

# Sermons of John Newton

Based on Scripture Passages  
Used in Handel's 'Messiah' Part 2

## Booklet Thirteen



29. Gifts Received for the Rebellious - Psalm 68:18  
30. The Publication of the Gospel - Psalm 68:11

## Sermons of John Newton

### Booklet Thirteen

#### 29. Gifts Received for the Rebellious and 30. The Publication of the Gospel

#### 29. Gifts Received for the Rebellious

*“Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them” Psalm 68:18.*

When Joseph exchanged a prison for the chief honour and government of Egypt, the advantage of his exaltation was felt by those who little deserved it (Genesis 45:4, 5). His brethren hated him, and had conspired to kill him. And though he was preserved from death, they were permitted to sell him for a bond-servant. He owed his servitude, imprisonment and sufferings to them; and they were afterwards indebted to him for their lives, subsistence, honour and comfort; God in a wonderful manner overruling their evil conduct, for future good to themselves. Thus Jesus was despised, rejected and sold; and He was actually slain. But He arose, and ascended. The man of sorrows took possession of the throne of glory, and not for Himself only. His honour is the source of happiness to those who were once His enemies, and rebellious against Him. For the sake of such He lived and died.

For their sakes He lives and reigns. He fought, conquered, and triumphed over their enemies. As their representative, He received gifts to bestow upon them. Such gifts as their necessities required, derived from the relation He was pleased to stand in to them, and from the value and dignity of His engagements on their behalf. Such gifts as He alone could communicate, and which alone could restore them to the favour of God, and revive His image in their hearts; so as to make it suitable to His holiness and truth, for the Lord God to return to His polluted temples, and to dwell in them, and among them.

I formerly observed [booklet 11 sermon 26 second paragraph] that this Psalm, and the twenty fourth, were probably composed and first published on the memorable occasion when David, having obtained the victory over his numerous enemies, and settled his

kingdom in peace, removed the ark, which till then had no fixed residence, into Zion.

The Apostle's application of this passage (Ephesians 4:8) authorizes us to consider that transaction as typical of our Lord's ascension. Jesus is the true ark. The holy law of God was in His heart; His obedience unto death was fully commensurate to the demands of the law (Romans 3:25); as the mercy seat, or propitiation, which covered the ark, was exactly equal to its dimensions. He who had thus obeyed on earth, ascended on high; the everlasting gates unfolded, and He "entered the holy place not made with hands, there to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). In this state He is highly exalted upon a throne of glory, and administers all power in heaven and in earth. From hence is the honour, safety, and happiness of those who believe in Him. They have nothing to plead for themselves. But, unworthy as they are, He is not ashamed to own them; and He assures them that all He did, and that all He has received, so far as they are capable of sharing in it, is for them.

The clauses, as they lie in the text, suggest a convenient method for our meditation, and will lead me briefly to consider four points:

1. His ascension;
2. His victories;
3. The gifts He received for men;
4. And the great end for which He bestows them.

1. "Thou hast ascended on high." God formed man originally for Himself, and gave him an answerable capacity, so that no inferior good can satisfy and fill his mind. Man was likewise, by the constitution and will of his Maker, immortal, provided he persevered in obedience. But sin degraded and ruined him, shut the gates of Paradise, and the gates of Heaven against him. Man destroyed himself; but wisdom and mercy interposed for his recovery. A promise was given of the seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head, defeat his policy, destroy his power, and repair the mischiefs he had introduced by sin. MESSIAH fulfilled this promise. And when He had finished all that was appointed for Him on earth, as the second Adam, the Head and Representative of His people, He ascended on high, and opened the

Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. As an illustrious proof to the universe, that God is reconciled: that there is forgiveness with Him for sinners who implore His mercy: one in our nature, and in our behalf, has taken possession of the Kingdom.

The series of texts in this part of the Oratorio recalls this subject frequently to our thoughts; nor can we think of it too often. It is the foundation of our hopes, the source of our most sublime joys, and the sufficient, the only sufficient answer to all the suggestions by which guilt, fear, unbelief and Satan, fight against our peace. Surrounded as we are with enemies and difficulties, we plead against every accusation and threatening, that our Head is in heaven; we have an Advocate with the Father, a High Priest upon the Throne, who, because He ever lives to make intercession, is able to save to the uttermost. This is all our plea, nor do we desire any other. His ascension on high, is a sure pledge that His servants shall follow Him (John 12:26). And even at present, by faith they ascend and are seated with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). They behold invisibles with the eye of their mind; they realize the glorious scene, from which they are separated by the veil of flesh and blood. They know that, even now, day and night, day without night, myriads of golden harps and happy voices resound His praise. The Babe of Bethlehem, the Man who once hung dead and forsaken upon the cross, is now the Lord of glory. In the thought of His glory they greatly rejoice, because they love Him, and because they expect shortly to be with Him.

2. “Thou hast lead captivity captive.” The expression is emphatic. He has conquered and triumphed over all the powers which held us in captivity, so that captivity itself is taken captive. The spirit and force of it is destroyed, and His people, when released by Him, and walking in His ways, have no more to apprehend from those whose captives they were, than a conqueror has to fear from a prisoner in chains. The energy of the phrase is not unlike that of the Apostle which we are hereafter to consider—“death is swallowed up in victory” (booklet 18). Man by nature is a captive, in a state of confinement and bondage, from which he cannot escape by any address or effort of his own.

He is captive to sin; a sinful state is a state of bondage; and this,

notwithstanding the sinner is a willing captive, speaks swelling words of vanity, and boasts of liberty while he is the servant, the slave of corruption. He is not always, and in every sense, a willing captive. Conscience sometimes remonstrates, fills him with fears and forebodings, which make him struggle to be free. And there are many sins, which, besides being offences against the law of God, are directly contrary to the sinner's present interest and welfare; and would be so upon his own plan, and if he was wholly his own master, and had no account to render of his conduct. Persons enslaved to habits of lewdness or drunkenness, need not be told from the pulpit, that the courses they pursue are injurious to their health, their business, or substance, their reputation and their peace. They know it and feel it, without a monitor. There are seasons, when the ill consequences they bring upon themselves, make them sick of the drudgery, and excite some effort towards a reform. But in vain. The next return of temptation, bears down all their resolutions like a torrent, and, after every attempt to amend, they usually become worse than before. For none can escape, unless the Son makes them free. His grace can overcome the most obstinate habits of licentiousness, and implant the contrary habits of purity and temperance. But they, who are not delivered by Him, must die in their chains.

3. "Thou hast received gifts, even for the rebellious." To bestow gifts upon the miserable, is bounty; but to bestow them upon rebels, is grace. The greatness of the gifts contrasted with the characters of those who receive them, displays the exceeding riches of the Redeemer's grace. He came to save not the unhappy only, but the ungodly. He gives pardon, peace, and eternal life to His enemies; whose minds are so entirely alienated from Him, that unless He makes them willing, in the day of His power, their minds are determined against accepting any favour from Him. They live long in contempt of the law and authority of God; and though justly obnoxious to His displeasure, while left to themselves, they despise and reject the proposals of His mercy. If they sometimes acknowledge themselves to be sinners, they still presume that they are able to procure His favour by their own performances. They strangely imagine they have a sufficient ground of hope, so long as

it appears to themselves that they are not altogether so bad as others. And when, by the Gospel, the Lord treats them as sinners already justly condemned by the tenor of His holy laws, and informs them of the exigency of their case; that nothing less than the resources of His infinite wisdom, and the most expensive exertion of His unspeakable love, can possibly save them from destruction; the pride of their hearts rises against His declarations. His wisdom, in their view, is folly; and His love provokes their enmity and scorn. He says of MESSIAH, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him;" but the language of their hearts is, "we will not have Him to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). They revile and oppose the messengers of His grace, account them as enemies, charge them as troublers of their peace, and as those who turn the world upside down: and when not restrained by the Providence of God, inflict reproaches, stripes, imprisonments, tortures, and death upon them, besides. If their dearest friends, and those who are connected with them by the nearest ties of relation, submit to the testimony of God, and yield themselves to the appointed Saviour, they are treated as apostates from the general opinion. This defection from the common cause, is often sufficient to cancel the strongest obligations, to dissolve the closest intimacy, to raise a persons foes in his own household, and to excite envy, hatred, and malice, in those who once professed esteem and love.

Can the spirit of rebellion rise higher, than when they who have insulted the authority, defied the power, and resisted the government and will of the great God, proceed at length to trample upon His tenders [offers] of reconciliation, and to affront Him in that concern, which of all others, is dearest to Him, the glory of His grace in the person of His Son? Yet this is no exaggerated representation. Such is the disposition of the heart of man towards God. Such were some of us. And such, I fear, some of us are to this hour. I do not say that this enmity of the carnal mind acts with equal rage and violence in every person who is not subject to the grace of God. In a land of light, liberty, and civilization, like ours, a variety of circumstances may concur to set bounds to its exercise; education, a natural gentleness of temper, and even interest, may keep it within limits of decorum, especially towards some individuals; but I affirm, or rather the Scripture declares, that

enmity against God, a disaffection to His Gospel, no less than to His law, and a dislike to those who profess and obey the truth, are principles deeply rooted in our nature, as fallen: and however they may seem dormant in some persons, for a season, would operate vigorously, if circumstances were so to alter, as to afford a fair occasion. For, as of old, “he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit,” (Galatians 4:29) even so it is now. And it is still true, as in the Apostle’s days, that “all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall,” in one degree or form or another, “suffer persecution,” from those who will not (2 Timothy 3:12).

Thus men are characterized in the Word of God. Rebels and enemies have “a neck of iron,” to denote their obstinacy; “a brow of brass” (Isaiah 48:4), to express their insolence and presumption; and “a heart of stone” (Ezekiel 36:26), insensible to the softest methods of persuasion; incapable of receiving tender, kind, and generous impressions, though they are wooed and besought by the consideration of the mercies of God, of the dying agonies of MESSIAH; unless that mighty power be displayed in their favour, which brought forth streams of water from the rock in the wilderness.

MESSIAH died, arose, and ascended on high, that He might receive gifts for rebels of this spirit and disposition. The one grandest gift I shall specify, is, indeed, comprehensive of every other good. The gift of the Holy Spirit. He said to His sorrowing disciples, “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7). Soon after His ascension, this promise was fulfilled. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4-37), and the people who had slain the Lord, were pricked to the heart, repented of their sin, received faith in Him whom they had pierced, and expressed joy and peace in believing.

That the Gospel is preached upon earth, by a succession of ministers, called and furnished for that service; and that the Gospel, when preached, is not rejected by all, as it is by many, is wholly to be ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit, whose office and covenant engagement it is, to convince “the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8), and to glorify MESSIAH. He opens the eyes of the understanding, subdues the

stubborn will, softens, or rather, removes, the heart of stone, and gives a feeling, tender heart, a heart of flesh. Then the rebels relent and sue for mercy. Then they obtain faith, repentance, remission, a full and free salvation, and all the gifts which MESSIAH has received for them.

4. His ultimate design, in favour of rebellious men, the great final cause of His mediation, and particularly of His bestowing on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, is, “that the Lord God may dwell among them.” Man was created in the image of God, who formed him for Himself. But he sinned, and was forsaken. God withdrew His light and love from him, and man sank into darkness and misery. Sin and Satan took possession of the heart, which was originally designed to be the temple of the living God. But the Lord had a merciful purpose, to return in a way worthy of His perfections. Without Him, the souls of men, and the whole human race, as to their proper happiness, are like what the earth would be without the sun—dark, cold, fruitless, and comfortless. But the knowledge of MESSIAH, like the sun, enlightens the world, and the heart.

When in the day of His power, by the revelation of His light and love, He destroys the dominion of sin, and dispossesses Satan, He reclaims His own, and takes possession for Himself. The heart, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, and anointed with the holy unction, becomes a consecrated temple of the Holy Ghost. This persuasion, though now deemed by many to be the essence of enthusiasm [fanaticism], (yet who have not renounced the name of Christian), was once thought essential to Christianity; so that the Apostle speaks of it as an incontrovertible fact, with which no Christian could be unacquainted. “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Again, he speaks of Christ dwelling in the heart (Ephesians 3:17) “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). And in another place, “Ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them” (2 Corinthians 6:16); agreeably to His promise by the prophets. He lives in them, as the principle of their life, wisdom, and power; therefore the Apostle says, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). There is a mutual indwelling between the Lord and His people. They in Him as the



branch in the vine; and He in them as the sap in the branch. He in them as in His temples; they in Him as in their strong tower of defence. And from hence we infer the duration of their life of grace; that it shall continue and spring up into everlasting life; since it is properly not their own, but His; and since He has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

He dwells likewise among His people in their collective capacity. His whole Church, comprising all the members of His mystical Body, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," form a building fitly framed together, a palace, a holy temple for the Lord the great King. He dwells likewise in every particular society who walk by His rule, and adorn the profession of His truth by a conversation becoming the Gospel. He is "a wall of fire round about" them, and a "glory in the midst of them" (Zechariah 2:5, 10). When they meet together in His name, He is there. He walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks. It is His presence that gives life and efficacy to all His ordinances, and communicates a power to His Word, by which the minds of His worshipping people are enlightened, strengthened, healed, and comforted. Here He manifests Himself to them, as He does not to the world; and they can adopt the words of the Psalmist, "A day in Thy courts, is better than a thousand." To His presence they owe their peace and increase, their union and protection. And if He withdraws, Ichabod [the glory is departed] may be written upon their solemn assemblies (1 Samuel 4:21); for even His own appointments can afford them neither profit nor pleasure, unless they are animated by His glory. Their graces languish, their harmony is interrupted, strife and dissension takes place, evil roots of bitterness spring up to trouble and defile them (Hebrews 12:15); "men arise" from among themselves, "speaking perverse things, and fierce wolves break in, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29, 30), if the good Shepherd suspends His influence and presence.

I trust He dwells and walks in the midst of us. He is here as an observer, and as a gracious benefactor. He sees who "draw near Him with their lips, while their hearts are far from Him;" and He likewise takes notice of them that fear and love Him, and who esteem the light of His countenance to be better than life. "The high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, who dwells in the high and

holy place, dwells likewise with those that are of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isaiah 57:15), to revive and bless them.

### **30. The Publication of the Gospel**

***“The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” [or of the preachers] Psalm 68:11.***

Perhaps no one Psalm has given greater exercise to the skill and patience of commentators and critics, than the sixty eighth. I suppose the difficulties do not properly belong to the Psalm, but arise from our ignorance of various circumstances to which the Psalmist alludes; which probably were, at that time, generally known and understood. The first verse is the same with the stated form of benediction which was used whenever the ark of the Lord set forward while Israel sojourned in the wilderness (Numbers 10:35); which confirms the prevailing opinion, that the Psalm was primarily designed by David as an act of thanksgiving, to accompany the removal of the ark to Zion. The seventh and eighth verses are repeated, with little variation, from the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:4, 5). The leading scope of the whole appears to be: first, a recapitulation of God’s gracious dealing with Israel, and of the great things He had done for them, from the time He delivered them from their bondage in Egypt; and then, a transition, in the spirit of prophecy, to the far greater things He would do for His people under and by the Gospel dispensation [order], in consequence of MESSIAH’S exaltation to receive gifts for rebellious men. This verse, though the particular occasion is not specified, probably refers to some season of deliverance or victory, when the women, according to the custom of the nation, assembled to praise the Lord with timbrels, songs and dances (Exodus 15). The songs and responses of Miriam and her companions, and of the women who welcomed Saul and David after the defeat of the Philistine (1 Samuel 18:6, 7), I have formerly mentioned as instances (Volume 1, Chapter 6, second paragraph). The word which is rendered, Those who published or preached, being expressed with a feminine termination, leads the mind to this sense. But we are not necessarily confined to it; for the word rendered “preacher” in the book of Ecclesiastes, is likewise in the feminine form, though we are sure the person intended by it was Solomon.

However, this passage is properly introduced in The Messiah Oratorio, and in its proper place, immediately after the view given of our Saviour's triumphant ascension, as it leads us to consider the first visible effect of that great event: for soon afterwards, "when the day of Pentecost was fully come," the Lord gave the word (Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit, the precious gift which Jesus had received for rebellious men, descended with visible emblems, and a powerful energy, and inspired and qualified His disciples for the great work of establishing and spreading His spiritual kingdom. From that hour, great was the number of preachers, and great was the success and efficacy of their mission. So that within a few years the Gospel had spread like the light, from Jerusalem, through all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And He who said, "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20), has, by the same Spirit, perpetuated His Word and a succession of preachers, to our time; and has promised to perpetuate and work by the same means, till time shall be no more.

My text therefore, if not a direct prophecy of the publication of the Gospel, is at least a fit motto to discourse on this very important subject. We may consider it in two senses, which, though something different, are equally agreeable to the words before us, and to the general tenor of Scripture.

1. That the message is the Lord's. He gave the word, and prescribed to His servants the subject matter of their preaching.

2. That the messengers employed, are called and sent forth by Him. The Lord gave the word, or command; in consequence of which word, the number of preachers was great, as when in the beginning He said, "Let there be light, and there was light."

1. The Lord gave the word which the multitude of preachers went forth to publish. His merciful design was great, to deliver sinners from bondage, misery and death; and to bless them with liberty, life and peace. But they are by nature rebellious and obstinate, and must be made willing. He only can subdue their prejudices, and soften their spirits; and He has promised to display His power in their favour, by a certain mean [medium; method] of His own appointment, and we cannot expect that He will do it in any other way. This mean [medium; method] is the Gospel, which, for its

admirable suitableness and efficacy, is commended to us as “His wisdom and power” (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24). He has given it for this purpose, and His blessing makes it successful. He has said concerning it, “As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10, 11). It has been confirmed by the experience of ages, that no mean [medium; method] but His, can produce the desirable effect. It is confirmed, by observation, in the present day. If the wisdom of man, if learning, if oratory, if animated descriptions of the beauty of virtue, and pathetic persuasions to the practice of it could reform, we should be a reformed people. But alas, this is only to oppose a mound of sand to the violence of a flood. Notwithstanding many ingenious sermons and treatises upon this plan, are admired and praised, wickedness prevails and triumphs. They have little influence upon the conduct of civil life; and, I may boldly say, no influence to inspire the heart with the love and peace of God, and to bring it into a habit of subjection to His will and command. Nothing will do this but the Gospel, the word which the Lord has given. This alone shows the evil of sin in its true light, affords a solid ground for the hope of mercy, and furnishes those motives which alone are sufficient to break the force of the temptations and difficulties with which we have to conflict. When this Word is simply and cordially [sincerely] received, an immediate and wonderful change takes place. The sinner abandons his false hopes and vain pursuits, is freed from his former slavery to the love of the world and the fear of man, and becomes the willing servant of Him who redeemed him with His own blood.

But we are sometimes asked, What do we understand by the Gospel? The use of the term in a restrained sense, so as to imply there are but comparatively few who preach it, is deemed invidious and assuming; and it is supposed by many that a sermon, if delivered from a pulpit and if the text be taken from the Bible, must of course be the Gospel. It is undeniable, however, that there are a variety of different and opposite sentiments delivered from pulpits;

and surely the Gospel cannot be opposite, contrary, yea contradictory to itself! It is a mournful consideration that multitudes of people are not qualified to judge of this point. Not properly for want of ability, for many of them are persons of good sense and discernment, and can judge and talk well upon other subjects; but for want of attention. Their application is engrossed by the demands of business or pleasure, and they have neither leisure nor taste for a careful perusal of the Scriptures, nor for the examination of religious sentiments. If the language and elocution of the preacher be good, and if there be no close and painful address to the conscience, they are satisfied. The Apostle Paul undoubtedly preached the Gospel; and he tells us himself that he preached Christ crucified; he preached Christ as appointed of God, “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). He preached the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14)—he gloried in it, and he determined to glory in nothing else. It treats all mankind as already in a state of condemnation; it declares their utter inability to save or help themselves; and it gives assurance of pardon and salvation to all who believe in the Son of God. That they may be encouraged and enabled to believe, it describes the dignity of His person, the necessity and greatness of His sufferings, the completeness of His atonement, the prevalence of His intercession—His love, authority, power and faithfulness. These truths revealed and applied to a guilty conscience, by the power of the Holy Spirit, produce faith. The sinner perceives the sufficiency and excellency of such a Saviour, commits himself to His compassion and care, and renounces every other hope and service. He looks to the Saviour by the eye of his mind, with desire and admiration, and derives life from His death, healing from His wounds, as the Israelites, when wounded, were healed by looking upon the brazen serpent. And not only is the conscience relieved by this knowledge of Christ crucified—the understanding is likewise enlightened, the judgment is formed, the affections regulated and directed by it. Then old things pass away, all becomes new. The love of sin departs, and the future life is devoted to Him, who therefore “died and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living” (Romans 14:9).

There is likewise a certain energy or power which accompanies

the Gospel when it is truly preached, which sufficiently characterizes and distinguishes it from all other religious schemes and systems. Our Lord, during His personal ministry, frequently gave proofs that He knew the heart of man. When Zacchaeus thought himself unknown and unseen, He called him by his name (Luke 19:5). He reminded Nathanael of what had passed in secret under the fig tree (John 1:48); and by a few words, brought to the remembrance of the woman of Samaria all that she had done in her life (John 4:29). A similar effect accompanies the preaching of His Gospel to this day. The Gospel is preached, when they who are present find the secrets of their hearts are made manifest; when the preacher, who perhaps never saw them before, reminds them of what they have done, or said, or thought, possibly of things transacted long ago, and almost forgotten by themselves; and likewise describes the very feelings of their hearts while He is speaking to them. It is usually in this way that conviction of sin first takes place; and in this way, that a convinced burdened sinner meets with seasonable support and direction, so exactly suited to his case, that he almost thinks the preacher is speaking to none but himself. No preachers but those who speak in conformity to the word which the Lord gave, have this power over the heart and conscience.

2. It is owing to the word, the appointment and power of God, that any persons are induced or enabled to preach this Gospel. Men may, indeed, assume the office of a preacher upon other grounds; there are too many who do. But though they speak in the name of the Lord, and as His ministers, if He has not sent them, they cannot declare His message in such a manner as to make full proof of their ministry (2 Timothy 4:5). They may profit themselves, according to their low views, and may obtain such honours and emoluments as the world can give; but they have not the honour which cometh from God only. They are not wise to win souls (Proverbs 11:30). They have no testimony in the consciences of their hearers. Occasionally they may deliver truths which are valuable and useful in their proper places, but for want of knowing how to connect them with what the Apostle styles, “the truth as it is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21), they are unable either to break the hard heart, or to heal the wounded spirit. The thoughtless are not alarmed, nor the ignorant

instructed. The wicked go on in their evil ways –

The hungry sheep look up, but are not fed.

Nay, we see in fact, though a few persons may still be found, who place their religion in a dull, unmeaning attendance upon the form of public worship, upon any form in which it was their lot to be educated; yet, in many places, the bulk of the people, by their contempt of the Lord's day, and by their customary manner of absenting themselves from their appointed teachers, give sufficient proof that they have neither found, nor expect to find, so much benefit or pleasure, as to make them think it worth their while to attend.

From the following considerations it will appear to competent judges, that faithful preachers are called and prepared for their office by the Lord, the Head of the Church, and not by human institutions:

(1). That the Gospel cannot be rightly understood but by [except by] divine teaching. The natural man, however distinguished by abilities or literature, cannot "receive the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14); nay, he cannot discern them. He may, indeed, know something of the Gospel system, considered as a matter of science; he may know how to defend the outworks of Christianity, and be master of the external evidences for its truth; and he may espouse orthodox opinions, and be a successful champion in the field of controversy. But the inward power and life, that which constitutes the essential difference of true religion, is no less remote from his apprehension, than the idea of light is from a person born blind. This he can only learn by experience. The first lesson received and learned by those who are taught of God, is a conviction of guilt, ignorance and misery—and then they begin to learn the importance, necessity, and design of the Gospel. The man who is thus instructed, if the Lord be pleased to call him to the office of teaching others, will in due time proceed to deliver to the people, what he has himself learned; not with hesitation, uncertainty or indifference, not what he has acquired by hearsay or from books, "but he has the witness in himself" (1 John 5:10). His heart teaches his mouth (Proverbs 16:23). He believes, therefore he speaks. He simply and freely declares that which he himself has known and

seen, and tasted of the word of life. And speaking from the fullness of his heart, with an earnestness inspired by the greatness and importance of his subject, he speaks to the heart and feelings of his hearers, and impresses a manifestation of the truth upon their minds.

(2). That the desire of preaching this Gospel when known, if it be a right desire, must likewise be given. If a man should attempt the service, without counting the cost, or considering the consequences, he will most probably be disgusted and wearied. And if, beforehand, he seriously and properly considers what he is about to engage in, and has a due sense of his own weakness, he will tremble at the prospect, and direct his thoughts to some other employment, unless his call and support be from on high. What courage, wisdom, meekness, and zeal appear requisite, in the view of such an enquirer, to qualify a man for preaching, and continuing to preach, a doctrine so displeasing to the world, as the doctrine of the cross has in all ages proved! What opposition, snares and difficulties, “what fightings from without, what fears within,” may be expected! Surely, he will be ready to shrink back, and to say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” But the Lord, by the constraining sense of His love, and by giving a deep impression of the worth of souls, and by exciting in the mind a dependence upon His all-sufficiency, can and does encourage those whom He calls and chooses to serve Him in the Gospel. In themselves they are quite unequal to what is before them, but they obey His voice; they trust in His promises for guidance and protection, and are not disappointed. We are therefore directed to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send, or rather (according to the force of the Greek word), thrust forth labourers into His harvest (Matthew 9:38)

(3). That only He who sends forth His ministers can enable them to persevere. It is a service of continual exertion and expense, and requires a continual supply. The opposition of the world, and the power of temptation, acting upon the weakness and depravity of the heart, would quickly prevail against the best ministers, if they were left to carry on the warfare at their own charges. They are at times, yea frequently, in situations and circumstances, which teach them feelingly the meaning of the Apostle’s words, “We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8). Besides the trials incidental to the



Christian profession, which they are exposed to in common with others, they have many which are peculiar to their calling as preachers of the Gospel. Their chief pre-eminence over Christians in private life, is a painful one; they have the honour of bearing a double share of the heat and burden of the day, and of standing in the foremost ranks of the battle, to provoke and receive the fiercest assaults of the enemy. Their only resource and hope is in the faithfulness and compassion of their Lord, under whose banner and eye they fight, and who has said, "Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

(4). That the Lord only can give success to their endeavours. "Paul may plant, and Apollos may water," but there is no increase unless He affords a blessing (1 Corinthians 3:6). It is at least a presumptive proof, that He has called a man to preach, if He owns his labours, since He has not promised to own any but those whom He sends.

We must however allow, and observe, that to preach salvation to others, and even to be instrumental in saving souls, will not absolutely prove that the preacher is in a state of salvation himself: we hope it is generally so; but there are exceptions and instances which should awaken our circumspection, and keep us constantly looking to the Lord in a spirit of humility and dependence. There was a Judas among the Apostles; and we are assured that at the last day, some, yea many, will plead having done great things in the name of Christ, whom He will notwithstanding disown as workers of iniquity (Matthew 7:22, 23). Even the Apostle Paul was impressed by this thought, and he has recorded the improvement he made of it for our instruction. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The thirteenth of twenty booklets.

