

A SERMON ON JOHN III. 33.

He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.—JOHN iii. 33.

FOR the occasion of these words, we must look a little back into the context. There you will find that both John and Jesus were admitting proselytes into the kingdom of God by baptism; Jesus in the land of Judea, and John at Ænon, near Salim. Now the kingdom of God seldom enjoyeth any long and successful progress without opposition. If outward enemies fail, domestic jars and quarrels shall be raised rather than this kingdom shall go forward without contradiction. John's disciples were at least half friends to Christ, yet were troubled at the great resort to his baptism, out of foolish emulation and jealousy for their master's credit; which was occasioned thus: A dispute there was between John's disciples and some Jews, whether John's baptism or their legal washings did most avail for the purging away of sin. Among other things objected by the Jews to lessen John's baptism, they mentioned that practised by Christ as a more excellent and esteemed way. This nettled John's disciples; therefore, as men grieved to see so many attend to Christ's doctrine and frequent his baptism, and fearing lest their master should be outshined, and the respects of the people be turned upon another, they complain to John: 'Rabbi,' say they, 'he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.' It is good to see how John receiveth this complaint. Nothing will try a man's grace more than questions of emulation. John, like a modest and self-denying spirit, doth seek to allay this envy in his disciples by his humility and faithfulness, giving a large testimony to Christ, both of the excellency of his person, and the certainty and truth of his doctrine.

1. Of the excellency of Christ's person above himself, or any other messenger of God. He telleth them that every one must hold the place given him from above, and contain himself within his degree and measure. Now his place was to be the servant, and Christ the lord. He was not the Christ, but his harbinger. Christ was the principal person and bridegroom. He had honour enough in being the friend of the bridegroom, and to rejoice in that the bride or the church began to hear Christ. Christ had the spring in himself; what others had was by communication; and therefore he must yield to the growing

glory of Christ, who by his original came from above, and in respect of dominion and sovereignty was above all.

2. The certainty and truth of this doctrine: 'What he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth.' His doctrine was infallible, and as being conscious to the secrets of God, his testimony was certain, though it found little credence and reception in the world: 'No man receiveth his testimony;' that is, no man in comparison, none with that assurance they ought to do. John's disciples say, 'All men follow him;' but John saith here, 'No man receiveth his testimony.' They think there were too many followed Christ, and John thinketh there were too few. They say invidiously, 'All men;' John humbly, 'No man.' None to speak of, none as they ought, for many followed him out of novelty. Thereupon he persuadeth them to receive Christ's testimony. His argument is, that thereby they should bring honour to God, and honour him with that honour which he most esteemeth, by a solemn acknowledgment of his truth: 'He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.'

The words contain—

1. The true notion of Christ's doctrine—it is a testimony.
2. The respect due to it—it must be received.
3. The effect and fruit of this receiving—it bringeth honour and glory to God.

There take notice—

[1.] Of the particular attribute that is honoured—that God is true.

[2.] The solemnity or manner of honouring—hath put to his seal.

Or, in short—

(1.) The description of a believer—he is one that receiveth Christ's testimony.

(2.) The work of a believer is to put to his seal that God is true.

Doct. He that heartily embraceth the doctrine of the gospel doth solemnly ratify and bear witness to the truth of God.

First, I shall speak of the true notion of Christ's doctrine—it is a testimony. Here I shall handle the nature, value, and use.

First, The nature of it. A testimony is a sort of proof, necessary in matters that cannot otherwise be decided, and found out by rational discourse, as in two cases—

1. In things that depend upon the arbitrary will of another; and—
2. In matters of fact. In both these respects the gospel is brought to us as a testimony. In the first respect by Christ, who came out of the bosom of God, and knew his secrets. In the second, as it is a report of matter of fact by eye and ear witnesses; so by the apostles.

[1.] A testimony is necessary in matters that depend upon the arbitrary will of another. If I be concerned to know how he stands affected towards me I must know it by his testimony solemnly deposed and given for my satisfaction. So the gospel, or the doctrine of God's good-will in Christ for the salvation of sinners, is a thing that cannot be found out by the light of nature. But Christ, who was in the bosom of the Father, knew his heart, and hath given testimony how it stardeth affected to the salvation of men. None can know God's mind but God himself, and he to whom he will reveal it. So Christ saith,

Mat. xi. 27, 'No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him,' as no man knoweth the things of a man but the spirit in a man. To save sinners is not *proprietas divince nature*—a necessary act of the divine nature; but *opus liberi consilii*—an act of his new grace, love, and condescension: John iii. 16, 'God so loved the world.' This wonderful work proceedeth from the free motion of God's will, and therefore it was impossible to be found out by discourse of natural reason; for how could any man divine what God purposed in his heart before he wrought it unless he himself revealed it? That *Deus est placibilis*—that God was to be appeased, man might find out by the continuance of the course of nature and the blessings of providence, notwithstanding many sins and the need of an expiation and a propitiatory sacrifice: but for the way of appeasing God, how a man shall be pardoned, reconciled to God, and obtain eternal life, of this nature knew nothing. The angels, which are the highest sort of rational creatures, wonder at it when it is revealed, Eph. iii. 10, and 1 Peter i. 11. Therefore the knowledge of the gospel merely dependeth upon the testimony of God brought us by Christ, who was sent to reveal his Father's will.

[2.] A testimony is necessary in matters of fact. Matter of law is argued and debated by reason, but matter of fact is only proved by credible witnesses; and in this sense the gospel to us is a testimony that Christ came into the world, taught the way of salvation in that manner wherein it is now set down in the scriptures, wrought miracles, died for our sins at Jerusalem, and rose again to confirm all, and to make faith to the world that he was the true Messiah. These things were to be once done in one place of the world, but yet the knowledge of it concerned all the rest of the world. All the world could not see Christ in the flesh, nor see him work miracles, nor see him rise again and ascend into heaven; and it was not necessary that he should always live here, and act over his sufferings in every age and every place, and so give the whole world a testimony of sense; yea, the contrary was necessary, that he should but die once, and rise again, and go to heaven; and those that lived in other ages and other places should have only valuable testimony of it; and this was the office put upon the apostles, who were chosen witnesses of the death and resurrection of Christ: Acts i. 21, 22, one of those that conversed with Jesus was ordained to be a witness of the resurrection; and Acts ii. 32, 'This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses;' so Acts x. 39, 'We are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and at Jerusalem;' and in many other places. In this sense the word of salvation is a testimony brought us by credible witnesses, the apostles confirming it by miracles everywhere; but of their testimony we speak not now, but his testimony.

Secondly, The value of his testimony. Christ is to be believed in all that he delivered to the world concerning the mind and will of God. This will appear if we consider—(1.) The witness; and (2.) The testimony itself.

1. The person witnessing. It was he who was spoken of and promised in paradise, Gen. iii. 15; shadowed and figured in the sacrifices of the law. It was he who was prophesied of in the Old Testament:

John v. 39, 'Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.' The whole scope of the Old Testament is to bear witness of Jesus Christ, of his person, natures, offices, his birth, life, death, sufferings, and the glory that should follow. A man may trace the story of Christ among the prophets, and show from point to point that he was the person sent from God to declare his will to the world. It was he who was owned by God by a voice from heaven at his baptism, Mat. iii. 17; at his transfiguration, Mat. xvii. 5; a little before his death: John xii. 28, 'Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again;' and 2 Peter i. 16, 'For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' It is his testimony whom the Father has sealed, John vi. 27; to whom he hath given the Spirit without measure, John iii. 34; who wrought miracles in the sight of all the people, appealed to his works, and professed to stand to that judgment. His followers, who could not be deceived, nor certainly would not deceive, have assured us so. His disciples could not be deceived, for they did not learn these things from others, nor gather them up from their own reason, but were eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses. It is not a report of a report, that is uncertain; neither did they hear and see them slightly or perfunctorily, but conversed with him from day to day; had no sign of distraction and fantastic impressions. Neither are the things such as they could be deceived in them; or, if that could be imagined, by whom should they be deceived? Not by God, who cannot be deceived himself, for he knoweth all things; nor will he deceive others, being so holy in himself, and so good and loving to mankind. Nor by angels, good or bad. Not by good angels, for how can they be good if they deceive? Nor by evil angels, whose tyranny they set themselves to oppose, overthrowing their idols, temples, and altars, and seeking to draw men from their worship to the worship of the true God, who made heaven and earth, to true virtue, piety, charity, and holy and inoffensive living with men. Nor would they deceive. To what end should they do this? Their religion forbiddeth them to lie for God, to do evil that good may come of it. What was it that they might have wealth, pleasure, or glory and honour, and the favour of men? These things they renounced for the doctrine's sake which they preached, and did teach others to renounce, and did endure all manner of displeasure, torments, and death. They had no reason to witness these things but for the profit of the world.

2. The testimony itself. It is such a testimony as man needeth, as hath a fair correspondence with other principles of reason, and such as hath a convincing evidence in itself.

[1.] It is such a testimony as man needeth. There is a double necessity upon mankind to look out for such a religion or doctrine as may allay our fears and satisfy our desires. Till these things be done man is unsatisfied; a religion doth not do the offices of a religion. As to God, the great business of a religion is to provide due honour for God; as to man, due rest for his soul. This latter we have now

under consideration chiefly: Jer. vi. 16, 'Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls;' and Mat. xi. 28, 29, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Now the soul is never at rest, nor sits easy within the bosoms of the considering part of mankind, till there be provided a suitable happiness, and a sufficient means for the expiation of the guilt of sin. Happiness is our great desire, and sin is our great trouble. The great question of the fallen creature is, Micah vi. 7, 'What shall I give for the sin of my soul?' They are haunted about the scruples of appeasing provoked justice. And then the other question and inquiry is, 'Who will show us any good?' Ps. iv. 6. Where shall a man be happy, that he needeth not seek any further? Now a testimony that shall answer these two grand scruples and controversies, which have much perplexed the mind of men, should be acceptable to us.

[2.] It hath a fair correspondency with principles of reason and truths evidenced by the light of nature, some of which respect our fears of punishment, some our desires of happiness, some both; but I keep to these two.

(1.) That there are a God of infinite power, and wisdom, and goodness, who made all things, and so men, and should be served by them.

(2.) That all have extremely faulted in this subjection which is due to the creator of the world. Experience manifesteth this.

(3.) That having faulted in this subjection, they are liable to God's punishment: Rom. iii. 19, 'All the world are become guilty before God;' ὑπόδικος τῷ Θεῷ.

(4.) That there are no hopes of being freed from this punishment, unless the holy and just God receive some satisfaction. Now the mystery of redemption by Christ doth fairly accord with these principles, and is built upon them. The heathens invented several ways of expiation to bring God and man together, and to reconcile justice and mercy, but none so considerable as this ransom found out by God.

And then, for desires of happiness, the principles of reason are these—

(1.) That reasonable creatures have immortal souls, and die not as the beasts die.

(2.) That true happiness is not to be found in such things wherein men ordinarily seek it, as riches, honours, and pleasures.

(3.) That since vice and virtue receive not suitable rewards here, therefore there must be some reward and punishment after this life.

(4.) That Christ's testimony showeth us the right way of obtaining the one and eschewing the other, for he hath brought the true life and immortality to light, 2 Tim. i. 10.

[3.] That this testimony hath a convincing evidence in itself: 2 Cor. iv. 2-4 'By the manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; but if our

gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.' If men's minds were not blinded with delusions, and their hearts biassed with carnal affections, they could never reject it. It is true, the way of salvation by the death of Christ and his resurrection from the dead are not known but by illumination from the Spirit or supernatural revelation; yet they are not contrary to such truths as are naturally known concerning the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, and are evidenced to us by their harmony and agreement with other truths revealed both in nature and scripture, and in the doctrine of Christ concerning them. There is a singular power to terrify and humble the mind of man, and then to give it true peace and comfort, such as cannot be found elsewhere; and to draw them to a genuine holiness, derived from the highest fountain and principle, the Spirit of Christ; the highest rule, the will and command of God; and the highest end, which is the pleasing, glorifying, and enjoying of God.

Thirdly, The use of it as a testimony.

1. To bless God that he hath stated a rule of commerce between us and him. If Jesus Christ had not come out from the bosom of God, we had been left at great uncertainties; but now God hath told us his mind, what we must do, and what we may expect in the testimony which Christ hath brought from heaven. The way of blessing and enjoying God is not left to our uncertain guesses, but made known in an authentic way by Christ.

2. To show us with what sureness we may build upon the hopes of the gospel; it is God's testimony. The apostle saith, 'If we receive the witness of men, the testimony of God is greater,' 1 John v. 9. It is but reason that we should allow God that value and esteem that we give to the testimony of men who are fallible and deceitful. Among men, in the mouth of two or three witnesses every truth is established, Deut. xix. 5. Now, we have witness upon witness concerning the gospel. There are three that bear witness in heaven, and there are three that bear witness on earth: 1 John v. 7, 8, 'There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost;' the Father by voice and oracle; the Son by voice to 'Saul, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' in words so convincingly that he knew it was God; the Holy Ghost descending on Christ in the form of a dove, and on the apostles in cloven tongues of fire. There are three also that bear witness on earth, 'the Spirit, the water, and the blood,' in the heart of a believer, a bosom, near testimony, illuminating and enabling a man to discern the doctrine to be of God; leaving constant and sensible effects, pacifying and quieting the conscience, and sanctifying the heart by this doctrine, the blood of Christ cleansing and purifying us as by clean water. God's testimony is the ultimate resolution of faith. Now if after all this we should not believe the testimony of God concerning his Son and his message delivered to us, how great will our condemnation be!

3. Our danger is great if we receive not and obey not this doctrine

concerning accepting sinners to life in Christ; that will appear by comparing two places. In Mat. xxiv. 14, it is said, 'The word of the kingdom shall be preached *εἰς μαρτύριον*, for a testimony to them;' and Mark xiii. 9, 'A testimony against them.' First to them, next against them; to them, if they receive it; against them, if they reject, neglect, or believe it not. What is now an offer of grace will then be an accusation for despising grace. God will not be without a witness at the day of judgment, and men will be left without excuse. We had sufficient to convince us of the way of pleasing God.

Secondly, The respect that is due to this testimony. It is not only to be heard or understood, but received: 'Whosoever receiveth this testimony;' that is, to hear it so as we may understand it; to understand it so as we may assent to it with our minds; to assent to it with our minds so as we may embrace it with our affections; to embrace it with our affections so as we may build our hope and confidence thereupon, and lie under the sovereignty of it in our lives and actions. This is to receive the testimony of Christ: one degree maketh way for another.

1. Hear it or regard it we must. Here is a testimony brought out from the bosom of God concerning the weightiest matters, our eternal peace and salvation; and that by his Son taking our nature. Now, for us to disregard it is the greatest indignity and affront that we can put upon God: Mat. xxii. 5, 'But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.' There was a feast provided, all things were made ready—a marriage-feast of the king's son—a message sent, but 'they made light of it.' Now many will not take it into their care and thoughts, nor so much as consider what God had intended from all eternity for their comfort and peace. The first sort of bad ground was the highway, the careless, neglected, unbounded common: Mat. xiii. 19, 'When any man heareth the word and understandeth it not;' *μὴ συνίεντος—non attendit*; doth not lay it to heart, doth not consider the necessity and use of this doctrine. So Acts xvi. 14, God's first work upon Lydia was to make her attend to the things spoken by Paul; that is, to enter into a deep consideration with herself. The careless highway hearer is very common, that lightly taketh up the current opinions where he liveth, and doth the work of an age in a breath. Men say, We are all sinners, and God is merciful, and Christ is the saviour of the world; but they never weigh these things. The outward notion falleth upon their hearts as seed doth upon the beaten path, but it never entereth so as to take root there.

2. Understand it we must, or we do not receive this testimony. We must search after the thorough knowledge of those things which Christ hath taught us concerning the purpose of his Father, or the manner of our salvation: John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them.' A man must have them before he can keep them; have them in our judgments before we can keep them in our memory, hearts, and consciences; know our duty before we can make conscience of it. Nothing gets to the will and affections without the understanding, as nothing passeth to the bowels without the mouth and the stomach: Prov. xix. 2, 'Without understanding

the heart is not good.' You cannot go on with the work of God till you do understandingly close with Christ Jesus. Christ called the multitude and said, 'Hear and understand,' Mat. xv. 10. Next to the ear, the mind must be possessed with these truths.

3. We must firmly assent to it, acquiesce in the testimony of Christ; and the mind must be so far prevailed with as to assent to the truth of what it understands. The apostle saith, 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.' First determine of that; the word is true. If we did believe it, we would make more use of it. There is a defect in point of assent. Doubts would sooner vanish if we did not secretly give God the lie. Man is apt to suspect evangelical truths as lying cross to his lusts and interests; even dogmatical infidelity is more rife in this lower world than we do imagine, where God is unseen, and our great hopes and enjoyments are to come, and our owning of God costs us so dear, and the flesh is so importunate to be pleased. All our coldness in duty and boldness in sinning cometh from hence; atheism and unbelief lieth at the bottom. Men are not persuaded of divine truths, and therefore they have so little influence upon them; therefore look to assent; John vi. 69, 'We know and are assured thou art the Christ;' so John xvii. 8, 'They have known assuredly that I came out from God.' We should come to this certainty and persuasion, and firm adherence to the general truths.

4. To embrace it with all affection: Acts ii. 41, 'They received the word gladly;' ἀσμένως. It is good news to a poor hungry conscience to hear of a pardoning God, and a merciful and faithful Redeemer, and the offers of eternal life, and a sure way pointed out how to come at it; it is the rejoicing of their souls. Therefore we must embrace it with hearty and unfeigned affection. The gospel is not only true, but good; therefore to be received with the dearest affection. Christ is not only to be received understandingly, but heartily, 1 Tim. i. 15. Many relish not the gospel because their affections are pre-engaged. Swine prefer swill before better food.

5. To build our hope and confidence thereupon while we continue with patience in well-doing. I join both together, because resolutions of duty (in a sound heart) are always mingled with expectations of mercy. Such a good being offered under conditions, we are to perform the conditions; they that believe shall have the good things promised: Ps. cxix. 166, 'Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.' None doth rightly rest and rely upon Christ but he that resigneth up himself to his service. Comforts are in order to work, and are never needed nor felt but while we are working. It is the laborious man that hungereth and hath an appetite. The last ground, which is the good ground, is that honest heart which, having heard the good word, keepeth it, and bringeth forth fruit with patience, Luke xviii. 15. This is to receive the testimony of Christ, when heart and conscience give way to it, and we suffer it to sway us to obedience, when the word dwelleth plenteously in us, ruling in our hearts. The degrees make way for one another; attentive audience for knowledge; knowledge for faith or assent; assent to the truth and goodness of what Christ offereth in the name of God, for

embracing and prosecution, and that for the subjection of the whole man and constant reliance upon God in the exercise of holiness. We must receive the precepts with a resolution to practise them; the promises with a resolution to depend on them as our only happiness.

Thirdly, He that thus receiveth doth ratify the truth of God, and solemnly bear witness to it. Here I shall—(1.) Speak of the manner of ratifying and confirming; and (2.) Of the matter confirmed.

1. The manner of ratifying and confirming. It is not said, believed, or confessed, or protested, but *ἐσφράγισεν*, 'hath put to his seal.' Those things that we doubt off we are not wont to confirm with our seal, but those things which we are assured of, and would have others to look upon as firm and authentic. Jezebel wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, 1 Kings xxi. 8, to give them the greater credit. Nehemiah, when he had renewed his covenant with God, he and the princes and Levites and priests sealed it, Neh. ix. 38. So Esther viii. 8, 'Write ye also for the Jews in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.' So Jer. xxxii. 10, 'I subscribed the evidence and sealed it.' But then here ariseth a doubt: How can we confirm the truth of God, and make it more authentic? for God is worthy of credit though no man believes him; he needeth only to say, *Teste meipso*: if he must stand to man's courtesy, *Tum Deus si homini non placuerit, Deus non erit!* as Tertullian saith in a like case. Again, what credit can the testimony of God have from man's seal, who deceiveth and is deceived? I answer—It is not out of need, but out of condescension. God's truth is the same in itself, and needeth not our confirmation; but he will put this honour upon us, that we should as far as we can honour his truth by our subscription. It is our honour that our testimony is taken in so great a matter. God is true, though every man be a liar, Rom. iii. 4; but our sealing is of great use and profit both to ourselves and others.

[1.] To ourselves; to bind us more firmly to believe that doctrine, and live according to it, which we have owned and ratified by our own consent. You do, as it were, give it under hand and seal that you are one that will stand to this faith, and expect comfort and privilege by this covenant: Isa. xlv. 5, 'One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall subscribe with his hand to the Lord.' When you assent unto and embrace this doctrine, you subscribe to the God of Jacob, and give up your names to be entered into his muster-roll, and registered into the church-book of the first-born: Ps. lxxxvii. 6, 'The Lord shall count when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there.' God hath his lease-book, wherein all that belong to him are registered. Now you do, as it were, under hand and seal list and enrol yourselves in his service, and, as a member of Christ's mystical body, engage yourselves to perform duty, and to wait for the comfort of the promises.

[2.] For the profit of others. Your faith professed doth as it were seal the truth of God to them: Isa. xliii. 10, 'Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord.' God's people, that have from time to time such plentiful proofs of divine power and providence, are able to give sufficient testimony for him; and others are confirmed in the faith and belief of

that to which we attest when we are diligent in holiness, patient and joyful under the cross, full of hope and comfort in great straits. We put to our seal to the promises, and commend our faith to others. God was angry with Moses and Aaron, Num. xx. 12, 'Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel; therefore ye shall not bring the people into the land which I have promised them.' We are not only to believe God ourselves, but to sanctify him in the eyes of others. We set hands to a thing that we would promote and get to pass in the world. We must believe so that others may be moved by the generousness of our faith to embrace the truth. When the Thessalonians had received the word in much assurance, and much affliction, and much joy in the Holy Ghost, the apostle telleth them, 1 Thes. i. 5-7, they were ensamples to all that believed in Achaia and Macedonia. Thus we propagate our faith, and commend the truth of God to others. But alas! many are not only infidels themselves, but propagate their infidelity: Titus i. 16, 'In their works they deny him,' live down the faith they pretend unto. Our lives should be a confirmation of the gospel, but are indeed a confutation of it; we should confirm the weak, and we offend the strong. Well, then, the meaning is, he is firmly persuaded in his own heart, and doth openly profess and live accordingly, and gains others to do likewise.

(2.) The matter confirmed, that God is true; not that God is merciful, or that God is just, holy, and wise, but that God is true.

[1.] God's truth is a great prop of faith. That which upheld Sarah, when she had a promise of conceiving a child, after she was past age, was the faithfulness of God, Heb. xi. 11. So you put to your seal that God is true, he is truth itself. God can do anything, but cannot lie. The heathen acknowledged it to be the property of the gods to speak the truth and do good.

[2.] The honour of his veracity is more pleasing to God than any other thing: Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' He hath ever stood upon that, in being punctual in keeping covenant and fulfilling his promises. This is most conspicuous above all that is famed or spoken or believed of God; nothing so dear to God as his truth. Men cannot endure to have the lie put upon them; they take themselves to be honoured when their word is believed. And will God disappoint them that deny themselves, and build upon his promises? It cannot be.

[3.] This setting to his seal that God is true, it supposeth some precedent obligation which he hath taken upon himself, and God's word is engaged and laid at pledge. Now—

(1.) God is engaged by promise to Christ in the covenant of redemption, that he will justify, sanctify, glorify all those that believe in Christ, Isa. liii. 10, 11. Now the poor soul that receiveth his testimony giveth it under hand and seal that God is as good as his word, that he hath performed the conditions of the eternal covenant; as when men are bound to pay great sums, they require an acquaintance that they have discharged their obligation. God is obliged to Jesus Christ to bestow eternal life upon all those that come to him in his name. Now every poor soul that is encouraged to wait for this benefit giveth it under his hand that God is true.

(2.) God was engaged to the old church to send Christ to raise up a great prophet from among his brethren, like unto Moses, whom they should hear, Deut. xviii. 13. He was to be a lawgiver as Moses was, but of a far more perfect law; such an one whom the Lord had known face to face, as he did Moses, but of a far more divine nature; one approved to the world by miracles, signs, and wonders, as Moses was, but miracles evidencing a divine power. Now they that receive Christ's testimony do acknowledge that God hath discharged his faith which was plighted to the old church in the promises and prefigurations of the law. You say, Yea, Lord, it is as thou hast promised. Therefore, Rom. xv. 8, Christ is said to be 'the minister of circumcision, for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers;' so Luke i. 70-73, 'As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he sware to our father Abraham.'

(3.) God is true in the doctrine of reconciliation and promise of eternal life to Christ's faithful disciples discovered to us in the gospel, or in what he speaks by Christ; there is a divine character in his doctrine. The testimony of Christ is the testimony of God. He spake as an original author; for so it followeth, ver. 34, 'He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God;' John vii. 16, 'My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.' He devised it not himself as man, nor acquired it by any human art and industry. As God equal with the Father, he knew all these mysteries; as man, by communication from his Godhead. God is true in what he revealeth by his Son: so John xiv. 24, 'The word which you hear is not mine, but the Father which sent me.' You justify God's truth against the objections of your own hearts and the prejudices of the world; you own it as a doctrine that hath a divine truth only in it, and so build on it.

Use. To persuade us to receive Christ's testimony, and to receive it so as that we put to our seal that God is true. It is easy to reason; partly—

1. From the honour that is done to God. God justifieth, sanctifieth, glorifieth us, and we justify, sanctify, and glorify God. We justify God: Luke vii. 29, 'And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.' When we receive God's message by Christ, we acquit him of all that the blind world or our carnal hearts lay against him. We sanctify God: Isa. viii. 13, 'Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.' To sanctify is to set apart, and to expect and fear more from God than can be expected and feared from all the powers in the world. We glorify God: Rom. iv. 20, it is said of Abraham, 'He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.'

2. Consider what an honour there is put upon us, that such poor worms as we are should be called to the sealing of God's truth, to confirm the promises by our consent, and to give it under our hands that we believe the promises, that so others may be moved by our example

to accept of this way of salvation, and so your faith procures credit to God. Oh! do not deprive yourselves of this dignity.

3. On the other side, consider what a great dishonour it is to God not to give credit to his word. You blaspheme God when you do not receive his testimony: 1 John v. 10, 'He that believeth not God hath made him a liar.' To make God a liar is to make him no God at all. To have the promise of life unfolded, if we do not heartily embrace it, and firmly build upon it, and be diligent upon these hopes, we carry it so as if his testimony were not true. Hereby you wrong yourselves by your own prejudices, and become a stumbling-block to your brethren, confirming them in an evil way.

4. You are of the church, and pretend to receive Christ's testimony; you are God's witnesses, it is a mockery, a treachery, if you should not put to your seals, live in the constant sense and belief of eternal blessedness by Christ

5. Consider how careful God's faithful servants have been to perform their duty in this kind. Moses: Deut. xxxii. 4, 'He is the rock; his work is perfect; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.' So Joshua, chap. xxiii. 14, 'Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord spake concerning you.' So Jacob: Gen. xlviii. 15, 16, 'He blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my father Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads,' &c. It is the great and most acceptable piece of worship; if you put to your seal to God, God will seal to you: Eph. i. 13, 'In whom also, after ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.'

Object. But you will say, What needeth all this ado? Do not we believe the scriptures to be the word of God, and Jesus Christ to be the Messiah? Are we not baptized into his name? I answer—

1. Many may visibly possess Christ, and yet not believe in him. Christ hath disciples in name, and disciples indeed: John viii. 37, 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.' Many profess to know God, but in their works deny him, Titus i. 16. So God refuteth the claim of those that said, 'My God, we know thee; but ye have not followed the thing that good is,' Hosea viii. 2. We profess God knoweth the heart, and yet we never take care to purge the heart from corrupt lusts. We profess God hath a particular providence and care of his people, and yet we shift for ourselves. We profess God is true, yet believe him no further than we can see him.

2. A speculative assent doth not denominate us true believers, but answerable walking. Certainly to believe so as to put to our seal implieth it, where, when a man receiveth the word of God as his truth, and doth accordingly manifest it in his life, he puts to his seal, and by his profession and practice doth declare that God is true. They that live merrily and sleep quietly in a course of sin, or a negligent uncertainty of their salvation, do not believe, unless a dead opinion be taken for faith; a dead opinion begotten in us by education, and the tradition of the country where we live. We deceive ourselves with names, and shows, and dead opinions, and customary religion, but have no life nor seriousness: they have a literal knowledge and appre-

hension of the things taught, but it worketh no change in them. You are to believe so as to put to your seal; not in word, but in deed; to declare plainly in the whole course of your lives that you believe the great promises brought to you from God by Christ. Many in their manner of living make God a liar. The careless preacher is as bad, or worse, than he that is haunted with actual doubts about christianity. The trembling doubter mindeth his business, but these never regard it, and do in effect say, Christ and his salvation is not worth the looking after; as it is said of them, Ps. cvi. 24, 'They despised the good land, they believed not his word.' Those that resolve to give over the pursuit of Canaan are said to doubt of his promise. They that neglect salvation do not believe the truth of it: Heb. ii. 3, 4, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles.' If a man tell you that in your field there is a rich treasure which you may have for digging, if you believe the man, will not you go about to dig it up? but if you doubt the truth of it, then you let it alone. The things propounded by Christ are so worthy, that, if you believe them, you will put in for a share, and use all good means to obtain the comfort and benefit promised.

3. In speculative assent there is not that firmness in many that live in the church as is generally conceived. In the bosom of the church there are practical atheists: Zeph. i. 12, 'And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.' In Jerusalem, in the degeneracy of the christian religion, such men were more rife than the serious worshippers of Christ: 2 Peter iii. 3, 'There shall come in the last time scoffers, walking after their own lusts.' The last days are full of those profane scoffers. At the first promulgation of the gospel, while truths were new, and the exercises of christian religion lively, and there was great concord and seriousness amongst the professors of the gospel, then profane scoffers were rare and unfrequent; before men's senses were benumbed with the customary use of religious duties, the notions of God were fresh, lively, and active upon their hearts; but afterwards, when the profession of christianity grew into a form and national interest, and men were rather christians by the chance of their birth than their own choice and natural conviction, the church was pestered with this cattle. It was an article objected against Pope John the twenty-third in the Council of Basil, that he believed that there was no life eternal, that the soul died with the body; and Paul the third is reported by another good author to say, when he was dying, that now he should know three things of which he had doubted all his life—*An anima fiat immortalis; an sit infernus; an sit Deus.* Were these monsters alone, think you? Certainly there are others who, however they smother their opinions, do indeed think there is no heaven and no hell; especially now are they rife among us that live in the dregs of christianity, when men are grown weary of the name of Christ, and the ancient severity and strictness is much lost, and the

memory of those miracles and wonderful effects by which our religion was confirmed is almost worn out, or else questioned by subtle wits and men of a prostituted conscience. Now there are many mockers, and men of atheistical spirits swarm everywhere, who only talk of these things in jest; nay, and as it seemeth by their slight and frothy handling of the matter, preach of them in jest. Certainly one great fault in christians, is they do not mind strengthening assent to or belief of gospel revelations; whereas the weakness of this weakeneth all our graces, and is the cause of that unevenness and uncertainty that we bewray in the course of our lives. Hence cometh our coldness in duty, our boldness in sinning. Our coldness in duty: Would we serve God in such a lifeless, heartless manner, and pray so carelessly, if we did believe that what Christ hath told us of the everlasting enjoyment of the blessed God were true? If we did believe the truth of the gospel and of the world to come, how careful and earnest should we be to make our calling and election sure. We would think all diligence little enough. So our boldness in sinning: We would not venture, if we did believe everlasting torments and the strict account that we must make to God. Temptations then would be refused with scorn and indignation: 'In vain is the net laid in the sight of any bird,' Prov. i. 17. Therefore it is a fault in christians when they mind the applying act, but do not labour to make their assent more firm. Things may be daily applied when once we are assured of them; otherwise we raise an house without a foundation.

4. In this sealing God's truth there are many things implied which most christians want. It implieth spiritual evidence, experience, and confidence in temptations to the contrary, and enforceth practice.

[1.] It implieth spiritual evidence. None can receive Christ's testimony without a work of the Spirit; spiritual things must be spiritually discerned: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' To sight there must 'be not only *objectum perspicuum*, but *organum bene affectum*. Besides the perspicuity of the object, there must be a clear eye. A blind man cannot see at noonday, nor he that hath the strongest sight at midnight, Eph. i. 17, 18. Now most christians have not the Spirit of Christ. God revealeth these things and giveth us eyes to see them.

[2.] Some experience of the power of this truth in comforting and changing the heart. A report of a report is never judged valuable; you cannot say to others, God is true, till you have felt somewhat of it in your own hearts: 1 John i. 1, 2, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.' Experience is above all dispute: Phil. i. 9, 'This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment;' to have some impression of the truth upon our hearts.

[3.] It discovereth itself by confidence in temptations to the contrary, either from inward troubles or outward. Inward troubles or agonies of conscience: The faith of a weak christian bringeth more honour to God than the love of a strong christian. Upon the encouragement of Christ's testimony he casts himself upon God's mercy, when he feeleth him as an enemy: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' So in outward troubles; when in the midst of deep afflictions, you can comfort yourselves in the promises, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorious. This is to honour God, to put to your seal that God is true; as the martyrs are said to seal it with their blood. Faith is but a notion before.

[4.] It enforceth holiness. When your lives are swayed by these principles, and you are full of that lively diligence which becometh christians, then you declare plainly that you think God is true. All these are exemplified in the church of the Thessalonians: 1 Thes. i. 5-7, 'For our gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake; and ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. So that you were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.' So that you see there is need of pressing you to believe, that you may put to your seal that God is true.
