

# A SERMON

CONCERNING THE

## RIGHT MANAGEMENT OF FRIENDLY VISITS.

PREACHED IN LONDON, APRIL 14, 1704.

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ACTS xv. 36.

*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.*

THIS was a good motion which St. Paul made to Barnabas, his brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, inviting his company and assistance in watering those churches among the Gentiles which they had together lately planted. Blessed Paul, that prime minister of state in Christ's kingdom, was not only thoroughly furnished for every good word and work, but was always forward to put forth himself to both; not only a *chief speaker*, (Acts xiv. 12.) but a *chief doer*. Many will be content to follow, who do not care to lead in those services that are difficult and hazardous; but those who by the grace of God are spirited *προιστασθαι*, to go before in good works, as the word is, (Tit. iii. 8.) are worthy of double honour: such a one was Paul; witness this instance here.

Though Paul and Barnabas had an extraordinary call to preach the gospel among the Gentiles at first, the Holy Ghost by special designation, separating them to that great work, (Acts xiii. 2.) yet in the prosecution of that service, they were not to expect immediate direction from heaven at every turn, but much was left to their own prudence and zeal, that their example might be the more imitable, in after-times; and this, particularly, of visiting those to whom they had preached.

Antioch was now a safe and quiet harbour, into which Paul and Barnabas, after a troublesome but successful voyage, were lately retired to refresh themselves a little: there they were easy, and yet not idle; for while they continued there (though not

many days) they were teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, Acts xv. 35. And they had reason to say, It is good to be here; better be here than in those cities, where bonds and afflictions continually awaited them. But St. Paul's active spirit could not long be reconciled to rest; and, therefore, he has soon thoughts of putting to sea again; he is not unmindful of, nor will he be disobedient to, that heavenly vision which appointed him his work *afar off among the Gentiles*, Acts xxi. 21. Among them, therefore, he is here meditating a second expedition. Against this it was easy to object, as the disciples did against Christ's going into Judea, (John xii. 8.) *Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?* The Gentiles had of late actually stoned Paul, (ch. xiv. 19.) and yet like a stout soldier of Jesus Christ, that he might make full proof of his ministry, he resolves to go thither again.

Those who have obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful, will prefer the service of God and their generation before their own ease and safety; and will consult the honour of Christ, and the good of souls, more than any secular interest or satisfaction of their own. If we would approve ourselves the servants of Christ, we must be willing both to labour for him, for this is the day of our work, it will be time enough to rest when we come to heaven; and to venture for him, for this is the day of our combat, and we must not expect our crown, till our warfare is accomplished. Nay, and those who have laboured much, and ventured far, must be willing, with St. Paul here, to labour more, and venture further; Let us go again to do the same work, and encounter the same difficulties. If we would finish our course with joy, we must, like the sun, be constant to it, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race, according as our work is renewed upon our hands, and as the duty of every day requires.

That which St. Paul here designs is a visit, a circular visit; and as one who neither presumed that he was able himself alone for the work that was to be done, nor was ambitious himself alone to receive the respects that would be paid, he urges Barnabas to go along with him, as a sharer in both: for we are members one of another, and the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee. Christ sent forth his disciples two and two.

Now observe in this project of Paul's,

1. Who they were whom he designed a visit to: *Let us visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord.* Note here,

(1.) That he called them *brethren*; not only the *brethren*; he means not only the ministers, the elders they had ordained in every church, (*ch. xiv. 23.*) but all the believers. Though St. Paul was an eminent apostle, the greatest favourite of heaven, and the greatest blessing to this earth, that (for ought I know) ever any mere man was, yet he styles himself brother to the least and meanest of the disciples of Christ; so setting us a copy of humility and condescension, and giving us an example to Christ's rule, with an eye to its reason, (*Matt. xxiii. 8.*) *Be not ye called Rabbi, for all ye are brethren.* If our Master be not ashamed to call us all brethren, we must not be ashamed to call one another so; not in formality, but in sincerity, and in token of brotherly love.

(2.) That he takes it for granted, that they had brethren in every city where they had preached the word of the Lord; for the word of the gospel, though in every place it met with a fierce opposition from some, yet others gave it a kind reception; though to some it was a savour of death unto death, to others it was a savour of life unto life. In every city where the gospel was preached, there was some good done; some lost sheep brought home, some lost silver found. This caused the apostles always to triumph, that by them Christ made manifest the savour of his knowledge in every place, *2 Cor. ii. 14.* Even in those cities out of which the apostles were driven in seeming weakness and disgrace, yet they left behind them some lasting trophies of the Redeemer's victories, and seed under the clods, which sprung up and grew by degrees to a plentiful harvest.

They who are acquainted with the true principles and pleasures of the communion of saints, have a kind and tender concern, not only for their brethren in their own city, but for their brethren in every city, even those whom they never saw, nor are ever likely to see in this world; they love, esteem, and pray for, and are one with, all that in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, and have room for them all in their enlarged hearts; and when perhaps not many serious Christians fall within the lines of their own communication, which occasions them some melancholy thoughts, they comfort themselves with this, that they have brethren in

every city; who all belong to that one city of the living God, the Jerusalem which is above, which is free, and is the mother of us all.

(3.) That he speaks with a particular concern for their brethren, in those cities where they had preached the word of the Lord. Those whom he had preached to, were in a special manner dear to him, dearer than others. To them he had imparted the gospel of Christ, and was ready to impart even *his own soul* also, as he speaks, *1 Thess. ii. 8.* They who truly love Christ and his gospel, cannot but dearly love those to whom they preach Christ and his gospel, especially those who, through grace, have by their ministry received them. Spiritual fathers naturally care for the state of those who are born again by the word they have preached to them; and it is a pity that there should be any love lost between them.

These were they whom St. Paul would visit, though they lay remote and scattered: he did not think it enough to send some of his attendants to wait upon them, and bring him an account of their state, much less did he summon them to come and attend him with their several reports, but he undertook a perilous and expensive journey to visit them, for he was in journeying often; and yet all the toil and fatigue of them was nothing compared with that which put him upon them, even that which came upon him daily, *the care of all the churches, 2 Cor. xi. 26, 28.*

2. On what errand he would visit them. *Let us see how they do, πως εχουσιν—how it is with them; quid faciunt—what they do; so some: quid facti sunt—what they have done; so others; and both from the Syriac.* It was not merely a compliment that he designed, nor did he take such a journey with a bare "How do ye?" No, he made this visit to his brethren, that he might acquaint himself with their case, and impart unto them such spiritual gifts as were suited to it. He visited them as the physician visits his recovering patient, that he may prescribe what is proper for him, for the perfecting of his cure, and the preventing of a relapse.

Let us see how they do; that is, Let us see what spirit they are of, and what state they are in.

(1.) Let us see what their temper and conversation are; how they stand affected, and how they behave themselves. They received the word of the Lord, which we preached to them, with all readiness of mind; let us see whether they hold fast that which they received, or no, and what is become of the blessedness they then spake of: a good work was begun among them; let us see how it goes on, and what advances are made in the building which we laid the foundation of. They embraced the gospel of Christ, and professed a subjection to it; let us see whether they stand firm or are shaken, whether they get ground or lose it, whether they are an orna-

ment to that worthy name by which they are called, or a reproach to it.

This inquiry was the fruit of his godly jealousy over them, which he expresses in many of his epistles with a great deal of tenderness, and true affection: he was afraid concerning those among whom he had laboured, lest he had bestowed upon them labour in vain, and lest Satan's emissaries had disordered and undone that good work which had been done with so much care and pains by Christ's ambassadors. See 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3. *I fear lest your minds should be corrupted.*—Gal. iv. 11. *I am afraid of you.*—1 Thess. iii. 5. *Lest by some means the tempter have tempted you.* This was the language, not of his ill opinion of them, but of his good affection to them: and from this jealousy proceeded a diligent endeavour to recall them if he found them straying, to confirm them if he found them wavering, and to comfort them if he found them steadfast. Let those suspicions which are the bane of friendship be banished, and then let not those jealousies, which are the fruits of friendship, be misinterpreted.

(2.) Let us see what condition they are in, and what their present circumstances are; whether the churches have rest and liberty, and their door of opportunity open, or whether they are not in trouble and distress, scattered and broken up. When they had last taken leave of them, they gave them notice of approaching trouble, (*ch. xiv. 22.*) that *through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God.* Now, says he, let us go see whether the clouds which were then gathering are dispersed, or no; whether the wrath of their enemies be cooled and restrained, or no. Come, let us go see how it is with them, that however it is, we may be some way helpful to them; that we may rejoice with them if they rejoice, and caution them against security; that we may mourn with them if they mourn, and comfort them under the cross.

Now this visit here designed may be considered two ways; either,

1. As an apostolical visit to the churches; or
2. As a friendly visit to their friends.

1. This visit was an apostolical visit to the churches, those particularly to whom they themselves had preached the word of the Lord; not building upon another man's foundation, as St. Paul speaks, (*Rom. xv. 20.*) but cultivating their own husbandry. The persons visited must be considered as those who had been within hearing of the joyful sound of the gospel, and to whom the word of this salvation was sent, as St. Paul had told them, *Acts xiii. 26.* Now he would go and see *how they do.* Whence we may observe,

That it is needful to inquire into the spiritual state of those to whom the word of the Lord is preached.

I know I speak to those who have the word of the

Lord preached to them in as much purity and power, as, perhaps, any people under the sun; you have precept upon precept, and line upon line, in season and out of season. Now I would, as a friend to your souls, suggest to you a necessary inquiry, whether the intention of all this good preaching you have here be answered, and the ends of it in some measure attained, or whether it be not lost upon you, and the grace of God therein received in vain.

(1.) Every man is most concerned to inquire into the state of his own soul, while he sits under the ministry of the gospel. It is the work and office of conscience to visit the soul with this interrogation, and to give in a true answer to it. O that I could prevail with you to deal faithfully with yourselves in this matter, and to try and judge yourselves, because the day is coming when the righteous God will try and judge us all.

So long the word of the Lord has been preached to me, "How do I do" with it? It is a word of life; has it quickened me? or am not I to this day dead in trespasses and sins? It is light; has it enlightened me, or am not I still sitting in darkness? It is spiritual food; has it nourished me? It is spiritual physic; has it healed me? What am I the better for all the sermons I have heard, and all the acquaintance I have got with the Holy Scriptures? What state am I in, a state of sin, or a state of grace? What frame am I in? am I habitually serious and heavenly, or vain and worldly? Is my soul in health? Does not some spiritual disease hang upon me, which is both weakening and threatening? What appetite have I to spiritual delights? What digestion of spiritual food? What strength for spiritual labour? How do I breathe in prayer? How do I walk in a religious conversation? Does my soul prosper, as the soul of Gaius did, *3 John 2?* Do I thrive in my spiritual merchandise, and increase my stock of wisdom, grace and comfort, or do I decline and go behind-hand? Am I getting nearer to God, and fitter for heaven, or am I not cleaving to this earth, and setting my heart upon it as much as ever?

According as we find the case to be upon inquiry, let us proceed in dealing with ourselves; if we find no improvement by the word, we ought to take the shame of it; if our profiting does through grace appear, we ought to take the comfort of it.

(2.) Every minister is next concerned, to inquire into the state of his own hearers; they who dispense God's words and sacraments should sometimes, with Paul and Barnabas here, visit those to whom they dispense them, and see *how they do*, how their souls do. These are the visits which the text would in a special manner lead us to discourse of.

Ministers should not think it enough to preach sound doctrine to their congregations in the lump, which is like the shepherd's turning all his flock together into a good pasture, but they must search

the particular sheep, and seek them out, (as it is expressed, (Ezek. xxxiv. 11.) that they may strengthen the diseased, heal the sick, bind up that which is broken, and bring again that which is driven away, v. 4, 16. As we must look after our prayers, to hear what answer God gives to them, (Hab. ii. 1.) so we must look after our preaching, to see what success it has among those we preach to, that we may return answer to him who sent us, (2 Sam. xxiv. 13.) and like the servant who invited the guests, may show our Lord all these things, (Lukc xiv. 21.) Blessed Paul, that prince and pattern of preachers, taught not only publicly, but from house to house; *warning every one night and day with tears*, (Acts xx. 20, 31.) *exhorting, comforting, and charging every one, as a father doth his children*, 1 Thess. ii. 11. Let us go and do likewise, as those who naturally care for the state of souls.

In the most humble, tender, and obliging manner that may be, let us visit our brethren to whom we have preached the word of the Lord, and inquire what improvements they have made in knowledge by the means of knowledge, that where we find them defective, we may instruct them, mistaken, we may rectify their mistakes. Inquire also what progress they make in practical godliness, that what is amiss may be amended, and what is good may be encouraged; that their doubts may be removed, and they may be helped over their difficulties and discouragements. "Come, (my friend) you are a constant hearer of the word of the Lord, and you seem to heed it, and to be attentive to it, I am come to ask you *how you do?* The soul is the man; if it be well with the soul it is well with the man. How does your soul? Have you understood all these things? If any of the sayings you have heard be hard sayings, let me know, and I will endeavour to make them more easy. Are you affected with what you hear? And does your heart burn within you while we reason with you? Do you relish good truths, and experience the power and influence of them upon your heart? If so, it is well, go on and prosper, the Lord is with you while you be with him: that is a good sermon indeed that does you good; that convinces you of sin, and humbles you for it; shows you your duty, and quickens you to it. But if you find yourself cold and unaffected with the things of God, dull and inactive in the work of God, dark and unacquainted with the life of God, inquire into the cause of it; whence it is that the things which remain are ready to die. It may be there is some secret sin indulged and harboured, the love of the world perhaps, or some lust of the flesh; and this is the worm at the root of your profession, which withers its leaves, and dries up all its fruit; if you love your soul, whatever it is, mortify it, crucify it, and suppress the first risings of it. It may be that you are not so close and constant to your se-

cret devotions as you should be, or careless and lifeless in them, and the soul cannot prosper while that work of the Lord is neglected, or done deceitfully. Perhaps family worship is not kept up as it should be, and therefore God has withholden the dews of his grace from you. You let your place be empty perhaps at the table of the Lord, and deprive yourself of the benefit of that ordinance; the communion of saints is slighted, and it is well if the society of evil-doers be not chosen rather. Come, let me beg of you, as a friend who wishes well to your soul, that you will walk more circumspectly, and keep more close to God and your duty, and you will soon find the comfort of it in your own breast."

How to adapt the inquiries and counsels to the case of each person visited, young and old, rich and poor, weak and strong, careless and careful, I cannot undertake here to give particular rules; but *wisdom is profitable to direct*. And many excellent books we are furnished with, both ancient and modern, for our assistance herein. Mr. Baxter's *Gildas Salvianus, or Reformed Pastor*, will either quicken us or shame us. And cause for shame, I doubt, we all have, for our woful neglect of this part of our duty. God by his grace revive this good work!

But if ministers have not the opportunity they would have to visit their brethren, it would come all to one if their brethren would sometimes visit them, as their spiritual physicians, to consult them, and converse with them about their spiritual state. If the *priest's lips should keep knowledge*, the people should *seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts*, Mal. ii. 7. And the spiritual help thus sought is likely to be given most cheerfully, and received most thankfully.

2. This visit may be considered as a friendly visit made to their friends, with a pious design, and to very good purposes. The brethren they speak of were such as they had some knowledge of, and concern for, and whose welfare they were desirous of: Let us go, (says St. Paul,) and visit them, thereby to testify the kindness we retain for them, now we are at a distance, and that though they are out of sight, they are not out of mind. And let us see *how they do*, that we may sympathize with them according as their condition is, and contribute what we can to their holiness and comfort. This was that which St. Paul had in his eye, and thought worth his while, in undertaking this circuit. Hence observe,

That friendly visits, and kind inquiries into each others' state, are very good things, if they be managed in a right manner, and intended for good purposes.

There are two sorts of commendable visits to be made to our brethren.

(1.) There are visits, that are properly called Christian visits, I mean visits of pure charity, designed for the succour, help, and comfort of those

who are in sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity. Few consider what stress the Scripture lays on this part of our duty. When the apostle undertakes to give a description of religion, and to show wherein it consists, this is the first thing he describes it by, Jam. i. 27. *Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this; one would think it should follow.*—It is wholly to retire from the world and all communication with it, and to spend the whole time in acts of devotion, in prayer and pious contemplations, or at least to fast twice in the week, and to attend all the public performances of divine service; sure, this is the principal part of pure religion, and which must stand first in its description: No, *it is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction*; that by owning them and sympathizing with them, we may comfort and encourage them; and by inquiring into their state, may learn which way we may show them real kindness.

Nor does this act of charity make a less figure in our Saviour's description of the processes of the judgment-day, wherein this will be published to the praise, and honour, and glory of the saved remnant, *I was sick, and ye visited me, I was in prison, and ye came unto me,* (Matt. xxv. 36.) therefore, *Come inherit the kingdom,* (v. 34.) as if all the happiness of heaven were not too much to be the return of these visits. Probably St. Paul had an eye of faith to that word of Christ, when upon the mention of the kind visits which Onesiphorus had made to him in his bonds at Rome, he prayed, *The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day,* (2 Tim. i. 18.) that day when such visits shall be remembered, and abundantly recompensed, and accounted as visits made to Christ himself.

Among all your visits therefore, I pray, let not these charitable ones be omitted: the poor, the sick, the prisoners, you have always with you; the widows and the fatherless you have always with you; and whenever you will, you may thus do them good, Mark xiv. 7. You do not want objects of this charity, if you do not want a heart to it. Look after your poor neighbours, visit them, either yourselves or by your servants, and *see how they do.* Inquire into the necessities of those who are not themselves forward to make them known. *Deep poverty,* (as the apostle calls it, 2 Cor. viii. 2.) like deep waters, commonly makes the least noise, while counterfeit poverty is clamorous. What our Saviour directs in making feasts, (Luke xiv. 12—14.) may be applied to the making of visits, visit not thy friends and thy rich neighbours, not them only who will visit thee again, and so a recompence will be made thee; but visit *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, who cannot recompense thee, and thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.* The liberal should devise liberal things; and since by works of charity we

sow upon the best soil, let out what we have to the best interest, and upon the best securities, and send our effects upon the most advantageous voyages, contrivances of doing good will turn to a better account at last, than the most celebrated projects of worldly wisdom. God presents us with the blessings of his goodness, gives before we ask, and is found of those who seek him not: therefore, we must be merciful, *as our Father in heaven is merciful.* We must seek opportunities of doing good, by visiting our poor brethren, and inquiring into their wants. If our proud hearts be sometimes ready to ask, What are such and such poor people, that we should visit them and regard them? we may soon answer them with another question, What is man, then, that God should visit him? Man who is a worm, and the son of man who is a worm? What are we that he should visit us, so visit and regard us? That he should regard us, who are so mean and vile, according to the estate of a man of high degree, 1 Chron. xvii. 17. If we think much to visit the sick and poor often, and to be liberal to them in our visits, let us remember that God visits us *every morning,* (Job vii. 18.) and that his *visitation preserves our spirits,* Job x. 12.

(2.) Our common visits, which we make to our relations, friends, and neighbours, as such, should be so managed that they may be truly Christian visits. These and the like—polite actions of life, as well as natural ones—are in themselves, morally, neither good nor evil, but according to the principle we are actuated by, and the rule we are governed by in the doing of them. Whatever we do, even in our calling and common conversation, we must do it to the glory of God; and then it is sanctified, it is dignified, *Holiness to the Lord* is written upon it, and it will be fruit abounding to our account. It is a common piece of civility to bring our friends forward on their journey, and few look further therein than the obliging of their friends, and the diverting of themselves; and yet, even this is capable of being done *after a godly sort,* as we find, 3 John 6. *Whom if thou bring forward on their journey, after a godly sort, αὐτῶς τῷ Θεῷ,* as becomes one that belongs to God to respect those who belong to him likewise, *thou shalt do well.* And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, wherein lies much of its life and power, the doing of common actions after a godly sort, with an eye to God's honour as our end, his word as our rule, and his providence as our guide and disposer. Believe it, Christians, religion is not a thing to be confined to our churches and closets; no, wherever we are we must have it with us: *Bind it continually upon thine heart, tie it about thy neck: When thou goest, let it lead thee; when thou sleepest, let it keep thee; when thou wakest, let it talk with thee,* Prov. vi. 21, 22. Let it sit down with thee at thy table, lie down with thee in thy bed, go out with

thee about thy business, come in with thee to thy repose; let it be at thy right hand in buying and selling, in reading and writing, alone and in company. *As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so let it cleave to thee:* by this let it appear that religion has renewed thy heart, let it regulate thy life; and abide always under the commanding power and influence of it.

Among other common actions of life, let this of visiting our friends be done after a godly sort. To assist you herein is what I principally designed in the choice of this text, and what will take up the remainder of our time. And I shall offer something by way of caution against those things which corrupt our visits, and turn them into sin to us; and by way of direction to those things which will sanctify our visits, and make them to turn to a very good purpose.

I. Suffer, I beseech you, a word of caution; and take heed that your visits of your friends, and your inquiries into their state, be not so mismanaged, as to turn to some ill purpose. This we must not judge of by the common sentiment or fashion of a vain world; for our Saviour has told us, that there is *that which is highly esteemed among men*, perhaps as a mighty accomplishment, and a piece of very good breeding, which yet *is an abomination in the sight of God*, Luke xvi. 15. Let us, therefore, have recourse to the law and to the testimony, and take admonition thence in this case.

1. Let us take heed, that our friendly visits be not the waste and consumption of our precious time. We are intrusted with time as a talent to be traded with for eternity: as we spend our time well or ill, so will our eternity be spent, comfortably or miserably. Every good Christian will therefore endeavour to approve himself a good husband of his time; and that is a piece of *good husbandry*, which is indeed *good divinity*. It is not only necessary that some part of our time be spent in actual preparation for another world, but all our time must be spent with an habitual regard to it. Every hour of the hireling's day must be at the disposal of him who hired him into his vineyard. Our time is not our own, for we know in whose hands our times are, and must always live to him, by whom we always live.

The wisdom which is from above will therefore direct us what proportion of time is to be allotted to every service, both of our general and particular calling, so that the several duties we have to perform, and the several enjoyments we have to take the comfort of, may not interfere with or intrude upon one another. *Every thing is beautiful in its season, and to every purpose there is a time*, which the *wise man's heart discerns*. Now if that time be spent in visits, which should be spent in any needful duties relating to life or godliness, then they are not

Christian visits. If, under colour of visiting our friends, and seeing how they do, we indulge ourselves in sloth and laziness, and the careless neglect of business and labour, we shall give but a bad account of so many of our hours mispent. We may justly say to many, as Pharaoh unjustly said to Moses and the Israelites, *Ye are idle, ye are idle, therefore ye say, Let us go and visit our brethren*; nay, it is perhaps pretended, *Let us go and do sacrifice*, Exod. v. 17. Such as these the apostle describes, (1 Tim. v. 13.) who *learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house*, under pretence of friendly visits; and not only idle, (for few who are idle are only idle, usually they have other faults; when they have nothing to do, the devil will find them something to do,) they are tattlers also and busy-bodies; idle in good, but busy in evil. But what will they do when God rises up, and shall bring them into judgment, for all their idle visits, and idle frolics, and every idle word?

Learn, therefore, to adjust and limit the expense of your time, and be not prodigal of such a talent. When you say that you will go and visit a friend, ask, Can I afford time for it? Is there not some greater good to be done at the same time, which cannot so well be deferred till another time? Will not the calling be neglected, or some religious duties be prevented by it? And let that be done first, which, all things considered, is most needful,—and every thing in its own order. And where a visit, which must be made, we fear intrenches too much upon some more necessary business, it will be our wisdom to improve it the more carefully for some very good purpose, that so at least we may effectually save it from being an idle visit.

2. Let us take heed that our friendly visits be not the gratifications of pride and vain curiosity. They who desire to make a fair show in the flesh, (as the apostle speaks, Gal. vi. 12.) visit their friends only that they may see and be seen; that they may show themselves in their best ornaments and accomplishments, and that they may observe what figure other people make, and what they set themselves off by. They go abroad only to learn fashions, and to see how the world goes; like the Athenians, who spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or hear some new thing, (Acts xvii. 21.) or like Dinah, who went out to *see the daughters of the land*, (Gen. xxxiv. 1.) to see how they were dressed, what entertainments they gave, and how they lived, only that she might have something to talk of when she came home, either by way of praise or censure. This was all her business; and the sequel of the story shows that the journey was not for her honour. Yet it is to be feared that many of our visits are made from no better a principle.

Decency indeed is duty; civility must be paid and returned in that which is the current coin of our

country. Religion was never intended to destroy good manners, or to make men rude and unfashionable; in matters of common conversation, it is a rule of direction, not a rule of contraries. But in our compliances with the customs and usages of the place we live in, and the persons we converse with, we have need to look well to our spirits, and to keep our hearts with all diligence, lest that which is not only innocent but commendable in itself, arise from a corrupt principle, and so become sin to us. Hezekiah's showing his house and furniture, his armoury and jewels, to the king of Babylon's ambassadors, seemed but a piece of common respect, and what is usually done among friends; and yet, because he did it in the pride of his heart, wrath came upon him, and on Judah and Jerusalem, for it, (2 Chron. xxxii. 25.) and it is upon record for warning to all, even to those who have escaped the grosser corruptions that are in the world through lust, to take heed lest foolish pride, that root of bitterness, which bears so much gall and wormwood, make their visits, dress, and compliments, a snare to them. Pride is a subtle sin, a sin that most easily besets us, a sin that is apt to mingle itself with our best actions, and like a dead fly it spoils many a pot of precious ointment; we have therefore need to keep a jealous eye, and a strict hand, upon the motions of our own souls, as in other instances, so in this of making and receiving visits, *lest being lifted up with pride we fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

If in our common conversation we are more solicitous to approve ourselves to men, by appearing gay and agreeable, than to approve ourselves to God, either by doing or getting good, surely we forget that fundamental law of our Christianity, *not to live to ourselves, but to him that died for us, and rose again.* That common principle, (which too many govern themselves by more than by the principles of religion,) "As good be out of the world as out of the fashion," ought to be of no force with them who know that they are called out of the world, and are not to be conformed to it, nor to walk according to the course of it.

Let us always endeavour, while we accommodate ourselves to the fashions of our country, and of our place in it, yet to be *dead to them*, and observe them with a holy indifference, as those who seek a better country, that is, a heavenly, and belong to it: so we may do what others do, and yet not as the most do it. Let the visits we make daily to our God by prayer, be more our care, and more our delight, than any visits we have to make to our friends.

3. Let us take heed that our friendly visits be not the cloak and cover of hypocrisy; that they be not such visits as David's enemies made to him, (Ps. xli. 6.) *If he come to see me he speaketh vanity, that is, what he says by way of compassion and condolence is all counterfeit and pretended: His heart*

*gathereth iniquity to itself, when he goeth abroad he telleth it.* A base practice, and that which all, who have any sense of virtue and honour, will cry out shame on. Next to hypocrisy in religion, nothing is worse than hypocrisy in friendship.

It is bad enough if kindness be not designed in our visits, and if we do not duly respect those whom we thus profess a respect for; for love ought to be without dissimulation, (Rom. xii. 9.) but it is much worse if mischief and unkindness be intended to those whom we pretend to make visits of friendship to; and we go to see them, that we may find some occasion against them, and pick up something to make the matter of their reproach in the next company. Thus to make the shows and ceremonies of friendship serve the designs of malice and ill-will, is to involve ourselves in a double guilt, both the want of charity, and the want of sincerity.

Not that therefore, when we have conceived a displeasure against any, whom upon the account of relation, communion, neighbourhood, or former acquaintance, we owe respect to, we must presently break off all intercourse and conversation with them, and deny due civilities to them, for fear of hypocrisy in paying them; no, that is to make ill, worse: but we must mortify that corrupt passion which is working in us; *not let the sun go down upon our wrath*; forgive the injury, whether real or imaginary; be reconciled to our friend, cordially reconciled, and then come and offer our gift to God, and our respects to our friend. We ought carefully to avoid every thing that tends to the alienating of the affections of Christians one from another, and the cooling of love; and to devise all means possible for the preserving of true friendship where it is, and the reparation and retrieval of it where it is withering and ready to die.

4. Let us take heed that our friendly visits be not made the opportunities of slandering and tale-bearing. Our rule is, *Speak evil of no man*, not only that evil which is false and altogether groundless; but not that which is true, when our speaking of it will do more hurt than good. If we have not wherewithal to speak well of those we speak of, we had better not say any thing of them than say ill. The general law of justice obliges to do as we would be done by: we would not have our own faults and follies, our own miscarriages and mismanagements, proclaimed in all companies, and made the subject of discourse and remark; let us then treat other people's good name with the same tenderness that we expect and desire our own should be treated with. There is also a particular law of charity, which obliges us to cover even a multitude of sins; to keep that secret which is secret, for we need not make scandals, by divulging that which might be concealed: and to speak of that which cannot be hid, as those who mourn, and not as those who are puffed up; as those who are willing to make the best, and hope

the best, of every person, and every action, and not as if we were of counsel against the delinquent, and thought ourselves obliged to aggravate the crime, and press for judgment against the criminal.

Nothing is more destructive to love and friendship than tale-bearing is: we have in the Scripture laws against it, (Lev. xix. 16.) *Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people.* The word רכיל here and elsewhere used for a tale-bearer, properly signifies a pedlar or petty chapman, who buys goods (stolen ones it may be) at one place, and sells them at another, taking care to make his own markets of them; so a tale-bearer makes his visits, to pick up at one place, and utter at another, that which he thinks will lessen his neighbour's reputation, that he may build his own upon the ruin of it. Another law to the same effect we have, (Exod. xxiii. 1.) *Thou shalt not raise a false report.* The margin reads it, *Thou shalt not receive a false report:* for, many times, the receiver in this case is as bad as the thief. We have also proverbs against it, (Prov. xx. 19.) *He that goes about (making visits suppose) as a tale-bearer, revealeth secrets;* and (Prov. xxvi. 20, 22.) *Where there is no tale-bearer, the strife ceaseth—and the words of a tale-bearer are as wounds.* They who make it their business in their visits to carry peevish, ill-natured stories and characters from place to place, to the wounding of their neighbours' good name secretly, the propagating of contempts and jealousies, and the sowing of discord, do the devil's work, and serve his interests, more than they are aware of. That great and good man, St. Austin, ordered the law of his house to be written over his table, which forbid all tale-bearers any room there;

*Quisquis amat dictis absentum rodere famam,  
Hanc mensam vetitam noverit esse sibi.—*

Be it known that this table is forbidden the man, who delights in injuring the reputation of absent persons.

As a greater than he had done before him, (Ps. ci. 5.) *Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off;* and I heartily wish that not the persons but the thing might be cut off from all conversation.

You will do me the justice (my brethren) to think that what I say in these cautions is intended not as an accusation of any, I know the faces of but few of you, much less do I know your faults; but as an admonition to you all, to take heed of those sins, which I know most easily beset us: for *as in water face answers face, so doth the heart of man to man.*

II. Suffer, I beseech you, a word of counsel, and direction; and let us all endeavour that our visits of our friends, and our inquiries into their state, may be made to serve some good purpose; that they may not only be rectified, and made innocent, but sanctified, and made excellent; and may be so managed

as to rescue that from being lost time, which we cannot but be sensible has been too much so, and to make it pass well in our account. Even acts of civility may be so improved as to become acts of piety; and the common salutation of a "How do you," may, by a good intention, be advanced to the rank of those good words, which they that fear the Lord speak often one to another, and which the Lord hearkens and hears, and of which he writes a book of remembrance, Mal. iii. 16. As the sincere, sacred words of "God be with you," and "God bless you," when they are used carelessly and lightly, degenerate, and turn into the sin of taking the name of the Lord our God in vain; so this common word, "How do you do?" and, "How does your family?" may be consecrated by a principle of Christian friendship, and we may even therein glorify God.

This, which I say concerning the personal visits of our friends, may also be much of it accommodated to paper visits, by letter. The keeping up of our friendly correspondences, which is the chief intention of most of the letters which we write, who are not men of business in the world, ought to arise from a good principle, and to be managed by us as becomes Christians, that we may not have to answer for waste paper, as well as lost time.

Let us then be governed in this matter by the following directions:

1. Let our friendly visits be the proofs and preservatives of brotherly love. Brotherly love is the law of Christ's kingdom, the livery of his family, the great lesson to be learned in his school; nothing is more the beauty and strength of the Christian church, nor a brighter ornament to that holy religion which we make profession of: it is maintained and kept up by reciprocal kindnesses, and particularly by mutual visits. This, therefore, we must intend, both in giving and receiving them, and manage them accordingly, to testify our affection to those whom we are obliged by nature, providence, or grace, in a particular manner to respect; and so to show the proof of our love, as the apostle speaks, (2 Cor. viii. 24.) and thereby to confirm and improve that unity wherein brethren ought to dwell together. We must therefore visit one another, that we may the better love one another, with a pure heart and more fervently.

Mutual strangeness and affected distance, is both the effect and the cause of the decay of love; it is an evidence that it is cooled, and it cools it yet more, and perhaps by degrees kills it, and gives Satan room to sow his tares. When relations and neighbours, and those who are under some particular ties of friendship, yet are as shy one of another, and as much on the reserve, as if they never had seen one another before in this world, and never expected to see one another in a better world, it is easy to say, contrary to what was said of the primitive Chris-



tians, *See how* little these people *love one another* ; but when they visit each other with mutual freeness and openness, embrace each other with a cordial endearment, and concern themselves for each other with all possible tenderness, by this it will appear that they are taught of God to love one another ; and hereby the holy fire is kept burning upon the altar.

Now since our lot is cast in those latter days, wherein it is foretold, that iniquity should abound, and the love of many wax cold, (Matt. xxiv. 12.) those perilous times in which men shall be lovers of their own selves only, (2 Tim. iii. 1, 2.) it is a good service to the public, by all means possible to cultivate true and hearty friendship, and bring it into reputation. Why should we be strange one to another, who hope to be together for ever with the Lord ?

But if the diseases of selfishness and deceit should prove still obstinate to the methods of cure among most people ; yet if we approve ourselves warm and cordial in our love, we shall have the comfort of having done our duty, and delivered our souls : and perhaps they who are more loving than others, will have the further comfort of being better beloved than others ; for he who watereth shall be watered also himself.

2. Let our friendly visits be the helps and occasions of Christian sympathy. Christian sympathy is one branch of Christian love. As it is in the natural body, it ought to be in the mystical body, *If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, and if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it*, 1 Cor. xii. 26. What is love but a union of souls, and a twisting of interests ? And where these are, there will be sympathy, according to that law of our religion, *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*, Rom. xii. 15.

We must therefore visit our friends, and *see how they do*, that we may rejoice with them in those things which are the matter of their rejoicing ; that when we find them and their families in health and peace, their employments successful, their substance increased, their relations agreeable, the vine by the side of the house fruitful, and the olive plants round about the table green and flourishing, we may be comforted in their comfort, as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. vii. 13. God takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants, and so should we, Ps. xxxv. 27. And we should be the more studious to show ourselves pleased in the prosperity of our friends, because most seek their own, and few another's weal ; and thence arise envy, and emulation, and mutual jealousies.

We must likewise desire to know the state of our friends, that we may mourn with them for their afflictions, and mingle our tears with theirs ; that if the hand of the Lord be gone out against them, and

breaches are made on them and their comforts, we may give them some relief, by putting a respect upon them in their sorrows, and assuring them of our continued friendship, when they are most apt to be discouraged, and to think themselves slighted ; also by giving them an opportunity of making their complaints to such as will hear them, not only with patience, but with tenderness and compassion, and this is some ease to a burthened spirit. And perhaps we may then speak some word in season, which God may bless for the strengthening of the weak hands, and confirming the feeble knees.

On this errand Job's friends came to visit him, when they heard of all the evil that was come upon him, that they might *mourn with him*, and *comfort him*, (Job ii. 11.) and it is some comfort to the mourners to have their friends mourn with them. Thus Nehemiah inquired after the condition of his friends with a tender concern ; as appears by his deep resentment of the evil tidings brought him ; *He sat down and wept, and mourned certain days*, Neh. i. 3, 4. Let us learn in this manner to bear one another's burthens, by a compassionate sorrow for others' griefs ; and this suffering at second-hand, will either prevent our own afflictions, or prepare us for them.

3. Let our friendly visits furnish us with matter for prayer and praise. Besides the plain intimation which our Master has given us, in teaching us to address ourselves to God as *our Father*, we have an express command, *Pray one for another*, (James v. 16.) which supposes it our duty likewise to give thanks for one another ; for whatever mercy we pray for, when it is given, we ought to return thanks for it. We find St. Paul, in most of his Epistles, both to churches and particular friends, speaking of the prayers and thanksgivings he offered up to God daily upon their account. And it could not but be an unspeakable comfort to them, to think of the interest they had in the prayers of so great an intercessor as he was. It is written also for our learning, that we may in like manner give thanks to God for our friends, making mention of them always in our prayers ; that thus we may testify our affection to them, and may be really serviceable to their comfort, when perhaps we are not in a capacity of being so any other way ; and that we may thus keep up the communion of saints in faith, hope, and love.

Now, that we may do this the more particularly, and the more sensibly, it is of good use to visit our brethren, and to *see how they do* ; that, whatever is the matter of their rejoicing, and ours with them, we may make the matter of our thanksgiving to God ; and whatever just complaint they make to us, we may with them spread it before the Lord, and beg relief and comfort for them. When we visit our friends, we have an opportunity of praying with them, and I heartily wish it were more practised.

especially by ministers; this would indeed sanctify our visits, and turn them to a very good account. When you are sick and in trouble, you desire us to pray with you; and why should you not desire us to pray with you when you are in health and peace? that your prosperity may be continued and sanctified; and that you may be kept from the snares and temptations of it. Help likewise in returning thanks, is as necessary as help in prayer; and they who know how to value aright the privilege of communion with God, will reckon this as good an entertainment as they can either give or receive.

But besides the opportunity it gives of praying together, it gives us much assistance in praying for one another when we are alone. When we have seen our friends, and talked with them, or heard from them, we can pray the more affectionately for them. And perhaps we shall find it a furtherance to us in this part of our work, if we would make it a rule to ourselves, (not to *bind* conscience, but to *mind* it,) that those friends whom in the day we have visited, or have visited us, whom we have written to, or heard from, we will at night in our closets particularly pray for, and give thanks for, as there is occasion. I know not why we may not as well spread the letter of a friend before the Lord, as Hezekiah did the letter of an enemy. And some have observed, that they have had most comfort in those relations and friends which they have prayed most for: or if herein we should be disappointed, as holy David was, and those we pray for should prove unkind to us, it will be our satisfaction, as it was his, that our prayers will return into our own bosom, and we ourselves shall have the comfort of them, Ps. xxxv. 13.

It is a pious request which serious Christians commonly make one to another, both by word and letter, "Pray remember me in your prayers;" and it is good to use it, provided it do not degenerate into a formality, and that we request this kindness from a deep sense of our own wants and unworthiness, and a real value both for the duty of prayer in general, and for our friends, and their prayers in particular, whom we suppose to have an interest in heaven. And being separated from each other in this scattering world, a world we cannot expect to be always together in, by those mutual requests for a share in each other's prayers, we make appointments of meeting often at the same throne of grace, in hopes of meeting shortly at the right hand of the throne of glory to part no more.

4. Let our friendly visits be improved as opportunities of doing good to the souls of our friends. Spiritual charity, though it must begin at home in teaching ourselves and our families, yet it must not end there; we must contribute what we can to the edification of others in knowledge, faith, holiness, and joy. This is mutual duty to be studied and

done, in giving and receiving visits; that *as iron sharpens iron*, so our pious affections and resolutions may be sharpened by conversation with one another, Prov. xxvii. 17. We are often commanded to exhort one another, admonish one another, teach one another, comfort one another, and stir up one another to that which is good, Heb. iii. 13; x. 25. 1 Thes. v. 11. And when can this be better done than when we come together for mutual society? Then we have a price put into our hands, if we have but a heart to it, that is,—skill, and will, and courage to improve it, Prov. xvii. 16.

Much has been said, and much written, to promote pious discourse among Christians, but I fear to little purpose. We have all reason to lament it, that so much corrupt communication proceeds out of our mouths, and so little of that which is good, and to the use of edifying; which might either manifest grace in him who speaks, or minister grace to them who hear. *And shall vain words never have an end?* Job xvi. 3. *Shall we reason always with unprofitable talk, and with speeches wherewith we can do no good, but are in danger of doing hurt?* Job xv. 3. Shall we never learn the art of introducing and keeping up profitable discourse in our conversation with our friends, such as we may hear of with comfort in that day, when by our words we must be justified, and by our words we must be condemned? Matt. xii. 37. A visit thus improved will be fruit abounding to a good account: *What knowest thou*, but that thou mayest thus *save a soul from death, eternal death, or at least further a soul toward life, eternal life?* Thus we must confess Christ before men, as those who are not ashamed of him or of his words: reproach for it we must not fear, but say, *If this be to be vile, I will be yet more vile*; nay, we need not fear it, for perhaps even of them whose reproach we fear, if we manage it with meekness and humility, and without affectation, we may be had in honour. Serious godliness is an awful thing, and will command respect.

We grant, that our discourses with our friends cannot be turned entirely into this channel; allowance must be made for a great deal of common talk, yet even upon that there should appear an air of religion and godliness. Though a foreigner may speak English, yet ordinarily we can discern by his pronunciation, that he is a foreigner; so, though a good Christian, who belongs to another world, while he is here cannot avoid speaking much of the things of this world, yet he ought to do it in such a manner, that those he converses with may take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus, (Acts iv. 13.) and may say unto him, *Thou art a Christian, and thy speech bewrays thee.*

If it appear that we make conscience of our words, and are afraid of offending with our lips; if in our tongue be the law of kindness; if we always speak

of God and his providence with reverence and a holy awe, like the great Mr. Boyle, who, in discourse, was observed never to mention the name of God without a discerning pause, or stop, leaving room for a pious thought; if we speak of common things after a godly sort, as those who accustom themselves to the language of Canaan, and not the language of Ashdod; God will hereby be honoured, our profession will be beautified, those we converse with will be edified, and say that God is with us of a truth. Our speech, though it be not always of grace, should be always with grace, seasoned with it as with salt, which gives it its own relish and savour, Col. iv. 6.

5. Let our friendly visits be improved as opportunities of getting good to our own souls. By doing good, we do indeed get good; our own lamp will burn the brighter for its lighting others; but those who are not in a capacity of doing much good in conversation, and can say little to edify others, may yet hear that which will edify themselves. They who cannot be teachers, must be glad to be learners; and should visit those who are knowing and gracious with this design, that they may improve themselves in knowledge and grace by conversation with them, and that by walking with wise men they may be wise. When St. Paul designed a visit to his friends at Rome, he aimed both at their spiritual benefit, and at his own, Rom. i. 11, 12. *I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift,—and, that I may be comforted together with you.*

What we hear from our friends we visit that is instructive, and what we see in them that is exemplary and praise-worthy, we should take notice of and treasure up, that it may be ready for our use when there is occasion. By conversing with those who are wise and good, we should strive to be made wiser and better. Some rules either of prudence, or piety, or both, we should gather up for our own use out of every visit, that in every thing we may order our conversation aright. As vain people make visits chiefly to see fashions, so serious people should make visits chiefly to learn wisdom. *A wise man will thus hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will by this means attain to wise counsels,* Prov. i. 5.

Nay, even from what we hear and see, which is foolish and blame-worthy, we may learn that which will be profitable to us. Solomon received instruction, even from the field of the slothful, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding. What we observe indecent in others, we must learn to avoid; and take warning by others' harms. Thus out of the eater may come forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness.

But it is now time to conclude, with a word or two of exhortation, upon the whole matter.

1. Let us all remember our faults this day, and be humbled before God for the guilt we have contracted

by our mismanaged visits of our friends. In our common conversation, as well as in our common business, it is hard to keep ourselves unspotted. Think, how much time we have lost in needless and unprofitable visits, which might have been better bestowed, and cannot now be recalled! What mean and low ends we have proposed to ourselves in making our visits, and how we have in them walked after the course of a vain and foolish world, and not after the conduct of the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus! *Are we not carnal, and do we not walk as men?* as the apostle speaks, (1 Cor. iii. 3.) far short of the spirit of Christianity, that high and holy calling wherewith we are called.

Think, how little good we have done in the visits we have made and received! How few have been the better for us! It is well if many have not been the worse for us, and for our corrupt communication. When the company has fallen into vain discourse, that foolish talking and jesting which the word of God expressly condemns, (Eph. v. 4.) have we not been as forward as any to promote it and keep it up, and showed ourselves well pleased with it? Have we not provoked one another's lusts and passions, instead of provoking one another to love and to good works? Have we not given offence, and put an occasion of stumbling in our brother's way, by taking too great a liberty of speech in our conversation with our friends, encouraging the hearts of the licentious in their looseness, and grieving the hearts of those who are serious themselves, and expect we should be so too? Let us for these things *judge ourselves* this day, that we may not be judged of the Lord.

2. Let us be so wise as to choose those for our intimate friends, who will concur with us in a serious endeavour to get this matter mended. For the truth is, in this, as in a trade, we have the making but of one side of the bargain; we can do but little toward the rectifying of what is ordinarily amiss in conversation, and the improving of it to some good purposes, unless those we converse with will do their part: those therefore we should desire to associate ourselves with, who will edify us, and be edified by us, whom we may either do good to, or get good by, or both.

It is our wisdom to avoid that company which we find corrupts our minds, and makes them vain, and indisposes them for serious exercises: what good there is in us is apt enough to dwindle and decay of itself, we need not the help of others to quench it. Therefore take Solomon's counsel, *Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge,* Prov. xiv. 7.

But since the communion of saints is intended to be the furtherance of our holiness and comfort, and the earnest of our future bliss, and we are taught by the pattern of that truly primitive church (Acts

ii. 42.) to continue steadfast, not only in the Apostle's doctrine, but in fellowship, let us acquaint ourselves with some who appear to be serious Christians, without distinction of parties, and converse with them; let such only be our bosom-friends: and let us say to them, as the neighbour nations did to God's Israel, (Zech. viii. 23.) *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.* Let God's people be our people, and David's resolution ours, (Ps. cxix. 63.) *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*

3. Let us all resolve, by the grace of God, to look well to ourselves, and to the frame of our own spirits, in giving and receiving visits. If we cannot reform the world, yet I hope we may reform our own hearts and lives, and every man prove his own work, so shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, though perhaps not in another; so shall his praise be of God, though perhaps not of men.

Christians, I am not persuading you to any thing that is rude or morose, or looks like an affectation of singularity; nor am I declaiming against the innocent diversions and entertainments of conversation, which make it pleasant to yourselves and your friends, and are a relief to the fatigue of business: but I am only to remind you, that you be very careful not to lose your religion in them. Remember that you are Christians, and you must speak and act in every thing as becomes saints, Eph. v. 3. Remember that you are hastening into eternity, the days of your probation will shortly be numbered and finished: you are therefore concerned to spend your time on earth as those who are candidates and probationers for heaven, so that you may not *seem to come short.* Converse with this world of sense, as those who know you must shortly remove to the world of spirits; and let this thought give a check to every thing that is vain and frothy, and put you upon considering, seeing you look for such things, *what manner of persons you ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness,* 2 Pet. iii. 11.

Lay before you (my brethren) the example of the Lord Jesus, and as he was so let us be in this world; walking as he walked,—as in other things, so in this: let us make visits as he did, with a design to do good, according as the sphere of our activity is. His lips dropt as a honey-comb, and fed many; let ours do so too, as we are able. Wherever he was,

still he was about his Father's business; and let us, though unworthy such an honour, still endeavour to be so employed. When he visited his friends, he sympathized with them in their griefs, comforted them under their afflictions, reproved them for what was amiss, and entertained them with edifying and instructive discourse, taking rise for it usually by an admirable yet imitable art, from common occurrences; and these things are written for our learning: *Go thou and do likewise.*

And that we may be thoroughly furnished, like the good householder, who brings out of his treasury things new and old, let us daily pray to God for that wisdom of the prudent, which is to understand his way in every thing. There is no one grace that we are more particularly directed and encouraged to pray for than this; (Jam. i. 5.) *If any man lack wisdom (and which of us is there that does not?) let him ask it of God, who gives liberally, and upbraids us not with our former follies, our present necessity, or the frequency of our addresses and applications to him.* Solomon, who in his youth made wisdom his choice, wisdom his request, had that granted him, and abundance of other good things added thereto. In putting up this petition, let us, therefore, be not only constant and earnest, but very particular; Lord, give me wisdom to direct me in such a case that is difficult and doubtful! Lord, enable me to behave myself wisely in a perfect way towards my family, and my friends and neighbours whom I visit, and to walk in wisdom also toward them that are without, that my profession of religion and relation to Christ may never suffer damage or reproach through any imprudence or indiscretion of mine, in any visit, given or received.

And lest this wisdom should degenerate into that which is worldly, and err by an excess of caution, let us pray to God for a spirit of holy boldness and courage also, that we may be enabled to appear and act for God and godliness in all companies, and upon all occasions, with that pious zeal which becomes the good soldiers of Jesus Christ, that all we converse with may see, that we serve a Master whom we are neither ashamed nor afraid to own; and that we have ventured all our credit with men, upon the security of that promise of God, *Them that honour me I will honour.*