

THE
THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF THE
REV. THOMAS SCOTT,
AUTHOR OF A COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE.

CONTAINING
THE FORCE OF TRUTH,—TREATISE ON REPENTANCE,—GROWTH IN GRACE, SER-
MON ON ELECTION AND FINAL PERSEVERANCE,—SERMONS ON SELECT SUB-
JECTS,—ESSAYS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN RELIGION, AND THE
NATURE AND WARRANT OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

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THOMAS NELSON AND PETER BROWN.

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SERMON XXI.

ON A CONVERSATION BECOMING THE GOSPEL

PHILIPPIANS, i. 27.

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ.

ST Paul wrote this epistle, as well as some others, from his prison at Rome, and it is manifest that the Lord was with him, as he had been with Joseph in similar circumstances; which rendered his confinement unspeakably more pleasant, than a splendid palace with a guilty conscience and ungovernable passions. Instead of dejection, murmurs, or resentment, we find the apostle uniformly employing the language of cheerfulness, confidence, and exultation. He declares, that “to him to live was Christ, and to die gain.” All his credit, interest, business, and pleasure in life, consisted in communion with Christ, and earnest endeavours to glorify him and promote his cause; and he was sure that death, in whatever form it should arrest him, would prove his richest advantage! What a blessed religion is this, which can turn the king of terrors into a kind friend, and the loss of all terrestrial things into the most valuable of acquisitions? What, my brethren, can wealth, reputation, authority, genius, or philosophy propose, which is comparable to this? Why then should you hesitate to sell all, and purchase the pearl of great price?

But though the apostle had a longing “desire to depart and be with Christ, as far better;” yet he was willing to continue on earth, “for the furtherance and joy of faith” of his beloved people.—As if a pardoned rebel should voluntarily submit to the inconveniencies and sufferings of a dungeon, in order to recommend the clemency of his prince to other criminals; or be helpful to those, who having likewise received mercy, were for some reason retained a while longer in confinement.

Hence he took occasion to exhort the Philippians in the following words, “Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, and in nothing terrified by your adversaries.”—From the part of this exhortation contained in our text, I shall endeavour,

I. To give a compendious view of the gospel of Christ.

II. To show that this gospel, when rightly understood, and truly believed, will produce a correspondent conduct and conversation.

III. To mention some leading particulars in which “a conversation becoming the gospel” more especially consists.

IV. To make some remarks on the emphatical word “Only.”

I. I would attempt to give a compendious view of the gospel of Christ.

We know that the word rendered *gospel* signifies *glad tidings*; and a preacher of the gospel is a messenger or herald, bringing and publishing good news. “How beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things? Isaiah lii. 7. Rom. x. 15.

The Ephesians, when they had formed the design of building the celebrated temple of Diana, were at a loss where to procure a sufficient quantity of the finest marble, to accomplish the plan; and it is recorded, that a certain person in this emergency, found a quarry at no great distance, exactly suited to the purpose. Running therefore without delay to inform the citizens of this fortunate event, he was saluted and afterwards called, *Evangelus* or *the bringer of good tidings*; a name of exactly the same import with that rendered a preacher of the gospel, or an evangelist. But though his tidings were infinitely less important and joyful than ours, it may be questioned, whether any whole city ever thus gladly welcomed the message of salvation: and we know that in general it meets with a very different reception!

Good tidings often derive a great part of their value, from their suitability to the case or those who hear them. The promulgation of good laws, and the impartial administration of justice, though valuable blessings in themselves, can give no pleasure to condemned malefactors: but a report of the king’s clemency, or an assurance of a pardon would suit their case, and tend to cheer their drooping hearts. An act of grace is glad tidings to confined debtors; though it may give umbrage to their creditors; and the arrival of a fleet with provisions, in a time of urgent famine, occasions a joy, of which such as live in plenty can form no adequate conception. We must therefore understand something of our own condition, before we can cordially welcome the gospel of Christ; and inattention or mistake, in this respect forms one grand reason, why so many slight the message of salvation. But lectures on moral duties separated from the doctrines of grace, no more meet the case of lost sinners, than an extract from the statutes of the realm can give comfort and hope to condemned criminals.

We may know something of our situation by facts; and the Scripture further explains the humiliating and alarming subject. It cannot be denied, that the world is full of crimes and miseries; this is equally certain, whether men

believe or disbelieve the Bible. Even they who are averse to the doctrine of human depravity, when applied to themselves and their connections; show by the caution with which they transact their affairs, that they consider mankind in general as basely selfish: and he who at first disdains this sentiment, as unjust and illiberal, will be at length constrained to adopt it, or become a prey to designing men. Hence it is, that incautious young persons, having been repeatedly deceived, often grow suspicious and peevish as they advance in years; and, when this is the case, they give vent to their vexation by reviling this or the other description of men. As if the fault lay in their rank or profession, and were not common to the human species, however restrained, disguised, or modified, except as true religion produces an effectual change of disposition.

At the same time, it is evident, that all our comforts are entwined with cares and disquietudes; every enjoyment, after a while, palls and grows insipid: all our possessions are precarious, and may either be torn from us, or become the causes of the most exquisite anguish. Pain and sickness are entailed upon us; death is certain, and who knows how near? Its approach is dreadful, its stroke inevitable, and its *visible* effects intolerably mortifying. A dark gloom overshadows the rest: who but he that believes the sure testimony of God, can say, what is beyond the grave? Yet there are forebodings of future retribution, which most men experience to their additional alarm; so that numbers seem to suffer many deaths in fearing one! To escape such distressing reflections, they who are not confined by daily business, have recourse to some species of dissipation. These at first yield a childish delight; but soon become irksome, unless novelty be superadded by unceasing variety. This is the real secret of public and private diversions; and of the liberality with which immense sums are expended, in encouraging new species of amusement, however frivolous and absurd! These enable men, for a moment, to escape from the tediousness of life, or the anguish of solitude and reflection; and tend to promote forgetfulness of God, of death, and of a judgment to come.

We appeal to every man's feelings and observation, whether this description does not accord with facts? and whether it have any dependence on religious opinions, except as men are seldom able wholly to disbelieve a God and a future state? Let us then inquire what light the Scriptures throw upon the subject. There we learn, that "God made man in his own image," and created the world "very good but that the first parents of our race ungratefully rebelled against their bountiful Creator, and disobeyed his express and easy command. Thus "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin;

and so death passed upon all men, in that all have sinned.” Thenceforth the human race became subject to labours, pains, afflictions, and diseases, until “they return to the dust, whence they were taken.” The holy image of God was also effaced, and men became incapable of spiritual felicity, dead in sin, and prone to every kind of evil.

When the *root* of our race thus fell, all the branches must share his doom, and become mortal and sinful: And as “it is appointed to all men once to die, and after death the judgement still more terrible miseries may justly be dreaded in a future world. A criminal may suffer many things previous to his trial and condemnation, but his principal punishment follows afterwards. And as the human soul is subject to sinful passions, corresponding to the diseases of the body, we must inevitably be exposed to condemnation at the tribunal of God, and we also carry in our lapsed nature the seeds of misery and destruction.

But our pride and self-love start a thousand objections to these doctrines; though the difficulty of reconciling *facts* with our notions and reasonings unavoidably recoils upon us. We have, however, another view given us, in the sacred oracles, of our actual condition, still more suited “to stop every mouth, and to bring in all the world guilty before God.”—We are doubtless, as reasonable creatures, accountable to our supreme Governor and Judge, for every part of our conduct; and his holy law is the rule, by which every disposition, word, and action must be tried. Now, without entering further on the subject, who does not feel, that he hath in many instances violated the reasonable and righteous commandments of God? Who hath not heard that “cursed is every one that *continueth not in all things* written in the book of the law to do them?”

Thus “the Scripture hath concluded all under sin and it was not without *cause*, I hope not without *meaning*, that we this morning added after each of the commandments, ‘Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.’

The man, who carefully compares his past and present conduct, with this most strict and spiritual standard, will soon find his own conscience bring in a verdict against him: “And if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.” No repentance or amendment can compensate for past offences: because we cannot in any instance exceed our present duty; and our debt increases in proportion as we still fall short of perfect obedience. Nor can we estimate the intrinsic evil of our sins against the infinite majesty of heaven, or the punishment we deserve for our ungrateful rebellion.

When we attempt to frame our conduct by the holy law of God, we feel a wonderful reluctance and backwardness to this most reasonable service, and a strong propensity to disobedience. These evil dispositions, though common to all, are in some exceedingly strengthened by habit, and rendered ungovernable by peculiar temptations. Such men therefore, as have some serious thoughts and form good purposes, commonly find their resolutions enervated, and their endeavours baffled; and after some fruitless efforts, they return to their former course of life, unless relieved by the gospel of Christ.

When these things are seriously considered, the condition of mankind appears truly deplorable. Related to God and an eternal world; exposed to death and a future judgment; already guilty of many heinous crimes, and propense to increase the number; liable to final condemnation, and vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: what can anyone do, to rescue or ransom himself or his brother, from the awful sentence already published by the Judge, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?” It is in vain to reason and dispute against facts, and the sure testimony of Scripture: “Who art thou, that repliest against God? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?” Job iv. 17.

Let us rather submit to his righteousness, and seek that relief which his gospel proposes to us. The Lord, against whom we have rebelled, hath revealed himself to us, as “merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin and hath made way for the exercise of his boundless mercy, in harmony with infinite justice and holiness, in the person, redemption, and mediation of his beloved Son. And the divine Saviour, having made a complete atonement for sin, brought in everlasting righteousness, and triumphed over all our enemies, now reigneth Lord of all worlds, and is “able to save to the uttermost all them that come to God by him; seeing, he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

The proposal of mercy and grace, without money and without price, to the chief of sinners; the pressing invitations and persuasions with which God doth by his ministers beseech us to be reconciled to him; the actual pardon and complete justification of every true believer; the gift of the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify our souls; the exceeding great and precious promises, privileges, and engagements of the new covenant; and the present comfort and future inheritance of the Lord’s adopted children, might be particularly insisted on, in discussing the subject. These are in all respects good news, glad tidings, most needful for us, suited to our case, sufficient for our happiness, springing from love unspeakable, and terminating in the everlasting

salvation and glory of all, who obtain an interest in them. This is the gospel of Christ; the most rejoicing report that ever reached the ears of mortal man! Little indeed has been said on such a subject; yea that little may serve to introduce an attempt,

II. To show, that this gospel, when rightly understood and truly believed, will produce a correspondent conduct and conversation.

This will appear, if we consider the information which it affords us, on the most interesting subjects connected with our judgement and practice. "That God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." The discoveries made to us in the gospel, concerning the mysteries of the Godhead, and the harmonious perfections of the divine character, are suited to excite our highest admiration, adoration, and love; and to make us exclaim, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" This directly influences our judgement and affections, which are as the regulator and main-spring of all our words and actions: and hence we must perceive, that God is worthy of all possible love, worship, confidence, and obedience; that happiness consists in his favour, that his image is beauty and excellency, and his service perfect freedom.

The views which the gospel of Christ gives us of the holy law of God, as worthy to be honoured, both in its requirements and sanctions, by the obedience and atoning sacrifice of Him, whom all angels worship, is suited to impress our minds with the deepest sense of its excellency and authority. The clear revelation of an eternal state of righteous retributions, and of the unmingled happiness or misery which succeeds this present life, is sufficient, when truly believed, to swallow up all our anxiety about this vanishing scene; and to make the eager pursuits of worldly men appear as frivolous as the sports of children, or as infatuated as the intoxicated mirth of condemned criminals.

The gospel of Christ shows us also the *evil* of sin in the most affecting light. "We know that the judgement of God is according to truth;" and here we especially learn his judgment on this disputed subject. The language of the gospel is that of infinite and everlasting love and mercy; it declares sin to be so enormous and malignant an evil, that rather than leave it unpunished, "God spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all." How can an enlightened believer look to the cross, without mourning for his sins, abhorring them as the murderers of Christ his Lord, and earnestly longing for the destruction of every evil propensity in his heart and nature?

Various other subjects might be mentioned, but they frequently call for our attention. The worth of an immortal soul, the ruined state of mankind, the vanity of worldly prosperity, and many similar instructions, emphatically conveyed to us by the gospel of Christ, are exactly suited to form the believer to a holy and heavenly temper and conversation.

The knowledge of our duty, and of the divine authority by which it is enjoined us, is not sufficient for practical purposes, in the present state of human nature: our affections must also be influenced by such powerful motives, as may preponderate against all that can be cast into the opposite scale.—But *proximity* gives earthly things an immense advantage. As objects appear large when near, but seem to diminish when removed to a distance; so *present* things are considered as important beyond all proportion; while things *future*, though immensely more valuable, are thought to be of little consequence, and scarcely possess any influence over the minds of men in general. But *faith*, like a telescope, brings objects invisible to unbelievers near to the soul; and enables us to contemplate, as *real* and of infinite magnitude, those things which other men consider as doubtful, remote, and uninteresting: while the Holy Spirit, producing in us a new and heavenly nature, makes us capable of perceiving the glory, and relishing the excellency of spiritual blessings. Thus they obtain the ascendancy in our judgment and choice, we become spiritually minded, and savour the things which are of God; bonds which fastened our hearts to earthly objects are broken; the balance turns the other way; and we set our “affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”

“Fear not,” says our Lord to his disciples, “fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”—When the gospel is really understood and believed, we “fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into heavenly rest, any of us should seem to come short of it;” and this apprehension prevails over our dread of labour, reproach, scorn, self-denial, or persecution: yea, the fear of divine chastening, of grieving the Spirit, of a wounded conscience, or of dishonouring the doctrine of Christ, is a powerful motive to watchfulness and prayer. The desire of everlasting felicity in the favour of God, and of the present consolations found in communion with him, subordinate our hungerings and thirstings after earthly objects. A kingdom that cannot be moved; glory, honour and immortality; treasures in heaven that fail not, and pleasures at God’s right hand for evermore, are blessings commensurate with our largest wishes and capacities, and durable as our immortal souls; and the lively hope of this incorruptible inheritance, grounded on

the sure word of God, and sealed by his sanctifying Spirit, is capable of triumphing over all our expectation of temporal advantages, distinctions, and gratifications; and of animating the soul to patient continuance in well-doing. Love to our God and Saviour, likewise, unites its powerful influences: and while we cleave to him with fervent desires, rejoice in him with admiring gratitude, and are fervently zealous for the honour of his name; we shall feel constrained by his supreme affection “to live no longer to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again.” Thus we shall be prepared to venture, suffer, and labour, in seeking to glorify his name and recommend his precious salvation.

The encouragements of the gospel also are very efficacious. The sinner who attempts to amend his life, according to the word of God, is very liable to grow weary in his attempts. The law seems to say to him, “Pay me that thou owest;” and he feels as if he were further and further removed from the righteousness he went about to establish, and that victory over his passions which he expected speedily to accomplish. On the other hand if he make the principles of morality, or some *mitigated law* his standard, he is at a loss to determine how much obedience will entitle him to acceptance, and uncertainty tends to discouragement. For the diligent and conscientious are in this case always harassed with doubts; and none but the heedless and self-confident think themselves *good enough* to be the objects of the divine favour.

But the gospel of Christ invites all that are athirst to come to him, and he will give them of the fountain of the water of life freely: and assures the trembling sinner, that “him, who cometh to the Saviour, he will in *no wise cast out.*” It runs in this gracious tenor, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth.” As therefore every blessing is freely given, for Christ’s sake, to the poor supplicant however unworthy; nothing but pride, unbelief, contempt of heavenly things, aversion to God and religion, or idolatrous love of the world, can exclude any sinner from this great salvation. Every part of the plan is free from ambiguity: our wants are distinctly stated; promises are given exactly answering to them; means are appointed, in which we may apply for the performance of these promises; and God pledges the honour of his faithfulness, that every one who seeks the blessing in the appointed way, shall certainly obtain it. Delays and difficulties may intervene to prove our sincerity; but sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than any word of God shall fail of its accomplishment.

The assistance likewise, proposed by the gospel, tends to produce a peculiar conduct and conversation in the true believer. Evil habits, corrupt pro-

pensities, bad connections, and strong temptations, are not easily broken off and mastered; and our resolution is found by experience to be unequal to the conflict: but the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to surmount every obstacle, and to resist and overcome all his enemies. He feels he can do nothing of himself; but he finds, that he can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him.”—Thus by “waiting on the Lord he renews his strength,” and rises superior to those difficulties, which all other men find in the event to be insurmountable.

The assurances made of an abundant present and future recompense, to those who renounce temporal things for the sake of Christ and the gospel; the supports afforded in seasons of trial and affliction; the authoritative and perfect example set before us; the obligations conferred upon us, and the glorious prospects that open to our view, are all of them exceedingly influential on the believer’s spirit and conduct. But we must proceed,

III. To mention some leading particulars, in which “a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ,” more especially consists.

Every doctrine of the gospel requires, and is suited to produce *humility* in all its variety of exercises. The whole seems arranged on purpose to lay us low in self-abasement, to exclude all boasting and glorying in ourselves, to produce deep repentance, to render us poor in spirit and contrite in heart, and to form our dispositions teachable, lowly, unambitious, and unassuming. When therefore we speak and act in this manner, our conversation is consistent with our principles, and becomes our profession: but self-confidence, self-importance, vain-glorious vaunting, desire of praise or pre-eminence, and an unteachable, dogmatizing, or overbearing deportment, are more unbecoming and odious in an evangelical professor, than in any other person.

From this deep humility, patience, contentment, and thankfulness must proportionably arise. “It is of the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed our sufferings are less than our iniquities; our mercies are invaluable and unmerited: our situation is appointed by God our Saviour, in perfect wisdom, truth, and love: our light afflictions are counterbalanced by divine consolations; and they “work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” So that it becomes us to be resigned, satisfied, and thankful in every circumstance; and repining, fretfulness, and discontent are entirely inconsistent with evangelical principles.

Confidence in God likewise peculiarly becometh the gospel of Christ. “The Lord is our Light, and our Salvation: whom then shall we fear?” “If God be for us, who can be against us?” To be calm and collected in perilous

situations; to recognize the hand of God in the alarming events of life, and hence to assume courage and cheerful expectation; to rely on his providential care amidst temporal losses and difficulties; and in every case to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;" becomes the character of his redeemed people. But too often he may rebuke us and say, "Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?"—We act also consistently with our principles, when we take pleasure in attending on the ordinances of God; when we count the holy day of rest honourable and delightful; when we are glad to have it said to us, "Let us go unto the house of the Lord and when we prefer his courts, and the communion of the saints, above all other places of resort, and every other kind of society. It becomes the professors of the gospel, to abound in praises and thanksgivings; to reverence the name and the word of God; to worship him in their families with evident alacrity and punctuality; to seek his blessing on every undertaking; to praise him for every deliverance and benefit; to act habitually as in his presence; to devote themselves to his service; and to seek all their happiness from him. But whatever is contrary to this is unbecoming the gospel, and dishonourable to our profession.

Even worldly men, while they charge our doctrines with a licentious tendency, expect more from us in our conduct towards them, than they do from each other. This is evidently the case: for a single instance of immorality, in one that professes the gospel, excites general attention, and becomes a topic of discourse; while the numberless crimes of other men are very slightly noticed. This should remind us, that strict integrity, veracity, sincerity, and punctuality to our engagements, become our profession; and that both the world and the church will charge us with inconsistency, if we at all deviate from this direct uprightness of conduct and conversation. An inoffensive deportment is likewise necessary, if we would walk "worthy of God," and "as it becometh saints." We must no more injure a man, wantonly or heedlessly, than from selfishness: We must not wound any person's character, interrupt his domestic comfort, or needlessly disquiet his mind. We should carefully avoid exciting men's passions, provoking them to anger, or tempting them to envy, ambition, or discontent. We should "study to be quiet and mind our own business," without intermeddling with other men's matters; and to be peaceable, orderly, and industrious neighbours, and members of the community. We ought so to avoid evil, and the appearance of evil, that none may have any thing to say against us, except it be for our religious peculiarities.

General benevolence also becomes the gospel of rich grace and mercy. Every man almost, may at some times, by retrenching superfluities, do a little to show his compassion and good-will to his afflicted neighbours. From those

to whom much is given much shall be required. There are likewise various other methods, by which a friendly disposition may be manifested; and this is peculiarly ornamental to the gospel. The more entirely we renounce all dependence on our good works, the greater alacrity and zeal we should manifest in performing them: and this will be our disposition, if, indeed “we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and understand our obligations to him, who “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” Indeed, even in this lukewarm age, the excellency of the gospel does appear in this respect; for the liberality of those, who profess to rely on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, is vastly greater, in proportion to their circumstances, than that of such persons, as expect to atone for their sins, and to purchase heaven, by their good works. But “we beseech you,” brethren, “to abound more and more.

We should also exercise meekness, forgiveness of injuries, and unwearied perseverance in endeavouring to overcome evil with good; for these things peculiarly become those, who own themselves so deeply indebted to the pardoning mercy and abundant grace of God our Saviour. An exact attention to every relative duty; a condescending, affable, and modest demeanour, “in honour preferring one another’s constant endeavour to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;” to promote brotherly love; and to concur in every design, for advancing the purity and enlargement of the church, and the benefit of mankind, are evidently and eminently becoming the gospel of Christ.

To these we should add, habits of strict sobriety and temperance: moderation and regard to expediency in the use of things lawful, and in worldly pursuit; and indifference about external decoration; and entire disregard to these frivolous amusements, in which numbers waste their time and substance; a disinterested conduct, remote from all suspicion of covetousness; a strict government of the passions; and a tongue bridled and refrained from vain and improper discourse, but prepared to speak such things as are edifying and useful. These are evidently parts of that conversation which becometh the gospel of Christ; and reflection may enable every one to add to this specimen many others of a similar nature. We proceed therefore,

IV. To make some observations on the emphatical word “Only.”

Some persons think, that the apostle meant in this manner to intimate the reasonableness of his exhortations; and no doubt we have abundant cause to consider them in this light; yet I apprehend that it is not the import of the expression in this place. It rather implies that nothing could prove injurious

in the event to professed Christians, provided their conversation were consistent with their principles. And we may apply this general instruction to various cases.

There may be wars and rumours of war, famines, pestilences, revolutions, and distress of nations with perplexity; yea, the sun shall be turned into darkness, the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth with all its works shall be burnt up: but none of these events need alarm the consistent Christian: For “what shall separate us from the love Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” Rom. viii. 35—39. “God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble: therefore we will not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the depths of the sea.” Psalm xlii. 1, 2.

Affecting changes may likewise take place in our families: our beloved relatives may be torn from us, our friends alienated, and our property lost; poverty, contempt, and sickness, may oppress us; and we may fall under unmerited censure and reproach, so that even our brethren may mistake our case and character, as Job’s friends did his: but “if our conversation be as it cometh the gospel of Christ,” none of these things can hurt us. The Lord will enable us to rejoice in the testimony of our conscience; he will plead our cause, and vindicate our reputation; he will not leave us comfortless, but will afford us proportionable supports: “No weapon formed against us shall prosper, and every tongue that ariseth against us in judgment we shall condemn and when we have been tried we shall come forth as gold purified from the furnace.

Changes may likewise take place in the church: many who have been useful to us, may be removed, and among them the very “ministers by whom we believed;” nay, such persons as we most looked up to, may “forsake Christ, having loved this present world;” or become zealous teachers of destructive heresies. But if our conversation be consistent with our profession; our own experience of the Lord’s faithfulness, and the sanctifying efficacy of his word, will preserve us from fatal effects, and teach us by such events, to be more watchful, and simple in our dependence on divine grace.

Some persons may be perplexed with difficulties, in respect of certain points of doctrine; but if they truly embrace the salvation of Christ and walk worthy of it, they will be at length led to establishment in the truth. “If any man *will* do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.” An upright heart and an obedient will, directly tend to free the mind

from the clouds of various prejudices and passions, to produce teachableness, and to improve spiritual discernment; and there are numerous promises of divine teaching to persons of this description. But they “who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil,” are given up to strong delusions, and fall into final condemnation.

Difficulties also occur to many, in determining whether they be in a state of salvation or not; nor are they able, after much self-examination, to decide the important question. To these likewise we may say, “Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ and this will have a powerful, though gradual efficacy, in producing the desired satisfaction. “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.” “For the path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

The exhortation before us also points out, to those who are labouring to do good in their families and connections, or in a more extensive sphere, the grand method of obtaining the desired success; and when the interest of the gospel in any place seems greatly declined; the consistent conduct of the few who adhere to it, will have the happiest effects in promoting a revival. Finally some persons are harassed with apprehensions of future trials and temptations, or with the dread of death; but let all such trembling believers attend to the apostle’s exhortation; and they may rest assured, that the grace of the Lord Jesus will be sufficient for them; and his strength be perfected in their weakness. “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Seeing we address ourselves to those only, who expect to be thought Christians, the exhortation may be applicable to every individual. Let a becoming conversation prove that you are Christians in reality. But alas, what gloomy reflections crowd into the mind, when this subject comes in our way! Do the generality of nominal Christians live as becomes the gospel? Is not the conversation of a vast majority diametrically opposite to the spirit and precepts of our holy religion? Who can imagine that Christ will own such men as his true disciples? Who can doubt, but that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for them?

There are persons who say, (When you instruct us in our duty, we regard you; but we are not infidels, we have always believed the doctrines of Christianity? But let me ask you, have these doctrines properly influenced your heart and life? If they have not, then surely you have believed in vain! You would say to an Antinomian professor of justification by faith alone, who

lived an immoral life, “Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead.” Beware then lest you slide into Antinomianism of a more reputable kind. Faith and practice are not like grapes tied upon a vine branch, but like grapes growing upon a living vine. True faith receives the doctrines of the gospel into the heart, where they produce a change in the judgments, dispositions, and affections; thus the tree becomes good, and good fruit is the genuine consequence.

This is real Christianity: and all that comes short of this, however distinguished, is a mere name, notion, or form. But if we have thus received the gospel, we shall be conscious that we have in many things fallen short of a becoming conversation. Let us then humbly seek forgiveness of the past, and beg to be enabled henceforth so to abide in Christ, “that we may bring forth much fruit.” and walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory.”—Amen.