

GLEANINGS IN THE GODHEAD

**Part 2: Excellencies Which
Pertain to God the Son as Christ**



**Section Seven
The
Example of Christ.**

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The Example of Christ

Two Serious Mistakes have been made by men in taking or not taking Christ for their example. It is difficult to determine which is the more evil and fatal of the two. First, those who held up the perfect life of the Lord Jesus before the unconverted maintained that they must imitate it in order to find acceptance with God. In other words, they made emulating Christ “the way of salvation” to lost sinners. This is a fundamental error, which cannot be resisted too strenuously. It repudiates the total depravity and spiritual helplessness of fallen man. It denies the necessity for the new birth. It nullifies the atonement by emphasizing Christ’s flawless life at the expense of His sacrificial death. It substitutes works for faith, creature efforts for divine grace, man’s faulty doings for the Redeemer’s finished work. If the Acts and epistles are searched it will be revealed that the apostles never preached imitating Christ as the way to obtain forgiveness of sins and secure peace with God.

But in recent generations the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme. If, a century ago, the example which Christ has left His people was made too much of, our moderns make far too little of it; if they gave it a place in preaching to the unsaved which Scripture does not warrant, we have failed to press it upon Christians to the extent Scripture requires. If those a century ago are to be blamed for misusing the example of Christ in connection with justification, we are guilty of failing to use it in connection with sanctification. While it is true that the moral perfections which Christ displayed during His earthly sojourn are

still extolled in many places, how rarely one hears (or reads) of those who insist that emulating Christ is absolutely essential for the believer's preservation and ultimate salvation. Would not the great majority of orthodox preachers be positively afraid to make any such assertion, lest they be charged with legality?

The Lord Jesus Christ is not only a perfect and glorious Pattern of all graces, holiness, virtue, and obedience, to be preferred above all others, but also He alone is such. In the lives of the best of the saints, Scripture records what it is our duty to avoid, as well as what we ought to follow. Sometimes one is puzzled to know whether it is safe to conform to them or not. But God has graciously supplied us with a sure rule which solves that problem. If we heed it we will never be at a loss to see our duty. Holy men and women of Scripture are to be imitated by us only as far as they were themselves conformed unto Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). The best of their graces, the highest of their attainments, the most perfect of their duties, were spoiled by blemishes; but in Christ there is no imperfection whatever, for He had no sin and did no sin.

Christ is not only the perfect, but also the pattern Man; and therefore is His example suitable for all believers. This remarkable fact presents a feature which has not received the attention it deserves. There is nothing so distinctive in personality as racial and national characteristics. The greatest of men bear unmistakable marks of their heredity and environment. Racial peculiarities are imperishable; to the last fibre of his being, Luther was a German, Knox a Scot; and with all his largeness of heart, Paul was a Jew. In sharp contrast, Jesus Christ rose above heredity and environment. Nothing local, transient, national, or sectarian dwarfed His wondrous personality. Christ is the only truly catholic man. He belongs to all ages and is related to all men, because He is "the Son of man." This underlies the universal suitability of Christ's example to believers of all nations, who one and all may find in Him the perfect realization of their ideal.

This is indeed a miracle, and exhibits a transcendent perfection in the Man Christ Jesus which is rarely pondered. How remarkable that the converted Englishman may find in Christ's character and conduct a pattern as well-suited to him as to a saved Chinese; that His example is as appropriate for the regenerated Zulu as for a born-again German. The needs of Lord Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton were as truly met in Christ as were those of the half-witted youth who said, "I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all, But Jesus Christ is my all in all." How remarkable that the example of Christ is as appropriate for believers of the twentieth century as it was for those of the first, that it is as suitable for a Christian child as for his grandparent!

He is appointed of God for this very purpose. One end why God sent His Son to become flesh and tabernacle in the world was that He might set before us an example in our nature, in One who was like unto us in all things, sin excepted. Thereby He exhibited to us that renewal to His image in us, of that return to Him from sin and apostasy, and of that holy obedience He requires of us. Such an example was needful so that we might never be at a loss about the will of God in His commandments, having a glorious representation of it before our eyes. That could be given us no other way than in our own nature. The nature of angels was not suited as an example of obedience, especially in the exercise of such graces as we specially stand in need of in this world. What example could angels set us in patience in afflictions or quietness in sufferings, when their nature is incapable of such things? Nor could we have had a perfect example in our nature except in one who was holy and "separate from sinners."

Many Scriptures present Christ as the believer's Exemplar: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29),—learn by the course of My life as well as by My words; "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him" (John 10:4)—He requires no more of us than He rendered Himself; "I have

given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15); “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus” (Rom. 15:5); “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:1-2); “But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable unto God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:20-21); “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6).

Example is better than precept. Why? Because a precept is more or less an abstraction, whereas an example sets before us a concrete representation; therefore has more aptitude to incite the mind to imitation. The conduct of those with whom we are in close association exerts a considerable influence upon us, either for good or evil. The fact is clearly recognized in the Scriptures. For example, we are enjoined, “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul” (Prov. 22:24-25). It was for this reason that God commanded the Israelites to utterly destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan, so that they might not learn their evil ways and be contaminated by them (Deut. 7:2-4). Contrariwise, the example of the pious exerts an influence for good; that is why they are called “the salt of the earth.”

In keeping with this principle, God has appointed the consideration of Christ’s character and conduct as a special means to increase the piety in His people. As their hearts contemplate His holy obedience, it has a peculiar efficacy to their growing in grace beyond all other examples. It is in beholding the Lord Jesus by faith that salvation comes to us. “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isa. 45:22). Christ is presented before the sinner in the Gospel, with the promise that whosoever believingly looks to Him shall not

perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:14-15). This is a special ordinance of God, and it is made effectual by the Spirit to all who believe. In like manner, Christ is presented to the saints as the grand Pattern of obedience and Example of holiness, with the promise that as they contemplate Him as such we shall be changed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). Our response to that appointment of God is rewarded by a growing in piety.

But to get down to details: what is involved in the saints' imitating of Christ? First, it presupposes that they be already regenerate. The hearts of His followers must be sanctified before their lives can be conformed to Him. The spirit and principle of obedience must be imparted to the soul before there can be an external imitation of Christ's practice. This order is plainly enunciated in, "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19-20). One who is yet in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity has no heart for spiritual things; therefore the tree must be made good before it can produce good fruit. We must first live in the Spirit and then walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). One might as well urge the Ethiopian to change his skin or the leopard his spots, as call upon the unconverted to follow the example Christ has left His people.

Second, imitating Christ definitely denotes that no Christian may govern himself or act according to his own will. Those who are a rule to themselves act in fearful defiance of the Most High. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). A man may as well feign to be his own creator as his own guide. No man has wisdom enough to direct himself. When born again we are conscious of this fact. Our proud hearts are humbled and our rebellious wills broken, and we feel the need of being led by Another. The cry of a converted heart is, "Lord, what wouldst

thou have me to do?” His answer to us today is, follow the example which I have left you, learn of me, walk as I walked.

Third, if this imitating of Christ clearly implies that no man may pretend to be his own master, it is equally evident that no matter how wise or how holy he is, no Christian has the right or is qualified to rule others. Christ alone is appointed and fitted to be the Lord of His people. It is true that we read in the Word, “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12); and “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Heb. 13:17). Yet that must be taken in subordination to the example of Christ. The best of men are but men at the best; they have their errors and faults, and where they differ from Christ it is our duty to differ from them. It is very important that we be quite clear upon this point, for much mischief has resulted from allowing some to deprive others of a vital part of their rightful liberty.

It is not that Scripture teaches an ecclesiastical democracy, that is as far from the truth as the Romish hierarchy at the opposite extreme. God has placed rulers in the Church, and its members are commanded to obey them; but their rule is administrative and not legislative—to enforce the laws of Christ, and not invent rules of their own. Paul affirmed, “Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand” (2 Cor. 1:24); and Peter declared of the elders or bishops, “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). Filled with so great a measure of the Spirit of wisdom and holiness as Paul was, yet he goes no higher than this; “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Fourth, the imitation of Christ plainly intimates that true Christianity is very strict and exacting, and in no wise countenances licentiousness or the indulgence of fleshly lusts. This needs emphases in such a day as ours, when so much laxity prevails. People suppose they may be followers of Christ and yet

ignore the path which He travelled; that they may decline the unpleasant task of denying self and yet make sure of heaven. What a delusion! The vital necessity of the careful imitation of Christ disallows all loose walking, and rejects the claim of any to being real Christians if they do not heed His example. Neither worldliness nor self-indulgence can find any protection beneath the wings of the Gospel. The unvarying rule, binding on all who claim to be His, is "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). Let him either follow the example of Christ, or cease claiming to belong to Him; let him tread the highway of holiness or all his fair words are worthless.

Fifth, the imitation of Christ necessarily implies the blemishes of the best of men. If the life of Christ is our pattern, then the holiest among His followers are obliged to admit they come far short of this standard of duty, and not in a few details, but in every respect. The character and conduct of the Lord Jesus were without spot or blemish; therefore they are so high above our poor attainments that we are filled with shame when we measure ourselves by them. Self-satisfied religionists may take delight in comparing themselves with others, as the Pharisee did with the publican. Deluded souls who suppose that all Christian holiness consists of is measuring up to some humanly invented standard of perfection (or entering into some peculiar experience), may pride themselves that they have "received the second blessing," or "have the fullness or baptism of the Spirit;" yet all who honestly measure themselves by the perfections of Christ will find abundant cause to be humbled.

This too, is a point of tremendous practical importance. If I place my handkerchief against a dark background, it will appear spotlessly clean; but, if I lay it upon newly fallen snow, the imperfection of its whiteness is quickly apparent. If I compare my own life with that preached by certain "victorious-life" advocates I may conclude that my life is quite acceptable. But if I diligently apply to myself the plumbline of Christ's example, then I must at once acknowledge, like Peter of old, I am but

following Him “afar off.” Surely none was more proficient in holiness and punctilious in obedience than Paul; yet, when he compared himself to Christ, he declared, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend” (Phil. 3:12).

Sixth, the imitation of Christ as our pattern clearly implies His transcendent holiness, that His holiness is high above that of all creatures. Therefore it is the greatest of the Christian’s ambitions to be conformed to His image (Phil. 3:10). Christ has a double perfection: a perfection of being and a perfection of working. His life on earth supplies a perfect rule for us because there was no blot or error therein. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,” and such an High Priest became us (Heb. 7:26). Thus the conformity of professing Christians to Christ’s example is both the test and measure of all their graces. The nearer anyone approaches to this Pattern, the closer he comes to perfection.

Finally, the Christian’s imitation of Christ, under the penalty of forfeiting his claim to any saving interest in Christ, necessarily denotes that sanctification and obedience are the evidences of our justification and acceptance with God. Scriptural assurance is unattainable without sincere and strict obedience. “The work of righteousness [not of loose living] shall be peace” (Isa. 32:17). “We have it not for our holiness, but we always have it in the way of holiness. Let men talk what they will of the immediate sealings and comforts of the Spirit, without any regard to holiness, or respect to obedience: sure I am, whatever delusion they meet with in that way, true peace and consolation is only to be found and expected here” (John Flavel, to whom we are indebted for much in the seven points).

“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). We have seen that not only is the perfect life of Christ a suitable pattern of holiness and obedience for His people to imitate, but also that God has expressly appointed it for that purpose. This is so that we may

have a sure rule to walk by, the Law of God translated into concrete terms and its requirements set before us by a personal representation; and also for the purpose of humbling our proud hearts, by revealing to us how far short we come of measuring up to God's standard of righteousness. Furthermore, God has appointed that the example of Christ should be followed by His people so that His Son might be honoured by them; to distinguish His followers from the world; and so that they should evidence the reality of their profession. Imitating Christ, then, is not optional, but obligatory.

But here a very real difficulty confronts those who sincerely seek grace to heed this divine appointment. In what particular respects are we to regard Christ as our Exemplar? All things recorded of Him in Holy Writ are for our instruction, but not all for our imitation. There were some things Christ did as God; for example, He wrought miracles. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work . . . For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will" (John 5:17, 21); "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of and palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (Matthew 9:6)—even the apostles never performed such deeds in their own name or by their own power. Again; as Mediator, He performed works of merit, thus making expiation for the sins of His people and "bringing in everlasting righteousness" for them, and obtaining their justification and reconciliation. So now His intercession secures their preservation. No mere man can do anything meritorious, for at best we are all "unprofitable servants."

Even as Man, Christ performed extraordinary acts which are not for our emulation: fasting for forty days and nights, walking on the water, spending a whole night in prayer (Luke 6:12)—we do not read in Scripture of anyone else doing so—are cases in point. So He performed certain temporary works which pertained to the time in which He lived, which are not for our imitation—

such as His being circumcised, keeping the Passover. Wherein, then, is Christ to be imitated by us? First, in all those moral duties which pertain to all men at all times, which are neither extraordinary nor temporary, comprehended in the loving of God with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves. Second, in such duties as belong to a like calling: as the child obeying its parents (Luke 2:51); the citizen paying his taxes (Matthew 17:27); the minister of the Gospel diligently (Luke 8:1) and faithfully (Heb. 3:2) discharging his office. Third, in all such works as have like reason and occasion for doing them (Matthew 12:12; John 8:59).

The believer's conformity to Christ corresponds to the states through which He passed. Christ Jesus first entered a state of humiliation, before God rewarded Him by bringing Him into a state of exaltation. Therefore has God ordered that the members shall resemble their Head. They are called upon to endure sufferings, before they enter into the promised glory. The disciples of the Lord Jesus have to experience a measure of opposition, persecution, hatred, affliction, and they do so for their hope of a better life to come. In that, they do but follow "the captain of their salvation," who was "made perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10). Has not God declared, "If we be dead with him [Christ], we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:11-12). That order is inescapable, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10).

In like manner, the Christian is to be conformed to the special acts of Christ's mediation, which are His death and resurrection. These are of paramount consideration, for they are not only a pattern proposed to our meditation, but also a great influence upon our dying to sin and living unto holiness. This is evidenced from the fact that those effects of grace in us are ascribed to those acts of Christ's mediation which carry most correspondence with them. Thus our mortification is ascribed to

Christ's crucifixion (Gal. 2:20); our vivification to His rising unto life (Phil. 3:10); and our heavenly mindedness to His ascension (Phil. 3:20); so that all of those chief acts of Christ are verified in His people. We die to sin as Christ died for it.

But in descending to more specific details, it is in Christ's graces we are to be conformed to Him. All the graces and virtues of the Spirit were represented in their grandest glory and brightest lustre in His life here on earth. First, the purity and holiness of His life is proposed as a glorious pattern for the saints to imitate. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). Before enlarging upon this, let us point out where Christ is unique and beyond our imitation. He was *essentially* holy in His being, for He is "the Holy One of God." He entered this world immaculate, pure from the least stain of pollution, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee" (Luke 1:35). Again, He was *effectually* holy, for He makes others holy. By His sufferings and blood there opened a fountain "for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). He is also *infinitely* holy, as He is God, and no measure can be set upon His holiness as Mediator, for He received the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). In these particulars He is inimitable.

Notwithstanding these exceptions, the holiness of Christ is a pattern for us. He was truly and sincerely holy, without fiction or pretence. When the prince of this world scrutinized Him he could find no defect in Him (John 14:30). He was pure gold throughout. The Pharisee may pretend to be holy, but it is only in outward appearance. Now the Christian's holiness must be genuine, sincere, without simulation. Christ was uniformly holy, at one time and place as well as another. The same even tenor of holiness ran through the whole of His life from first to last. So should it be with His followers. "As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:15). What inconsistencies we have to bemoan; one part of our life heavenly, another earthly.

Christ was exemplarily holy; a pattern to all that came near

Him, so that even those sent to arrest Him had to return to their masters and say, “never man spake as this man.” We are to imitate Him in this respect. The Thessalonian saints were commended because they “were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad” (1 Thess. 1:7-8). Let none go out of our company without being either convicted or edified. Christ was strictly holy. “Which of you convicteth me of sin?” was His challenge. The most observing and unfriendly eye could pick no flaw in His actions. It is our duty to imitate Christ in this too, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15).

Second, the obedience of Christ to His Father’s will is a pattern for the Christian’s emulation. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . . [who] became obedient unto death” (Phil. 2:5, 8). Christ’s obedience was free and voluntary, not forced and compulsory. “Then said I, Lo, I come . . . I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Psa. 40:7-8). Nor did He waver, later, when suffering so grievously in the discharge of that will. “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life” (John 10:17). So the Christian is to follow the steps of Christ, doing nothing grudgingly and counting not God’s commands grievous. Our obedience must be rendered cheerfully if it is to be acceptable. See His perfect submission in Gethsemane. Here too He left us an example. We are to make no demur to the most unpleasant task God assigns us. Happy the Christian who can say with the apostle, “for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

The obedience of Christ was entirely disinterested. It was wrought for no self ends, but for the glory of God. “I have glorified thee on the earth. I have finished the work which thou

gavest me to do” (John 17:4). Christ sought not honour of men, but the great desire of His soul was “Father, glorify Thy name” (John 12:28). This quality must also characterize our obedience. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4). The streams of Christ’s obedience flowed from the fountain of love to God. “But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (John 14:13). Let this also be true of us, for loveless obedience is of no value in the sight of God. The obedience of Christ was constant, continuing to His very last breath. Being not “weary in well-doing” is required of us. “Be thou faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10).

Third, the self-denial of Christ is the pattern for the believer. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Though there is to be a resemblance, there can be no exact equivalent. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9). Who can gauge what Christ, for the glory of God and the love which He bare to the elect, gave up for us? How trivial in comparison is the greatest sacrifice we are called upon to make! Christ was under no obligation whatever to deny Himself for us, but He has placed us under the strongest obligation to deny ourselves for His sake. Though under no obligation, He denied Himself readily, making no objection to the severest part of it. Then let it not be said of us, “For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s” (Phil. 2:21). Let not self be loved, petted, pitied, pampered, and indulged; rather renounce and mortify it, and make pleasing and glorifying Christ your great business.

Fourth, the activity and diligence of Christ in fulfilling the work of God committed unto Him, was a pattern for all believers to imitate. It is said of Him that He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). What a glorious work He accomplished in so short a time!—a work which will be celebrated through all eternity by the praises of the redeemed, a work upon which His

heart was intently set. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me” (John 4:34). It was a work under which He never fainted, despite the greatest opposition. The shortness of the time provoked Him to the greatest diligence. “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). He improved all opportunities and occasions: granting Nicodemus an interview at night, preaching the Gospel to the woman at the well when He was exhausted from His journey. Nothing displeased Him more than to be dissuaded from His work. “Get thee behind me, Satan,” He said to Peter when the apostle said, “spare thyself, Lord.”

Shall His followers trifle their lives away in vanity? Shall we be slothful when He was so diligent? How great an honour God has placed on us by calling us to His service. Steadfastness in the work of obedience is our greatest security in the hour of temptation. “The LORD is with you, while ye be with him” (2 Chron. 15:2). Diligence in prosecuting holiness is the way to get more (Luke 8:18). Graces grow by being used; spiritual acts lead to spiritual habits; talents faithfully employed are rewarded by an increase. Diligence in the work of God is the direct way to an assurance of the love of God (2 Pet. 1:5-10). Diligence in obedience is the greatest security against backsliding. Coldness leads to carelessness, carelessness to negligence, negligence to apostasy. The more diligent we are in serving God, the more our likeness to Christ.

Fifth, the inoffensiveness of the life of Christ on earth is an excellent pattern to all His people. He injured none, and never gave occasion for any to be justly injured by Him. He was not only holy, but also “harmless.” He waived His own personal rights to avoid giving an offense, as in the case of tribute money. When he was reviled, He “reviled not again” (1 Pet. 2:23). So circumspect was our Saviour that when His enemies sought occasion against Him, they could not find any (John 19:4). Let us earnestly seek grace that we may imitate this blessed excellency of His life, that we may obey God’s command and be

“blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke” (Phil. 2:15). The honour of Christ, whose name we bear, is bound up in our deportment. The rule which He has laid upon us, is “Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

Sixth, the humility and meekness of Christ is proposed by Himself as a pattern for His people’s imitation. “Learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). He abased Himself, by taking upon Him the form of a servant. He stooped to the lowest office by washing the disciples’ feet. When He presented Himself to Israel as their King, it was in humiliation, riding upon the back of an ass. “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek” (Matthew 21:5). He declared, “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Matthew 20:28). He condescended to the lowest of men, eating with “publicans and sinners” (Matthew 9:11). In all of this He left us an example to follow. O to be “clothed with humility” (1 Pet. 5:5), and thereby evidence our conformity to Christ.

Pride ill becomes one who professes to be a follower of the Lord Jesus. It not only betrays lack of communion with Christ, but also a woeful ignorance of self. Nothing is so provoking to God, and more quickly estranges the soul from Him. “Though the LORD is high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly; but the proud he knoweth afar off” (Psa. 138:6). Pride is totally inconsistent with the complaints we make of our corruptions, and it presents a serious stumbling block to the children of God. Be not ambitious of the world’s great ones, but content yourself as one of Christ’s little ones. Learn humility at His feet. Evidence it in your apparel and deportment (1 Pet. 3:3). Display it in cultivating fellowship with the poorest of the flock (Rom. 12:16). Show it by speaking of and comporting yourself as “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8).

Seventh, the contentment of Christ in a low and mean condition in this world is an excellent pattern for His people’s imitation. His portion here was a condition of deepest poverty and contempt. The child of lowly parents; born in a manger. So

deprived of the comforts of this world that, much of His time, He had not where to lay His head; so poor He had to borrow a penny to point out its superscription. Yet He never murmured or complained. Nay, so far from it, so perfectly content was He with God's appointments, that He declared, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places" (Psa. 16:6). Under the most degrading sufferings, He never resisted: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7).

O that in this also the poorest Christians would imitate their Saviour, and learn to manage an afflicted condition with a contented spirit: let there be no complaints, or foolish charging of God heard from you, whatever straits or troubles He brings you into.

"The meanest and most afflicted Christian is owner of many rich, invaluable mercies (Eph. 1:3; 1 Corinthians 3:23). Is sin pardoned and God reconciled? then never open your mouths any more. You have many precious promises that God will not forsake you in your straits (Heb. 13:5). Your whole life has been an experience of the faithfulness of God to His promises. How useful and beneficial all your afflictions are to you! they purge your sins, wean you from the world, and turn to your salvation; then, how unreasonable must your discontentedness at them be! The time of your relief and full deliverance from all your troubles is at hand: the time is but short that you shall have any concernment about such things. Your lot falls by Divine direction upon you, and bad as it may be, it is much easier and sweeter than the condition of Christ in this world was. Yet He was contented, and why not you?" (John Flavel).

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). The principal design of the apostle in this epistle is to exhibit certain signs and marks, both negative and positive, for the examination or trial of men's claims to being Christians (1 John 5:13). It is in that light our verse must be interpreted. The proof of a saving interest in Christ

is our imitation of Him. Were this criterion faithfully insisted upon today from the pulpit much of the empty profession now abounding would be clearly exposed. A claim is made, "He that saith he abideth in Him," which signifies an interest in and communion with Him. The only way that claim can be established is by walking as Christ walked, following the example He has left us.

Every man is bound to the imitation of Christ under penalty of forfeiting his claim to Christ. The necessity of this imitation of Christ convincingly appears divers ways. First, *from the established order of salvation*, which is fixed and unalterable. God that hath appointed the end, hath also established the means and order by which men shall attain the ultimate end. Now conformity to Christ is the established method in which God will bring many souls to glory. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). The same God who has predestinated men to salvation, has, in order, predestinated them to conformity to Christ. This order of heaven is never to be reversed; we may as well hope to be saved without Christ, as to be saved without conformity to Christ.

Secondly, *the nature of Christ-mystical* requires this conformity, and renders it indispensably necessary. Otherwise, the body of Christ must be *heterogeneous*: of a nature different from the Head, and how monstrous and uncomely would this be! This would represent Christ to the world in an image, or idea, much like that, "The head of fine gold, the breasts and arms of silver, the thighs of brass, the legs of iron, the feet part of iron and part of clay" (Dan. 2:32-33). Christ, the Head, is pure and holy, and therefore very unsuitable to sensual and worldly members. And therefore the apostle in his description of Christ-mystical, describes the *members* of Christ (as they ought to be) of the same nature and quality with the Head: "As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthy, so we shall also bear the image of

the heavenly.” That image or resemblance of Christ, which shall be complete and perfect after the resurrection, must be begun in its first draught here by the work of regeneration.

Thirdly, this resemblance and conformity to Christ appears necessary from the communion which all believers have with Him in the same spirit of grace and holiness. Believers are called Christ’s “*fellows*” or co-partners (Psa. 45:7) from their participation with Him of the same Spirit. God giveth the same Spirit unto us, which He more plentifully poured out upon Christ. Now where the same Spirit and principle is, there the same fruits and operations must be produced, according to the proportions and measures of the Spirit of grace communicated; and this reason is farther enforced by the very design and end of God in the infusion of the Spirit of grace: for it is plain from Ezekiel 36:27 that practical holiness and obedience is the scope and design of that infusion of the Spirit. The very innate property of the Spirit of God in men is to elevate their minds, set their affections upon heavenly things, purge their hearts from earthly dross, and fit them for a life of holiness and obedience. Its nature also is *assimilating* and changeth them in whom it is into the same image with Jesus Christ, their Heavenly Head (2 Cor. 3:18).

Fourth, the necessity of this imitation of Christ may be argued from the design and end of Christ’s exhibition to the world in a body of flesh. For though we detest that doctrine of the Socinians. which makes the exemplary life of Christ to be the whole end of His incarnation, yet we must not run so far from an error as to lose a precious truth. We say, the satisfaction of His blood was a main and principal end of His incarnation, according to Matthew 20:28. We affirm also, that it was a great design and end of the incarnation of Christ to set before us a pattern of holiness for our imitation, for so speaks the apostle: He “hath left us an example, that we should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21); and this example of Christ greatly obliges believers to His imitation: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ

Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

Fifthly, our imitation of Christ is one of those great articles which every man is to subscribe, whom Christ will admit into the number of His disciples. “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27): and again “If any man serve me, let him follow me” (John 12:26). To this condition we have submitted, if we be sincere believers; and therefore are strictly bound to the imitation of Christ, not only by God’s *command*, but by our own *consent*. But if we profess interest in Christ, when our hearts never consented to follow, and imitate His example, then are we self-deceiving hypocrites, wholly disagreeing from the Scripture character of believers. They that are Christ’s are there described as walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Sixthly, *the honour of Christ* necessitates the conformity of Christians to His example, else what way is there left to stop detracting mouths, and to vindicate the name of Christ from the reproaches of the world? How can wisdom be justified of her children, except it be this way? By what means shall we cut off occasion from such as desire occasion, but by regulating our lives by Christ’s example. “The world hath eyes to see what we *practice*, as well as ears to hear what we *profess*. Therefore either show the consistency between your profession and practice, or you can never hope to vindicate the name and honour of the Lord Jesus” (John Flavel, Puritan).

From all that has now been before us we may draw the following inferences. First, if all who claim a saving interest in Christ are strictly bound to imitate Him, then it follows that Christianity is very unjustly charged by the world with the evils and scandals of empty professors. Nothing can be more unreasonable, for Christianity severely censures loose and scandalous actions in all professors, and therefore is not to be blamed for them. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly

in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12). Really, it is an argument greatly in favour of Christianity that even wicked men covet the name of it, though they only cloak their sins under it.

Second, if all professors forfeit their claim to a saving interest in Christ who endeavour not, sincerely and earnestly, to imitate Him in the holiness of His life, then how small a number of real Christians are there in the world! If flowery talking without strict walking, if common profession without holy practice, if Church membership without denying self and treading the narrow way, were sufficient to constitute a Christian, then a considerable percentage of earth’s population would be entitled to that name. But if Christ owns none but those who follow the example that He left, then His flock is indeed a little one. The vast majority of those who claim to be Christians have a name to live, but are dead (Rom. 6:13). The demands of Christ are too rigid for them. They prefer the broad road where the majority are found.

Third, what blessed times we should witness if true Christianity once generally obtained and prevailed in the world! How it would humble the proud, mellow the self-willed, and spiritualize those who are carnal. A perverse world has often charged Christianity with being the cause of all the tumult in it; whereas nothing but pure Christianity, in the power of it, can cure those epidemics of evil. If the great majority of our fellows were regenerated by the Spirit and brought to walk after Christ in holiness, living in meekness and self-denial, then our prisons would be closed, armies and navies done away with, jealousies and animosities be removed, and the wilderness and solitary places be glad. The desert would rejoice and blossom as the rose. That is what constitutes the great difference between heaven and a world that lieth in the wicked one. Holiness is the very atmosphere of the former, whereas it is hated and banned here.

Fourth, it also follows that real Christians are the best companions. It is a blessed thing to fellowship with those who genuinely seek to follow the example of Christ. The holiness, heavenly mindedness, and spiritual graces which were in Him

are, in their measure, to be found in all of His true disciples. They show the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into light. Something of the fruit of the Spirit is to be seen in all those whom He indwells. Yet it must be remembered there is a great deal of difference between one Christian and another, that the best is sanctified only in part. If there is something engaging and sweet, there is also that which is distasteful and bitter in the most mature saints. This is what gives us occasion to forbear one another in love. Nevertheless, notwithstanding all infirmities and corruptions, the Lord's people are the best companions on this earth. Happy are they who now enjoy fellowship with those in whom can be discerned the likeness of Christ.

Fifth, if no man's claim to being Christ's is warranted except so far as he is walking according to Him, then how groundless and worthless are the expectations of all unsanctified persons, who walk after their own lusts.

"None are more forward to claim the privileges of religion than those that reject the duties of it; multitudes hope to be saved by Christ, who yet refuse to be governed by Him. But such hopes have no Scripture warrant to support them; yea, they have many Scripture testimonies against them. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9). O how many thousand vain hopes are laid in the dust, and how many thousand souls are sentenced to Hell by this one Scripture!" (John Flavel, 1660).

Then how it behoves those of us who profess to be Christians to "be not conformed to this world," but to be "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:2). How we should strive to follow Christ's steps. That should be the great business of our lives, as it is the chief scope of the Gospel. If Christ has conformed Himself to us by taking upon Him our nature, how reasonable it is that we should conform ourselves to Him in a

way of obedience. He came under the Law for our sakes (Gal. 4:4), the least we can do in return is to gladly take His yoke upon us. It was Christ's abasement to conform Himself to those who were infinitely beneath Him; it will be our advancement to conform ourselves to Him who is so high above us. Surely the love of Christ must constrain us to spare no efforts to "grow up into him in all things" (Eph. 4:15).

If we will be conformed to Him in glory, how logical it is that we should now conform ourselves to Him in holiness. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2), like Him not only in our souls, but also our bodies too will be transformed like unto His (Phil. 3:21). What a motive this is to bring us into conformity with Christ here, especially since our conformity to Him in holiness is the evidence of our conformity to Him in glory (Rom. 6:5). The conformity of our lives to Christ is our highest excellence in this world, for the measure of our grace is to be estimated by this rule. So far as we imitate Christ, and no farther, are we of any real help to those around us; contrariwise, the less we be conformed to Christ, the greater hindrances and stumbling blocks we are both to the saved and unsaved. What a solemn consideration this is! How it should drive us to our knees, seeking grace to be closer followers of Christ.

"That ye should walk worthy of God, who hath called you into his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12). By "worthiness" the apostle had no reference to what is meritorious, but to that decorum which befits a Christian. As Davenant pointed out, "The word 'worthy' as used in Scripture does not always denote an exact proportion of equality between one thing and another, but a certain suitableness and fitness which excludes inconsistency." To walk worthy of God is to walk as Christ walked, and any deviation from that standard is a reflection on our profession and a reproach upon Him. It is for our own peace that we be conformed to Christ's pattern. The answer of a good conscience and the smile of God's approbation are rich compensation for denying the flesh. A comfortable death is the

ordinary close of a holy life. “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Psa. 37:37).

In drawing to a conclusion let us consider a few lines of comfort to those who are cast down by the realization of how far short they come of measuring up to the standard Christ set before them. According to the yearnings of the new nature, you have sincerely endeavoured to follow Christ’s example. But being weak in grace and meeting with much opposition from the flesh and temptations from the devil, you have been frequently turned aside from the holy purposes of your honest hearts, to the great discouragement of your souls. You can say with David, “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” (Psa. 119:5): you have tried hard to follow after holiness, “If by any means” you might attain it. But your efforts have been repeatedly thwarted, your aspirations dashed, and you have to cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?” (Rom. 7:24).

First, let us assure the genuinely exercised soul that such defects in obedience do not invalidate your justification, or affect your acceptance with and standing before God. Your justification is built not upon your obedience, but upon Christ’s. However imperfect you are, you are “complete in him” (Col. 2:10). Woe to Abraham, Moses, David, or Paul if their justification depended upon their own holiness and good works. Let not your sad failures dampen your joy in Christ, but rather be increasingly thankful for His robe of righteousness. Second, your heart anguish over your unlikeness to Christ, instead of being a proof that you are less sanctified than those who do not grieve over their lack of conformity to Him, evidences that you are more sanctified than they; for it shows you are better acquainted with your heart than they are, have a deep loathing of sin, and love God more. The most distinguished saints have made the bitterest lamentation on this account (Psa. 38:4).

Third, the Holy Spirit makes an excellent use of your infirmities and turns your failures into spiritual advantages. By those very defects He hides pride from your eyes, subdues your

self-righteousness, causes you to appreciate more deeply the riches of free grace and place a higher value on the blood of the Lamb. By your many falls He makes you to long more ardently for heaven, and gradually reconciles you to the prospect of death. The more a holy soul is buffeted by sin and Satan, the more sincerely he will cry, “O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest” (Psa. 55:6). “O the blessed chemistry of Heaven, to extract such mercies out of such miseries” (John Flavel), to make sweet flowers spring up out of such bitter roots. Fourth, your infirmities do not break the bond of the everlasting covenant, that holds firm, notwithstanding your many defects and corruptions. “Iniquities prevail against me” said David, yet in the same breath he added, “thou shalt purge them away” (Psa. 65:3).

Fifth, though the defects of your obedience are grievous to God, yet your deep sorrows for them are well pleasing in His sight. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:17). Sixth, your grief is a conformity to Christ, for He was “the Man of sorrows.” If He suffered because of our sins, shall we not be made to weep over them. Seventh, “Though God have left many defects to humble you, yet He hath given many things to comfort. This is a comfort, that the desire of thy soul is to God and the remembrance of His name. This is a comfort, that thy sins are not thy delight as once they were, but thy shame and sorrow. This is a comfort, that thy case is not singular, but more or less the *same* complaints and sorrows are found in *all* gracious souls through the world” (John Flavel, to whom we are indebted for much of the above).

The seventh of seven booklets.

