

Receiving Christ, and Walking in Him

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"As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him"—Colossians 2:6.

You have here such an ordinary text, that perhaps there are few present but have heard sermons preached upon it; and yet it is such an extraordinary text that we can never hear enough upon it, nor ever reach to the bottom. There is more in it than ever yet we saw or felt. It contains a sum of heart and life religion, and of all that concerns either faith or manners; a GOSPEL-PRINCIPLE, which is believing in Christ; and a GOSPEL-PRACTICE, a walking in him: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him."

The apostle here, in this epistle, gives a good copy to all the ministers of Christ to follow in their preaching and teaching, 1. To inform the judgments of people, and lay a good foundation in the knowledge of Christ. 2. To excite their affections after Christ, and to rouse and awaken them to a walk and conversation suitable to their knowledge and faith; knowing that there can be no sure building erected in a gospel walk, unless there be a sure foundation laid in a gospel principle. That the believing Colossians were well informed and instructed, the apostle observes, to the commendation and praise of free grace; and he exhorts them to persevere in the doctrine wherein they were taught by Epaphras, a faithful minister of Christ (chapter 1, verse 7). However, there were false teachers that had crept in among them who were ready to beguile them with enticing words (chapter 2, verse 4), and that had actually seduced and carried away the Galatians from their true faith which they formerly professed (Gal 1:6,7); yet he would have the Colossians to stand fast in their faith, and in that doctrine which had been truly and honestly delivered to them. The apostle commends the Colossians for their steadfastness, as you see in the verses preceding our text; and yet he exhorts them more and more to this duty, as you see from the verse following the text; which may let us into something of the intent of the text itself; intimating that the doctrine of Christ had been brought to them, and they had believed it, and received it, and Christ in it, and that though this was well, yet it was not all; they were therefore, through grace, to persevere in that doctrine, to walk forward in the knowledge of Christ, and his gospel, and in the practice of what they knew.

The verse that goes before the text sets before us two things, that denote the good constitution and temperament of a right church, such as the church of the Colossians was. 1. The first is its order; O but it makes a beautiful church when all things in it are ordered according to the pattern seen in the mount, with respect to the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government! When the doctrine is sound and lively, the worship pure and spiritual, discipline powerful and impartial, and the government beautiful and regular; but it is a very unpleasant appearance in a church when confusion with respect to all these doth take place. 2. The second was steadfastness in the faith. The apostle rejoiced to behold in the church of Colossae, not only their order, but their steadfastness in the faith of Christ, in the doctrine of the gospel; for, when a church fails in this, then all goes to wreck. If the apostle Paul were on earth, and to write an epistle to the Church of Scotland, would any think that he would have this to commend us for, our order and steadfastness in the faith? O for such a prospect of affairs in this island, that we who have been Corinthians in respect of our disorders and divisions, and Galatians in respect of our un-steadfastness in the right faith of Christ, and the revolt of many from reformation truth, may become Colossians in respect of our order and steadfastness in the faith, "I joy to behold your order and steadfastness," saith the apostle.

Now, as there are two things in that preceding verse that shew the good constitution of a

church in general: so, in this text, there are two things that shew and set forth the good state of any church member in particular, or of a true Christian. The first is, the receiving of Christ Jesus the Lord; the second is, a walking in him. And we may conceive these two as having a reference to two things mentioned in the preceding verse, namely, order and steadfastness; for, as there is no order, but all in confusion in that soul where there is no faith, or receiving of Christ; so there is no steadfastness in faith where there is no walking in him. And as the text stands properly connected with the former verse by the particle Therefore; "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." From the connection of these two verses, I say, you may observe, "That churches of the best constitution, both for the order and steadfastness of their faith, had need to be exhorted to hold fast their principles, and to keep their way." This observation, I think, may be obvious to you at the first view; it is the scope of the apostle all along in the chapter to fortify this church against swerving and declining from the truths of Christ; and why does he so? even because truth is but one, and when received is all reducible to this one word, the receiving of Christ Jesus the Lord, who is the centre of truth.

Truth, I say, is but one, let all the men of the world say what they can about it, or the several branches of it, truth is simple and one; but error is many. And the apostle, in order to fortify them from swerving from the truth, offers several caveats in this chapter. -One is verse 4, "And this, I say, lest any man beguile you with enticing words." Enticing words are the bait wherewith credulous and simple sort of people are taken; such as the apostle notices (Rom 16:17,18). The simple are they that are caught with this bait of enticing words, like merchants that put off slight and corrupt wares with the finest words. Another caveat is verse 8, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men; after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"; and as the former is a bait to the simple; so here is a bait to the more learned, where human philosophy, and natural reasoning are set in opposition to scriptural truth, as it is in Christ Jesus. -A third caveat is verse 16, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath day." Where he cautions them against all legal ceremonies, the errors of Judaizers, and these that are symbolizers with ceremony-mongers.

A fourth caveat he gives, even to this church of Colosse, is, verses 18,19, "Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up with his fleshly mind; and not holding the head from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." Where the apostle cautions against strange paradoxes and opinions in religion. Although some, for maintaining the faith of their forefathers, have been calumniated as if they were bringing in new schemes of doctrine,¹ we could show how some, in opposition to them, have brought in strange opinions that were never before heard tell of in this church, such as gospel repentance before faith and justification, a new scheme and principle that may be charged with not holding the Head, Jesus Christ, and faith in him, as the head of all other gospel graces. Of this nature is that of maintaining the believer's obligation to take the law out of the hand of a God out of Christ. How is this, and many other points that I could name, chargeable with not holding the Head Christ, from which all the body by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God?

A fifth caveat is against all superstitious ordinances of men, verses 21-23. These superstitious ordinances of men are but a tempting of God (Acts 15:10), "Why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of disciples, which neither we, nor our fathers, were able to bear"? The apostle there speaks of legal ceremonies that were instituted of God, after they came to be abolished; and the argument is the stronger, for if it was a tempting of God to make use of these ceremonies that God himself had instituted of old, then what prodigious tempting of God is it to bring in such a superstitious and ceremonial service into the worship of God, as is entirely of human invention?

In a word, the sixth caveat is against all deviations whatsoever from Christ and his truth, and this is the scope of the whole chapter; he fortifies them against all deviations and declining; and

how does he that? just as you would do a house that leans to the one side; what would you do? surely you would labour to get it upright and perpendicular to its foundation: Even so, the apostle strives to make the church here perpendicular, and upright upon their foundation, and that is Christ and his doctrine; exhorting them, under the phrase of holding the head, verse 19, and getting a full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God. And so in the text, and immediate context, it is expressed by a walking in him, a being rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught.

The apostle here useth similitudes; and there are these three comparisons couched here. 1. That Christ is the way, and this is implied in these words, "walk ye in him." 2. That Christ is the root, and this is implied in these words, "rooted in him." 3. That Christ is the foundation, and that is implied in these words, "built up in him." Why, say you, how can a man stand rooted and stable, and yet walk? Why, you may walk, and yet keep your way steadfast; you may build, and yet build high in Christ; you may be rooted in Christ the true vine, and yet grow in him. And hence that emphasis, in the 6th and 7th verses, "As ye have received," and "As ye have been taught." Why, some may think they cannot grow unless they change and overgrow their principles, as a child does over-grow his old clothes. But why cannot a man mend his pace, and yet go on in his right path still? Cannot a man build high and yet build upon the foundation still? Cannot a man grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, and of the truth of Christ, and yet grow upon the everlasting root still? Yea, surely; we are to walk as we have received, and to be established as we have been taught. And here is comfort to believers that are of the lowest form, such as have no great stock of knowledge to trade with in difficult questions; here there is comfort, that fundamental points are few and clear; so few, that a weak capacity, in any measure divinely spiritualized, may bear them; and so clear, that a dim eye, in any measure divinely enlightened, may see them. Would you know what is the field where all the flowers of truth grow? It is the word: Therefore says Christ, "Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of me." The Scripture is God's word, God's field; and Christ is the treasure hid in the field: search in that field till you find the treasure, and then you will find all truth treasured up in them. Hence the apostle sums up all fundamental truths in two words to believers; "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head-corner stone" (Eph 2:20). There is the sum total of doctrinal fundamentals, or fundamental doctrines. Yea, the very same apostle hath taught us to sum up all in one word, PANTA KAI EN PASI CHRISTOS, "Christ is All, and in all." God can, with one glance of Christ's glory, in the light of his word and Spirit, give you a view of all. Why, the Scripture is to be believed, because it is inspired by God, it is a garden of God's planting; but here is a garden within that garden; the gospel is the paradise of the whole scripture, and Christ is the tree of life in the midst of that gospel-paradise.

But besides the doctrinal fundamentals, there are what we may call practical fundamentals, which pertain to the state and being of a true Christian, and these are two, and they are both in our text; the one is a "receiving of Christ Jesus," and the other is a "walking in him." The former, viz., "the receiving of Christ," is necessary to the essence and being of a Christian; the latter, viz., "walking in Christ," is necessary to the progress, growth, and well-being of a Christian.

Now, in the words, you may notice these four things. 1. The believer's character and privilege; he is one that hath "received Christ Jesus the Lord." 2. The believer's duty, namely, to walk in him. 3. The rule of his duty, which is to walk in him as he hath received him. 4. The connection betwixt the character and the duty, the one being supposed to the other, gospel-faith being the ground of gospel practice; no walking in Christ, unless there be a receiving of him: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him."

Now, I shall, as the Lord may assist, explain these parts of the text, in the prosecution of this doctrine.

OBSERVATION: That as true believers are these that have received Christ Jesus the Lord: so they ought to walk in him as they have received him.

The method may be according to the several parts of the text. I. To speak of the believer's

character and dignity as a receiver of Christ Jesus the Lord. II. To speak of the believer's duty, namely, to walk in Christ.

I. The first general Head is to speak of the believer's character; he is one that **receiveth Christ Jesus the Lord**.

Receiving Christ and believing in him are equivalent terms; "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name" (John 1:12). And as they have power, or privilege, to become the sons of God, by believing in him, or receiving him; so they have power to receive him by virtue of their receiving the spirit of faith, by the means of the doctrine of faith, or the gospel-doctrine. "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith" (Gal 3:2)? But that I may speak more closely to this point, the receiving of Christ Jesus the Lord; the text leads me to inquire into three things. 1st, The act of faith, as it is a receiving. 2nd, The object of it, Christ. 3rd, The capacity, or respect, under which this object is received, namely, as he is Christ Jesus the Lord. These points being very great and momentous, I would touch at them severally.

First, The ACT of faith, it is called a receiving of Christ. Now, to explain this act of receiving Christ; as distinctly as, through grace, I can, you may notice that it hath something supposed that it relates to, and something imported that it consists in.

1st, It hath something supposed that it relates to. This receiving then does refer or relate unto some offer or tender that is made of Christ to him that does receive him. For Christ is unknown to nature, he is unknown to reason, and unknown to the wisdom of the wisest men upon the earth, until he be revealed and offered, there being no footsteps of the gospel in the heart or nature of man; whatsoever there may be of the law, there is none of the gospel. Now, therefore, receiving relates to offering; a receiving-hand hath relation to an offering-hand, holding forth Christ to be received, and that is the hand of God's free grace in the dispensation of the gospel. And this offer of Christ unto sinners in the gospel, in order to their being believers, is sometimes in scripture called a giving of Christ, "A man can receive nothing, unless it be given to him from heaven" (John 3:27). And therefore we maintain, that as it is the duty of all that hear this gospel to receive Christ, and believe in him; so it is the privilege of all that hear the gospel, that Christ is given to them in the offer thereof. It is true, the giving in possession follows faith; "My Father giveth you the true bread." The taking-hand of faith, presupposes the giving-hand of God. God's promise in the gospel is the offering-hand, that offers Christ; a saving faith of God's operation, is the receiving-hand which goes forth to the hand that offers; and when these two hands meet together, then the work is done, there is a receiving. But that you may the better understand this point of receiving Christ, by considering this offer that receiving relates to, there are three things that may be observed. 1. To what kind of persons the gospel offers Christ. 2. Upon what grounds. 3. For what ends. Mark these three then in the offer of Christ.

1. To what kind of persons the offer is made. To whom doth the hand of the promise hold them out? The person to whom he is held out, is no other than a lost sinner, a lost soul: Christ came to seek and save them that were lost: I mean not only these that are sensible of their lost state, but these that are in a lost state, whether they be sensible of it or not; if the gospel comes to them, the offer of Christ comes to them: "To you, O men, do I call; and my voice is to the sons of men." We are warranted to preach the gospel to every rational creature (Mark 16:15). The offer of Christ comes to you. Why, may not sin exclude us from the offer? By no means; for Christ came to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15). If sinners were excepted, all mankind would be excepted; for all have sinned. But is it to gross sinners? Yea, "Come let us reason together-though your iniquities were like scarlet, I will make them white as snow; though they be red, like crimson, I will make them as wool" (Isa 1:18). To murderers of the Lord of glory was the offer made (Acts 2:41). But are mockers and scorners under the offer? Yea, they are, as you see (Pro 1:22,23). But what if a person cares not for the offer, and thinks himself happy enough without Christ, and believes himself well enough as he is without him; is the offer of Christ to such? Certainly it is;

"Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread; and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness" (Isa 55:1,2). But if a man be neither convinced of sin or misery, nor see any need of Christ, is Christ offered to him? Yea, undoubtedly he is; "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich: and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed" (Rev 3:18). Let them venture to shut the door of the gospel-offer who will, we must open it in God's name to all who hear this gospel, and tell them that Christ is offered to them, that he may be received by them: and if there were no offer, it would not be their duty to receive, and so unbelief would not be their sin. Again, let them shift the offer of the gospel who will, and think Christ is not offered to them, this offer will rise up in judgment against them, if they do not answer it; for, "He that believeth not, shall be damned." And one of two shall take place upon this universal offer, either ye shall receive him as offered, or ye shall all be made inexcusable that receive him not; I am pretty sure, though we reach not the first, yet the second shall take place, though I should say no more than I have said. The gospel-offer does not tell who will come; for many get the offer who will never receive the gift offered to them: but it tells who should come, and that is all: But though all should come, whether they be sensible of their lost state or not: yet these that see themselves lost, are in the fairest way to receive the offer of a Saviour; and none will come, till God make them see themselves lost and undone without Christ, as all of you are lost indeed, though few are sensible of their lost state. However, I say to lost souls, Christ is offered to these that are spoiled by the sentence of the law, arraigned, convicted, condemned, and accursed; the hand of the gospel promise holds out Christ to you; for where Moses leaves you, there Joshua finds you, where the law ends, there the gospel begins; the law ends in the shipwreck of the sinner in splitting him upon the rock of its terrors and curses, drowning him in the ocean of divine wrath, and sinking him into the depths of despair; and just there the gospel begins; it comes to the bottom of the pit of sin and misery, and offers a Christ, a Saviour. Thus, where Moses leaves you, there Joshua finds you. When the law ends, Christ begins; and when the soul is so shipwrecked by the law, that he is, as it were, all to pieces, to such an one is the gospel offer most welcome; for the hand of grace holds forth Christ, like a plank after shipwreck, a plank to swim ashore upon. Such a soul is encouraged to see no other qualification required of him to come to Christ, and receive him but just that he is lost, which he finds himself to be; and there is no other condition or qualification required, but that you be a lost man, a sinful miserable person. Some will offer Christ upon such and such terms, saying, you must be so and so humbled, so and so penitent, before Christ can be offered to you; so that a man that finds himself a lost, sinful, unhumbled, impenitent, wretched creature, can never come to their hand, or meddle with what they offer; just like a man holding out a cup of excellent wine to his friend, and offering him a drink, but in the mean time he hath made the wine scalding hot upon the fire, so as the man, to whom it is offered, dare not touch it with his lips, even so, many offer Christ, and hold forth the cup of salvation to the people, but they heat their gospel liquor, as it were red hot upon the fire of the law; I mean, with so many legal terms, conditions, and qualifications, that the poor soul that finds himself a lost sinner, every way sinful, destitute of all good qualifications, dare not come near, and thinks he may not, he ought not to come near with his lip to taste it. We need be at no pains to hinder sinners from coming to Christ, to receive the offer, for they are unwilling enough of themselves. Besides that, they will never have a good qualification till they come to him and receive him; and all good in him; all grace and glory, all holiness and happiness. Thus you see to what kind of persons the offer of Christ is made which the receiving of Christ doth relate to.

2. Upon what ground is the offer made? Or, what is the ground upon which Christ is offered? To this I answer, only in general, It is just upon the ground of free grace; sovereign grace in Christ crucified. And hence the gospel is called by the name of GRACE, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11); or, as in the margin, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men," it brings the offer of Christ, and so of salvation to all men to whom the gospel comes; and it is grace that does it, without the consideration of any condition, or

qualification in us. Sovereign grace is a thing that can neither be promoted by our goodness, or hindered by our badness. Free grace, that makes the offer, looks neither to the worthiness, nor unworthiness of the receiver; neither to his merit, nor demerit; neither to the merit of his virtue, nor the demerit of his vice. It is the hand of the promise that offers Christ to the lost sinner, upon the ground of free grace alone; and here is the most inviting encouragement to a lost sinner that can be, that as he hath no worthiness to plead for him (which if he had, grace would be no grace,) so his unworthiness is no bar against him; for, if it were, then grace would be no grace also in this respect; for if your worthiness did work it, then it would not be the work of grace; or, if your unworthiness did hinder it, then it would not be the doing of grace; yea grace would never do anything at all; for all are unworthy. Here there is encouragement to all sinners to receive an offered Christ. But, what is the obstruction? Why, when a man should take hold of Christ, then his heart goes about to mar the freedom of grace, before he dare venture his soul upon it? and how is that? Even by seeking some qualifications in himself that a Christ should be offered unto him; why, I should be so and so holy, before I meddle with Christ; so and so humble and penitent, before I reckon the gospel offer belongs to me. Thus a man naturally would be looking after something in himself, and he would gladly find it, that he may thus build the gospel upon the law; God upon the man; Christ upon self; and free grace upon works; for it is no better than so; and thus the soul will not come to free grace; he will be obstructing himself: and in this mire he lies till free grace teach him how to come to the market of free grace, without money, and without price; till then all is but nothing; the ground of the offer is free and sovereign grace. What a great deal of latent obstructions are there that hinder our receiving this offer of Christ made by free grace! Why, when a lost sinner comes ever to find himself a lost sinner, then he stands aback because he thinks either he is too much lost, or too little lost. Either,

(a.) He thinks he is too much lost, his sins are so very great; and so the man secretly says, that he would buy his pardon with his own goodness, if he had it, and will not be obliged to free grace for it; or by this means he magnifies the demerit of his sins, above the merit of the blood of Christ, which is a great affront poured upon the infinitely glorious bargain that is in his offer. or,

(b.) He thinks he is too little lost, his sense of sin and humiliation is so very little; and this is another obstruction. He would be more broken and more humbled, before he thinks the offer belongs to him; and this shews the fullness of his heart, that though he thinks he cannot buy Christ at the gospel market, with his good works, yet he would buy and purchase Christ with his humiliation, deep down-casting, and the like. Now, this cannot be, it is but a rotten excuse; for, what though you should sink as far into the deeps of legal convictions, as despair itself; yet, will that despair merit any thing at the hand of God, or yet make God better pleased with him? No: to despair is to displease him, as well as to presume. And as you cannot presume, if you come to take him in the tenor of our text, namely, as a Christ, as a Jesus, as a Lord (of which afterwards), so you cannot despair, if you know that the ground of the offer is free grace. Would you be humbled to despair in yourself, and of all your excellencies, and of recommending yourself to God by any good, any humility of yours, it were a good despair; but if you would be humbled for sin, so far as to expect thereupon the favour of God, and forgiveness of sin, this can never be. But here a question may be proposed, What measure of humiliation should I have? We answer, So much humiliation as makes you see your want of humiliation, your want of all good, all grace, all conditions, and qualifications; so much as shall oblige you to relinquish your own fancied goodness, and make you come to Christ for all, and accept of him upon gospel terms, and the term of the gospel is free grace. I will tell you, by a comparison, the true level of humiliation. When is the metal sufficiently melted in the fire? It may be burnt in the fire, and it may be melted too little; but when is it enough? Why, it appears to melted enough when it runs easily into the mould; but now, it is not the melting that gives it the shape, the form, or fashion; but the melting makes it run into the mould, and the mould gives it the form or shape; so I say here, When is the soul melted enough? It is when it runs into the gospel mould. There are some that have, as it were, too much of the fire; there are these that apprehend themselves such great sinners that they

dare not come to Christ. There are others that have too little of the fire; these are they that only think they are not so good as they ought to be, and therefore they should not come. There are others that have nothing of the fire at all; and these are they that think they are good enough already, and they need not come to receive Christ. But then only is the soul melted enough in the fire, when it runs into the mould. What is the gospel mould? It is even Christ. And when the melted soul, like melted lead, or other metal, runs into this mould, then, and not till then, does it get a good shape; it is not the melting that gives it the shape or fashion, or form, but it is the mould that gives the form. And so never expect to have any good form, any good shape, any good qualification, till your soul run into this mould, by receiving Christ Jesus the Lord, thus offered to you upon the ground of free grace. And thus you see the ground of the offer.

3. For what end is the offer made? Why, Christ is offered to the lost sinner, upon the ground of free grace, to be both a Jesus and a Lord. As he is to be received as such (of which we may afterward speak), so he is offered as such, even as a Saviour and a Lord; that is, he hath coupled the salvation of Christ, and the dominion of Christ together; and it shews that all whom he saves he will sanctify; that whom he saves, by the price of his blood, he will conquer by the power of his Spirit; he being the Christ of God, Anointed of God, Sealed of God, to be both a Saviour and a Lord; and he is offered for this end to be both. This shews what a suitable offer it is to the poor sinner that is both under the wrath of God, the curse of the law, condemned to hell fire, which makes him stand in need of Christ as a Saviour; and also, he is under the power of sin, the slavery of lusts, the bondage of Satan, which makes him stand in need of Christ as a Lord; and here is encouragement to the poor soul, that would be sanctified as well as justified, Christ is offered for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; he is not offered as a Saviour only, to save from hell; but as a Lord also to deliver from sin. Now, what is the great obstruction here, that hinders the receiving of the offer? Why, it is even the false heart that would divide salvation from dominion; would be content to have his soul saved, but not to have the sin conquered, would have Christ as a Jesus, but not as a Lord: the man would be under his garment, and yet not under his government. In this case, the man is not so much out of love with sin, as out of love with hell; not so much in love with Christ, as with his benefits: while his guilt craves Christ's salvation, his lusts oppose Christ's Lordship. If Christ were offered as a cloak to your lusts, then the false and bloody calumny of some would be true, that we call men to believe, and then live as thy list. Why, If Christ were offered as a Jesus, a Saviour, and not as a Lord, then such a thing might be supposed; but let the mouth of calumny be stopped: we offer Christ to sinners, upon the ground of free grace, both as he is a Jesus and a Lord; and I defy any man in the world to receive this offer, and desire to live as he lists. It is not possible in nature: For if the language of man's heart be, Lord let my soul be saved, but let my lusts reign; in this case the offer is not received; for then the man says, Let me have Christ as a Saviour, but not as a Lord: and so, the offer not being received, it is not faith, but a fancy, a delusion; for, at the same time that he desires such a latitude, he refuses the offer of Christ as a Lord; yea, and betrays the rottenness of his faith in him as a Saviour, while he would divide salvation from dominion, and Christ's priesthood from his lordship.

When God brings a man therefore to receive his offer in the gospel, he makes him to pass under three convictions, which three you read of, "When the Spirit is come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). 1. He passes under the conviction of sin; both of his general sin, in rebelling against and contemning the authority of a commanding God in the law; and of his particular sin of unbelief, in despising the grace as a promising God in the gospel. 2. He passes under the conviction of righteousness; that is, of the righteousness of Christ as a Saviour, a Priest, a Sacrifice, and as the Lord our righteousness, for justification: he is convinced that he is lost for ever without an interest in this righteousness. 3. He passes under the conviction of judgment; that is, of the government of Christ; making the man willing to be subject to him, as well as justified by him; to be under the dominion of his grace, as well as under the covert of his blood. Now, till a man hath passed these three convictions, he is still blocked up, and concluded under unbelief.

There are two things, which when they do appear, tend mightily to draw out the heart toward the gospel-offer; the one is in us, the other is in Christ. The first is, the necessity of the sinner; and the second is, the excellency of the Saviour. The necessity of having Christ upon pain of death, and the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. The one makes the man willing to be saved by him, the other makes the man willing to be subdued by him. Such is my necessity, Oh I must have him for a Jesus to me! Such is his excellency, Oh I must have him for a Lord to me! And thus he is brought to go in to the proper ends of the gospel-offer, namely, to receive Christ as Jesus the Lord.

Thus I have shewed you somewhat relative to the offer which this receiving of Christ relates to. And from this manner of offering Christ, it appears, that though the offer be to sinners, and grounded upon free grace, yet what a hard thing, yea, how impossible it is, without the almighty power of God, to receive the offer, or to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. What a mighty hard work it is, when there are such obstructions in the way! Many think it is an easy thing to be believers; and so it may be said indeed of a multitude of ordinary, superficial, dogmatical believers in the world. But saving faith, though it be the easiest and sweetest thing in the world, under the conduct of divine grace, and the drawings of the divine Spirit, yet, without that, it is the hardest thing in the world. Why?

1. For a lost sinner, under the curse of the law, to believe that God should be as good to him, as the promise of the gospel tells him, is hard; nay, he is afraid the promise be too good to be true, and this argues his want of faith; for whatever unbelief does, faith never questions the truth of God's promise.

2. For a proud man to be beholden to free grace, when he hath been building his hope all his days upon some good work or deed of his own; for such a sinner to strip himself of his own righteousness, and look upon it as a filthy rag; how hard is this! nay, publicans and harlots go to heaven sooner.

3. For a sinner filled with self-love, self-ease, self-will, self-wisdom, self-sufficiency, self-estimation, self-justification, to deny himself, his sinful self, his natural self, moral self, worldly self, religious self, and go wholly out of himself, and wholly in to Christ for all; all this is very hard: and yet for this end Christ is offered, that he maybe thus received, even for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, and all; for wisdom, that is, as a Prophet to teach you; for righteousness, that is, as a Priest to justify you; for sanctification, that is, as a King to sanctify you: and for complete redemption, that is, for your all and all; even the whole of your salvation, in time and through eternity. Now, the hardness and difficulty of believing and accepting of this noble offer, does not lead in some great work that you have not power to do, for faith and works are opposite here; believing is not working: He that believeth, is he that worketh not but believeth on him that justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5), but the difficulty rather lies in some great worth, and apprehended good, that you have no will to quit, till a day of power make you willing; such as, your own wit and wisdom, which you oppose unto Christ as a Prophet: your own works and righteousness, which you oppose unto Christ as a Priest: your own strength and power, together with your own self-love and sin-love, which you oppose unto Christ as a King. In receiving this offer, the man not only quits his sin and lust, which is very hard; but quits his righteousness and works, which is yet harder. Need I to explain this, for preventing mistakes, in this critical age and day of reproach? When I speak of quitting our works, I mean, a quitting them, not in point of performance, but in point of dependance; it is a quitting of the law, not as a rule of obedience, but as a rule of acceptance, or as a covenant of works. Now, I say, it is the hardest of all for a man to quit his works and righteousness, and have no hope of any favour or acceptance with God for them; for the light of nature, will tell him, that he should quit his sins; but the light of nature, and the remainders of the legal covenant in him, will never tell him that he should quit his works and righteousness; nay, it will tell him, on the quite contrary, that he must do, or be damned; that he must do and live; and work so and so well, and God will accept of him. This is the way of the covenant of works, the natural way; and to quit that way is right hard, so as to venture all upon

the works of another, the righteousness of another: Indeed it is not so hard for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, with his hunch on his back, as for a rich man; I mean one that is rich in his own conceit, rich and increased with goods, and standing in need of nothing; nay, it is impossible for him with his hunch of duties and works of righteousness on his back, to enter into heaven. Some by the needle-eye, understand the wicket of the gate of Jerusalem, no camel with his burden could go in; so it is here. Others by the camel, understand a cart-rope, as they think the word we translate camel, may be rendered; and as a cart-rope cannot go through the eye of a needle, unless it be untwisted, and put through the needle's eye thread by thread; neither will any get to heaven, unless the cart-rope of his righteousness be untwisted and dissolved piecemeal; for otherwise his cart-rope will be fit for nothing, but casting anchor on the sandy bank of the law, where his vessel will be broken to pieces, and his soul will sink into the sea of God's wrath, for "By the deeds of the law, no flesh living can be justified."

So that, I say, the difficulty here lies not so much in some great thing that you have not power to do, but in some great thing that you have not will to undo: and so the greatest knack of true religion lies in being made willing; and the great power of God is necessary for that end; "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power"; and when this day of power comes, then to receive the offer of Christ for the ends for which he is offered, becomes as easy as ever before it was hard; why, the offer takes hold of the man's heart, and the offering hand takes hold of the receiving hand: like a child, that never had a pen in his hand, and cannot write a word, the father takes the child's hand within his, and leads it; so here, the Lord takes the man's hand, and leads it to write down his name, to sign the offer, saying, I accept.

Now, what shall we say? Is there any here to whom the offer is come with power? The external dispensation of this gospel, and revelation of this offer, make it the unquestionable duty of every one of you to accept and receive it; but it is the internal effectual revelation of it only, that will determine you actually to accept and receive it freely, without money, and without price: without terms and conditions on your side; renouncing all the good qualifications you dreamed of having to recommend you to him, and coming to him for all; like a black and ugly monster coming to accept of an offer that can make you fair and clean. It is an offer of all things in Christ: and nothing makes it hard and uneasy but yourself, that you will not quit an all, that is nothing, and take an all, that is all things. The natural man finds it hard, because it is a quitting all the good that he has; but the enlightened soul finds it easy, because it is just a taking all the good that he wants; and when he is taking all things in Christ, he does not find it hard to quit all in himself; why, he sees all things loss and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; and when he sees that, he finds it is not hard to relinquish a heap of jewels, and a pearl of infinitely great price in the midst of them. O! is there any here welcoming God's offer? Here is his offering hand, where is your receiving hand? Here is the hand of grace offering, where is the hand of faith accepting? Is any here taking God's offer off his hand? Do you see the offer is to you; to you, man; to you, woman; whether young or old? "To you is the word of this salvation sent." The greater gift it is that is offered to you, the less will you be ready to take, as long as you think, it cannot be to me. But to you, I say, it is, man, woman; whoever you are, the promise is to you; the offer is to you, be who you will. Now, are you receiving, are you taking God's offer? Why, if you be doing so, it is easy, through grace, to know that you are doing so. How do you know when you are taking a gift that a man offers you, in an outward sense? The man holds it out in his hand, saying, Take it; and if you receive, then you hold out your hand to his, saying, Content, I will take it; or, if your hand be short, and cannot reach his, yet you will hold it out in testimony of your acceptance, saying, Well, come and give it. So here, in a spiritual sense, if you be taking God's offer off his hand, then your heart will be determined to say, Content, Lord; even so I take the unspeakable gift that thou offerest; or, if your hand be short, or withered, that you think you cannot get the offer embraced as you would, yet you will be stretching out heart and hand as you can, saying, Come, Lord, and give what thou offerest; even a whole Christ to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, and all to me. O! is this the language of your soul, I

have nothing, but let Christ come and be all for me; I can do nothing, but let Christ come and do all for me; I have a world of self-enmity, and innumerable evils, that oppose Christ within me, but let Christ come in and put all to the door that hold him out; I cannot take him, but let him take me, and take my blessing for ever? Why, if that were the language of your heart and soul, I hope there hath been some secret power working in you to make you thus far to receive the offer of God. And thus I have considered the offer which the receiving of Christ relates unto. Now, I told you that as to this act of receiving we would consider what it relates to, and what it consists in. Having then shewed what it relates to, namely, the offer, I come to shew,

2ndly, What it consists in. Here I need not tell you, that receiving and believing are all one, according to John 1:12; and this believing is not a mere notional persuasion, or dogmatical opinion concerning Christ; for that is too slight a thing to be accounted a receiving of Christ; but this receiving of Christ,

1. In general, to express it in a word, if possible, it may be called (as one of our renowned commentators expresses it) a fiducial knowledge; that is, such a knowledge of Christ as leads the soul to an assured confidence in him. Our Shorter Catechism defines faith to be, a receiving, as it is a continuation of that act of receiving; for when we receive him for salvation we begin our resting on him; and when we rest upon him for salvation, we continue our receiving of him, or believing in him. The reception is the rest begun; and the resting, is the reception continued. And therefore whatever application of Christ is imported in resting on him, the same is imported in receiving of him. And as Christ is offered to every one in particular, that hear the gospel; so it is the duty of every one to receive the offer by applying Christ to himself, for his own particular good, benefit, and salvation. I could here lay before you several terms or expressions whereby this faith, or receiving of Christ, is held forth in the scripture, but I confine myself to the text. Receiving of Christ is "a going out of the whole soul, to close with Christ for complete salvation to a man's self, as he is offered in the gospel," and so the language of faith is, Here is an offer made by God to me myself; and therefore I receive Christ for salvation to myself, according to the offer, and that with my whole heart and soul, for, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness: My heart trusteth in him, and I am helped," said the psalmist. Some make faith to be only an act of the will, that they may exclude from the nature of faith that persuasion which yet cannot be excluded. In opposition to such we assert, That, according to scripture, faith is an act of the whole soul; the understanding, will, and affections; and hence these and the like scriptures, make faith to be an act of the soul, "O my God, my soul trusteth in thee" (Psalm 57:1). "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord. O my soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him. My soul maketh her boast in the Lord. My soul thirsteth for the living God. Return to thy rest, O my soul" (Psalm 16:2). All eminent expressions of faith. Now, I say, this receiving of Christ is the soul's closing with him; the soul's going out towards him; or going in to him as offered, so as to become one with him. As you see how grafts are knit to the stock, so as to become one with the stock, and one in the stock, or else it cannot live in a vegetative manner; so the soul is by faith knit and unite to Christ, the root, to be one with him, and one in him; for true faith so closes with Christ, as not merely to have a Christ without the man, but a Christ within the him; and therefore the soul by faith goes in to Christ, so as not only to unload his debt, and leave his sin and guilt upon him, but also to surrender himself into his possession and property.

But that I may further open up this act of receiving Christ, I would,

2. And more particularly consider the nature thereof, in the following qualities of it:—

(a.) This act of receiving Christ is a spiritual act, in opposition to all natural acts done by natural wit and strength; men may believe that way with a cradle faith, a natural faith, a common faith, and believe unto perdition; but will never believe to the saving of their souls. True faith is a spiritual act, under the conduct of the Spirit of faith; and therefore faith is called a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and of the power of the Spirit, even the exceeding greatness of his mighty power (Eph 1:19). It is a fruit and effect of the day of God's power, and the revelation of his arm

(Isa 53:1). It is the gift of God, and a fruit of his free grace; and hence we read of some that through grace believed (Acts 18:27). The power of the Spirit of Christ creates it where it is not; and that same power of the Spirit excites it where it is, It is a spiritual act.

(b.) This act of receiving Christ is a judicious act, in opposition to darkness and confusion. The man being acted by the Spirit of faith doth act judiciously and distinctly, as in a matter of the greatest concern with judgment and understanding, saying, "To whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life? We believe and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68). The man believes the promise, and the doctrine of grace and salvation so judiciously, that, as his judgment approves it as a truth, so the will accepts it as a good; "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief" (I Tim 1:15).

(c.) This act of receiving Christ is a warrantable act, in opposition to presumption and delusion. True faith acts upon a sufficient warrant. It acts upon the warrant of an objective sufficiency; there is a sufficient Christ presented to him. O the sufficiency of his person, being Godman, in one person! the sufficiency of his offices, whether his general offices, as a Mediator, a Surety, a Redeemer; or his particular offices, as a Prophet, Priest, and King; the sufficiency of his righteousness, his doing and dying, his obedience and satisfaction; the sufficiency of his power, being able to save to the uttermost; the sufficiency of his will, while he proclaims his good-will towards men, and that God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Besides, faith acts upon the warrant of a general dispensation of grace, through Christ, in the external revelation of the word, where the elect are not characterized more than others, but life and salvation through Christ held out to sinners of mankind, without distinction of nation, state, or condition, and so in an indefinite way. Thus run all the promises, except these that are made to believers, or such as have grace already; to them indeed the promises are definite, as also they are definite to the elect in the purpose of God; but in the external dispensation of the gospel, they are indefinite and general (Acts 2:32; Rom 9:4). And as the promise is indefinite, so the call is universal, whether by exhortations, invitations, counsels, or commands, to all and every one to come and receive Christ, and all his sure mercies, freely. And upon such like warrants as these does faith act.

(d.) This act of receiving Christ it is an adventuring act, in opposition to despondency, diffidence, and distrust; hence it is called a boldness, "We have boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus." It is a venturing our souls, our life, upon the blood of the Son of God, and upon the promise of God in Christ. To receive Christ, and believe, is in effect to say, I adventure my soul upon nothing in the world, but, upon the promise of a God that I have provoked, and been an enemy to, all my days; I have nothing but the word of this God, and yet I must venture upon it my everlasting all. It is an adventuring grace, like Peter upon the boisterous water, with this in his mouth and heart, "Master, save me" (Matt 14:30). To venture upon the promise of a provoked God, and to believe him to be a God in Christ reconciled, according to his word, upon the account of the ransom he hath found out, and the propitiation he hath set forth; here is the boldness of faith. It is a venturing act.

(e.) This act of receiving Christ, it is an evangelical act, in opposition to a legal faith. It is evangelical in the ground of it; legal faith acts upon the ground of a legal inherent strength, and personal righteousness; but true faith upon a borrowed strength, and an imputed righteousness of another, saying, "Surely in the Lord only have I righteousness and strength"; and it is a self-emptying grace, stripping the man of his own righteousness, of his own strength, and taking him entirely off his own bottom. It is evangelical in the order of it, receiving him as a Jesus, and then as a Lord; first for justification; legal faith perverts that gospel order, seeking sanctification first, that upon that bottom it may build its justification: "Seeking righteousness, as it were, by the works of the law" (Rom 9:32). It is evangelical in its fruit; legal faith is a fruitless faith, it brings forth no acceptable fruit, either from a right principle or to a right end; and so all its fruits of good works are rejected, as unprofitable and vain; but true faith brings virtue and good from its object; such as, ease to the conscience, quiet to the mind, holiness to the heart, and holy lustre to the

whole life; when faith touches, if it were but the hem of Christ's garment, virtue comes out and heals the soul; grace come forth, and purifies the heart; yea, it brings forth all the good fruit of gospel-grace: "Out of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Faith is the receiving grace, and other graces are received by it; it fetches them out of Christ's fullness; it brings out repentance, and then it is a penitential faith; gospel-repentance is in it. and with it, and after it, but not before it. As true faith is a penitent faith, even so it is a humble faith, a joyful faith, a thankful faith, an obediential faith, a working faith; yea faith is the root of all these fruits that natively grow upon it, and go along with it.

(f.) This act of receiving Christ, it is a particular, appropriating, fiducial act, in opposition to the general doubtful faith of the Papists, which we have abjured in our National Covenant. The man that believes truly, believes applicatively. The man that receives Christ rightly, receives him with a particular appropriation to himself; just as a man eats and drinks for his own particular benefit; and hence faith is called an eating of the flesh, and drinking of the blood of the Son of God; that is, he takes home Christ, his merit, righteousness, mediation, and the benefits thereof to his own soul. And thus it is also a fiducial act, importing an assured confidence according to the measure of it, in opposition to an uncertain faith. A doubtful, wavering faith, is not the faith that receives Christ; nay, it is a faith that receives nothing, if we will take God's word for it, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed; for let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:5-7). Why then, a doubtful faith receives nothing, far less such a prize as Christ. I know some have been reproached on this head, notwithstanding of this plain scriptural doctrine, as if they asserted, that they had no pity upon doubting believers. Really we should have no pity upon ourselves if we should say, that no believers have their doubts. Well, say you, may not a man that hath faith have doubts? Yea, to be sure he may; but his doubts are not his faith, but his unbelief; and whoever said but a believer may have much unbelief? I would ask such persons, May not a man that hath grace, have corruption? And yet you will own that his corruption is none of his grace; nay, it is the direct opposite of grace; even so, a man that hath faith may have doubts, but yet his doubts are not his faith, but his sin, his unbelief, and the quite opposite of faith; there is no doubting in his faith, even as there is no corruption in grace; they are antipodes. And it is not by his doubting, but by his believing, that he receives any thing from God. The Lord deliver us from justifying a doubtful faith which Christ reproves: "O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt"? Some make doubting a mark of faith; but it is such a mark of faith as corruption is a mark of grace, as in the following sense: Why, say you, there is a notorious profligate sinner, that says he never doubted all his days, but still had a good hope; that is indeed a sign that he hath no faith; whereas the poor soul that finds a world of doubts may yet be a true believer. Very true; and therefore I say it is such a mark as corruption is a mark of grace, in this sense there is an impenitent wretch that says he never saw what they call corruption within him all his days; nay, he blesses God he is a good Christian, a good neighbour, and hath always had a good heart to God; there is an evidence that he hath no grace; whereas the poor soul that finds corruption working, and sin raging within him, may yet be a true saint. Thus as corruption felt may be a mark of grace, because grace fights against corruption, even so, doubting felt may be a mark of faith, because faith fights against doubting, and opposes it, as being quite contrary to its very nature. But will any therefore put doubting into the nature of faith, as if it were essential to faith to doubt? Or, will any therefore exclude persuasion from the nature of faith, as if it were not essential for faith to be persuaded, because the man that hath faith is sometimes doubting? Just as if it were not in the nature of the eye to see, because the man that hath eyes is sometimes sleeping; nay, we say, it is in the nature of faith to see, and be assured, and persuaded, because it is a fiducial act; hence these and the like scriptures, "He staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, but was strong in the faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded, that he that had promised was able to perform" (Rom 4:20,21). And Hebrews 11:13, it is said of all the Old Testament believers, to whom

notwithstanding the revelation of the object of faith was not so clearly made as under the New Testament, that they received the promises; well, but what sort of an act was that receiving act of theirs? Why, it follows, "they were *persuaded* of them, and embraced them."

The common sense of mankind usually takes faith, or believing, for a persuasion: I believe such a thing; that is, I am persuaded, or assured of it; I do not doubt it; I believe such a man; that is, I am persuaded it is truth that he says; if the honest man give me his word, his oath, his bond, this fortifies the persuasion, and certifies the person that hath ado with him. So here, to believe, is to be persuaded, assured, and certified upon the word, the oath, the bond, the promise, the covenant, yea, the blood and righteousness of God; and he that believeth upon such a ground, as all true believers do, must believe with persuasion, according to the measure of faith; if it be a weak faith, it is a weak persuasion; if a strong faith, a strong persuasion. And it is not a natural persuasion, a man's persuading himself, and so no more of it; nay, it is supernatural, and comes of God, which the former does not; "This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you" (Gal 5:8); intimating, that right persuasion cometh of God.

This act of receiving Christ, then, is a fiducial act, a fiducial persuasion, which some call a fiducial assurance. I know that one great ground of mistake in this point is the confounding of fiducial assurance with evidential assurance. The former is the assurance of faith, and in the nature of it; the latter is the assurance of sense, and the effect of faith, and is not properly faith at all, but sense. They differ in their acts; by fiducial assurance, we receive Christ as ours; by evidential assurance, we know him to be ours; the former ever believer hath, when he acts faith; the latter, many believers want, even when they act faith; because, though they may be conscious that they are acting, yet they may not be conscious of the quality of the act, if it is saving or not. Again, this fiducial and evidential assurance differ, as in their acts, so in their order; we first believe by a fiducial persuasion, and then we are sure by an evidential persuasion: the one is the cause, the other the effect; the persuasion that is in faith, is like heat in the fire; the persuasion that is after faith, is like fire in the room, that is the effect of the other. They differ in their object; the object of fiducial assurance is without the man, and looks to the promise of God, and righteousness of Christ; but the object and foundation of evidential assurance is within the man, and looks to the work of God within; such as graces, attainments, and experiences. They differ in their effects; the effect of fiducial persuasion is justification, the effect of evidential persuasion is consolation; a man is not justified by his evidential knowledge, or by knowing that Christ is his; but he is justified by his fiducial knowledge, or his receiving and resting upon Christ for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel. "By his knowledge, shall my righteous Servant justify many." Faith is a fiducial act.

7. In a word, It is an interesting act, whereby a man is interested in Christ and all that he is worth; insomuch that upon his believing, all his debts are paid; as a woman that is in debt, upon her marriage to a rich man, all her debt is paid; because, by her marriage, all her debt is transferred upon the husband that hath married her; so the soul being married to Christ, hath all his debt paid; the soul being now under the covert of its husband, is not answerable for its own debt, nay, hath not its own sins to answer for, but Christ the husband answers for them. And thus much concerning the act of faith in receiving Christ; it is a spiritual act, a warrantable act, a venturing act, an evangelical act, and a fiducial act, as also an interesting act. I come now to consider,

Secondly, The OBJECT of this act, namely, Christ; "As ye have received Christ"; which admits of a double interpretation. 1. By Christ may be meant, Christ doctrinally considered, or the doctrine of the gospel of Christ. 2. By Christ may be meant, Christ personally considered, or Christ himself received in and by that doctrine.

1. I say, by Christ may be meant Christ doctrinally, or the doctrine of the gospel of Christ, "Ye have not so learned Christ" (Eph 4:20); that is, ye have been otherwise taught the doctrine of the gospel. And whoever views accurately the context here, both the verse preceding the text, and the verse following, as formerly explained, will find that by Christ here may evidently be

understood the doctrine of Christ, or the gospel. and indeed none can receive Christ and reject his doctrine; but, in receiving Christ, must first receive his doctrine, and so Christ therein: and so he that receiveth Christ is said to believe the gospel, and every true receiver of Christ is a receiver of his doctrine, because that is the seed by which he is conceived and born, and it is the milk by which he is brought up and nourished to eternal life (I Peter 1:23; 2:2). I need not here stand to commend the gospel doctrine; it is enough to say that, by the Lord's blessing upon it, it is the seed to conceive and the milk to nourish all the children of God. Why? it is the channel in which the Spirit runs; "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith" (Gal 3:2)? It is the organ of the almighty power of God; "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth"; his power in working faith, his power in measuring faith, and his power in saving sinners in a way of believing, is put forth in the gospel; Why? "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith" (Rom 1:16,17). The law hath convinced many, but never converted one to this day; and a gospel minister may preach the law for many good ends, but it is the gospel part of preaching that doth the business, if the power of God be going along with it; for the gospel only is the channel wherein the converting power of the Spirit runs; "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God": Christ is revealed therein in order to his being received. It is not the gospel of itself, but Christ revealed therein that heals the sinner. It is like the serpent lifted upon the pole in the wilderness; the pole did not heal, but the serpent upon the pole, that healed the sting; but the pole held it up to be seen. Even so, it is not the pole of the gospel that heals, but Christ lifted up upon the pole. It is Christ that is to be received, but he is to be received as offered in the gospel, and the gospel holds out Christ to the eye of faith; it is with respect to Christ what the pole was with respect to the serpent, and therefore they that pull down this pole of the gospel in any respect, they take away Christ from the eye of the wounded soul, the stung sinner; they that pull down the pole, they take away the serpent out of view that the sinner cannot see it. Cast down Christ they cannot, but they will pull down the pole, and so take him out of sight. They that are concerned to have, or to give others a sign of Christ, will be concerned to have the pole straight that holds him up; I mean, the gospel sound and clear, that holds him forth.

Now, there is no good merchant for the kingdom of heaven but for the treasure's sake that is hid in the field, will buy the whole field, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth; and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matt 13:44). Well, did the man buy the treasure only, and not the field, as many think they can take Christ, and reject the gospel? No; he went and bought the field where the treasure was. The treasure is Christ, the field is the gospel; and he bought, he received the gospel, and so had the treasure in it. Every true believer values the gospel at a very high rate; and the reason is, because it is the field where the treasure is hid, where Christ is to be had. And yet withal many may receive the gospel doctrine by a dogmatical faith, an opinionative faith, and not receive Christ himself. This is a faith that thousands perish by, but true faith receives the gospel, and Christ in it. Therefore,

2. By Christ here, as the object of faith, we are to understand Christ himself to be received, Christ personally considered. The object of faith is Christ the Son of God, not excluding the Father, and the Holy Ghost, for each person of the glorious Trinity is the object of faith; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God; but this God would be as inaccessible to us as to the fallen angels, were it not through Christ. Christ, you know, signifies anointed, and to receive Christ is to receive him as the Messiah, the Sent, Sealed, and Anointed of God (Isa 61:1). His anointing signifies his singular ordination to be our Redeemer, and to perform the work of our redemption; for, "Him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27); sealed, by the supereminent unction of the Holy Ghost, and authorized of the Father to it; he did not undertake this work presumptuously, without a call, but by the ordination and appointment of God. His being the Christ points out his eminent qualifications for the work of our redemption; as he is a Redeemer of God's sending, so of God's qualifying; "He hath laid help upon One that is mighty"; One that is able of himself, and enabled

of his Father to work out our salvation and redemption work: and so to receive Christ is to receive God's Sent, God's Anointed, God's Sealed One. And here faith views the divine authority of his commission, in that he is given of the Father to be a Prophet, Priest, and King, and came from the Father in his name and authority. And hence there is nothing that Christ commends more in the New Testament than this faith that believes his divine mission, his divine ordination to this mediatory work; "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest unto me, and they have received them and have known surely that I came out from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me" (John 17:8). To receive Christ, then, is to receive God's Ambassador, God's Anointed; and that is a noble faith.

But, again, to consider the termination of faith upon this glorious object; the man that receives Christ receives him as a living root, and as a glorious head, as a living root in whom he is implanted, and as a glorious head to whom he is united. Faith goes into him; and so by faith there is a saving implantation in him, a spiritual union to him; and so this receiving of him makes all that is in Christ yours. If a man should look for life and righteousness from Christ without union to Christ, it is as if a woman should look for an estate from a man by conveyance, and not by marriage; now God gives not any saving benefit to sinners by conveyance, but by marriage and union with Christ. Many, indeed, have a great deal of gifts, parts, and abilities, and such knowledge as peradventure you may call it revelation; these things are given to men through Christ, but with this difference; some, they receive these things from Christ as a steward that may dispense them, but not from him as a head, flowing into them as members. To natural men, and wicked men, these things come from Christ as a steward; but they come not from him as a head of union; for these only that are united to him by faith, have spiritual blessings flowing to them from Christ, as the head, to them as members. It is true that unions are great mysteries; the union of God and man into one Christ is a great mystery; the union of Christ and all his members into one body is a great mystery; the apostle calls it a great mystery, saying, "I speak concerning Christ and his church" (Eph 5:32). The believer receiving Christ, is in him as a member is in the head, and as a branch is in the root; and in him so as that he lives by the life of Christ, and is righteous by the righteousness of Christ and is acted by the Spirit of Christ. Neither is this union to Christ by receiving him lessened by this, that Christ is in heaven, and we upon earth; for, as the union between man and wife is not lessened, the one towards another, though they be a thousand miles asunder (though the communion is not so much); so here, the union that we have to Christ, by receiving him, is not lessened by his being in heaven, and we upon the earth. It is true, the communion is not so close, nor so intimate as it would be if we were in the same place with him, but the union is not lessened; they are united and married to the person of Christ by receiving him.

Now, the object of faith being Christ's person, and the receiving of Christ, a-closing with this person, here is the honour of all the saints. What a comfortable and honourable station is it, to be a member united to this glorious head! And therefore, before I pass this, I would acquaint you with a thing which you will find true in your experience, namely, many are very much troubled and tried in seeking this and the other benefit from Christ, such as the pardon of sin, and mortifying of corruption; they seek and are never the better, and what is the reason? Even because they begin at the wrong end of the gospel, at the wrong end of religion and Christianity; they seek the things of Christ, but not the person of Christ; they look out for his graces and benefits, without closing with his person. O! says one, for such and such a benefit from Christ, and such and such graces of his Spirit; very well: but would you have them from Christ without union to him? Would ye have blessings from Christ without Christ himself? Why, what though you should get some blessings from him, if you live and die without him. O, says one that goes to a sacrament, O for some communion with Christ very good; but here is a falsity; you would have communion without union to him, and that cannot be. Union to his person is the foundation of true communion with him in his benefits; and therefore you may seek communion with him, and yet neglect the foundation. You cannot have true communion without union by faith, receiving Christ

himself; for, as the graft cannot have sap from the root, unless it be set into the stock, if it be not ingrafted, it cannot have communion with the root; so, neither can you have these graces and comforts that you would have in a way of communion with him, unless it be first in a way of union to him. And, therefore, let it be your great business through grace to close with Christ himself, the person of Christ, as he is handed to you in the doctrine of the gospel; never rest till the offering hand of the gospel and the receiving hand of faith meet together, for when Christ is received, then, and not till then, is there a real union, and this is the foundation of all true and spiritual communion. Thus much shall suffice concerning the object, namely, Christ doctrinally and personally considered.

In the illustration of the first head of method, which was to speak of the believer's character and dignity as a receiver of Christ Jesus the Lord, we propose to consider the act of faith, as it is a receiving of Christ; next, the object of it, Christ; and then the capacity or respect under which this object is received, viz.: as he is "Christ Jesus the Lord." We have considered the first two, the act and object. It remains,

Thirdly, That we consider the CAPACITIES or respects in which Christ is to be received, namely, as a Jesus and a Lord, which will still farther clear the object. There are three letters of Christ's name here that point him out beyond all other names in the world. I have formerly told you that Christ is offered in these capacities, and I have just now spoke of the first letter of his name, viz., Christ the anointed of God; and indeed it is not sound faith that doth not take him as the Sent of God, and qualified of God for the whole redemption work. But the other two letters of his name remain yet to be touched at. And you may consider them under this view as the two-fold capacities in which we are to receive Christ, namely, as "Jesus the Lord." 1. As he is Jesus. 2. As he is the Lord.

1. As he is Jesus, that is, a Saviour. This is the first name given Christ in the New Testament, Matthew 1:21, "His name shall be called Jesus, because he shall save his people from their sins;" and it is the best name that sinners can hear tell of; it is a name above all names, both for the glory of him that bears it, and the comfort of them that hear of it. Now, to receive Christ as a Jesus, is to receive him as a singularly mighty Saviour, that is able to save to the utmost, as appears by his doing, dying, suffering, satisfying, conquering; and surely, he that was able to atone God, and conquer the devil, is able to save sinners. To receive him as a Jesus is to receive him as an universal Saviour; I mean not only in the apostle's sense, 1 Timothy 4:10, that he is the Saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe; but I mean in respect of the salvation that he brings to them whom he makes to believe in him; and so I mean, in the sense of the same apostle, Acts 13:39, "By him all that believe are saved and justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." What law of Moses? Why, as his ceremonial law could not do the business, for it was impossible that the blood of bulls or goats should take away sin, satisfy offended justice, or pacify a wounded conscience; so his moral law could not justify, for we having broken and transgressed it, instead of justifying us it condemns us; therefore, what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, that Christ by the gospel does; he justifies from all things, from all guilt, so as the believer can never become liable to the sanction of the law. Some would have the believer justified only from some things, as it were, and still liable to the lash of the law; but we maintain the apostle's doctrine, that the believer is justified from all things, so as nothing can be laid to his charge; and seeing, "It is God that justifieth, who is he that can condemn," or make him liable thereunto? To receive him as a Jesus, then, is to receive him as a complete Saviour, a perfect Saviour; that saves meritoriously, by the price of his blood, and his mediation for us; and efficaciously, by the power of his Spirit, and his effectual operation in us, that saves from the law as a covenant, both in its commanding and condemning power: that saves from death, hell, and wrath. But salvation is a great word that we cannot now enlarge upon; only, to receive Christ as a Jesus, is to receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, and all the salvation that we need, temporal, spiritual, or eternal, in a suitableness to his promise and offer in the word.

2. As he is the Lord; which imports a desire to be subject to him, as he is a King, and to be conquered by him, as well as saved by him. Christ hath upon his vesture and thigh this name written, "King of Kings, and Lord of lords; he is the King and Head of his church; the government of all is upon his shoulder, particularly the government of Zion, where he hath left officers to rule under him, according to the laws of his kingdom, and in a suitableness to the liberties of his subjects pointed out in his word; and to have any hand in marring the beautiful order of his government that he hath appointed, or encroach upon the liberties of his people, doth ill become any that profess to receive him as a lord; as little doth it become them to say in effect, "Our Lord delays his coming," and so begin to smite their fellow-servants and so fall out with one another, especially when a common enemy is creeping in that would subject the government of Christ's house entirely to a secular power, whether it be patrons or prelates, princes or popes. Surely they that receive Christ as a Lord and King over themselves, will not be careless or indifferent about his lordship and government over Zion, as a King and Head of his church; for if they be careless about his government that way, whether it stand or fall, they give evidence of their never truly receiving him as a Lord.

But, more particularly, to receive him as a Lord, is to close with him for sanctification as well as salvation, and to welcome him in his kingly office, to subdue sin, conquer Satan, and destroy the works of the devil. A true believer does receive Christ not only as he is a Saviour, but as he is a Lord. Consider both these capacities jointly, and they may search every corner of your heart. The eye of a lost sinner is first upon Christ as a Saviour; so God propounds him, and so we may come to him; but observe, there may be much self-love in seeking Christ, a Saviour, for salvation; for salvation may be desired merely out of self-love, which is evident if we are for dividing Christ, for taking the Saviour, and leaving out the Lord. Many would divide between his salvation and his dominion, they would have Christ as a Saviour, to save from wrath; but not as a Lord, to destroy their lusts and sins. But herein true receiving of Christ will discover itself; the Lord makes the man as weary of his load of corruption as he is weary of his load of condemnation. The man that is weary of condemnation only, would have Christ as a Saviour; but he that is weary of corruption also would have Christ as a Lord. But when the heart would have water as well as blood, then it is in a right temper; when the man would have water to purify the heart, as well as blood to pacify the conscience. Our desire of Christ for salvation, may be tried with this touchstone, whether we have the same desire for Christ the Lord as for Christ the Jesus.

I think it is utterly impossible there can be any more uprightness in your desire after the salvation of Christ, than there is of a desire after the dominion of Christ. Faith, whatever it is, will bring a man out from under the commanding power of sin, as well as from under the condemning power of it. And however a believer may lie in darkness, yet I conceive that soul is out of danger, who is made willing to receive Christ both as a Saviour and a Lord; and so, willing to receive out of his hand poison to kill his lusts, as well as pardon to remove his guilt; the desire of pardon of sin, and the desire of purification of heart, bear proportion; none can truly take Christ as a Saviour for justification, but they will also truly take him as a Lord for sanctification. This we maintain, let calumny say what it will; as if our doctrine were an enemy to holiness!² What can be the ground of the calumny, I cannot know, unless it be that men cannot distinguish betwixt saving faith and justifying faith; for saving faith (of which we are now speaking) respects Christ in all his offices as a Prophet, Priest, and King; but when we speak of faith merely as it is justifying, we maintain against all the subtle Popery in the world, that it respects Christ only as a Priest, as a sacrifice and propitiation; but not Christ as a King. For, to make that act of faith, that receives Christ as a Lord, to be the justifying act of faith, is the very soul of Popery, that builds justification upon sanctification, or upon sanctifying faith; whereas it is the receiving of Christ as a Priest, that alone justifies before God. It is true, faith in Christ as a Saviour and a Lord, go hand in hand together; they are inseparably connected; even as the eye and ear are both joined together in one head; yet it is not the office of the eye to hear, or of the ear to see; no, but it is the office of the eye to see, and of the ear to hear; even so, though faith in Christ as a Jesus and as a Lord go

together in one and the same believer, and at one and the same time, yet they have their different offices; Christ, as a King and Lord, is not the object of justifying faith, but only Christ as a Priest and Saviour. It is not Christ as the Lord, subduing my sin, that is the matter of my justification before God, but Christ, as a Priest, paying all my debt; it is not my personal righteousness, even in my gracious subjection to Christ as a Lord, that can be the ground of justification; but it is the righteousness of Christ alone as a Priest, his doing and dying, that is the ground of justification. And therefore it is not faith dealing with Christ as a Lord that justifies, but faith's dealing with Christ as a Priest, a Saviour, and a complete Righteousness. This is the doctrine of the word; which, when our Reformers began to publish, they were branded as enemies to holiness and good works; and if something of this be not at the root of many reproaches in our day, I know not what it is; and if this be the ground of these reproaches, we may gladly bear them as our glory.

But now, we are speaking of the object of faith, more largely taken, in its latitude, as it is saving faith; which, we say hath a respect to Christ in all his offices, and particularly, as in our text, it receives him as a Saviour and a Lord both: and truly, the receiving of Christ as a Lord, for sanctification, is the best mark imaginable of right receiving of Christ, not by the degree of your persuasion concerning him as a Saviour, but rather by the degree of his virtue and power in you as a Lord; it is better to measure it by the depth of his work in you, than by the height of your confidence in him, which may be too proud and bold. If you should meet a man travelling upon the way, and should ask him how many hours high the sun is, you need not marvel, if, instead of looking up to the sun to see how high it is, he should look down to your shadow to see how short it is; for he can tell that way better than looking upon the sun itself; even so, if a man would judge how much of Christ is in him, the best way to try is rather to look downward than upward; look in to your heart, and see what dash your pride hath got, and what abatement your corruption is brought under; for the shorter these dark shadows are in you, the higher is the Sun of righteousness. Now, the grand corruption of the heart of man, the great root-sin, which sets itself against Christ as a Lord, I will tell you what it is, it is that lord of all mis-rule, SELF; that is the lord that lords it over you, and all other sins are but the brats of Self; they are but sub-servants, under-servants to this great lord of self-love, self-pride, and self-righteousness. Now, a true believer is righteous by the righteousness of another; he lives by the life of another; he is acted by the spirit of another; and therefore he, of any man in the world, should have least of self in him; because Christ, as Lord, doth absolutely set himself against this great corruption. And therefore, if you would know one excellent way of judging of Jesus Christ the Lord, his being in you, it is by the breaking and casting down of self; for the more full that a man is of self, the more empty is he of Christ; and the more full he is of Christ, the more empty he is of self; for the lord-self, and the Lord-Christ, cannot stand together; the lordship of Christ and the lord-ship of self are inconsistent; when you receive the Lord-Christ, then the lord-self is unthroned and thrown down. Thus much of the believer's character and dignity as a receiver of Christ Jesus the Lord.

II. The second general head is, To speak of the believer's duty, having received Christ Jesus the Lord, then to **"walk in him."**

You have heard of the two tables of the law, and if you never heard of the two tables of the gospel, you may see them in our text; the first is to "receive Christ," and the second is to "walk in him." Though I make not the gospel, strictly taken to be a doctrine of commandments and precepts; yet where the law is in the hand of Christ, and where Christ is the ALPHA and OMEGA, there we will find the two tables of the gospel: "Christ is All in all;" and these two ALLS make the two tables of the gospel. Or, if the two tables of the gospel must answer to the tables of the law, then consider the law as a covenant, or as a rule, and we get both fulfilled in Christ; the law as a covenant if fulfilled by "receiving Christ;" the law as a rule if fulfilled by "walking in him;" and so the two tables of the law in either of these respects, are answered by these two tables of the gospel; for, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth."

I must only here touch a little, 1. At the denomination of the duty, it is a walking. 2. The

qualification of it, it is a walking in Christ. As to the

First, The denomination of this duty, it is a walking. I know many things might be said in running the parallel; but I do not design to squeeze the metaphor beyond the scope of the text, but just to observe what is intended therein. And there are these three things that I apprehend are intended. It plainly denotes, 1. Practice. 2. Progress. 3. Permanency.

1. It denotes practice, or practicalness. And this is opposed to a dogmatical faith where there is no practical religion. These that have received Christ they ought to be practical Christians, practical believers: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so WALK ye in him;" let your faith be a working faith. As by the same hand that we receive a thing, by the same hand we work; so your faith, if it be saving, then as it receives Christ in the promise of the gospel. So it will work by love in the precept of the law; if it receives Christ in the covenant, it will work by love in the commandment: Galatians 5:6, In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that works by love." Why? his commandments are not grievous.

Question: If we have received Christ, what need we more. Christ hath done all, and therefore we need do nothing.

Answer: Indeed many good principles are abused in the world, e.g., Christ hath done all for his people in point of merit, and he does all in his people in point of power; and so without him we can do nothing: here is a good principle; but thence to infer, that the duty and lawful use of means is not ours, is to abuse this good principle to licentiousness. "When sin abounds, grace much more abounds;" there is a good principle; but thence to infer, Let us sin that grace may abound, is to abuse that good principle, and a turning of the grace of God to wantonness. We are justified by faith, without the works of the law; there is a notable gospel principle: but thence to infer that a justified man needs not conform to the law, here is a good principle abused; for, "Do we make void the law, through faith? God forbid; nay, we establish the law."

There are two things concerning a justified person, which call for practical religion: the one is, God glorifies him; and the other is, he is to glorify God. God glorifies him: for, "Whom he justifies, them he also glorifies," Romans 8:30. But then God is to be glorified as well as he, and will be glorified by all that are justified, and therefore, that they may glorify God, they are to bring forth good fruit. And, on this account, may the Lord deliver us from a dead, unfruitful, and unprofitable faith.

There are four great reasons why they that have received Christ, by a gospel-faith, should walk in him by a gospel-practice, namely, because hereby the power of faith is seen; hereby the trial of faith is made; hereby the beauty of it appears to others; and the comfort of it accrues to ourselves.

(a.) Hereby the power of faith is seen, in that it leads to a gospelpractice. How is it that its power is thus seen? Why, even in opposing many and strong lusts; though it should not conquer them, yet it opposes them, and to oppose and fight against sin, in scripture-language, is to conquer it; this is a fighting the good fight of faith. The power of faith is seen in a gospel-practice, while faith is thus exercised in souring the sweetest sin, in bearing the greatest burden, and making easy the hardest commandment.

When Christ speaks of doing the greatest things, then he compares faith to the least things; when he speaks of removing mountains, then he compares faith to a grain of mustard seed; and indeed, faith makes a man to remove mountains of pride, and sets a man's hatred upon that which he loved; and sets a man's love upon that which he hated. How shall a heavy weight of lead be made easy to a child? Why, if you do not pare the lead to make the weight less, then you must add strength to the child; and if he has more strength, though the weight be not pared, yet it makes no matter, because the child hath strength to bear it; even so, God in the gospel makes the command light and easy. How so? Not by paring or abating the commandment, or diminishing the rule (that is our corrupt way;) but God does it by giving more of faith, and more of Christ. And so the power of faith is seen in carrying a man through the greatest duties and trials.

(b.) Hereby the trial of faith is made; I say, by a gospel practice. Many judge of the truth of

their faith by the degrees of their confidence; but the best trial is by the degrees of their conquest over sin; the degrees of their conquests over their lusts and corruptions. As I said before, you may know the height of the sun by the shortness of your shadow, more than by the degrees of altitude. How much doth a man believe? even as much as his faith purifies his heart, and mortifies his lusts; so much does he believe, and no more. It is true a man may be believing in Christ for justification, and coming under the covert of his blood, while in the meantime he sees no measure of sanctification; but, on the contrary, his heart full of hell, and enmity and corruption; yea, but in the meantime what is that light wherein he sees his own vileness, but sanctifying light? And what is that grace whereby he is loathing and abhorring himself, but sanctifying grace? And so when justifying faith is busy flying under the covert of blood, sanctifying grace is not idle; nay, the more that faith acts upon Christ for justification, the more will it act in purification. Again,

(c.) Another reason why a gospel faith should have a gospel practice is, because hereby the beauty of faith appears to others, and our light shines before men, so as they, seeing our good works, do glorify God. The beauty of faith is seen by others, not in faith itself, but in the gospel walk and practice that it produces. If a man would know in the morning whether the sun be risen in the east, he will readily look to the west, and see whether he can notice the reflection of the sunbeams upon the top of a house, or the top of a hill; he looks the quite contrary way from the sun; and yet he does it ingeniously enough; even so here, if a man would know you to be a believer, he will not look into your faith, but will look out to your life, or look back to your conversation, and see what marks your faith makes there; hence, saith the apostle, "Shew me thy faith by thy works." Faith and works are contrary in point of justification, and yet when a man would see your faith, he will look to the contrary part, and see how it appears in your walk and work; and if it appears not there, the beauty of faith is not seen.

(d.) Hereby the comfort of faith accrues to yourselves; even by a gospel practice you have the comfort of faith; for, "Great peace have all they that love his law: the fruit of righteousness is peace." There is no greater comfort in the world than for a man to get, by, faith, mastery over sin, and grace to do duty for God. Whatever a man does for God, leaving self behind him, it carries the sweetest relish in the world with it. All duties, and sufferings both, are made sweet by this, that is done for God. Self, in any duty, doth sour the duty be it never so admirable, "Let every man prove his own work, saith the apostle, then shall he have rejoicing in himself, and not in another," Galatians 6:4. These are some reasons why gospel faith in receiving Christ must be attended with gospel practice in walking in him.

Many talk of practical religion in our day, but few know what it is to walk in it; they are like the lark that sings with the highest, but builds with the lowest; some sing with the highest, as if they were almost angels: but where do they build? where are their affections? where are their hearts, their aims, their ends? They are low, earthly, and sensual. You that profess to be friends to the gospel, O let the mouths that reproach religion be stopped by the power of religion in your walk. If the world call us Antinomians, "It is the will of God, that by well doing we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," 1 Peter 2:15. We account them the greatest stars that give the greatest light; so men will account them still the greatest Christians that give the greatest light, by their gospel practice in holiness toward God and righteousness toward men. If you be not a better servant, a better child, a better parent, a better master, than you were, or than others are, what credit will religion get by you? Therefore, seek a practical faith, leading to a gospel practice.

2. This walk imports not only practice, but progress; to stand still is not to walk. Walking imports progress and growth from faith to faith, from strength to strength, from glory to glory. For the truth is, by reason of corruption, we are like the boat in a stream; if we go not forward by the oar, we go backward by the tide; so, if we go not forward, by the strength of grace, we will go backward, by the strength and power of corruption; even as the boat in the stream cannot stand, it must go backward. It is true, people may be at a stand in religion, and yet seem to walk; men may go the round of duties, and yet not be walking; like a spinning wheel, it goes round, but yet it is in the same place still. Many may be called old job-trot professors; they are the same now that they

were twenty years ago; no more holiness, no more knowledge, no more experience.

Question: What is this growth and progress?

I answer, It is not like a wheel that runs round, and stands still in the same place; but where there is more knowledge of Christ, more insight into the mysteries of the gospel, more feeling of the power of the gospel, more victory over lusts and corruptions, etc., there is growth and progress. It is true, a child of God may fall, and he may relapse, and fall again; his feet may be benumbed that he cannot walk; but here is the happiness of a true child of God, one that hath truly received Christ, that his sins are always beneficial to him; he will gain more in holiness by one sin, than a natural man will gain by an hundred duties; for his fall is like the stumbling of a horse that makes him ride the faster; so the believer may stumble, but when he gets to his feet again, he runs the faster, makes quicker progress in the ways of God; his fall humbles him, and makes him more dependent, more watchful, more circumspect, etc.

3. This walk imports permanency both in the way and doctrine of Christ, according to the following verse, "Rooted and established in the faith." A single step is not a walk, it is a permanent motion; therefore it is called a being established in the faith, as we have been taught. Why, how can a man walk, and yet be rooted; walk, and yet stand stable? these are very inconsistent, 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Be ye steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," STEADFAST, and yet abounding in the work; MOVING, and yet unmovable! like the two feet of a pair of compasses, the one foot of the compass stands fast in the center, and the other draws the line, and goes round; so it is with the believer, his faith is like the foot of the compass, that stands fast in the center, Christ and his doctrine; but his gospel practice is the part that is like the other foot of the compass, it never stands, but ever moves in the way of the Lord. He "stands fast in the faith, and yet walks yet," As in walking one foot stands while the other moves, or else a man is leaping and not walking; so while we go forward in the way of gospel obedience, we must stand fast in the faith; that foot must stand while the foot of obedience moves, or else we are like them that leap, rather than like these that walk; I mean, there are some who will leap out of one doctrine into another, not being established in the faith of Christ, which was a steadfastness which the apostle commends in the Colossians here, in the verse immediately preceding our text. But as a tree that is planted in one place today, and transplanted to another place tomorrow, and so on from place to place, cannot bear fruit; so the soul doth not stand fast, but leaps from doctrine to doctrine; from principle to principle; from profession to profession; and is unsettled in the principles of religion, cannot be fruitful. Therefore the apostle exhorts, Ephesians 4:14,15, "That we hence forth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ." And, Hebrews 13:9, "Be not carried about with strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." And thus you see what may be imported in walking.

Secondly, the qualification of this duty is, it is a walking in CHRIST. Here is a great word, and many things might be said upon it; but all that I offer shall be in two short words on it at the time. To walk in Christ is not to walk in ourselves, but out of ourselves. Now, there is a two-fold self-denial; a self-denial in point of sin; that is, a denying ungodliness and worldly lusts; this the grace of God that brings salvation teaches effectually, as the law teaches preceptively. Again, there is a self-denial in point of grace. Now, there is a two fold denial of grace, the one is in point of justification, and the other is in point of sanctification. Consider these two a little, in order to know what it is to walk in Christ.

1. There is a denial of grace in point of justification; a self-denial with respect to grace in point of subsisting with God in justification. I would ask you, How do you subsist in a justified state? Are you justified by faith in Christ without the works of the law? Doth your grace, or sanctification, justify you, or expiate your sin? Nay, that which brought you into the favour of God at first must keep you there still. You that are brought into the favour of God, how do you

stand in favour with him? It is not because of your savoury venison, but your elder brother's clothes; it is not your graces or best holiness, but the garment of Christ's righteousness that brings you, and keeps you in favour with God. Now, to walk in Christ in the matter of justification, or looking for acceptance with God, is to be denied to your graces in point of acceptance; but to let Christ have his proper room, put not grace in the room of Christ and his righteousness; be as holy as you can, but never a whit more justified are you thereby; grace hath its place in sanctification, and walking before God, but it must have no place here; for a man doth not subsist in a justified state by his graces, or holiness; hence, though Paul could say, Romans 7:22, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man," but behold how denied he is to this, saying, verse 24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" What then does he? "Thanks be to God, says he, through Christ; for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ." He sets not sanctification in the room of Christ's righteousness.

2. There is, in some sort, a denial of grace, even in respect of sanctification: that is imported in a walking in Christ thus; even because a believer doth not walk in Christ merely by the strength of habitual grace: nay, he cannot do it but by the operation and motion of the Spirit of Christ that cometh down from above; for, as we used to say, the ship does not go by its sails, but by the wind, the sails indeed take in the wind, but it is the wind that makes the ship to go; so, when a believer walks in spiritual obedience, either active or passive, in doing or suffering, it is owing to grace that comes down like auxiliaries, which makes him walk in him. This is what the apostle calls grace sufficient for him; "My grace shall be sufficient for thee:" and this makes a weak believer strong, in a moment, both for work and warfare. "My grace shall be sufficient for thee;" why, had not the apostle grace within him? Yea, but the scripture gives ground for this distinction; there is grace in a man, and grace with a man; grace in the believer, that is, habitual implanted grace; grace with the believer, that is, actual assisting grace, that comes and carries him on in his course, and by this means he walks in Christ being denied to his own habitual grace, and resting on him for actual constant supply. To walk in Christ in both these respects, is for a soul to say, "In the Lord only have I righteousness and strength" -- "In the Lord only have I RIGHTEOUSNESS," there is the denial of grace, in point of justification; "In the Lord only have I STRENGTH," there is the denial of grace, in point of sanctification.

Notes:

¹ These who espoused the Marrow Doctrine, at this time controverted, were thus unjustly accused.

² It hath been the fate of the witnesses for the truths of God, in every period of the church, especially since the commencement of Christianity, to be traduced and reproached with the most scurrilous epithets and opprobrious names. The blessed Author of the Christian religion himself did not escape the obloquy, contumely, and censures of the world; and his disciples were accused with being turbulent and pestilent fellows, and such as turned the world upside down. When it fared so with them, we need not be surprised that their successors should be flouted at, maltreated and evil spoken of by those who do not favour the truth as it is in Jesus--About the time when our author delivered these discourses, an irreligious disposition, and legal spirit was like to spread universally, and had arrived to such a pitch that many could not endure to hear sound doctrine; and the teachers and defenders thereof were the objects of the resentment both of the infidel and legalist. As our worthy author was sincerely attached to the doctrines of the gospel, he could not but be sincerely affected and truly alarmed at every encroachment upon the sacred truths of his ever glorious Master, so this led him frequently to notice, in his public appearances, the aspersions cast upon him and others, in inculcating the most important truths of the gospel of Christ, particularly their being derided as favourers of Antinomianism, and enemies to holiness for their befriending the freedom of the doctrine of grace, in asserting the necessity of sinners dying to the law in point of Justification, in order to their living to God in point of Sanctification.