that it encourages them, and makes both their sufferings and their services more easy. Yet it is observable, that though the christians at Rome were now so respectful to Paul, and he had promised himself so much from their respect, yet they failed him when he most needed them ; for he says, (2 Tim. 4. 16.) *At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all men forsook me*. They could easily take a ride of forty or fifty miles to go meet Paul, for the pleasantness of the journey ; but to venture the displeasure of the emperor, and the disobliging of other great men, by appearing in defence of Paul, and giving evidence for him, here they desire to be excused ; when it comes to that, they will rather ride as far out of town to miss him, as now

they did to meet him. Which is an intimation to us, *to cease from man*, and to *encourage ourselves in the Lord our God*. The courage we take from his promises will never fail us, when we shall be ashamed of that which we took from men's compliments. *Let God be true, but every man a liar*.

IV. The delivering of Paul into custody at Rome, v. 16. He is now come to his journey's end. And,

1. He is *still a prisoner*; he had longed to see Rome, but when he comes there, he is delivered, with other prisoners, to the *captain of the guard*, and can see no more of Rome than he will permit him. How many *great men* had made their entry into Rome, crowned and in triumph, who really were the plagues of their generation! But here a good man makes his entry into Rome, chained and triumphed over as a poor captive, who was really the greatest blessing to his generation. This thought is enough to put one for ever out of conceit with this world.

2. Yet he has some *favour shewed him*; he is a prisoner, but not a close prisoner, not in the common jail; *Paul was suffered to dwell by himself*, in some convenient, private lodgings, which his friends there provided for him, and a soldier was appointed to be his guard, who, we hope, was civil to him, and let him take all the liberty that could be allowed to a prisoner; for he must be very ill-humoured indeed, that could be so to such a courteous obliging man as Paul. Paul, being suffered to *dwell by himself*, could the better enjoy himself, and his friends, and his God, than if he had been lodged with the other prisoners. Note, This may encourage God's prisoners, that he can give them favour in the eyes of those that carry them captives, (Ps. 106. 46.) as Joseph in the eyes of his keeper, (Gen. 39. 21.) and Jehoiachin in the eyes of the king of Babylon, 2 Kings 25. 27, 28. When God does not deliver his people presently out of bondage, yet if he either *make it easy* to them, or *them easy* under it, they have reason to be thankful.

17. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men *and* brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18. Who, when they had examined me, would have let *me* go, because there was no cause of death in me. 19. But when the Jews spake against *it*, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. 20. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see *you*, and to speak with *you*: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. 21. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. 22. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

Paul, with a great deal of expense and hazard, is brought a prisoner to Rome, and when he is come, nobody appears to prosecute him, or lay any thing to his charge; but he must call his own cause; and

here he represents it to the *chief of the Jews at Rome*. It was not long since, by an edict of Claudius, all the Jews were banished from Rome, and kept out till his death; but in the five years since then, many Jews were come thither, for the advantage of trade, though it does not appear that they were allowed any synagogue there, or place of public worship; but those *chief of the Jews*, were those of best figure among them, the most distinguished men of that religion, who had the best estates and interests. *Paul called them together*, being desirous to *stand right* in their opinion, and that there might be a good understanding between him and them. And here we are told,

I. What he said to them, and what account he gave them of his case; he speaks *respectfully* to them, calls them *men and brethren*, and thereby intimates that he *expects* to be treated by them both as a *man* and as a brother, and *engages* to treat them as such, and to tell them nothing but the *truth*; for *we are members one of another*, all we are *brethren*. Now,

1. He professes his own innocency, and that he had not given any just occasion to the Jews to bear him such an ill-will as generally they did; "I have *committed nothing against the people* of the Jews, have done nothing to the prejudice of their religion or civil liberties, have added no affliction to their present miseries, they know I have not; nor have I committed any thing *against the customs of our fathers*; either by abrogating, or by innovating, in religion." It is true, Paul did not impose the customs of the fathers upon the Gentiles, they were never intended for them; but it is as true, that he never opposed them in the Jews; but did himself, when he was among them, conform to them. He never quarrelled with them for practising according to the usages of their own religion, but only for their enmity to the Gentiles, Gal. 2. 12. Paul had the testimony of his conscience for him, that he had done his duty to the Jews.

2. He modestly complains of the hard usage he had met with; that, though he had given them no offence, yet *he was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans*. If he had spoken the whole truth in this matter, it would have looked worse than it did upon the Jews, for they would have murdered him without any colour of law or justice, if the Romans had not protected him; but however, their accusing him as a criminal before Felix the governor, and demanding judgment against him, were, in effect, *delivering him prisoner into the hands of the Romans*, when he desired no more than a fair and impartial trial by their own law.

3. He declares the judgment of the Roman governors concerning him, v. 18. They *examined him*, inquired into his case, heard what was to be said against him, and what he had to say for himself; the *chief captain* examined him, so did Felix, and Festus, and Agrippa, and they could *find no cause of death in him*; nothing appeared to the contrary but that he was an honest, quiet, conscientious, good man, and therefore they would never gratify the Jews with a sentence of death upon him; but, on the contrary, would have *let him go*, and have let him go on in his work too, and have given him no interruption, for they all heard him, and liked his doctrine well enough. It was for the honour of Paul, that those who most carefully examined his case, acquitted him, and none condemned him but unheard, and such as were prejudiced against him.

4. He pleads the necessity he was under to remove himself and his cause to Rome: and that it was only in his own defence, and not with any design to re-criminate, or exhibit a cross bill against the complainants, v. 19. *When the Jews spake against it*, and entered a caveat against his discharge, design-

ing, if they could not have him condemned to die, yet to have him a prisoner for life, he was *constrained to appeal unto Cæsar*, finding that the governors, one after another, stood so much in awe of the Jews, that they would not discharge him, for fear of making them their enemies; which made it necessary for him to pray the assistance of the higher powers. This was all he aimed at in this appeal; not to *accuse his nation*, but only to vindicate himself. Every man has a right to plead in his own defence, who yet ought not to find fault with his neighbours. It is an invidious thing to accuse, especially to accuse a nation, such a nation. Paul made intercession *for them*, but never *against them*. The Roman government had at this time an ill opinion of the Jewish nation, as factious, turbulent, disaffected, and dangerous; and it had been an easy thing for a man with such a fluent tongue as Paul had, a citizen of Rome, and so injured as he was, to have exasperated the emperor against the Jewish nation; but Paul would not for ever so much do such a thing, he was for making the best of every body, and not making bad worse.

5. He puts his sufferings upon the true foot, and gives them such an account of the reason of them, as should engage them not only not to join with his persecutors against him, but to concern themselves for him, and to do what they could on his behalf, if they had any interest to procure him his liberty; (v. 20.) "*For this cause I have called for you*, not to quarrel with you, for I have no design to incense the government against you, but to *see you*, and *speak with you* as my countrymen, and men that I would keep up a correspondence with, because that *for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain*." He carried the mark of his imprisonment about with him, and probably was chained to the soldier that kept him; and it was, (1.) Because he preached, that the Messiah was come, who was the Hope of Israel, he whom Israel hoped for. "Do not all the Jews agree in this, that the Messiah will be the Glory of his people Israel? And therefore he is to be hoped for, and this Messiah I preach, and prove he is come. *They would keep up such a hope of a Messiah yet to come*, as must end in a *despair of him*; I preach such a hope in a Messiah already come, as must produce a *joy in him*." (2.) Because he preached, that the *resurrection of the dead* would come; that also was the *hope of Israel*; so he had called it, *ch. 23. 6.—24. 15.—26. 6, 7*. "They would have you still expect a Messiah that would free you from the Roman yoke, and make you great and prosperous upon earth, and that is it that occupies their thoughts; and they are angry at me for directing their expectations to the great things of another world, and persuading them to embrace a Messiah, who will secure those to them, and not external power and grandeur; I am for bringing you to the spiritual and eternal blessedness which our fathers by faith had their eye upon, and that is what they hate me for; because I would take you off from that which is the *cheat of Israel*, and will be its shame and ruin, the notion of a temporal Messiah; and read you to that which is the true and real *hope of Israel*, and the genuine sense of all the promises made to the fathers, a spiritual kingdom of holiness and love set up in the hearts of men, to be the pledge of, and preparative for, the joyful resurrection of the dead, and the *life of the world to come*."

II. What was their reply; they own,

1. That they had *nothing to say* in particular *against him*; nor had any instructions to appear as his prosecutors before the emperor, either by letter or word of mouth; (v. 21.) "*We have neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee*, have no orders to prosecute thee; *neither any of the brethren* of the Jewish nation that have lately come up

to Rome, (as many occasions drew the Jews thither now that their nation was a province of the empire,) *have shewed or shakèd any harm of thee*." This was very strange, that that restless and inveterate rage of the Jews, which had followed Paul wherever he went, should not follow him to Rome, to get him condemned there. And some think they told a lie here, and had orders to prosecute him, but durst not own it, being themselves obnoxious to the emperor's displeasure; who, though he had not, like his predecessors, banished them all from Rome, yet he gave them no countenance there. But I am apt to think that what they said was true, and Paul now found he had gained the point he aimed at, in appealing to Cæsar, which was to remove his cause into a court to which they durst not follow it. This was David's policy, and it was his security; (1 Sam. 27. 1.) *There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines, and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coasts of Israel; so shall I escape out of his hand*: and it proves so, v. 4. *When Saul heard that David was fled to Gath, he sought no more again for him*. Thus did Paul by his appeal, he fled to Rome where he was out of their reach; and they said, "Even let him go."

2. That they desired to know more particularly concerning the doctrine he preached, and the religion he took so much pains to propagate in the face of so much opposition; (v. 22.) "*We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest*—*a sçavoir*, what thy opinions or sentiments are, what are those things which thou art so wise about, and hast such a relish of, and such a zeal for; for though we know little else concerning christianity, we know it is a *sect every where spoken against*." Those who said this scornful, spiteful word of the christian religion, were Jews, the chief of the Jews at Rome, who boasted of their knowledge; (Rom. 2. 17.) and yet this was all they knew concerning the christian religion, that it was a *sect every where spoken against*. They put it into an ill name, and then run it down. (1.) They looked upon it to be a sect, and that was false. True christianity establishes that which is of common concern to all mankind, and is not built upon such narrow opinions and private interests as sects commonly owe their original to. It aims at no worldly benefit or advantage, as sects do; but all its gains are spiritual and eternal. And besides, it has a direct tendency to the uniting the children of men, and not the dividing of them, and setting them at variance, as sects have. (2.) They said, it was *every where spoken against*, and that was too true; all that they conversed with spake against it, and therefore they concluded every body did; most indeed did. It is, and always has been, the lot of Christ's holy religion, to be *every where spoken against*.

23. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into *his lodging*; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. 24. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. 25. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, *Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers*, 26. Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: 27. For the heart of this peo-

ple is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with *their eyes*, and hear with *their ears*, and understand with *their heart*, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 28. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that* they will hear it. 29. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

We have here a short account of a long conference which Paul had with the Jews at Rome about the christian religion. Though they were so far prejudiced against it, because it was *every where spoken against*, as to call it a *sect*, yet they were willing to give it a hearing; which was more than the Jews at Jerusalem would do. It is probable that these Jews at Rome, being men of larger acquaintance with the world, and more general conversation, were more free in their inquiries than the bigoted Jews at Jerusalem were; and would not answer this matter before they heard it.

I. We are here told how Paul managed this conference in defence of the christian religion. The Jews appointed the time, a day was set for this dispute, that all parties concerned might have sufficient notice, *v.* 23. Those Jews seemed well disposed to receive conviction, and yet it did not prove that they all were so. Now when the day came,

1. There were *many got together to Paul*; though he was a prisoner, and could not come out to them, yet they were willing to come to him to his lodging. And the confinement he was now under, if duly considered, instead of prejudicing them against his doctrine, ought to confirm it to them; for it was a sign not only that he believed it, but that he thought it worth suffering for. One would visit such a man as Paul in his prison, rather than not have instruction from him. And he *made room* for them in his lodging, not fearing giving offence to the government, so that he might do good to them.

2. He was very large and full in his discourse with them; seeking their conviction more than his own vindication. (1.) He expounded, or explained, the *kingdom of God* to them, shewed them the nature of that kingdom, and the glorious purposes and designs of it, that it is heavenly and spiritual, seated in the minds of men, and shines not in external pomp, but in purity of heart and life. That which kept the Jews in their unbelief, was, a misunderstanding of the *kingdom of God*, as if it came *with observation*; let but that be *expounded* to them, and set in a *true light*, and they will be brought into obedience to it. (2.) He not only *expounded the kingdom of God*, but he testified it, plainly declared it to them, and confirmed it by incontestable proofs, that the kingdom of God by the Messiah's administration was come, and was now set up in the world. He attested the extraordinary powers in the kingdom of grace, by which it was *set up*, and the *miracles* in the kingdom of *nature*, by which it was confirmed. He bore his testimony to it from his own experience of its power and influence upon him, and the manner of his being brought into subjection to it. (3.) He not only expounded and testified the kingdom of God, but he persuaded them, urged it upon their consciences, and pressed them with all earnestness to embrace the kingdom of God, and submit to it, and not to persist in an opposition to it. He followed his doctrine (the explication and confirmation of it) with a warm and lively application to his hearers, which is the most proper profitable method of

preaching. (4.) He persuaded them *concerning Jesus*; the design and tendency of his whole discourse were to bring them to Christ, to convince them of his being the Messiah, and to engage them to believe in him as he is offered in the gospel. He urged upon them, *τὰ πρὸς τὰ ἱστοῦ*—the things *concerning Jesus*, the prophecies of him, which he read to them *out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets*, as pointing at the Messiah, and shewed how they had all had their accomplishment in this Jesus. They being Jews, he dealt with them out of the scriptures of the Old Testament, and demonstrated that these were so far from making against christianity, that they were the great proofs of it; so that if we compare the history of the New Testament with the prophecy of the Old, we must conclude that this Jesus is *he that should come*, and we are to *look for no other*.

3. He was very long; for he continued his discourse, and it should seem to have been a continued discourse, from *morning till evening*; perhaps it was a discourse eight or ten hours long. The subject was curious, he was full of it; it was of vast importance, he was in good earnest, and his heart was upon it; he knew not when he should have such another opportunity, and therefore, without begging pardon for tiring their patience, he kept them all day; but it is probable that he spent some of the time in prayer with them and for them.

II. What was the effect of this discourse; one would have thought that so *good a cause* as that of christianity, and managed by such a *skilful hand* as Paul's, could not but carry the day, and that all the hearers should have yielded to it presently; but it did not prove so; the child Jesus is *set for the fall* of some, and the *rising again* of others, a Foundation Stone to some, and a Stone of stumbling to others.

1. They did not *agree among themselves*, *v.* 25. Some of them thought Paul was in the right, others would not admit it. This is that division which Christ came to send; that fire which he came to kindle, Luke 12. 49, 51. Paul preached with a great deal of plainness and clearness, and yet his hearers could not agree about the sense and evidence of what he preached.

2. *Some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not*, *v.* 24. There was the disagreement. Such as this has always been the success of the gospel; to some it has been a *savour of life unto life*, to others a *savour of death unto death*. Some are wrought upon by the word, and others hardened; some receive the light, and others shut their eyes against it. So it was among Christ's hearers, and the spectators of his miracles; some believed, and some blasphemed. If all had believed, there had been no disagreement; so that all the blame of the division lay upon those who would not believe.

III. The awakening word which Paul said to them at parting; he perceived by what they muttered, that there were many among them, and perhaps the greater part, that were obstinate, and would not yield to the conviction of what he said; and they were getting up to be gone, they had had enough of it; "Hold," says Paul, "take one word with you before you go, and consider of it when you come home: what do you think will be the effect of your obstinate infidelity? What will you do in the end hereof? What will it come to?"

1. "You will by the righteous judgment of God be *sealed up under unbelief*; you harden your own hearts, and God will harden them, as he did Pharaoh's; and this is what was prophesied of concerning you. Turn to that scripture, (Isa. 6. 9, 10.) and read it seriously, and tremble, lest the case there described should prove to be your case." As there are in the Old Testament gospel-promises, which will be accomplished in all that believe, so there are

gospel-threatening of spiritual judgments, which will be fulfilled in them, that *believe not*; and this is one. It is part of the commission given to Isaiah the prophet, he is sent to make those worse, that would not be made better. *Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers.* What was spoken by JEHOVAH, is here said to be spoken by the Holy Ghost, which proves that the Holy Ghost is God; and what was spoken to Isaiah, is here said to be spoken by him to their fathers; for he was ordered to *tell the people* what God said to him; and though what is there said had in it much of terror to the people and of grief to the prophet, yet it is here said to be well spoken. Hezekiah said concerning a message of wrath, *Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken*, Isa. 39. 8. And *he that believes not, shall be damned*, is gospel, as well as, *He that believes, shall be saved*, Mark 16. 16. Or, this may be explained by that of our Saviour, (Matt. 15. 7.) "*Well did Esaias prophesy of you.*" The Holy Ghost said to your fathers, that which would be fulfilled in you, *Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand.*"

(1.) "That which was their great sin against God, is your's; and that is this, *You will not see*; you shut your eyes against the most convincing evidence possible, and will not admit the conclusion, though you cannot deny the premises; *your eyes you have closed*," v. 27. That speaks an obstinate infidelity, and a willing slavery to prejudice. "As your fathers *would not see* God's hand *lifted up against them* in his judgments, (Isa. 26. 11.) so you *will not see* God's hand *stretched out to you* in gospel-grace." It was true of these unbelieving Jews, that they were prejudiced against the gospel, they *did not see*, because they were resolved they would not; and none so blind as they that will not see. They would not prosecute their convictions, and for that reason would not admit them. They have purposely *closed their eyes*, lest they should *see with their eyes* the great things which belong to their everlasting peace; should see the glory of God, the amiableness of Christ, the deformity of sin, the beauty of holiness, the vanity of this world, and the reality of another; they will not be changed and governed by those truths, and therefore will not receive the evidence of them; *lest they should hear with their ears* that which they are loath to hear, the wrath of God revealed from heaven against them, and the will of God revealed from heaven to them. They *stop their ears*, like the *deaf adder*, that *will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely*. Thus their fathers did, they *would not hear*, Zech. 7. 11, 12. And that which they are afraid of in shutting up their eyes and ears, and barricading (as it were) both their learning senses against him that *made both the hearing ear, and the seeing eye*, is, *lest they should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them*. They kept their mind in the dark, or at least in a constant confusion and tumult, lest, if they should admit a considerate sober thought, they should *understand with their heart* how much it is both their duty and their interest to be religious, and so by degrees the truth should be too hard for them, and *they should be converted* from the evil ways which they take pleasure in, to those exercises which they have now an aversion to. Observe, God's method is to bring people first to see and hear, and so to *understand with their hearts*, and then to convert them, and bow their wills, and so heal them; which is the regular way of dealing with a rational soul: and therefore Satan prevents the conversion of souls to God, by *blinding the mind, and darkening the understanding*, 2 Cor. 4. 4. And the case is very sad, when the sinner *joins with him* herein, and *puts out his own eyes*. *Ut liberius peccent, libenter ignorant*—They

plunge into ignorance, that they may sin the more freely. They are in love with their disease, and are afraid lest God should heal them; like Babylon of old, we would have healed her, and she *would not be healed*, Jer. 51. 9. This was the sin.

(2.) "That which was the great judgment of God upon them for this sin, is, his *judgment upon you*, and that is, *You shall be blind*. God will give you up to a judicial infatuation; *hearing you shall hear*, you shall have the word of God preached to you over and over, but *you shall not understand it*; because you will not give your minds to understand it, God will not give you strength and grace to understand it; *seeing you shall see*; you shall have abundance of miracles and signs done before your eyes, but *you shall not perceive* the convincing evidence of them. Take heed lest it be true of you, what Moses said to your fathers, (Deut. 29. 4.) *The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day*; and what Isaiah said to the men of his generation, (Isa. 29. 10—12.) *The Lord has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes*." What with their resisting the grace of God, and rebelling against the light, and God's withdrawing and withholding his grace and light from them; what with their *not receiving the love of the truth*, and God's *giving them up* for that to *strong delusions, to believe a lie*; what with their wilful, and what with their judicial hardness, *the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing*; they are stupid and senseless, and not wrought upon by all that can be said to them; no physic that can be given them operates upon them, or will reach them, and therefore their disease must be adjudged incurable, and their case desperate. How should they be happy, that will not be healed of a disease that makes them miserable? And how should they be healed, that will not be converted to the use of the methods of cure? And how should they be converted, that will not be convinced either of their disease or of their remedy? And how should they be convinced, that *shut their eyes and stop their ears*? Let all that hear the gospel, and do not heed it, tremble at this doom; for when once they are thus given up to hardness of heart, they are already in the suburbs of hell; for who shall heal them, if God do not?

2. "Your unbelief will *justify God in sending the gospel to the Gentile world*, which is the thing you look upon with such a jealous eye; (v. 28.) *therefore*, seeing you put the grace of God away from you, and will not submit to the power of divine truth and love, seeing you will not be *converted and healed* in the methods which divine wisdom has appointed, *therefore be it known unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles*, that salvation which was of the Jews only, (John 4. 22.) the offer of it is made to them, the means of it afforded to them, and they stand fairer for it than you do: it is sent to them, and they will hear it, and receive it, and be happy in it."

Now Paul designs hereby,

(1.) To abate their displeasure at the *preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles*, by shewing them the absurdity of it; they were angry that *the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles*, and thought it was too great a favour done to them; but if they thought that salvation of so small a value as not to be worthy of their acceptance, surely they could not grudge it the Gentiles as too good for them, or envy them for it. The salvation of God is sent into the world, the Jews had the first offer of it, it was fairly proposed to them, it was earnestly pressed upon them, but they refused it; they would not accept the invitation which was given to them first to the wedding-feast, and therefore must thank themselves if other guests be invited. If they will not strike the bar-

gain nor come up to the terms, they ought not to be angry at those that will. They cannot complain that the Gentiles took it over their heads, or out of their hands, for they had quite taken their hands off it; nay *they had lifted up their heel against it*; and therefore it is their fault; for *it is through their fall that salvation is come to the Gentiles*, Rom. 11. 11.

(2.) To improve their displeasure at the favour done to the Gentiles to their advantage, and to bring good out of that evil; for when he had spoken of this very thing in his *epistle to the Romans*, the benefit which the Gentiles had by the unbelief and rejection of the Jews, he says, he took notice of it on purpose that he might provoke his dear countrymen the Jews to a holy emulation, and might save some of them, Rom. 11. 14. The Jews have rejected the gospel of Christ, and pushed it off to the Gentiles, but it is not yet too late to repent of their refusal, and to accept of the salvation which they did make light of; they may say No, and take it, as the elder brother in the parable, who, when he was bidden to go work in the vineyard, first said, *I will not*, and yet afterwards repented, and went, Matt. 21. 29. Is the gospel sent to the Gentiles? Let us go after it rather than come short of it. And will they hear it, who are thought to be out of hearing, and had been so long like the idols they worshipped, that have ears and hear not? And shall not we hear it, whose privilege it is to have God so nigh to us in all that we call upon him for? Thus he would have them to argue, and to be shamed into the belief of the gospel, by the welcome it met with among the Gentiles. And if it had not that effect upon them, it would aggravate their condemnation, as it did that of the Scribes and Pharisees, who, when they saw the publicans and harlots submit to John's baptism, did not afterwards thereupon repent of their folly that they might believe him, Matt. 21. 32.

IV. The breaking up of the assembly, as it should seem, in some disorder.

1. They turned their backs upon Paul; those of them that believed not, were extremely nettled at that last word which he said, that they should be judiciously blinded, and that the light of the gospel should shine among them that sat in darkness; when Paul had said these words, he had said enough for them, and they departed, perhaps not so much enraged as some others of their nation had been upon the like occasion, but stupid and unconcerned; no more affected, either with those terrible words in the close of his discourse, or all the comfortable words he had spoken before, than the seats they sat on; they departed, many of them with a resolution never to hear Paul preach again, nor trouble themselves with further inquiries about this matter.

2. They set their faces one against another; for they had great disputes among themselves; there was not only a quarrel between them who believed and them who believed not, but even among them who believed not there were debates; they that agreed to depart from Paul, yet agreed not in the reasons why they departed, but had great reasoning among themselves. Many have great reasoning, who yet do not reason rightly; can find fault with one another's opinions, and yet not yield to truth. Nor will men's reasoning among themselves convince them, without the grace of God to open their understandings.

30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

We are here taking our leave of the history of blessed Paul; and therefore, since God saw it not fit that we should know any more of him, we should carefully take notice of every particular of the circumstances in which we must here leave him.

I. It cannot but be a trouble to us, that we must leave him in bonds for Christ, nay and that we have no prospect given us of his being set at liberty. Two whole years of that good man's life are here spent in confinement, and, for aught that appears, he was never inquired after, all that time, by these whose prisoner he was; he appealed to Cæsar, in hope of a speedy discharge from his imprisonment, the governors having signified to his imperial majesty concerning the prisoner, that he had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds, and yet he is continued a prisoner. So little reason have we to trust in men, especially despised prisoners in great men; witness Joseph's case, whom the chief butler remembered not, but forgot, Gen. 40. 23. Yet some think, that though it be not mentioned here, yet it was in the first of these two years, and early too in that year, that he was first brought before Nero, and then his bonds in Christ were manifest in Cæsar's court, as he says, Phil. 1. 13. And at that first answer it was that no man stood by him, 2 Tim. 4. 16. But it seems, instead of being set at liberty upon his appeal, as he expected, he hardly escaped out of the emperor's hands with his life; he calls it a deliverance out of the mouth of the lion, (2 Tim. 4. 17.) and his speaking there of his first answer, intimates that since that, he had a second, in which he had come off better, and yet was not discharged. During these two years' imprisonment he wrote his epistle to the Galatians, then his second epistle to Timothy, then those to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon, in which he mentions several things particularly concerning his imprisonment; and lastly, his epistle to the Hebrews, just after he was set at liberty, as Timothy also was, who, coming to visit him, was upon some account or other made his fellow-prisoner; (with him writes Paul to the Hebrews, 13. 23. if he come shortly I will see you;) but how or by what means he obtained his liberty, we are not told; only that two years he was a prisoner. Tradition says, that after his discharge he went from Italy to Spain, thence to Crete, and so with Timothy into Judea, and from thence went to visit the churches in Asia, and at length came a second time to Rome, and there was beheaded in the last year of Nero. But Baronius himself owns, that there is no certainty of any thing concerning him, betwixt his release from this imprisonment, and his martyrdom; but it is said by some, that Nero, having when he began to play the tyrant, set himself against the christians, and persecuted them, (and he was the first of the emperors that made a law against them, as Tertullian saith, *Apologet. cap. 3.*) the church at Rome was much weakened by that persecution, and that brought Paul the second time to Rome, to re-establish the church there, and to comfort the souls of the disciples that were left, and so he fell a second time into Nero's hand. And Chrysostom relates, that a young woman that was one of Nero's misses, (to speak modestly,) being converted, by Paul's preaching, to the christian faith, and so brought off from the lewd course of life she had lived, Nero was incensed against Paul for that, and ordered him first to be imprisoned, and then put to death.

But, to keep to this short account here given of it, 1. It would grieve one to think that such a useful man as Paul was, should be so long in restraint; two years he was a prisoner under Felix, (ch. 24. 27.) and beside all the time that passed between that and his coming to Rome, he is here two years more a prisoner under Nero. How many churches might Paul have planted, how many cities and nations

might he have brought over to Christ, in these five years time, (for so much it was at least,) if he had been at liberty ! But God is wise, and will shew that he is no debtor to the most useful instruments he employs, but can and will carry on his own interest, both without their services, and by their sufferings. Even Paul's bonds fell out to the *furtherance of the gospel*, Phil. 1. 12, 14.

2. Yet even Paul's imprisonment was in some respects a kindness to him, for these *two years he dwelt in his own hired house*, and that was more, for aught I know, than ever he had done before ; he had always accustomed himself to sojourn in the houses of others, now he has got a *house of his own, his own* while he pays the rent for it ; and such a retirement as this would be a refreshment to one who had been all his days an itinerant ; he had been accustomed to be always upon the remove, seldom stayed long at a place, but now he lived for *two years in the same house* ; so that the bringing of him into this prison, was like Christ's call to his disciples to *come into a desert place, and rest awhile*, Mark 6. 31. When he was at liberty, he was in continual fear by reason of the *lying in wait of the Jews*, (ch. 20. 19.) but now his prison was his castle. Thus *out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness*.

11. Yet it is a pleasure to us, (for we are sure it was to him,) that though we leave him in bonds for Christ, yet we leave him at work for Christ, and this made his bonds easy, that he was not by them bound out from serving God and doing good ; his prison becomes a temple, a church, and then it is to him a palace ; his hands are tied, but, thanks be to God, his mouth is not stopped ; a faithful zealous minister can better bear any hardship than being silenced ; here is Paul a prisoner, and yet a preacher ; he is bound, but the word of the Lord is not bound. When he wrote his *epistle to the Romans*, he said *he longed to see them, that he might impart unto them some spiritual gift* ; (Rom. 1. 11.) he was glad to see some of them, (v. 15.) but it would not be half his joy, unless he could *impart to them some spiritual gift*, which here he has an opportunity to do, and then he will not complain of his confinement. Observe,

1. Whom he preached to ; to all that had a mind to hear him, whether Jews or Gentiles. Whether he had liberty to go to other houses to preach, does not appear ; it is likely not ; but whoever would had liberty to come to his house to hear, and they were welcome ; *he received all that came to him*. Note, Ministers' doors should be open to such as desire to receive instruction from them, and they should be glad of an opportunity to advise those that are in care about their souls. Paul could not preach in a synagogue, or any public place of meeting that was sumptuous and capacious, but he preached in a poor cottage of his own. Note, When we cannot do what we would in the service of God, we must do what we can. Those ministers that have but little, hired houses, should rather preach in them, if they may be allowed to do that, than be silent. *He received all that came to him*, and was not afraid of the greatest, nor ashamed of the meanest : he was ready to preach on the first day of the week to christians, on the seventh day to Jews, and to all who would come on any day of the week ; and he might hope the better to speed, because *they came in unto him*, which supposed a desire to be instructed, and a willingness to learn ; and where these are, it is probable that some good may be done.

2. What he preached ; he does not fill their heads

with curious speculations, or with matters of state and politics, but he keeps to his text, minds his business as an apostle. (1.) He is God's ambassador, and therefore *preaches the kingdom of God*, does all he can to preach it up ; negotiates the affairs of it, in order to the advancing of all its true interests ; he meddles not with the affairs of the kingdoms of men, let those treat of them whose work it is, he *preacheth the kingdom of God* among men, and the word of that kingdom ; the same that he defended in his public disputes, *testifying the kingdom of God*, (v. 23.) he enforced in his public preaching, as that which if received aright, will make us all wise and good, wiser and better, which is the end of preaching. (2.) He is an agent for Christ, a friend of the Bridegroom, and therefore *teaches those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ* ; the whole history of Christ, his incarnation, doctrine, life, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension ; all that relates to the *mystery of godliness*. Paul stuck still to his principle—to *know and preach nothing but Christ, and him crucified*. Ministers, when in their preaching they are tempted to divert from that which is their main business, should reduce themselves with this question, What does this *concern the Lord Jesus Christ* ? What tendency has it to bring us to him, and to keep us walking in him ? *For we preach not ourselves, but Christ*.

3. With what liberty he preached.

(1.) Divine grace gave him a liberty of spirit ; he preached *with all confidence*, as one that was himself well assured of the truth of what he preached, and that it was what he durst stand by ; and of the worth of it, that it was what he durst suffer for. He was *not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*.

(2.) Divine Providence gave him a liberty of speech ; *no man forbidding him*, giving him any check for what he did, or laying any restraint upon him ; the Jews that used to forbid him to speak to the Gentiles, had no authority here ; and the Roman government as yet took no cognizance of the profession of Christianity as a crime. Herein we must acknowledge the hand of God, [1.] Setting bounds to the rage of persecutors ; where he does not turn the heart, yet he can tie the hand, and bridle the tongue. Nero was a bloody man, and there were many, both Jews and Gentiles, in Rome, that hated Christianity ; and yet so it was, unaccountably, that Paul, though a prisoner, was connived at in preaching the gospel, and it was not construed a breach of the peace. Thus God makes *the wrath of men to praise him, and restrains the remainder of it*, Ps. 76.

10. Though there were so many that had it in their power to forbid Paul's preaching, (even the common soldier that kept him might have done it,) yet God so ordered it, *that no man did forbid him*. [2.] See God here providing comfort for the relief of the persecuted. Though it was a very low and narrow sphere of opportunity that Paul was here placed in, compared with what he had been in, yet, such as it was, he was not molested or disturbed in it. Though it was not a wide door that was opened to him, yet it was kept open, and no man was suffered to shut it ; and it was to many an effectual door, so that *there were saints even in Cæsar's household*, Phil. 4. 22. When the city of our solemnities is thus made a quiet habitation at any time, and we are fed from day to day with the bread of life, *no man forbidding us*, we must give thanks to God for it, and prepare for changes ; still longing for *that holy mountaint, in which there shall never be any pricking brier or grieving thorn*.