

NOT TO BE OFFENDED IN CHRIST, THE READY WAY TO BLESSEDNESS.

And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.—MAT. XI. 6.

THESE words are the conclusion of Christ's answer to John's disciples, who were sent from him in prison to inquire if Christ were the true Messiah, or they must look for another. This message was not sent for his own satisfaction, but theirs; not his own, for he had before openly owned Christ as such, John i. 29, but theirs: they are offended in Christ out of respect to their master. For answer Christ referreth them to his works, whether they were not such as the prophecies foretold were to be performed by the Messiah.

Two things he urgeth:—

First, His miracles.

Secondly, His preaching the gospel.

First, His miracles. 'The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.' This was foretold: Isa. xxxv. 5, 6, 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be open, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.' And then for his setting afoot the gospel, compare Isa. lxi. 1, with Luke iv. 18. Isa. lxi. 1, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening the prison to them that are bound.' Luke iv. 18, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' And Luke iv. 21, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.' This is here expressed, 'The poor have the gospel preached to them'—(πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται) 'The poor are evangelised'—have not only the promises of the gospel offered to them, but the impression and power of it is left upon their hearts. By *the poor* may be meant the humble-minded, or persons of the meanest and lowest condition—the humble-minded, or such as were affected with their sin and misery. The proud resist and stand out against the gospel, but the broken-hearted thankfully accepted glad tidings

of this salvation. The Messiah was to preach to 'the poor,' Luke iv. 18. But in Isa. lxi. 1, it is 'the meek.' The gospel doth affect the poor needy soul, so as to put a stamp of grace upon it. They that are sensible of their sin and misery are the proper objects of this dispensation; or else it may be meant of persons of the meanest and lowest condition. The Christian church was made up of such at first: James ii. 5, 'Hearken, my beloved brethren; hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?' and 1 Cor. i. 26, 'For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.' Christ did not then call the eminent and great, but the obscure and despised of the world, lest religion should seem to owe its growth and progress rather to the power of the world than to the evidence of the truth. Now these are said to be evangelised, that is, to have a good share in the blessed message, they above others being wrought upon and affected with it. To be evangelised implieth grace on God's part, and on theirs a willing reception of the impression of it, so as to be changed by it. The poor are all to be gospelled; those whose poverty is sanctified to make way for brokenness of heart, which is not said to exclude the rich from all benefit; some were called then, though not many. Grace, where it prevails in the heart, puts rich and poor on the same level. It humbleth the rich, and exalteth the poor, James i. 9, 10. It teacheth the one to abound, the other to be abased, Phil. iv. 12. Poverty and riches do as they are used. Now, saith Christ, tell John the things that ye hear and see; let him expound the characters of the Messiah as they lie in the Old Testament; and if they be verified in me, see what application and inference you ought to make. Therefore he dismisseth them with this conclusion: 'And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.'

In which words observe:—

1. The privilege: *And blessed is he*: it is meant of our supreme blessedness.

2. The qualification: *Whosoever is not offended in me*. Where observe—1. It is negatively expressed: *not offended*. 2. There is a universal negative: *whosoever is not*. But are all those who are not offended at Christ saved? I answer, No; you must look upon this conclusion as annexed to the last clause of the former verse,—'The poor have the gospel preached unto them: and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.' To be offended is to be scandalised, or kept from owning Christ as the true Messiah; all are happy and blessed so far as they are evangelised, and miserable so far as scandalised. When the kingdom of heaven is brought to us, nothing can bar us from entering into it but our being offended in Christ. But if we be not scandalised so as to hinder our being evangelised, then we are in a happy and blessed condition; that is, blessed so far as the impediment of our blessedness is removed; and indeed, that is all the blessedness we can attain unto in this life. Thus blessedness is ascribed to pardon of sins, Ps. xxxii. 1, because that taketh away the legal impediment. Blessedness is ascribed to sanctification, Ps. cxix. 1, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way,' because that removeth the

moral incapacity, and so is a forerunner of eternal happiness: and here it is ascribed to not being offended in Christ when he is sufficiently revealed to us, as it removeth the impediment of our faith, which is always some offence and dislike that we take at Christ and the ways of God.

The point that I shall insist on is this:—

That whosoever, being invited to embrace the gospel, is not offended in Christ, is in the ready way to true blessedness.

In the prosecution of this point I shall use this method:—

First, To show you what it is to be offended in Christ.

Secondly, Upon what occasions men were then offended.

Thirdly, Whether this sin were proper to that age only, or we may now be guilty.

Fourthly, I shall show you the kinds of this sin.

Fifthly, How it is true that those which escape this sin are in the ready way to salvation.

First, What it is to be offended in Christ.

I answer—To be offended in Christ is to be offended because of Christ; something in him which we dislike, which is a hindrance to our receiving and owning him in that quality wherein he appeared in the world, and offereth himself to us—namely, as our Lord and Saviour. *Σκάνδαλον*, in the natural sense of it, signifieth either any obstacle or hindrance laid in a man's way, by which the passenger is detained or stopped: peculiarly it is put for those sharp stakes which they were wont to stick in the ground in the ancient way of warring, to wound the feet and legs of their enemies in their pursuit of them, against which they used greaves of brass: most usually *σκάνδαλον* signifieth a stone or block in the way, at which a man is apt to stumble and fall. So 1 Peter ii. 8, 'Unto them which believe, Christ is precious; but a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to them that stumble thereat.' A rock with respect to those that travel by sea, a stone of stumbling with respect to those that travel by land. So it is used here, 'Who are not scandalised at Christ.' In this expression there is something expressed and something supposed.

1. It supposeth some offer and revelation made to us, that grace is brought home to us, and salvation offered to us. Jews and professing Christians are more properly said to be offended in Christ than heathens who never heard nor sought after him, 1 Cor. i. 23: 'We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks foolishness.' They stumble who, being invited to come to him, dislike and are displeased with something in him; or being on their way, are upon some occasion and temptations laid aside and prejudiced, and either stumble or fall in the way undertaken by them, or have no heart to go forward, but either directly retire or faint.

2. It expresseth or implieth such an offence, that either they are kept off from Christ, or else drawn away from him.

[1.] Some are kept off by their carnal prejudices, or offence they take at somewhat of Christ, and so continue in their unbelief; thus Christ is said to be a rock of offence to 'the disobedient,' 1 Peter ii. 8, that is, the impenitent and unbelieving world, who, out of indulgence to their lusts, slight an offered Saviour.

[2.] Others are drawn from him, as those that had carnal expectation when they were disappointed: John vi. 66, 'From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.' This is the offence, when we are either discouraged *from*, or *in* the ways of godliness.

I now come to show you:—

Secondly, Upon what occasions were men then offended in Christ. They were displeased with his person, sufferings, doctrine.

1. His person. They were somewhat alarmed with his miracles, and the wisdom of his gracious speeches, but how to reconcile this with the meanness of his person they were at a loss. Sometimes his birth and breeding were a distaste to them: Mat. xiii. 55, 56, 'Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, Joses, Simon, Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him.' So Mark vi. 3, 'Is not this the carpenter, brought up in the same trade with Joseph?' Thus upon the consideration of his mean and known beginning they forsook him. Sometimes they quarrelled at his country, not where he was born, but bred. He was born in Bethlehem, but bred in Nazareth, which was in Galilee, and Galilee, as they conceived, was looked upon by God as a mean and despicable place: John vii. 52, 'Art thou of Galilee? (speaking to Nicodemus), search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.' This was the common conceit, for Jonah was of that country. So John vii. 41, when some said, 'This is the Christ,' others said, 'Shall Christ come out of Galilee?' That country was under a reproach. Nay, a good man was possessed with this prejudice: John i. 46, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? And Philip saith, Come and see.' Trial would make him of another mind. But many good people are led away with common prejudice, and so overlook things and persons of the chiefest regard, &c. Sometimes they were offended at the meanness of his followers: John vii. 48, 'Have any of the rulers and pharisees believed in him? But this people, that knoweth not the law, are cursed;' that is, the rabble are ready to follow any false teacher, and such ones follow him.

2. They were offended at his doctrine, the mysteriousness of it, as when he had spoken of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, they could not tell what to make of it. If it signified anything, it signified his death, and that was a point not to be touched upon in the hearing of them that expected a glorious, pompous Messiah, that should subjugate other nations to them. Therefore Christ saith, 'Doth this offend you?' John vi. 61. Yea, the offence was so great, that 'many of his disciples went backward, and walked no more with him,' ver. 66. Sometimes they were offended at the holiness of it, as when he pressed the pharisees, who were altogether for external observances, to look after an inward cleansing: Mat. xv. 12, 'Knowest thou not that the pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?' This was a great distaste to them to hear that a man is defiled by sin, and not at all by meats, and that the washing of the heart is the chief thing.

3. The great stumbling-block of all was his sufferings. This offended good and bad. The good: Mat. xxvi. 31, 'All of you

shall be offended because of me this night. For it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. And Peter saith, 'Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended,' ver. 33. The bad: This was the great stumbling-block to the Jews: 1 Cor. i. 23, 'We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block.' By this they fed their obstinacy and prejudice. They could not believe that he that was crucified as a malefactor was the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

Thirdly, Was it not proper to that age only? I answer, No; we also may be prejudiced, and guilty of this sin of being offended in Christ. You will say, What danger is there of that now, since Christ is publicly owned, and Christianity in fashion, and the world run into the church?

I shall show you:—

1. That there is danger still.

2. What is likely to offend since Christ's exaltation.

1. There is danger still:—

[1.] Because though the name of Christ be had in honour, yet the stricter profession and practice of godliness is under reproach, and the nominal hateth the serious Christian, though both own the same Bible, believe the same creed, and are baptized with one and the same baptism into the same profession. Those that are false to their religion will malign and scorn those that are true to it, and live up to the power of it. As there is no commerce between the living and the dead, so no true friendship between the carnal and the heavenly. Among the outside Christians, it will be matter of reproach to be serious and diligent; and they that are so, will be accounted more precise and nice than wise. No wonder if they slight you, who first slight God, and Christ, and their own salvation.

[2.] It may happen that the stricter sort of Christians are the poorer sort; and such as carry no great port and appearance in the world; and so, though they be precious in the eyes of God, yet they may be despised by men. Strictness of religion is many times looked upon by some as too mean a thing for persons of their rank and quality; and so whilst the poor receive the gospel, they, to keep up their greatness, go the broad way to hell; these are offended in Christ. In Salvian's time, *Quantus in Christiano populo honor Christi est, ubi religio ignobilem facit; Coguntur esse mali ne viles habeantur*,—religion makes them base, and men are compelled to be evil, that they may not be scorned and disgraced. Now we should resolve to be more vile for God, 2 Sam. vi. 22.

[3.] Though men be not distasted against Christianity in whole, yet in part; though they be not offended in Christ altogether, yet they take offence at some of his ways, wherein his glory and interest is concerned. In the age that we live in, many of those things that fall within the conscience and compass of our duty may be under a cloud and disesteem. Now they that have received light about these things should not be offended though the generality of the world decry and oppose them. Christ gets up by degrees; and where the main of religion is received, yet all the parts and branches of it are not

received, which must be required in their place; and though we are not always bound to the positive profession of lesser things, yet we are bound negatively; we must do nothing against the truth, 2 Cor. xiii. 8. We must not renounce a truth because it is run down by a vulgar prejudice, but in all meekness of wisdom own the better way. Such constancy of mind is expected from a good man, who consults with conscience rather than interest.

[4.] The world may not be able to bear the owning of these truths; and therefore, those who set them afoot may be disgraced, afflicted, and reproachfully used; but the knowledge of a hated truth is a greater argument of God's favour than the prosperity of the world: Prov. iii. 32, 'Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is an abomination unto the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous.'

[5.] There is no man in the world but, if he run up his refusal of Christ, or his impenitency and unbelief, to its proper principle, he will find it to be some offence or dislike, either because of the inward constitution of his mind, or the external state of religion in the world. Either he cannot bring his heart to suit with the strictness, purity, and self-denial of Christ's religion, or Christ's religion to suit with his heart. As the young man, Mark x. 22, 'He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions.' Or else, if both suit, the world liketh not the match; so that it cometh to this point, that he must be an enemy to God or the world: James iv. 4, 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God! Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.'

2. What is likely to offend, since Christ's exaltation of his person in heaven, and his religion in the world?

[1.] The many calamities which attend the profession of it. John, who was his forerunner, was now in prison when Christ spake these words; and Christ foretelleth grievous troubles and afflictions: Mat. xxiv. 10, 'And then many shall be offended.' And he foretelleth us that we may not be offended: John xvi. 1, 'These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended;' that is, scandalised by the hazards which attend Christ's service, or take occasion to alienate themselves from him. Yet all will not do: Mat. xiii. 21, 'When persecution ariseth for the word, by and by he is offended.' A man is offended when he findeth that which he did not look for. Many promise themselves ease and peace in Christianity; and when it falleth out otherwise, they dislike what they formerly seemed to prize.

[2.] They may take offence at Christ's doctrine, at the purity, the self-denial, the simplicity, the mysteriousness of it.

(1.) The purity of it. To holy men this is an argument of love: Ps. cxix. 140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' But to the carnal of dislike and offence: John iii. 20, 'Every one that doeth evil hateth the light; neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.' They have somewhat to conceal, somewhat which they are loth to part with. And so, lest they should be found faulty, and engaged to reform themselves, they cannot endure

the light of the gospel, and are offended at Christ's strict doctrine, as sore eyes are at the brightness of the sun. This light is not only shining, but scorching.

(2.) The mortification and self-denial of it. Mortification respects our lusts, and self-denial our interest. Our worldly interests are the baits of our carnal desires or lusts. Now, to crucify the flesh or deny the world are both distasteful to flesh and blood; and, therefore, they are apt to say, 'This is an hard saying;' and 'What strange doctrine is this?' 1 Peter iv. 4, 'They think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot.' It is matter of great admiration that others should abandon their course of life. The sweetness of Christ's service is wholly hidden from them; therefore they hate that religion which they do profess, and all that are serious in it. They think strange God should plant desires in them which he would not have to be satisfied. But they do not distinguish between what nature craveth and corruption lusteth after. That the inordinancy is from themselves, and therefore have a secret dislike of Christ in their souls, because they would do what they list, not what they ought. They would not be fettered by any of his laws, or look upon that fruit as forbidden which corrupt nature hath a longing unto, as if all necessary restraint were a kind of prison to them.

(3.) The simplicity and plainness of the gospel, void of human wisdom and excellency of words. It is a plain thing teaching the way how sinners may return to God and blessedness. This doctrine is clad in the simple attire of a vulgar style; and this was the offence of the Gentiles, who would be gratified with eloquence and profound knowledge: 1 Cor. i. 22, 'The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom;' that is, the Jews, who were trained up in extraordinary dispensations, they would have miracles and prodigies from heaven. The Gentiles look for profound philosophy in the gospel, and scorn it because they find it not there. Their offence was because they found not matter of dispute, but practice; for they were altogether bred up in the uncertain debates of their philosophers. But little did these mind that there was a sublimity of wisdom in this plain doctrine (1 Cor. ii. 6, 'We speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world,' &c.), as discovering the true way of easing the conscience, and the nature of true happiness, which were the two things about which the wisest and profoundest of them spent all their thoughts and speculations. Nor did they mind this: that laws would lose their authority, if not delivered in a plain style; nor would our duty so clearly be stated by man's reason as by God's authority. When it is to be found out by man's reason it is left more to the uncertainty of dispute. Bare nature is a hard book to study in, nor are the lessons of it so easily found out. While the wise men of the world were debating about felicity and happiness, practical godliness died upon their hands, and men strove rather to be witty than good, and so delivered things more coldly, and not with that life and power and authority for the reclaiming and reducing man to his duty to God; like the curious wits of our age, who delight to speak finely, rather than successfully, in the matters of religion.

(4.) The mysteriousness of it above all natural reason. The devil

playeth on all hands ; sometimes the doctrine of the gospel is too plain, sometimes too mystical. It cannot enter into their hearts to conceive how God should be distinguished into three persons, how God should become man, and the like ; and therefore scoffing atheists, such as are rife in the latter days, question all ; and having lost the light of their reason, yet retain the pride of their reason, and are objecting all the difficulties they can think of against the truth of the word of God, and are apt to say, as Nicodemus, John iii. 9, ‘ How can these things be ? ’ Till they see a reason for everything they will not own it. Indeed, we must see a reason why we believe everything, and that is, divine revelation contained in the word of God ; but we cannot always see a reason of everything which we do believe, for many things are mysteries, and we receive them as we do pills, not chew, but swallow them ; we take them upon the credit of the revealer : to chew produceth a loathsome ejection ; to swallow, a wholesome remedy. Believing in the common notion of it is a receiving a truth upon the trust of another ; so it differeth from knowing, for then we reason of ourselves ; and divine faith is a receiving such things as God hath revealed, because he hath revealed them. Then our first inquiry is, Whether these things be so or so ? not how they can be so ? Therefore we begin at the wrong end if we inquire first, How can this be ? In many cases, *constat de re*, the thing is evident in scripture ; but, *non constat de modo*, how it can be is beyond our reach. Now, when we should believe, we dispute and cavil, rather than inquire. If anything be not plainly revealed by God, you may reject it without sin ; but if it be, you must not contradict all that you cannot comprehend—the Trinity of the persons in the unity of the divine essence, or how a virgin should conceive, or how a God can become man. It is sufficient that all this is revealed in scripture, which carrieth its own evidence in its forehead, and shineth by its own light, and hath the seal and statap of God upon it. In short, to believe is not to receive a thing in its own evidence, but upon the credit of the testifier. If you will not credit it unless the thing be evident in itself, you do not believe Christ, but your own reason ; and instead of being thankful for the revelation, you quarrel with his truth, because it is somewhat above your capacity. You should captivate your understandings to the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. x. 5.

I now come to show you :—

Fourthly, The kinds of this sin of being offended in Christ. Three distinctions I shall give you :—

1. There is an offence with contempt, and an offence with discouragement.

[1.] The offence with contempt is when we are prejudiced against, or turn from the faith ; either never embrace it, or quite forsake it. Contempt produceth unbelief and disobedience. They are so given over to their sinful courses that they cannot be persuaded to relinquish them : John iii. 19, ‘ This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.’ Nothing will gain them to submit to Christ’s healing methods ; they think he seeketh their loss and hurt rather than their benefit, because he would reclaim them from their lusts. These

reject all admonitions, and remain obstinate and impenitent in their sins.

[2.] The offence with discouragement : when men are staggered in their hope and obedience. Troubles are distasteful to the flesh, which seeketh its own ease. Some are discouraged in a greater, some in a lesser degree : Heb. xii. 3, 'Lest ye wax weary, and faint in your minds.' Weariness is a lesser degree of deficiency, faintness a greater. These terms are translated from the body to the mind.

2. There is an offence of ignorance and an offence of malice and opposition.

[1.] The offence of ignorance and weakness : when men are carried with a blind zeal. 'I verily thought that I ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth,' saith Paul, Acts xxvi. 9. Men of a superstitious conscience are like a blind horse, full of mettle, but ever and anon stumbling. But this is more pardonable : 1 Tim. i. 13, 'Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.'

[2.] There is the offence of malice and opposition, when men err, not only in their minds, but in their hearts ; do not know, and do not desire to know ; they would not know what they know, and are willingly ignorant ; *nolentes audire, quod auditum damnare non possunt*, &c. (Tertul. in Apol.) They have not a mind to know that which they have not a mind to do. They would not know the truth because they have a mind to hate it. This is spoken of, Acts xiii. 45, 'They were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.' This is malice ; men first hate, then persecute and oppose the truth. Conviction choked with prejudices breaketh out into rage against that way they were convinced of, or the light of which they cannot rationally withstand. Herod taketh offence against John the Baptist, whom he formerly liked, and then beheadeth him. Light resisted, or not kindly used, maketh a man turn devil, that he may the more deface all feelings of conscience. This is the malignity of revolvers, Hosea v. 5 ; they will hear nothing to the contrary.

3. There is a total and there is a partial offence. The total offence is when men will give Christ no place in their hearts, but remain in their infidelity : John viii. 24, 'Because ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.' When they will take no warning, they shall perish for despising the remedy. The partial offence is, when they do not receive all of Christ, though they may be sound in the main ; these are those that the apostle speaks of, that they are 'saved as by fire,' 1 Cor. iii. 15. Some doctrine or practice, wherein they allow themselves, may prove false and unchristian ; yet the man may be mercifully dealt with by Christ, and freed from having his portion with unbelievers ; yet it goeth hard with him, as one involved in a common fire hardly escapeth out of it ; their salvation is more difficult. In short, every one is more happy, as he is less apt to be offended in Christ ; but they are most unhappy that are most offended in him.

I now come to show you—

Fifthly, How it is true that those that escape this sin are in the ready way to salvation.

To this I answer—

1. The negative includeth the positive, and must be thus explained: He that is not offended, but evangelised, hath the power and virtue of the gospel stamped upon his heart: 'Blessed is he.' Among them that are offended, some forsake and fall off from Christ, others never come at him. But these believe so as to be changed and converted. Nothing hindereth them when Christ hath gained their liking and esteem; for this esteem that we speak of now is not a simple speculative approbation (for that may be, and no change follow: Rom. ii. 18, 'Thou approvest the things that are excellent'), but a practical comparative approbation: all things considered, Christ is best for their turns. Always a change followeth this esteem: Phil. iii. 8, 'I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.' And till we have this esteem, there is some secret offence that we take at Christ, either at his person, doctrine, precepts, or the bad entertainment they have in the world; and for the contrariety of our affections, Christ and we do not close with full complacency and delight.

2. This esteem produceth a uniform obedience; for they that thus esteem Christ will study to please him. Delight in our master breedeth delight in our work: Col. i. 10, 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;' and 1 Thes. ii. 12, 'That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.' The only way to know whether we be more or less offended in Christ, is to compare our conversation and practice with his precepts. His benefits commend themselves to our affections, his precepts to our consciences; the one sweeten the other. We have such a good master, we can never do enough for him. If we like Christ, nothing will be grievous that he giveth us in charge: 1 John v. 3, 'His commandments are not grievous.'

3. When we are not offended in Christ we are the better fortified against temptations to apostasy. They are of three sorts—errors, scandals, persecutions.

[1.] Errors. Many are drawn away with vain pretences, 'But we have an unction from the holy one, and know all things,' 1 John ii. 20. But they are an offence, not only of seduction, but contristation: Rom. xvi. 17, 'Mark them which cause errors and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.' These are wens of Christ's mystical body, not parts. Errors in the church breed atheism in the world. Many question the ways of God, and give over all religion; because there are so many differences and sects, therefore they think nothing certain. Certainly God saw this discipline to be fittest for his people; he hath told us there must be errors; he would not have us to take up religion upon trust, without the pains of study and prayer. Lazy men would fain give laws to heaven, and teach God how to govern the affairs of the world; they would have all things clear and plain, that there should be no doubt about it. But the Lord, in his wise providence, seeth it fit to permit these things, 'That they which are approved may be made manifest.' To excuse the trouble of a search, study, and prayer, men would have all things

agreed, else they take offence at religion, and that is one means to draw them off, even after profession. The canonists say, *Non fuisset discretus Dominus Deus, nisi unum constituerit universalem judicem.* This was their blasphemy, that God was not discreet and wise, unless he had appointed one universal and infallible interpreter. This is men's natural thoughts; the Jews say that Christ was not the true Messiah. Why? Because if he had been, he would not have come in such a way as to leave any of his countrymen in doubt, but would so plainly have discovered himself that all might know him. So many think religion is but a fancy, and so fall off to atheism and scepticism at last, and irresolution in religion, because there are so many sects and divisions, and all upholding it with plausible pretences. And to excuse laziness or prejudice, men pretend want of certainty; but God's word is plain to all that will do his will, John vii. 17.

[2.] The scandalous and evil practices of professors. These do not only infect but offend many, and cause them to stumble at religion, or fall into a dislike of the way of salvation. Scandal is far more dangerous than persecution. In persecution, though many be discouraged, yet others are gained to a liking of religion. There are many that have been gained by the patience, courage, and constancy of the martyrs, but never any were gained by the scandalous falls of professors. Persecutions do only work upon our heart, which may be allayed by proposal of the crown of life; but by scandalous actions, how many settle into a resolved hardness of heart! In crosses and persecutions many men may have a secret liking of the truth, and a purpose to own it in better times; but by this kind of scandal, men grow into an open and professed dislike thereof. In persecutions there is not a dislike of religion itself, but of the hard terms upon which it must be received; but by scandals men dislike religion itself, and nourish a base and vile opinion thereof in their hearts, and so they grow loose and fall off. And this mischief doth not only prevail with the lighter sort of Christians, but many times those which have had some taste, it makes them fly off exceedingly: Mat. xviii. 7, 'There will be offences, but woe unto them by whom they come.' Christ hath told us all will not walk up to the religion they own; but a man that is not offended in Christ will not be offended at the disorders of those that profess his way: 1 John ii. 10, 'He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him.' All things that offend will not be taken away till the reapers come: Mat. xiii. 41, 'The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.' In the meantime he that loveth Christ, and loveth his brother, dareth not reason from some to all, from persons to the religion; for religion is not to be judged by the persons that profess it, but the persons by the religion. These things must ever be distinguished: the rule and the practice, the form and the power. The form, manner, or model of truth may be complete, though the virtue of this religion doth not prevail over all those that come under the profession of it. It is against all reason that the excellency of Christ should stand to the courtesy of man's obedience. The art is not to be judged by the bungling of the artist; and then

for the other, the love of the brethren will not permit them that they should judge of all the rest by a few, and those the worsers part. This is, as if a man should judge of a street by the sink or kennel, or throw away the whole cluster or bunch of grapes for one or two rotten ones. Shall the apostles be judged of by Judas? or the good angels by the bad? or Abraham's family by Ishmael? If some make shipwreck of a good conscience, others keep up the honour and majesty of religion, as well as they disgrace it.

[3.] The troublesome poverty and mean outside of those that profess the gospel, and their many troubles and calamities; as in Christ's time the grandees and learned rabbis did not own Christ. 'Have any of the pharisees or rulers believed in him?' that is, persons of eminence and place. Celsus, the heathen, maketh the objection, Should a few mariners (meaning fishermen) prescribe to the world? But God never intended that truth should be known by pomp, nor condemned or disallowed for troubles that accompany it. The drift of Christianity is to take us off from the hopes and fears of the present world; therefore he that liketh Christ and his promises is not likely to be separated from him by persecution, Rom. viii. 37. He is held to him, not only by the head, but by the heart.

Now the use that we should make of this is caution. Take heed of being offended in Christ. I shall show you:—

1. Who are in danger of it.
2. The heinousness of it.
3. What we should do to avoid it.

1. Who are in danger of it? I answer—

[1.] All such as are hardened in malice and opposition against those that profess godliness, and have a male talent¹ against strictness, and are glad when it meeteth with any trouble or disgrace. The clearest evidence will not convince these men. Such were the froward obstinate Jews, who were hardened and believed not, but spake evil of that way, Acts xix. 9. Again, there are some that are more moderate, but are discouraged in their first attempts of a godly life, and so give over through despondency. The bullock is most unruly at the first yoking; the fire at first kindling casts forth most smoke. This they cannot bear, therefore give it over as hopeless. And then partly the insincere, whose league with their lusts was never dissolved. And again, weak Christians, who are not fortified and rooted in the love of God, and the faith and hope of the gospel.

2. I shall show you the heinousness of it.

[1.] It is unreasonable. Whatsoever hindereth any man from coming to Christ or embracing the gospel, it is an offence not given but taken. There is nothing in Christ to make us stumble and be offended at him:—Jer. ii. 5, 'What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?'—but everything that may draw our desire or delight towards him; yet by men's blindness and ignorance it is very frequent: Luke xix. 42, 'They do not know the things which belong to their peace in this their day.'

[2.] It is very natural. We are apt to set stumbling-blocks in our

¹ An almost obsolete word, meaning ill-will.—Ed.

own way, and matter of offence before our own feet; and take up every obvious pretence to excuse ourselves to ourselves from hearkening to the offers of the gospel. Flesh and blood will stumble in God's plainest ways: Hosca xiv. 9, 'The ways of the Lord are right; the just shall walk therein, but the transgressors shall fall in them.' They will count every molehill a mountain, and be offended at everything which concerneth God, and their duty and obedience to him.

[3.] A prejudicate opinion and malice is always apt to pick quarrels at truth and goodness: Acts xvii. 5, 6, '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. And when they found them not, they drew Jason, and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These which have turned the world upside down are come hither also.' So chap. xviii. 6, 'They opposed themselves and blasphemed.'

[4.] It is a dangerous sin. If we continue to be offended in Christ, Christ will be offended at us at the last day. We get nothing by dashing against the corner-stone; we hurt not Christ but ourselves: Mat. xxi. 44, 'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.'

3. What shall we do to avoid it?

[1.] Get a clear understanding, or a zeal according to knowledge: Rom. x. 2, and John ix. 39, 'For judgment I am come into the world, that they which see not might see, and they which see might be made blind.' This will be the effect of my coming, that the ignorant will be enlightened, and learned men will not see the things before their eyes; they were hardened and left to their own prejudices.

[2.] Get a good measure to mete things withal. The Jews were offended in Christ, because they were leavened with a notion of a pompous Messiah; and so judged of all things concerning Christ as they suited with that conceit. So John vii. 24, 'Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment.' We judge according to appearance, but judge not righteous judgment. This is no good measure, but an idol of our hearts. Many are in an evil way, but yet want not their pretences. As the tradition of the elders, Mat. xix. 2; and succession, John viii. 33; the novelty of Christ's doctrine: Mark i. 27, 'What new doctrine is this?' The vile abject condition of Christ and his disciples. They never enter into the merits of the cause, but determine it by prejudicate opinions. A good measure, therefore, is necessary. There is *mensura mensurans*, and *mensura mensurata*, a measure measuring, and the measure that is measured. The measure that is measured is an upright unbiassed mind.

[3.] Labour to get a mortified heart. They are most apt to be scandalised that have a carnal bias upon their hearts, a contrariety of affections to the gospel, Luke xvi. 14; John v. 44; xii. 42, 43; who are leavened with covetousness, jealousy of reputation, fear of disgrace, and the like.

[4.] Get a fervent love: Ps. cxix. 165, 'Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.' It is want of a true and hearty love that maketh us so easy and apt to take offence.

A second use that we make of it is this,—Be sure to take heed of prejudices against practical godliness.

1. Some take prejudice against the necessity of regeneration. But surely there is a necessity of fitting us anew to the use and end for which we were made. For the use see Eph. ii. 10, and for the end John iii. from the 3d to the 5th verse.

2. Another prejudice is the difficulty of a godly life: Mat. xix. 25, 'With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' Use will make it easy; at first it is most hard and tedious.

3. Another prejudice is the persecutions which attend it. God will have his servants and graces tried. They that go to sea must look for wind and waves, but in the haven we shall have rest. In heaven we shall enjoy full and eternal rest.