

Christ the Example of Ministers

A Sermon by Jonathan Edwards

John xiii. 15, 16. *For I have given you an example, that he should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you. The servant is not greater than his lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.*

We have in the context an account of one of the many very remarkable things that passed that night wherein Christ was betrayed, (which was on many accounts the most remarkable night that ever was,) viz. Christ's washing his disciples' feet; which action, as it was exceeding wonderful in itself, so it manifestly was symbolical, and represented something else far more important and more wonderful, even that greatest and most wonderful of all things that ever came to pass, which was accomplished the next day in his last sufferings. There were three symbolical representations given of that great event this evening; one in the Passover, which Christ now partook of with his disciples; another in the Lord's Supper, which he instituted at this time; and another in this remarkable action of his washing his disciples' feet. Washing the feet of guests was the office of servants, and one of their meanest offices: and therefore was fitly chosen by our Saviour to represent that great abasement which he was to be the subject of in the form of a servant, in becoming obedient unto death, even that ignominious and accursed death of the cross, that he might cleanse the souls of his disciples from their guilt and spiritual pollution.

This spiritual washing and cleansing of believers was the end for which Christ so abased himself for them. Tit. ii. 14. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people." Eph. v. 25, 26. "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water." That Christ's washing his disciples' feet signified this spiritual washing of the soul, is manifest by his own words in the 8th verse. Of the context. "Peter saith unto him, Thou shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him. If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Christ, in being obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, not only did the part of a servant unto God, but in some respects also of a servant unto us.

And this is not the only place where his so abasing himself for our sakes is compared to the doing of the part of a servant to guests. We have the like representation made in Luke xxii. 27. "For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth." And wherein Christ was among the disciples as he that did serve, is explained in Matt. xx. 28. namely, in *his giving his life a ransom for them*.

When Christ had finished washing his disciples feet, he solemnly requires their attention to what he had done, and commands them to follow his example therein. verses 12-17. "So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet: for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

When our Saviour calls on his disciples to imitate the example he had given them in what he had done, we are to understand him, not merely by the example he gave in the emblematical action, in washing his disciples' feet, in itself considered; but more especially, of that much greater act of his that was signified by it, in abasing himself so low, and suffering so much, for the spiritual cleansing and salvation of his people.

This is what is chiefly insisted on as the great example Christ has given us to follow: so it is once and again afterwards, in the discourse Christ had with his disciples, this same night, verse 34. of the chapter wherein is the text:" A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Chap. xv. 12, 13. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And so in 1 John iii. 16. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Christ, in the words of the text, does not only intend to recommend this example of his to the disciples as Christians, or some of his professing people, but especially as his ministers.

This is evident by those words he uses to enforce this counsel, “Neither he that is sent, is greater than he that sent him.” In which words he manifestly has respect to that great errand on which he had sent them, when he bid them *go and preach the gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*; Matt. x. 5, 6. and on which they were to be sent after his resurrection, when he said to them, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” The same errand that Christ has respect to John xx. 21. “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

And what confirms this is, that Christ elsewhere recommends to officers in his church, that are in that respect chief among his followers, the example which he set in his abasing himself to be as a servant that ministers to guests at a table, in his giving his life for us; Matt. xx. 27, 28. “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Compare Luke xxii. 25-23.

The work and business of ministers of the gospel is as it were that of servants, to wash and cleanse the souls of men: for this is done by the preaching of the word, which is their main business, Eph. v. 26. “That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”

The words of the text thus considered, do undoubtedly lead us to this conclusion, and teach us this doctrine, viz. That it is the duty of ministers of the gospel, in the work of their ministry, to follow the example of their great Lord and Master.

And this is what I would by divine assistance make the subject of my present discourse.

And I propose to handle this subject in the following method.

I. I would observe wherein ministers of the gospel ought to follow the example of Christ.

II. Give some reasons why they should follow his example.

III. I would endeavour to make a proper application of those things to myself, and others that are called to this work of the ministry.

IV. Show what improvement should be made of them by the people of this church and congregation.

I. Then, I would show wherein ministers of the gospel ought, by the work of their ministry, to follow the example of their great Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

And here,

1. In general, ministers should follow their Lord and Master in all those excellent virtues, and in that universal and eminent holiness of life, which he set an example of in this human nature.

The ministers of Christ should be persons of the same spirit that their Lord was of: the same spirit of humility and lowliness of heart; for the servant is not greater than his Lord. They should be of the same spirit of heavenly-mindedness, and contempt of the glory, wealth, and pleasures of this world: they should be of the same spirit of devotion and fervent love to God: they should follow the example of his prayerfulness; of whom we read from time to time of his retiring from the world, away from the noise and applauses of the multitudes, into mountains and solitary places, for secret prayer, and holy converse with his Father; and once of his rising up in the morning a great while before day, and going and departing into a solitary place to pray, Mark i. 35. and another time, of his going out into a mountain to pray, and continuing all night in prayer to God, Luke vi. 12.

Ministers should follow Christ's example, in his strict, constant, and inflexible observance of the commands which God had given him, touching what he should do and what he should say; he spoke nothing of himself, but those things which the Father had commanded him, those he spoke, and always did those things that pleased him, and continued in thorough obedience in the greatest trials, and through the greatest opposition that ever there was any instance of. Ministers should be persons of the same quiet, lamb-like spirit that Christ was of, the same spirit of submission to God's will, and patience under afflictions, and meekness towards men; of the same calmness and composure of spirit under reproaches and sufferings from the malignity of evil men; of the same spirit of forgiveness of injuries; of the same spirit of charity, of fervent love and extensive benevolence; the same disposition to pity the miserable, to weep with those that weep, to help men under their calamities of both soul and body, to hear and grant the requests of the needy, and relieve the afflicted; the same spirit of condescension to the poor and mean, tenderness and gentleness towards the weak, and great and effectual love to enemies. They should also be of the same spirit of zeal, diligence, and self-denial for the glory of God, and advancement of his kingdom, and

for the good of mankind; for which things' sake Christ went through the greatest labours, and endured the most extreme sufferings.

2. More particularly should ministers of the gospel follow the example of their great Master, in the manner in which they seek the salvation and happiness of the souls of men. They should follow his example of love to souls: though it be impossible that they should love them to so great a degree, yet they should have the same spirit of love to them, and concern for their salvation, according to their capacity. Love to men's souls in Christ was far above any regard he had to his temporal interest, his ease, his honour, his meat and drink; and so it should be with his ministers.

They should have the same spirit of compassion to men under their spiritual calamities and miseries that he had, of whom we read, Mark vi. 34. "That when he came out and saw much people, he was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things." The word translated *moved with compassion*, signifies, that he was most sensibly affected, and his inmost bowels moved with pity. And again we read, Luke xix. that when Christ was riding to Jerusalem, that wicked city, but a few days before his crucifixion, and was come to the descent of the Mount of Olives, where he had a fair view of the city, when he beheld it, he wept over it, on account of the misery and ruin they had brought themselves into danger of by their sin; although the sin by which especially they had made themselves thus miserable, was their vile treatment of him; (for Jerusalem was a city that had been peculiarly injurious to him and though Christ knew how cruelly he should be treated in that city before that week was past, how he there should be set at nought, and with great malignity bound, falsely accused and condemned, reviled, spit upon, scourged, and crucified: yet all does not prevent his most affectionate tears of compassion towards them. "When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saving, If thou hadst known, even thou, (thou, as wicked as thou art, and as vile as thou hast been in thy treatment of me; even thou,) the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes." (Compare Matt. xxiii. 37. and Luke xiii. 34.) One would have thought he would have been more concerned for himself than Jerusalem, who had such a dreadful cup to drink, and was to suffer such extreme things by the cruelty of Jerusalem that week. But he, as it were, forgets his own sorrow and death, and weeps over the misery of his cruel enemies.

Ministers should imitate their great Master in his fervent prayers for the good of the souls of men. We find it to be Christ's manner, whenever he undertook any thing of special importance in the work of his ministry, first to retire and pour out his soul in extraordinary prayer to his Father.

Thus when he was about to enter on a journey, and go a circuit throughout all Galilee, to preach in their synagogues, "he rose up a great while before day, and went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." Mark i. 35-39. And when he was about to choose his twelve apostles, and send them out to preach the gospel, he first *went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.* Luke vi. 12,. &c. And the night before his crucifixion, wherein he offered up himself a sacrifice for the souls of men, he pours out his soul in extraordinary prayer, for those he was about to die for, as we have an account in John xvii. That wonderful and most affecting prayer of his, was not so much for himself as for his people. Although he knew what amazing sufferings he was to undergo the next day, yet he seems as it were to be unmindful of himself, and to have his heart all taken up with concern about his disciples; which he manifests in his spending so much time in comforting and counselling them, and praying for them with great affection, compassion, earnest care, and fatherly tenderness. And the prayers that he made in the garden of Gethsemane, under the amazing view of the cup he was to drink the next day, seem to be intercessory; especially the last of the three prayers which he there made, *699 when being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground:* when he did not pray that the cup might pass from him, as he had done before, but that *God's will might be done.* (Compare Luke xxii. 44. with Matt. xxvi. 42.) That prayer, as the apostle teaches us, Heb. v. 6, 7. was a prayer that he put up as our High Priest; and therefore must be a prayer of intercession for us, a prayer offered up with his blood which he sweat in his agony; as prayers were wont to be offered up with the blood of the sacrifices in the temple. His prayer at that time, *Thy will be done,* was not only an expression of submission, but had the form of a petition, as it is in the Lord's Prayer. he prayed that God's will might be done in *his* being enabled *to do the will of God,* persevering in obedience unto death; and in the success of his sufferings; which might in an eminent manner be called the will of God, as it is in Psal. xl. 7, 8. "Then said I, Lo, I come I delight to do thy will, O my God."

Ministers should follow the example of Christ in his diligence and laboriousness in his work.

“He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.” Acts x. 38. So abundant was he in labours, that oftentimes he scarcely allowed himself time to eat or drink; insomuch that his friends sometimes went out to lay hold of him, saying, “He is beside himself.” Mark iii. 20, 21. That three years and a half of his public ministry was so filled with action and labour, that one of his disciples that constantly attended him, and was an eyewitness of his activity, tells us that if *all that he did should be written, the world would not contain the books.*

Ministers should follow the example of Christ, in his readiness not only to labour, but suffer, for the salvation of souls, to spend and be spent for them. In this respect the apostle Paul imitated his Lord and Master. Philip. ii. 17. “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.” Col. i. 24. “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body’s sake, which is the church.” 2 Cor. xii. 15. “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you.” Christ, in his prayers, labours, and sufferings for the souls of men, is represented as travailing in birth with them. Isa. liii.

11. “He shall see of the travail of his soul.” In like manner should ministers travail for the conversion and salvation of their hearers. They should imitate the faithfulness of Christ in his ministry, in speaking whatsoever God had commanded him, and declaring the whole counsel of God. They should imitate him in the manner of his preaching; who taught not as the scribes, but with authority, boldly, zealously, and fervently; insisting chiefly on the most important things in religion, being much in warning men of the danger of damnation, setting forth the greatness of the future misery of the ungodly; insisting not only on the outward, but also the inward and spiritual, duties of religion; being much in declaring the great provocation and danger of spiritual pride, and a self-righteous disposition; yet much insisting on the necessity and importance of inherent holiness, and the practice of piety. Behaving himself with admirable wisdom in all that he said and did in his ministry, amidst the many difficulties, enemies, and temptations he was surrounded with, wonderfully adapting his discourses to persons, seasons, and occasions. Isa. 1. 4. “The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.”

Ministers should follow their Master in his zeal, so wonderfully mixed and tempered with gentleness and condescension in his dealing with souls; preaching the gospel to the poor, and taking a gracious notice from time to time of little children. And they should imitate their Lord in his following the work of the ministry, not from mercenary views, or for the sake of worldly advantages, but for God's glory, and men's salvation; and in having his heart engaged in his work; it being his great delight, and his meat, to do the will of his Father, and finish his work, John iv. 34. and having his heart set on the success of his great undertaking in the salvation of souls; this being the joy that was set before him, for which he run his race, endured the cross, and despised the shame; his delight in the prospect of the eternal salvation of souls more than countervailing the dread he had of his extreme sufferings. Many waters could not quench his love, neither could the floods drown it, for his love was stronger than death; yea, than the mighty pains and torments of such a death.

I now proceed to the

II. Thing proposed in the handling of this subject, which was to give some reasons why ministers of the gospel should follow the example of "their great Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

1. They should follow his example, because he is their Lord and Master. Christ, as he is a divine person, is the Lord of heaven and earth, and so one of infinite dignity, to whom our supreme respect is due; and on that account he is infinitely worthy that we should regard, not only his precepts but example. The infinite honourableness of his person recommends his virtues, and a conformity to them as our greatest dignity and honour.

Christ is more especially the Lord of Christians; who are therefore under special obligations to follow him. He is their shepherd, and surely the flock should follow their shepherd. He is the captain of their salvation; and it becomes soldiers to follow their captain and leader. He is their head; not only their head of rule and authority, but their head of influence and communication, their vital head; and Christians are members of his body; but members, as partakers of the life and spirit of the head, are conformed to the head.

But Christ is still in a more peculiar manner the Lord and Master of ministers of the gospel, as they are not only members of his church, but the officers of his kingdom, and the dignified servants of his family. It is the manner of a people to imitate their prince, but

especially the ministers of his kingdom, and officers of his household. It is the duty of the whole army to follow their general, but especially of those officers that have a commission under him.

2. Ministers of the gospel are in some respects called and devoted to the same work and business that Christ himself was appointed to. Ministers are not men's mediators; for there is but one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus: they are not our priests to make atonement and work out righteousness for us; for Christ by one offering has perfected for ever them that are sanctified: they are not lords over God's heritage; for one is their Master, even Christ. But yet ministers of the gospel, as Christ's servants and officers under him, are appointed to promote the designs of that great work of Christ, the work of salvation. It is the work that ministers are devoted to; and therefore they are represented as co-workers with Christ. 2 Cor. vi. 1. "We then as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." Christ is the Saviour of the souls of men: ministers, also, are spoken of in Scripture as saving men's souls. 1 Tim. iv. 16. "In doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." Rom. xi. 14. "If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them." 1 Cor. ix. 22. "That I might by all means save some." And whereas it is said, Obad. 21. "Saviours shall come upon mount Zion;" ministers of the gospel are supposed to be there intended.

The work of ministers is in many respects like the work that Christ himself was appointed to, as the Saviour of men; and especially the same with the work which Christ does in his prophetic office; only with this difference, that ministers are to speak and act wholly under Christ, as taught of him, as holding forth his word, and by light and strength communicated from him. Christ himself, after his baptism, followed the work of the ministry: he was a minister of the true sanctuary, (Heb. viii. 2.) he spoke and acted as his Father's minister; was a minister of the gospel, and as such preached and administered sacraments.

Pastors of churches are ministers of the same gospel; but in their ministry they act as the ministers of Christ. Jesus Christ is the great Bishop of souls; ministers are also bishops under him. Christ came into the world *that he might be the light of the world*; ministers are set to be lights unto the churches, and are also set to be *the light of the world*. Matt. v. 14. Christ is the *bright and morning star*; ministers are *stars in Christ's hand*. Christ is the *messenger of*

the covenant; ministers are called *messengers of the Lord of hosts*. Christ is his people's *shepherd, the good shepherd, the great shepherd of his sheep*. Ministers are also frequently called shepherds, and are directed to feed the flock of Christ, which he purchased with his own blood.

Seeing therefore it is thus, that the work that ministers are called and devoted to, is no other than the work of Christ, or the work that Christ does, certainly they ought to do his work; which they do not do unless they imitate him, and do as he does, or as he hath set them an example.

3. The example of Christ is most worthy of ministers' imitation. His example was perfect, without error, blemish, or defect; and therefore worthy to be made our rule, and to be regarded and followed without exception, limitation, or reserve; unless in those things which he did that were proper to his peculiar office. Christ's virtue was not only perfect, but was exercised in those circumstances, and under those trials, that rendered his virtuous acts vastly the most amiable of any that ever appeared in any creature whether man or angel. If we consider the perfection of the virtue that Christ exercised, his virtue did exceed that of the most eminent saints, more than the purest gold exceeds the meanest and foulest ore: and if we consider the manner of its exercise, and the trials under which it was exercised, and the blessed fruits it has brought forth, so his virtue exceeds that of all other perfectly innocent creatures, and even of the brightest angel, as the sun in its glory exceeds the stars.

And this example was set us in our own nature, and so is especially fitted for our imitation. There was in the man Christ Jesus, who was one of us, and dwelt among us, such exercises of virtue as became our state and circumstances in the world, as those who dwell in frail flesh and blood, and as members of human society, and dwellers in such a world of sorrow and death.

And then these amiable exercises of virtue in Christ were exhibited chiefly in the things which he did in that work wherein ministers are called to act as co-workers with him. The bright and glorious example of Christ that is set before us, is chiefly in what he did during the three years and a half of his public ministry; and in the devotion, heavenly-mindedness, humility, patience, meekness, forgiveness, self-denial, and charity, which he exercised in the labours and sufferings he went through for the good of the souls of men: and therefore is

especially set for the imitation of those who are set apart that they may make it the whole business of their lives to seek the same good of souls.

4. Ministers should follow that example of Christ which has been spoken of, because if they are fit for ministers, and are such as have any right to take that work upon themselves, Christ has set them this example in what he has done for their souls. "I have given you an example (says Christ in the text) that you should do as I have done to you." Ministers should be animated in this work by a great love to the souls of men, and should be ready to spend and be spent for them; for Christ loved them, and gave himself for them: he loved them with a love stronger than death. They should have compassion to men under their spiritual miseries, as Christ had pity on them. They should be much in prayer for the people of their flock, considering how Christ prayed and agonized for them, in tears of blood. They should travail in birth with the souls that are committed to their care, seeing their own salvation is the fruit of the travail of Christ's soul. They should exercise a meek and condescending spirit to the mean and weak and poor, and should as it were wash the feet of Christ's disciples; considering how Christ condescended to them, when they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and abased himself to wash their feet.

The chief trials of Christ's virtue, and so their most bright and eminent exercises, were in the abasement, labour, and suffering that he was the subject of for our salvation. Which certainly may well endear those virtues to us, and greatly engage us to imitate that example: so the things whereof this example consists, were things by which we have infinite benefit, without which we should have been unspeakably miserable for ever and ever, and by virtue of which we have the glorious privilege of the children of God, and have a full title to the crown of exceeding glory, and pleasures for evermore, at God's right hand.

III. I now proceed, as was proposed, in the third place, to apply what has been said to myself, and others that are employed in this sacred work of the gospel ministry, and to such as are about to undertake it, or are candidates for it; and particularly to him that is now to be solemnly set apart to this work in this place.

We are those to whom these things especially belong: we may hear Christ saying to us this day, "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done." For the words of Christ in the text were not only spoken to the twelve, but are also spoken unto us. We have now

had represented to us, though in a very imperfect manner, the example that Christ has set, and what reasons there are that we, above all others, should imitate it.

It is not only our great duty, but will be our greatest honour, to imitate Christ, and do the work that he has done, and so act as co-workers with him.

There are two kinds of persons that are given to Christ, and appointed and devoted of God to be his servants, to be employed with Christ, and under him, in his great work of the salvation of the souls of men; and they are angels and ministers. The angels are all of them, even the most exalted of them, subjected of God the Father to our Redeemer, and given to him as his servants, to be subservient to the great designs of his saving and glorifying his elect. Heb. i. 14. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" And doubtless they were created for this very end; God made them for his Son, to be subservient to him in this great work; which seems to be the chief design of all God's works. And the employment of ministers of the gospel in this respect, is like that of the glorious angels. The principalities and powers in heavenly places, esteem it not any debasement, but their great honour, to be employed as Christ's ministers in this work; for therein they are employed as the ministers of God, in the greatest and most honourable of all God's works; that work of God wherein his glory is chiefly displayed, and which his heart was chiefly upon from eternity. It is the honour of the Son of God himself, that he is appointed to this work. It was because God the Father infinitely loved his Son, and delighted to put honour upon him, that he appointed him to be the author of that glorious work of the salvation of men. And when we consider the greatness, importance, and excellency of it, we have reason to be astonished at the condescension of God, that he would ever improve mere creatures as co-workers and ministers of Christ in this affair; *for who is sufficient for these things?* 2 Cor. ii. 6. "Who is fit, or worthy? Who is equal to a work of such dignity, and vast importance?" Especially have we reason to wonder that God will employ, not only holy and glorious angels, but feeble, frail, sinful worms of the dust in this work, who need redemption themselves: and yet the honour that is put upon faithful ministers is, in some respects, greater than that of the angels: they seem to be that kind of servants that are the most dignified of the two. For Christ makes his angels to be ministering spirits unto them, unto the faithful ministers; and the angels are their angels: as faithful ministers of the gospel are not only ministers to the church, but dignified members of the

church, that spouse of the King of glory, on whom the most glorious angels, the highest ministers in the court of heaven, are appointed to attend. And then Christ seems especially to delight to carry on his work of the salvation of souls, through the ministrations of men, who have that nature that Christ is united to, and that are of those sons of men with whom he had his delight before the world was made. So it is by the ministration of men, that the Scriptures are given; they were the penmen of the Holy Bible; and by them the gospel is preached to the world: by them ordinances are administered, and, through their ministrations, especially, souls are converted. When Christ himself was employed in the work of the ministry, in the time of his humiliation, but few, comparatively, were brought home to him, immediately by his ministrations: it pleased Christ to reserve this honour for his disciples and ministers, after his ascension, to whom he promised that they should, in this respect, do greater works than he, Job xiv. 12. and accordingly it was by their preaching that the Gentile world was converted, and Satan's kingdom overthrown.

Thus God delights Psalms viii. 2. "to perfect praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, that he may still the enemy and the avenger."

It will be our great honour that we are called to this work of Christ, if therein we follow him: for therein we shall be like the Son of God: but if we are unfaithful in this office, and do not imitate our Master, our offence will be heinous in proportion to the dignity of our office, and our final and everlasting disgrace and ignominy proportionally great; and we, who in honour are exalted up to heaven, shall be cast down proportionally low in hell.

Let us further consider, that our following the example of Christ in the work of the ministry, is the way to enjoy the sensible joyful presence of Christ with us. The disciples had the comfort of Christ's presence and conversation by following him, and going where he went. When we cease to follow him, he will go from us, and we shall soon lose sight of him.

Our being conformed to Christ's example, will also be the way for us to be conformed to him, and partake with him in his privileges: it is the way for us to have his joy fulfilled in us. Christ, in doing the work to which the Father appointed him, obtained a glorious victory over his enemies, and having spoiled principalities and powers, triumphed over them. If we imitate his example, it will be the way for us in like manner to conquer the principalities and powers, yea, to be much more than conquerors: it will be the way for us always to triumph in Jesus Christ. It will be the way for us to obtain success in our ministry, and actually to be

made the happy instruments of the eternal salvation of souls. Christ has not only *told* us, but *shown* us, the way to success in our business, and the way to victory over all that oppose us in it. And our imitating Christ in our ministry, will be the way for us to be partakers with him in his glory; the way for us in like manner to be approved, and openly honoured and rewarded by God; the way to be brought to sit with Christ on his throne, as he is set down with the Father on his throne. And as Christ is now exalted to shine as the bright luminary and glory of heaven, so our following his example, will be the way for us to be exalted, to *shine* with him, as the stars for ever and ever. Daniel xii. 3. And as Christ in heaven rejoices in his success, and will receive his church, presented to him without spot, as his everlasting crown; so our imitating Christ in our work, will be the way to partake with Christ in this joy, and have the souls whose salvation we are the instruments of, to be our crown of rejoicing for ever. Thus Christ and we shall rejoice together in that world of glory and joy where there is no more labour or sorrow. And we must enter into that joy and glory, in the way of following Christ in our work; there is no other way for ministers to enter there.

And that we may thus follow Christ's example, and be partakers with him in his glory, we have need to be much in prayer for his Spirit. Christ himself, though the eternal Son of God, obtained the Holy Spirit for himself in a way of prayer. Luke iii. 21, 22. "Jesus being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended like a dove upon him." If we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, we shall have Christ himself thereby living in us, and then we shall undoubtedly live like him. if that fountain of light dwells richly in us, we shall shine like him, and so shall be burning and shining lights.

That we may *be* and *behave* like Christ, we should earnestly seek much acquaintance with him, and much love to him, and be much in secret converse with him. It is natural, and as it were necessary, for us to imitate those whom we are much acquainted and conversant with, and have a strong affection for.

And in order to our imitating Christ in the work of the ministry, in any tolerable degree, we had need not to have our hearts overcharged, and time filled up with worldly affections, cares, and pursuits. The duties of a minister that have been recommended, are absolutely inconsistent with a mind much taken up with worldly profit, glory, amusements, and entertainments.

And another thing that is of very great importance, in order to our doing the work that Christ did, is, that we take heed that the religion we promote, be that same religion that Christ taught and promoted, and not any of its counterfeits and delusive appearances, or anything substituted by the subtle devices of Satan, or vain imaginations of men, in lieu of it. If we are zealous and very diligent to promote religion, but do not take good care to distinguish true from false religion, we shall be in danger of doing much more hurt than good with all our zeal and activity.

I come now to the

IV. And last thing at first proposed, *viz.* to show what improvement should be made of what has been said, by the people of this church and congregation, who are now about solemnly to commit their souls to the charge of him whom they have chosen to be their pastor, and who is now about to be set apart to that office.

And you, my brethren, as all of you have immortal souls to save, if you have considered the things that have been spoken, cannot but be sensible, that it not only greatly concerns your elect pastor to take heed how he behaves himself in his great work, wherein he is to act as a co-worker with Christ for your salvation; but that it infinitely concerns you how you receive him, and behave towards him. Seeing that it is for your eternal salvation that he is appointed to watch and labour; and seeing his business is to do the work of Christ for you, it is natural and easy to infer, that your reception and entertainment of him should in some respect imitate the church's reception of Jesus Christ. Gal. iv. 14. "My temptation which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." Christ, in the text, commands those whom he sends to follow his example, and then in the 20th verse following, he directs those to whom he sends them, how to treat them. " Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." Seeing the work of your minister is in some respects the same with the work of Christ, and he is to be appointed and devoted to do this work for your souls in particular, surely you should esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake, and do all that is in your power to help him, and put him under the best advantages to imitate his great Master *in* this work, to give himself wholly *to* his work, as Christ did during the time of his ministry, and to be successful in his work. And as it was observed before, that it is impossible that ministers should in any tolerable degree imitate

the example of Christ in their work, if their minds are overcharged with worldly cares and concerns, you ought so to provide for him and support him, that he shall have no need to entangle himself with these things; otherwise you will not only bring a great temptation upon him, which will vastly tend to hinder him in the work of Christ among you, but will, for the sake of sparing a little of your worldly substance to yourselves, foolishly and miserably starve your own souls and the souls of your children, and will but cheat yourselves; for you will not be in the way to prosper either in your spiritual or temporal concerns.

The way to have your houses filled with plenty, is to “honour the Lord with your substance, and with the first-fruits of all your increase,” Prov. lli. 9.

And as it is your duty and interest well to support your minister, so it concerns you to pray earnestly for him, and each one to do what in him lies in all respects to encourage and help him, and strengthen his hands, by attending diligently to his ministry, receiving the truth in love, treating him with the honour due to a messenger of Christ, carefully avoiding all contention with him, and one with another. And take heed in particular, that you do not forsake him to follow those, who under pretence of extraordinary purity, are doubtless doing the devil’s work, in separating themselves, and endeavouring to draw off others from the ministers and churches in the land in general.

If you think I have spoken something freely to you, I hope it will be considered, that this is probably the last time you will ever hear me speak from the pulpit, and that I shall never see you again, till we see one another in the invisible and eternal world, where these things will open to us all in their just importance.

And now nothing is left but to express my sincerest wishes and prayers, that the God of all grace would be with you and your elect pastor, and that he would give you in him a great and long-lasting blessing, that you may enjoy much of the presence of Christ with you “in him”; that in him may be made up the great loss you sustained by the death of your former faithful and eminent pastor, whose praise was in all the churches; and that you may receive him as you ought to receive a faithful minister of Jesus Christ, and may be a great comfort to him, and may receive great spiritual and eternal benefit by his means; and that you may be each other’s crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus.