

The Character of Paul an Example to Believers

A Sermon by Jonathan Edwards

Philippians iii. 17.

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. the apostle in the foregoing part of the chapter, had been telling how he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and in the text he urges that his example should be followed.

He does this in two ways.

1. He exhorts the Philippian Christians to follow his example. "Brethren, be followers together of me." He exhorts them to be followers of him *together*; that is, that they should all follow his example with one heart and soul, all agreeing in it, and that all, as much as in them lay, should help and assist each other in it.
2. That they should take particular notice of others that did so, and put peculiar honour on them; which is implied in the expression in the latter part of the verse, "mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample."

Doctrine

We ought to follow the good examples of the apostle Paul. We are to consider, that the apostle did not say this of himself from an ambitious spirit, from a desire of being set up as a pattern, and eyed and imitated as an example to other Christians. His writings are not of any private interpretation, but he spoke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost directed that the good examples of the apostle Paul should be noticed by other Christians, and imitated. And we are also to consider, that this is not a command to the Philippians only, to whom the epistle was more immediately directed, but to all those for whose use this epistle was written, for all Christians to the end of the world. For though God so ordered it, that the epistles of the apostles were mostly written on particular occasions and directed to particular churches, yet they were written to be of universal use. And those occasions were so ordered in the wisdom of Divine Providence, that they are a part of that

infallible rule of faith and manners, which God has given to the Christian church to be their rule in all ages. And the precepts that we find in those epistles, are no more to be regarded as precepts intended only for those to whom the epistle was sent, than the Ten Commandments, that were spoken from mount Sinai to the children of Israel, are to be regarded as commands intended only for that people. And when we are directed to follow the good examples of the apostle Paul by the Holy Ghost, it is not merely as we are to imitate whatever we see that is good in any one, let him be who he may. But there are spiritual obligations that lie on Christians to follow the good examples of this great apostle. And it hath pleased the Holy Ghost in an especial manner to set up the apostle Paul, not only as a teacher of the Christian church, but as a pattern to other Christians.

The greatest example of all, that is set before us in the Scripture to imitate, is the example of Jesus Christ, which he set us in his human nature, and when in his state of humiliation. This is presented to us not only as a great pattern, but as a perfect rule. And the example of no man is set forth, as our rule, but the example of Christ. We are commanded to follow the examples which God himself set us, or the acts of the divine nature Ephes. v. 1. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." And Matt. v. 48. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." But the example of Christ Jesus, when on earth, is more especially our pattern. For, though the acts of the divine nature have the highest possible perfection, and though his inimitable perfection is our best example, yet God is so much above us, his nature so infinitely different from ours, that it is not possible that his acts should be so accommodated to our nature and circumstances, as to be an example of so great and general use, as the perfect example in our nature which Christ has set us. Christ, though a divine person, was man, as we are men; and not only so, but he was, in many respects, a partaker of our circumstances. He dwelt among men. He depended on food and raiment, and such outward supports of life, as we do. He was subject to the changes of time, and the afflictions and calamities of this evil world, and to abuse from men's corruptions, and to temptations from Satan, as we are; was subject to the same law and rule that we are, used the same ordinances, and had many of our trials, and greater trials than we. So that Christ's example is the example that is chiefly offered in Scripture for our imitation. But yet the example of some that are fallen creatures, as we are, may in some respects be more accommodated to our circumstances, and more fitted for our instructions,

than the example of Jesus Christ. For though he became man as we are, and was like us, and was in our circumstances in so many respects, yet in other things there was a vast difference. He was the head of the church, and we are the members. He is Lord of all, we are his subjects and disciples. And we need an example, that shall teach and direct us how to behave towards Christ our Lord and head. And this we may have better in some, that have Christ for their Lord as well as we, than in Christ himself. But the greatest difference lies in this, that Christ had no sin, and we all are sinful creatures, all carry about with us a body of sin and death. It is said that Christ was made like to us in all things, sin only excepted. But this was accepted, and therefore there were many things required of us, of which Christ could not give us an example. Such as repentance for sin, brokenness of spirit for sin, mortification of lust, warring against sin. And the excellent example of some, that are naturally as sinful as we, has this advantage; that we may regard it as the example of those, who were naturally every way in our circumstances, and laboured under the same natural difficulties, and the same opposition of heart to that which is good, as ourselves; which tends to engage us to give more heed to their example, and the more to encourage and animate us to strive to follow it. And therefore we find that the Scripture does not only recommend the example of Christ, but does also exhibit some mere men, that are of like passions with ourselves, as patterns for us to follow. So it exhibits the eminent saints of the Old Testament, of whom we read in the Scripture, that they inherit the promises Heb. vi. 12. "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, a great number of eminent saints are mentioned as patterns for us to follow. Abraham is, in a particular manner, set forth as an example in his faith, and as the pattern of believers Rom. iv. 12. "And the father of circumcision to them, that are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised." And so the prophets of the Old Testament are also recommended as patterns James v. 10. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." And so eminently holy men under the New Testament, apostles and others, that God sent forth to preach the gospel, are also examples for Christians to follow Heb. xiii. 7. "Remember them that have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their

conversation.” But of all mere men, no one is so often particularly set forth in the Scripture, as a pattern for Christians to follow, as the apostle Paul.

Our observing his holy conversation as our example, is not only insisted on in the text, but also 1 Cor. iv. 16. “Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.” And xi. 1. “Be ye followers of me as I also am of Christ.” And 1 Thess. i. 6. Where the apostle commends the Christian Thessalonians for imitating his example; “and ye became followers of us.” And 2 Thess. iii. 7. he insists on this as their duty. “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us.”

For the more full treatment of this subject I shall,

I. Particularly mention many of the good examples of the apostle Paul that we ought to imitate, which I shall treat of not merely as a doctrine, but also in the way of application.

II. I shall show under what strict obligation we are to follow the good examples of this apostle.

I. I shall particularly mention many of those good examples of the apostle Paul that we ought to imitate. And that I may be more distinct, I shall,

1. Mention those things that respect his watchfulness for the good of his own soul.
2. Those virtues in him that more immediately respected God and Christ.
3. Those that more immediately respect men.
4. Those that were exercised in his behaviour, both towards God and men.

1. We ought to follow the good example that the apostle Paul has set us in his seeking the good of his own soul.

First. We should follow him in his earnestness in seeking his own salvation. He was not careless and indifferent in this matter; but the kingdom of heaven suffered violence from him. He did not halt between two opinions, or seek with a wavering, unsteady mind, but with the most full determination and strong resolution. He resolved, if it could by any means be possible, that he would attain to the resurrection of the dead. He does not say that he was determined to attain it, if he could, by means that were not very costly or difficult, or by labouring for it a little time, or only now and then, or without any great degree of suffering, or without great loss in his temporal interest.

But if by *any* means he could do it, he would, let the means be easy or difficult. Let it be a short labour and trial, or a long one; let the cross be light or heavy; it was all one to his resolution. Let the requisite means be what they would, if it were possible, he would obtain it. He did not hesitate at worldly losses, for he tells us that he readily suffered the loss of all things, that he might win Christ, and be found in him, and in his righteousness. Philip. iii. 8, 9. It was not with him as it was with the young man, that came kneeling to Christ to inquire of him what he should do to inherit eternal life, and when Christ said, Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, he went away sorrowful. He was not willing to part with all. If Christ had bid him sell half, it may be he would have complied with it. He had a great desire to secure salvation. But the apostle Paul did not content himself with wishing. He was resolved, if it were possible, that he would obtain it. And when it was needful that he should lose worldly good, or when any great suffering was in his way, it was no cause of hesitation to him. He had been in very comfortable and honourable circumstances among the Jews. He had received the best education that was to be had among them, being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and was regarded as a very learned young man. His own nation, the Jews, had a high esteem of him, and he was esteemed for his moral and religious qualifications among them. But when he could not hold the outward benefit of these things and win Christ, he despised them totally; he parted with all his credit and honour. He made nothing of them that he might win Christ. And instead of being honoured and loved, and living in credit, as before among his own nation, he made himself the object of their universal hatred. He lost all, and the Jews hated him, and persecuted him everywhere. And when great sufferings were in the way, he willingly made himself conformable to Christ's death, that he might have a part in his resurrection. He parted with his honour, his ease, his former friends and former acquaintance, his worldly goods and everything else, and plunged himself into a state of extreme labour, contempt, and suffering; and in this way he sought the kingdom of heaven. He acted in this matter very much as one that is running a race for some great prize, who makes running his great and only business, till, he has reached the end of the race, and strains every nerve and sinew, and suffers nothing to divert him, and will not stand to listen to what anyone says to him, but presses forward. Or as a man that is engaged in battle, sword in hand, with strong and violent enemies that seek his life, who exerts himself to his utmost, as for his life 1 Cor. ix. 26. "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." When fleshly appetites stood in the

way, however importunate they were, he utterly denied them and renounced them; they were no impediment in the way of his thorough pursuit of salvation. He would not be subject to the appetites of his body, but made them subject to his soul 1 Cor. ix. 27. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." Probably there never was a soldier, when he bore his part in storming a city, that acted with greater resolution and violence, as it were forcing his way through all that opposed him, than the apostle Paul in seeking the kingdom of heaven. We have not only his own word for it; the history we have of his life, written by St. Luke, shows the same. Now those, who seek their salvation, ought to follow this example. Persons who are concerned for their salvation, sometimes inquire what they shall do. Let them do as did the apostle Paul; seek salvation in the way he did, with the like violence and resolution. Those that make this inquiry, who are somewhat anxious year after year, and complain that they have not obtained any comfort, would do well to ask themselves, whether they seek salvation in any measure in this way, with that resolution and violence of which he set them an example. Alas, are they not very far indeed from it? Can it in any proper sense be said, that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence at their hands?

Secondly. The apostle did not only thus earnestly seek salvation before his conversion and hope, but afterwards also. What he says in the 3rd chapter of Philippians of his suffering the loss of all things, that he might be found in Christ, and its being the one thing that he did to seek salvation; and also what he says of his so running as not in vain, but as resolving to win the prize of salvation, and keeping under his body that he might not be a castaway; were long after his conviction, and after he had renounced all hope of his own good estate by nature. If being a convinced sinner excuses a man from seeking salvation any more, or makes it reasonable that he should cease his earnest care and labour for it, certainly the apostle might have been excused, when he had not only already attained true grace, but such eminent degrees of it. To see one of the most eminent saints that ever lived, if not the most eminent of all, so exceedingly engaged in seeking his own salvation, ought for ever to put to shame those who are a thousand degrees below him, and are but mere infants to him, if they have any grace at all; who yet excuse themselves from using any violence after the kingdom of heaven now, because they have attained already, who free themselves from the burden of going on earnestly to seek salvation with this, that they have finished the

work, they have obtained a hope. The apostle, as eminent as he was, did not say within himself, "I am converted, and so am sure of salvation. Christ has promised it me; why need I labour any more to secure it?"

Yea, I am not only converted, but I have obtained great degrees of grace." But still he is violent after salvation. He did not keep looking back on the extraordinary discoveries he enjoyed at his first conversion, and the past great experience he had had from time to time. He did not content himself with the thought, that he possessed the most wonderful testimonies of God's favour, and of the love of Christ, already, that ever any enjoyed, even to his being caught up to the third heavens; but he forgot the things that were behind. He acted as though he did not consider that he had yet attained an interest in Christ Phil. iii. 11, 12, 13, 14. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead; not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The apostle still sought that he might win Christ and his righteousness, and attain to his resurrection, not as though he had attained it already, or had already obtained a title to the crown. And this is especially the thing in which he calls on us to imitate his example in the text. It was not because Paul was at a loss whether he was truly converted or not, that he was still so earnest in seeking salvation. He not only thought that he was converted, and should go to heaven when he died, but he knew and spake particularly about it in this very epistle, in the twenty-first verse of the first chapter. "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." And in the foregoing verse he says, "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death." The apostle knew that though he was converted, yet there remained a great work that he must do, in order to his salvation. There was a narrow way to eternal glory, through which he must pass, and never could come to heaven in any other way. He knew it was absolutely necessary for him earnestly to seek salvation still; he knew there was no going to heaven in a slothful way. And therefore he did not seek salvation the less earnestly, for his having hope and assurance, but a great deal more. We nowhere read so much of his

earnestness and violence for the kingdom of heaven before he was converted, as afterwards. The apostle's hope was not of a nature to make him slothful; it had a contrary effect. The assurance he had of victory, together with the necessity there was of fighting, engaged him to fight not as one that beat the air, but as one that wrestled with principalities and powers. Now this example the apostle does especially insist in the text that we ought to follow. And this should induce all present who think themselves converted, to inquire whether they seek salvation never the less earnestly, because they think it is well with them, and that they are now sure of heaven. Most certainly if the apostle was in the right way of acting, we in this place are generally in the wrong. For nothing is more apparent than that it is not thus with the generality of professors here, but that it is a common thing after they think they are safe, to be far less diligent and earnest in religion than before.

Thirdly. The apostle did not only diligently seek heaven after he knew he was converted, but was earnestly cautious lest he should be damned; as appears by the passage already cited. 1 Cor ix. 27. "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, 1 myself should be a castaway." Here you see the apostle is very careful lest he should be a castaway, and denies his carnal appetites, and mortifies his flesh, for that reason. He did not say, "I am safe, I am sure I shall never be lost; why need I take any further care respecting it?" Many think because they suppose themselves converted, and so safe, that they have nothing to do with the awful threatenings of God's word, and those terrible denunciations of damnation that are contained in it. When they hear them, they hear them as things which belong only to others, and not at all to themselves, as though there were no application of what is revealed in the Scripture respecting hell, to the godly. And therefore, when they hear awakening sermons about the awful things that God has threatened to the wicked, they do not hear them for themselves, but only for others. But it was not thus with this holy apostle, who certainly was as safe from hell, and as far from a damnable state, as any of us. He looked upon himself as still nearly concerned in God's threatenings of eternal damnation, notwithstanding all his hope, and all his eminent holiness, and therefore gave great diligence, that he might avoid eternal damnation. For he considered that eternal misery was as certainly connected with a wicked life as ever it was, and that it was absolutely necessary that he should still keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, in order that he might not be damned; because indulging the lusts of the

body and being damned were more surely connected together. The apostle knew that this conditional proposition was true concerning him, as ever it was. "If I live wickedly, or do not live in a way of universal obedience to God's commands, I shall certainly be a castaway." This is evident, because the apostle mentions a proposition of this nature concerning himself in that very chapter where he says, he kept under his body lest he should be a castaway. 1 Cor. ix. 16. "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." What necessity was there upon the apostle to preach the gospel, though God had commanded him, for he was already converted, and was safe; and if he had neglected to preach the gospel, how could he have perished after he was converted? But yet this conditional proposition was still true; if he did not live a life of obedience to God, woe would be to him; woe to him, if he did not preach the gospel. The connexion still held.

It is impossible a man should go anywhere else than to hell in a way of disobedience to God. And therefore he deemed it necessary for him to preach the gospel on that account, and on the same account he deemed it necessary to keep under his body, lest he should be a castaway. The connexion between a wicked life and damnation is so certain, that if a man lives a wicked life, it proves that all his supposed experiences are nothing. If a man at the last day be found a worker of iniquity, nothing else will be inquired of about him. Let him pretend what he will, Christ will say to him and all others like him, "Depart from me, I know you not, ye that work iniquity." And God has revealed these threatenings and this connexion, not only to deter wicked men, but also godly men, from sin. And though God will keep men that are converted from damnation, yet this is the means by which he will keep them from it; *viz.* he will keep them from a wicked life. And though he will keep them from a wicked life, yet this is one means by which he will keep them from it, *viz.* by their own caution to avoid damnation, and by his threatenings of damnation if they should live a wicked life. We have another remarkable instance in Job, who was an eminently holy man, yet avoided sin with the utmost care, because he would avoid destruction from God. Job xxxi. Surely we have as much cause to be cautious, that we do not expose ourselves to destruction from God, as holy Job had. We have not a greater stock of goodness than he. The apostle directs Christians to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Phil. ii. 12. And it is spoken of as the character of a true saint, that he trembles at God's word; Isa.

lxvi. 2. which is to tremble especially at the awful threatenings of it, as Job did. Whereas the manner of many now is, whenever they think they are converted, to throw by those threatenings of God's word, as if they had no more to do with them, because they suppose they are converted, and out of danger. Christ gave his disciples, even those of them that were converted, as well as others, directions to strive for salvation; because broad was the way that leads to destruction, and men are so apt to walk in that way and be damned. Matt. vii. 13, 14. "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Fourthly. The apostle did not seek salvation by his own righteousness. Though his sufferings were so very great, his labours so exceedingly abundant, yet he never accounted them as righteousness. He trod it under his feet, as utterly insufficient to recommend him to God. He gave diligence that he might be found in Christ, not having on his own righteousness, which is of God, through faith, as in the foregoing part of the chapter from which the text is taken, beginning with the fourth verse. "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having on mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

Fifthly. In those earnest labours which he performed, he had respect to the recompense of the reward. He did it for an incorruptible crown. 1 Cor. ix. 25. He sought a high degree of glory, for he knew the more he laboured the more he should be rewarded, as appears from

what he tells the Corinthians. 2 Cor. ix. 6. "He that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully." And 1 Cor. iii. 8. "Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour." That he had respect to that crown of glory, which his Master had promised, in those great labours and sufferings, is evident from what he says to Timothy, a little before his death, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." All Christians should follow his example in this also; they should not content themselves with the thought, that they have goodness enough to carry them to heaven, but should earnestly seek high degrees of glory; for the higher degrees of glory are promised to extraordinary labours for God, for no other reason, but that we should seek them.

2. I proceed to mention some of the virtues of Paul, that more immediately respect God and Christ, in which we ought to follow his example.

First. He was strong in faith. It may be truly said of him that he lived by faith. His faith seemed to be even without the least appearance of diffidence or doubt in his words or actions, but all seemed to proclaim, that he had God and Christ and the invisible world continually in view. Such a faith, that was in continual exercise in him, he professes, in 2 Cor. v. 6, 7, 8. "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." He always speaks of God and Christ and things invisible and future, as if he certainly knew them, and then saw them as fully and certainly as we see any thing that is immediately before our bodily eyes. He spoke as though he certainly knew, that God's promise of eternal life should be accomplished, and gives this as the reason why he laboured so abundantly, and endured all manner of temporal sufferings and death, and was always delivered unto death for Christ's sake, 2 Cor. iv. 11, &c. "For we which live are always delivered (into death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." He speaks of his earnest expectation and hope of the fulfilment of God's promises. And a little before his death, when he was a prisoner, and when he knew that he was like to bear the trial of martyrdom, which is the greatest trial of faith, he expresses his faith in Christ in the

strongest terms 2 Tim. i. 12. "For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Such an example may well make us ashamed; for how weak and unsteady is the faith of most Christians! If now and then there seems to be a lively exercise of faith, giving the person at that time a firm persuasion and confidence; yet how short are such exercises, how soon do they vanish! How often is faith shaken with one temptation; how often are the exercises of it interrupted with doubting, and how much is exhibited of a diffident, vibrating spirit! How little does our faith accomplish in times of trial; how often and how easily is our confidence in God shaken and interrupted, and how frequently does unbelief prevail! This is much to the dishonour of our Saviour Jesus Christ, as well as very painful to us. What a happy and glorious lot it is to live such a life of faith, as Paul lived! How far did he soar on the wings of his strong faith above those little difficulties that continually molest us, and are ready to overcome us! Seeing we have such a blessed example set before us in the Scriptures, let it prompt us earnestly to seek, that we may soar higher also.

Secondly. Another virtue in which we should follow his example, is his great love to Christ. The Corinthians, who saw how the apostle acted, how he laboured, and how he suffered, and could see no worldly motive, were astonished. They wondered what it was, that so wonderfully influenced and actuated the man. The apostle says, that he was a spectacle to the world. But this was the immediate principle that moved him; his strong, his intense love to his glorious Lord and Master. This love constrained him, that he could do nothing else than strive and labour and seek for his salvation. This account he gives of it himself 2 Cor. v. 14. "The love of Christ constraineth us." He had such a delight in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the knowledge and contemplation of him, that he tells us, he "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." He speaks in very positive terms. He does not say merely, that he hopes he loves Christ, so as to despise other things in comparison of the knowledge of him; but "yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord." And he assigns this reason why he even gloried in his sufferings for Christ's sake; because the love of God was shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost. Rom. v. 5. This expression seems to imply that he sensibly felt that holy affection, sweetly and powerfully diffused in his soul, like some precious, fragrant

ointment. And how does he triumph in his love to Christ in the midst of his sufferings! Rom. viii. 35, 36, 37. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us." May not this make us ashamed of our cold, dead hearts that we hear so often of Christ, and of his glorious excellencies and his wonderful love, with so little emotion, our hearts, being very commonly frozen up like a clod of earth by worldly affections. And it may be that now and then with much difficulty we persuade ourselves to do a little or expend a little for the advancement of Christ's kingdom; and then are ready to boast of it, that we have done so nobly. Such superior examples as we have are enough to make us for ever blush for our own attainments in the love of Christ, and rouse us earnestly to follow after those who have gone so far beyond us.

Thirdly. The apostle lived in a day when Christianity was greatly despised; yet he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Christians were everywhere despised by the great men of the world. Almost all those that made any figure in the world, men in honourable stations, men of learning, and men of wealth, despised Christianity, and accounted it a mean, contemptible thing to be a Christian, a follower and worshipper of a poor, crucified man. To be a Christian was regarded as what ruined a man's reputation. Christians were everywhere looked upon as fools, and were derided and mocked. They were the meanest of mankind, the off scouring of the world. This was a great temptation to Christians to be ashamed of the gospel. And the apostle Paul was more especially in such circumstances, as exposed him to this temptation, for before he was a Christian, he was in great reputation among his own countrymen. He was esteemed a young man of more than ordinary proficiency in learning, and was a man of high distinction among the Pharisees, a class of men of the first standing among the Jews. In times when religion is much despised, great men are more ready to be ashamed of it than others. Many of the great seem to think, that to appear religious men would make them look little. They do not know how to comply with showing a devout spirit, a spirit of supreme love to God, and a strict regard to God's commands. But yet the apostle was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ anywhere, or before any person. He was not ashamed of it among his own countrymen, the Jews, before their rulers, and scribes, and

great men, but ever boldly professed it, and confronted them in their opposition. When he was at Athens, the chief seat of learning and of learned men in the world, though the learned men and philosophers there despised his doctrine, and called him a babbler for preaching the gospel; yet he felt no shame, but boldly disputed with and confounded those great philosophers, and converted some of them. And when he came to Rome, the metropolis and mistress of the world, where resided the emperor, and senators, and the chief rulers of the world, he was not ashamed of the gospel there. He tells the Romans; "I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." The apostle was greatly derided and despised for preaching a crucified Jesus¹ Cor. iv. 13. "We are made as the filth of the world, and are the off scouring of all things unto this day." and in the tenth verse. he says, "We are fools for Christ's sake." They were everywhere accounted and called fools. Yet the apostle was so far from being ashamed of the crucified Jesus, that he gloried in him above all things Gal. vi. 14. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here is an example for us to follow, if at any time we fall in among those who hold religion in contempt, and will despise us for our pretensions to religion, and will be ready to deride us for being so precise, and look upon us as fools; that we may not be ashamed of religion, and yield to sinful compliances with vain and loose persons, lest we should appear singular, and be looked upon as ridiculous. Such a meanness of spirit possesses many persons, who are not worthy to be called Christians; and are such as Christ will be ashamed of when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Fourthly. Another virtue in which we ought to follow the apostle, was his contempt of the world, and his heavenly-mindedness. He condemned all the vain enjoyments of the world. He despised its riches Acts xx. 33. "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." He despised the pleasures of the world. "I keep under my body." The apostle's pleasures were in the sufferings of his body, instead of the gratification of its carnal appetites 2 Cor. xii. 10. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake." He despised the honours of the world 1 Thess. ii. 6. "Nor of men sought we glory; neither of you, nor yet of others." He declares that the world was crucified unto him, and he unto the world. These were not the things that the apostle sought, but the things that were above, that were out of sight to other men 2 Cor. iv. 18.

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” He longed greatly after heaven 2 Cor. v. 4. “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up in life.” And he tells us, that he knew no man after the flesh; that is, he did not look upon the men or things of this world, or regard them as related to the world, or as they respected the present life; but he considered all men and all things as they had relation to a spiritual nature, and to another world. In this the apostle acted as becomes a Christian; for Christians, those that are indeed so, are people that belong not to this world, and therefore, it is very unbecoming in them to have their minds taken up about these things. The example of Paul may make all such persons ashamed, who have their minds chiefly occupied about the things of the world, about gaining estates, or acquiring honours; and yet would be accounted fellow-disciples with the apostle, partakers of the same labours, and fellow-heirs of the same heavenly inheritance. And it should prompt us to strive for more indifference to the world, and for more heavenly-mindedness.

Fifthly. We ought also to follow the example of the apostle in his abounding in prayer and praise. He was very earnest, and greatly engaged in those duties, and continued in them, as appears from many passages Rom. i. 8. “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.” Eph. i. 15, 16. “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.” Col. i. 3. “We give thanks to God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” 1 Thess. i. 2, 3. “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” And chapter iii. 9, 10. “For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly, that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?”

2 Tim. i. 3. “I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers, night and day.”

Sixthly. We ought to follow him in his contentment under the allotments of Divine Providence. He was the subject of a vast variety of dispensations of Providence. He went through a great many changes, and was almost continually in suffering circumstances, sometimes in one respect, sometimes in another, and sometimes the subject of a great many kinds of suffering together. But yet he had attained to such a degree of submission to the will of God, as to be contented in every condition, and under all dispensations towards him Phil. iv. 11, 12, 13. "Not that I speak in respect of want, for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." What a blessed temper and disposition of mind was this to which Paul had arrived; and how happy is that man of whom it can now be said with truth! He is, as it were, out the reach of every evil. Nothing can touch him so as to disturb his rest, for he rests in everything that God orders.

Seventhly. We should follow the apostle in his great caution in giving an account of his experience; not to represent more of himself in his words, than men should see in his deeds. In 2 Corinthians. he gives somewhat of an account how he had been favoured with visions and revelations, and had been caught up to the third heavens. And in the sixth verse, intimating that he could relate more, he breaks off, and forbears to say anything further respecting his experience. And he gives this reason for it; *viz.* that he would avoid, in what he relates of himself, giving occasion for anyone to be disappointed in him, in expecting more from him, by his own account of his experience and revelations, than he should see or hear of him in his conversation. His words are, "for though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth; but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me." Some may wonder at this in such a man as the apostle, and may say, Why should a man so eminent in his conversation, be so cautious in this matter? Why need he be afraid to declare all the extraordinary things that he had witnessed, since his life was so agreeable, so eminently answerable to his experience? But yet you see the apostle forbore upon this very account. He knew there was great need of caution in this matter. He knew that if in giving an account of his extraordinary revelations, he should give rise to an expectation of too great things in his conversation, and

should not live answerably to that expectation, it would greatly wound religion. He knew that its enemies would be ready to say presently, "Who is this? The man that gives so extraordinary an account of his visions and revelations, and peculiar tokens of God's favour to him; does he live no more conformably to it?" But if such a man as the apostle, so eminent in his life, was so cautious in this respect; surely we have need to be cautious, who fail so much more in our example than he did, and in whose conversation the enemy may find so much more occasion to speak reproachfully of religion. This teaches us that it would be better to refrain wholly from boasting of our experience, than to represent ourselves as better than our deeds and conversation represent us. For men will compare one with the other. And if they do not see a correspondence between them, this will be much more to the dishonour of God, than our account will be to his honour. Let Christians therefore be warned to be ever cautious in this respect, after the great example of the apostle.

3. I shall mention some of those virtues of the apostle that more immediately respected men, in which we ought to follow his example.

First. His meekness under abuses, and his love to his enemies. There were multitudes that hated him, but there is no appearance of his hating any. The greater part of the world where he went, were his enemies. But he was the friend of every one, and laboured and prayed earnestly for the good of all. And when he was reproached and derided and buffeted, still it was with meekness and gentleness of spirit that he bore all, and wished well to them none the less, and sought their good 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13. "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat." In that period of his great sufferings when he went up to Jerusalem, and there was such an uproar about him, and the people were in so furious a rage against him, eagerly thirsting for his blood; he discovered no anger or ill will towards his persecutors. At that time when he was a prisoner through their malice, and stood before king Agrippa, and Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuades me to be a Christian; and his blood-thirsty enemies were standing by; he replied, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." He wished that his accusers, and those who had bound themselves with an oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him, had all of them as great privileges and as much of the favour of heaven as himself; and that they were altogether as he was, except his bonds and imprisonment, and those afflictions which they

had brought upon him. He did not desire that they should be like him in that affliction, though it was the fruit of their own cruelty. And when some of the Corinthians, whom he had instructed and converted from heathenism, had dealt ill by him, had hearkened to some false teachers that had been among them, who hated and reproached the apostle; he tells them, in 2 Cor. xii. 15. notwithstanding these abuses, that still he would very gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly he loved them, the less he should be loved by them. If they returned him no thanks for his love, but only ill will and ill treatment, still he stood ready to spend and be spent for them. And though the apostle was so hated, and had suffered so many abuses from the unbelieving Jews, yet how does he express his love to them.? He prayed earnestly for them. Rom. x. 1. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." And he went mourning for them. He went about with a heavy heart, and with continual grief and sorrow, from compassion for them, under the calamities of which they were the subjects; and he declares in the most solemn manner, that he had so great desire for their salvation, that he could find it in his heart to wish himself accursed from Christ for them, and to be offered up a sacrifice, if that might be a means of their salvation. Rom. ix. 1, 2, 3. We are to understand it of a temporal curse. He could be willing to die an accursed death, and so be made a curse for a time, as Christ was, if that might be a means of salvation to them. How are those reprov'd by this, who, when they are abused and suffer reproach or injury, have thereby indulged a spirit of hatred against their neighbour, a prejudice whereby they are always apt to entertain a distrust, and to seek and embrace opportunities against them, and to be sorry for their prosperity, and glad at their disappointments.

Secondly. He delighted in peace. When any contention happened among Christians, he was exceedingly grieved by it. As when he heard of the contentions that broke out in the Corinthian church. He intimates to the Philippians, how he should rejoice at their living in love and peace, and therefore earnestly entreats them that they should so live Philip. ii. 1, 2. "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." And he studied those things that should make for peace. To that end he yielded to every one as much as possible in those things that were lawful, and complied with the weakness and humours of others oftentimes, for the sake of

peace. He declares that though he was free from all men, yet he had made himself servant of all. To the Jews he became as a Jew; to them that were under the law, as under the law; to them that were without law, as without law; to the weak he became as weak. He rather chose to please others than himself, for the sake of peace, and the good of their souls 1 Cor. x. 33. "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

Thirdly. He was of a most tender compassionate spirit towards any that were in affliction. He showed such a spirit especially in the case of the incestuous Corinthian. The crime was very great, and the fault of the church was great in suffering such wickedness among them, and this occasioned the apostle to write with some sharpness to them respecting it. But when the apostle perceived that his reproof was laid to heart by the Corinthian Christians, and that they repented and their hearts were filled with sorrow, though he rejoiced at it, yet he was so affected with their sorrow, that his heart yearned towards them, and he was almost ready to repent that he had written so severely to them. He was full of concern about it, lest his former letter should have filled them with overmuch sorrow. "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent; for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season" So he had compassion for the incestuous man, though he had been guilty of so vile a crime, and was greatly concerned that he should be comforted. Whenever any Christian suffered or was hurt, the apostle says he felt it and suffered himself 2 Cor. xi. 29. "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"

Fourthly. He rejoiced at others' prosperity and joy. When he saw the soul of any one comforted, the apostle was a sharer with him; his soul was comforted also. When he saw any Christian refreshed in his spirit, his own spirit was refreshed 2 Cor. vii. 6, 7. "Nevertheless, God that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me, so that I rejoiced the more." "Therefore we were comforted in your comfort; yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all."

Fifthly. He delighted in the fellowship of God's people. He longed after them when absent Philip. i. 8. "For God is my record how greatly I long after you in the bowels of Christ." And also, "Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown." So Rom. i. 11, 12. "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

Sixthly. He was truly courteous in his behaviour towards others. Though he was so great a man, and had so much honour put upon him of God, yet he was full of courtesy towards all men, rendering to all suitable respect. Thus when he was called before Jewish or heathen magistrates, he treated them with the honour and respect due to their places. When the Jews took him in the temple, though they behaved themselves more like devils than men, yet he addresses them in terms of high respect, "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence: 603 " calling the common Jews his *brethren*, and saluting the elders and scribes with the title *of fathers*, though they were a body of infidels. So when he pleads his cause before Festus, a heathen governor, he gives him the title that belonged to him in his station; calling him, "Most noble Festus." His courtesy also appears in his salutations in his epistles. He is particularly careful to mention many persons, directing that his salutations should be given to them. Such a degree of courtesy, in so great a person as this apostle, reprove all those professing Christians, who, though far below him, are not courteous and respectful in their behaviour to their neighbours, and especially to their superiors. Incivility is here reproved, and the too common neglect of Christians is reproved, who do not take strict care, that their children are taught good manners, and politeness, and brought up in a respectful and courteous behaviour towards others.

4. I shall mention those virtues of the apostle that respected both God and men, in which we should imitate his example.

First. He was a man of a most public spirit; he was greatly concerned for the prosperity of Christ's kingdom, and the good of his church. We see a great many men wholly engaged in pursuit of their worldly interests: many who are earnest in the pursuit of their carnal pleasures, many who are eager in the pursuit of honours, and many who are violent in the pursuit of gain; but we probably never saw any man more engaged to advance his estate, nor more taken up with his pleasures, nor more greedy of honour, than the apostle Paul was

about the flourishing of Christ's kingdom, and the good of the souls of men. The things that grieve other men are outward crosses; losses in estates, or falling under contempt, or bodily sufferings. But these things grieved not him. He made little account of them. The things that grieved him, were those that hurt the interests of religion; and about those his tears were shed. Thus he was exceedingly grieved, and wept greatly, for the corruptions that had crept into the church of Corinth, which was the occasion of his writing his first epistle to them 2 Cor. ii. 4. "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you, with many tears." The things, about which other men are jealous, are their worldly advantages and pleasures. If these are threatened, their jealousy is excited, since they are above all things dear to them. But the things that kindled the apostle's jealousy were those that seemed to threaten the interests of religion, and the good of the church: 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3. "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." The things at which other men rejoice are their amassing earthly treasures, their being advanced to honours, their being possessed of outward pleasures and delights. But these excited not the apostle's joy; but when he saw or heard of anything by which the interests of religion were promoted, and the church of Christ prospered, then he rejoiced: 1 Thess. i. 3. "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." And chapter ii. 20. "Ye are our glory and joy." He rejoiced at those things, however dear they cost him, how much so ever he lost by them in his temporal interest, if the welfare of religion and the good of souls were promoted; Phil. ii. 16, 17. "Holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." He rejoiced at the steadfastness of saints: Col. ii. 5. "For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." And he rejoiced at the conviction of sinners, and in whatever tended to it. He rejoiced at any good which was done, though by others, and though it was done accidentally by his enemies: Phil. i. 15, 16, 17, 18. "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the

gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." When the apostle heard anything of this nature, it was good news to him: 1 Thess. iii. 6, 7. "But now, when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also you; therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith. "When he heard such tidings, his heart was wont to be enlarged in the praises of God: Col. i. 3, 4. "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints." He was not only wont to praise God when he first heard such tidings, but as often as he thought of such things, they were so joyful to him, that he readily praised God Phil. i. 3, 4, 5. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." Let us compare ourselves with such an example, and examine how far we are of such a spirit. Let those on this occasion reflect upon themselves, whose hearts are chiefly engaged in their own private temporal concerns, and are not much concerned respecting the interests of religion and the church of Christ, if they can obtain their private aims; who are greatly grieved when things go contrary to their worldly prosperity, who see religion, as it were, weltering in its blood, without much sorrow of heart. It may be, that they will say; It is greatly to be lamented that there is such declension, and it is a sorrowful thing that sin so much prevails. But if we would look into their hearts, how cold and careless should we see them. Those words are words of course. They express themselves thus chiefly, because they think it creditable to lament the decay of religion; but they are ten times as much concerned about other things as these, about their own private interest, or some secular affairs of the town. If anything seems to threaten their being disappointed in these things, how readily are they excited and alarmed; but how quiet and easy in their spirit, notwithstanding all the dark clouds that appear over the cause and kingdom of Christ, and the salvation of those around them! How quick and how high is their zeal against those, who, they think, unjustly oppose them in their temporal interests; but how low is their zeal, comparatively, against those things that are exceedingly pernicious of the interests of religion! If their own credit is touched, how are they awakened! but they can see the credit of religion wounded, and bleeding, and dying, with little hearty concern. Most men are of a private, narrow spirit.

They are not of the spirit of the apostle Paul, nor of the psalmist, who preferred Jerusalem before his chief joy. Psal. cxxxvii. 6.

Secondly. We ought to follow the apostle in his diligent and laborious endeavours to do good. We see multitudes incessantly labouring and striving after the world; but not more than the apostle laboured to advance the kingdom of his dear Master, and the good of his fellow-creatures. His work was very great, and attended with great difficulties and opposition; and his labour was answerably great. He laboured abundantly more than any of the apostles: 1 Cor. xv. 10. "I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." How great were the pains he took in preaching and in travelling from place to place over so great part of the world, by sea and land, and probably for the most part on foot, when he travelled by land: instructing and converting the heathen, disputing with gainsayers, and heathen Jews, and heretics, strenuously opposing and fighting against the enemies of the church of Christ, wrestling not with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places; acting the part of a good soldier, as one that goes a warfare; putting on Christ and using the whole armour of God; labouring to establish, and confirm, and build up the saints, reclaiming those that were wandering, delivering those that were ensnared, enlightening the dark, comforting the disconsolate, and succouring the tempted; rectifying disorders that had happened in churches, exercising ecclesiastical discipline towards offenders, and admonishing the saints of the covenant of grace; opening and applying the Scriptures, ordaining persons and giving them directions, and assisting those that were ordained; and writing epistles, and sending messengers to one and another part of the church of Christ! He had the care of the churches lying continually upon him: 2 Cor. xi. 28. "Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." These things occasioned him to be continually engaged in earnest labour. He continued in it night and day, sometimes almost the whole night, preaching and admonishing, as appears by Acts xx. 7, 11. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed." And he did all freely, without any view to any temporal gain. He tells the

Corinthians that he would gladly spend and be spent for them. Besides his labouring in the work of the gospel, he laboured very much, yea, sometimes night and day, in a handicraft trade to procure subsistence, that he might not be chargeable to others, and so hinder the gospel of Christ: 1 Thess. ii. 9. "For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail, for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." And he continued this course of labour as long as he lived. He never was weary in well-doing; and though he met with continual opposition, and thousands of difficulties, yet nothing discouraged him. But he kept on, pressing forward in this course of hard, constant labour to the end of his life, as appears by what he says just before his death, 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." And the effects and fruits of the apostle's labours witnessed for him. The world was blessed by the good he did; not one nation only, but multitudes of nations. The effects of his labours were so great in so many nations before he had laboured twenty years, that the heathens called it his turning the world upside down. Acts xvii. 6. This very man was the chief instrument in that great work of God, the calling of the Gentiles, and the conversion of the Roman world. And he seems to have done more good, far more good, than any other man ever did from the beginning of the world to this day. He lived after his conversion not much more than thirty years; and in those thirty years he did more than a thousand men commonly do in an age. This example may well make us reflect upon ourselves, and consider how little we do for Christ, and for our fellow-creatures. We profess to be Christians as well as the apostle Paul, and Christ is worthy that we should serve him as Paul did. But how small are our labours for God and Christ and our fellow-creatures! Though many of us keep ourselves busy, how are our labour and strength spent, and with what is our time filled up? Let us consider ourselves a little, and the manner of spending our time. We labour to provide for ourselves and families, to maintain ourselves in credit, and to make our part good among men. But is that all for which we are sent into the world? Did he who made us and gave us our powers of mind and strength of body, and who gives us our time and our talents, give them to us chiefly to be spent in this manner; or in serving him? Many years have rolled over the heads of some of us, and what have we lived for; what have we been doing all this time? How much is the world the better for us? Were we here only to eat and to drink, and to devour the good which the earth produces? Many of the

blessings of Providence have been conferred upon us; and where is the good that we have done in return? If we had never been born, or if we had died in infancy, of how much good would the world have been deprived of? Such reflections should be made with concern, by those who pretend to be Christians. For certainly God does not plant vines in his vineyard, except for the fruit which he expects they should bring forth. He does not hire labourers into his vineyard, but to do service. They who live only for themselves, live in vain, and shall at last be cut down as cumberers of the earth. Let the example of Paul make us more diligent to do good for the time to come. Men that do but little good are very ready to excuse themselves, and to say, that God has not succeeded their endeavours. But is it any wonder that we have not been succeeded, when we have been no more engaged? When God sees any person thoroughly and earnestly engaged, continuing in it, and really faithful, he is wont to succeed them in some good measure. You see how wonderfully he succeeded the great labours of the apostle.

Thirdly. He did not only encounter great labours, but he exercised also his utmost skill and contrivance for the glory of God, and the good of his fellow-creatures; 2 Cor. xii. 16. Being crafty, I caught you with guile.” How do the men of the world not only willingly labour to obtain worldly good, but how much craft and subtlety do they use? And let us consider how it is here among ourselves. How many are our contrivances to secure and advance our own worldly concerns! Who can reckon up the number of all the schemes that have been formed among us, to gain money, and honours, and accomplish particular worldly designs? How subtle are we to avoid those things that might hurt us in our worldly interest, and to baffle the designs of those who may be endeavouring to hurt us! But how little is contrived for the advancement of religion, and the good of our neighbours! How many schemes are laid by men to promote their worldly designs, where one is laid for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and the good of men! How frequent are the meetings of neighbours to determine how they may best advance such and such worldly affairs! But how seldom are there such meetings to revive sinking religion, to maintain and advance the credit of the gospel, and to accomplish charitable designs for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom, and the comfort and well-being of mankind! May not these considerations justly be a source of lamentation? How many men are wise in promoting their worldly interests; but what a shame is it, that so few show themselves wise as serpents and harmless as doves for Christ!

And how commonly is it the reverse of what the apostle advises the Christian Romans, “I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.” Is it not often on the contrary with professing Christians, as it was with the people of Judah and Jerusalem; “They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge?”

Fourthly. The apostle Paul did willingly forego those things that were in themselves lawful, for the furtherance of the interests of religion and the good of men. Thus marriage was a thing lawful for the apostle Paul as well as for other men, as he himself asserts; but he did not use the liberty he had in this matter, because he thought he might be under greater advantages to spread the gospel in a single than a married state. So it was lawful for the apostle to take the other course of life, as in eating and drinking, and freely using all kinds of wholesome food. And it was in itself a lawful thing for the apostle to demand a maintenance of those to whom he preached. But he forbear those things, because he supposed that in his circumstances, and in the circumstances of the church of Christ in that day, he could more advance the interests of religion and the good of men without them. For the gospel’s sake, and for the good of men, he was willing to forego all the outward advantages he could derive from them. 1 Cor. viii. 13. “Wherefore if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” He would not only avoid those things that were useless in themselves, but those also that gave any occasion to sin, or which led or exposed either himself or others to sin. Then it follows in the next chapter. “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?” The apostle did not only forbear some little things, but he put himself to great difficulties by forbearing those things that were in themselves lawful. It cost him a great deal of labour of body to maintain himself. But yet he willingly laboured, working with his own hands; and as he says, though he was free from all men, yet he made himself the servant of all, that he might gain the more. Let this induce such persons to consider themselves, whether they act altogether as become Christians, who look upon it as a sufficient excuse for all the liberties they take, that the things in which they

allow themselves, are in themselves lawful, that they are nowhere forbidden, though they cannot deny but that considered in their circumstances, they are of ill tendency, and expose them to temptation, and really tend to wound the credit and interest of religion, and to be a stumbling-block to others, or as the apostle expresses it, tend to cause others to offend. But they uphold themselves with this, that the things which they practise are not absolutely unlawful in themselves, and therefore they will not hearken to any counsels to avoid them. They think with themselves that it is unreasonable they should be tied up so strictly; that they may not take one and another liberty, and must be so stiff and precise above others. But why did not the apostle talk after their manner? Why did not he say within himself, It is unreasonable that I should deny myself lawful meat and drink merely to comply with the consciences of a few weak persons, that are unreasonable in their scruples? Why should I deny myself the comforts of marriage; why should I deny myself that maintenance which Christ himself has ordained for ministers, only to avoid the objection of unreasonable men? But the apostle was of another spirit. What he aimed at was by any means to promote the interest of religion, and the good of the church. And he had rather forego all the common comforts and enjoyments of life, than that religion should suffer.

Fifthly. The apostle willingly endured innumerable and extreme sufferings for the honour of Christ and the good of men. His sufferings were very great; and that not only once or twice, but he went through a long series of sufferings, that continued from the time of his conversion as long as his life lasted, so that his life was not only a life of extraordinary labour, but a life of extreme sufferings also. Labours and sufferings were mixed together, and attended each other to the end of the race which he ran. He endured sufferings of all kinds, even those that cannot consist in the loss of temporal things. He tells us he had suffered the loss of all things, Phil. iii. 8. all his former enjoyments, which he had before his conversion. And he endured many kinds of positive afflictions. 1 Cor. iv. 11, 12. "Even unto this present hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it." 2 Cor. vi. 4-11. "But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fasting; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth,

by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” None of the apostles went through so great and such various afflictions as he: 2 Cor. xi. 23-28. “Are they ministers of Christ? I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness.” His sufferings were so extreme, that he did not go through a series of sufferings merely, but might be said, as it were, to go through a series of deaths. He did in effect endure the pains of death over and over again almost continually, and therefore he expresses himself as he does 2 Cor. iv. 9-11. “Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 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. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.” Rom. viii. 30. “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” 1 Cor. xv. 31. “I protest by your rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.” He was so pursued and pressed by troubles, sometimes outward and inward troubles together, that he had no rest. 2 Cor. vii. 5. “For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side: without were fighting, within were fears.” Sometimes his sufferings were so extreme that his nature seemed just ready to faint under them: 2 Cor. i. 8. “For we would, not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble, which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” And at last the apostle was deprived of his life. He suffered a violent death at Rome under the hand of that cruel tyrant, Nero, soon after he wrote the second epistle to Timothy. These things he endured for Christ’s sake; for the advancement of his kingdom; as he says, he was always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake. And those he endured also from love to men, and from

an earnest desire of their good: 2 Tim. ii. 10. "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." He knew what afflictions awaited him beforehand; but he would not avoid his duty because of such afflictions. He was so resolute in seeking Christ's glory, and the good of men, that he would pursue these objects, notwithstanding what might befall him: Acts xx. 22-24. "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Yet he went through them cheerfully and willingly, and delighted to do God's will, and to promote others' good, though it was at this great cost: 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." And he was never weary. He did not, after he had suffered a long time, excuse himself, and say he thought he had done his part. Now here appears Christianity in its proper colours. To be of such a spirit as this, is to be of such a spirit as Christ so often requires of us, if we would be his disciples. This is to sell all and give to the poor. This is to take up the cross daily and follow Christ. To have such a spirit as this, is to have good evidence of being a Christian indeed, a thorough Christian, one that has given himself to Christ without reserve; one that hates father and mother, and wife, and children, and sisters, yea and his own life also; one that loses his life for Christ's sake, and so shall find it. And though it is not required of all that they should endure so great sufferings as Paul did; yet it is required and absolutely necessary, that many Christians should be in a measure of this spirit, should be of a spirit to lose all things and suffer all things for Christ, rather than not obey his commands and seek his glory. How well may our having such an example as this set before our eyes make us ashamed, who are so backward now and then to lose little things, to put ourselves a little out of our way, to deny ourselves some convenience, to deny our sinful appetites, or to incur the displeasure of a neighbour. Alas! what thought have we of Christianity, to make much of such things as these; to make so many objections, to keep back, and contrive ways to excuse ourselves, when a little difficulty arises! What kind of thoughts had we of being Christians, when we first undertook to be such, or first pretended a willingness to be Christians? Did we never sit down and count the cost, or did we cast it up

at this rate, that we thought the whole sum would not amount to such little sufferings as lie in our way?

II. I now proceed to show under what special obligations we are to follow the good example of this apostle. Beside the obligation that rests upon us to follow the good example of all, and beside the eminence of his example, there are some special reasons why we are under greater obligations to be influenced by the good example of this great apostle, than by the very same example in others.

This appears if we consider,

1. In general, that those whom God has especially appointed to be teachers in the Christian church, he has also set to be examples in his church. It is part of the charge that belongs to teachers, to be examples to others. It is one thing that belongs to their work and office. So this is part of the charge that the apostle gives to Timothy, "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." The same charge is given to Titus, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works." And this is part of the charge the apostle Peter gives to the elders and teachers of the Christian church, "The elders which are among you, I exhort; feed the flock of God. Neither being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." Thus Christ, the chief Shepherd of the sheep, whom God ordained to be the greatest teacher, he also ordained to be the greatest example to his church. And so those shepherds and teachers that are under him, according as they are appointed to be teachers, are also to be examples. They are to be guides of the flock in two ways, viz. by teaching and by example, as shepherds lead their flocks in two ways; partly by their voice by calling them, and partly by going before them, and by leading the way. And indeed guiding by word and guiding by example, are but two different ways of teaching; and therefore both alike belong to the office of teachers in the Christian church. But if this be so, if God has especially set those to be examples in the Christian church whom he has made its teachers, then it will follow, that wherever they have left us good examples, those examples are especially to be regarded. For God has doubtless made the duty of teachers towards the church, and the duty of the church towards her teachers, to answer one another. And therefore the charge is mutual. The charge is not only to teachers to set good examples, but the charge is to the church to regard and follow their good examples: Heb. xiii. 7. "Remember them which have the rule over you, which have spoken unto you

the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” It is with respect to the good examples of the teachers of the Christian church, as it is with their words, their instructions and exhortations. We ought to hear good instructions and good counsels of any one, let him be whom he may. But yet we are under special obligations to hearken to the good instructions and examples of those whom God has made our teachers; for that is the very office to which God has appointed them to teach and to counsel us.

2. There are two things that are to be observed in particular of the apostle Paul, which, from the foregoing general observation, will show that we are under very special obligations to regard and follow his good example.

First. God hath appointed the apostle Paul not only to be a greater teacher of the Christian church in that age in which he lived, but the principal teacher of his church of any mere man in all succeeding ages. He was set of God not only to teach the church then, when he lived, but God has made him our teacher by his inspired writings. The Christian church is taught by the apostle still, and has been in every age since he lived. It is not with the penmen of the Scriptures, as it is with other teachers of the Christian church. Other teachers are made the teachers of a particular flock in the age in which they live. But the penmen of the Scriptures hath God made to be the teachers of the church universal in all ages. And therefore, as particular congregations ought to follow the good examples of their pastors, so the church universal in all ages ought to observe and follow the good examples of the prophets and apostles, that are the penmen of the Scriptures, in all ages. So the apostle James commands us to take the ancient prophets for our example, because they have been appointed of God to be our teachers, and have spoken to us in the name of the Lord. James v. 10. “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and patience.” The prophets and apostles, in that God has made them penmen of the Scriptures, are, next to Christ, the foundation of the church of God: Eph. ii. 20. “Built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.” And Paul, above all the penmen of the Scriptures, is distinguished of God as being made by him the principal teacher of the Christian church of any mere man. Moses taught gospel truths under types and shadows, whereby he did, as it were, put a veil over his face. But Paul used great plainness of speech. 2 Cor. iii. 12, 13. Moses was a minister of the Old Testament and of the letter that kills. But the apostle Paul is the principal

minister of the New Testament, of the spirit, and not of the letter. 2 Cor. iii. 6, 7. Christ has empowered this apostle to be the penmen of more of the New Testament than any other man, and it is by him chiefly that we have the great doctrine of it explained. And God has actually made this apostle the principal founder of the Christian church under Christ. He doubtless did more towards it than all the other apostles; and therefore is to be looked upon as the principal shepherd under Christ of the whole flock of Christ, which is a great obligation on the flock to regard and follow his good example.

Secondly. We, who are Gentiles, are especially under obligations to regard his teaching and example, because it has been mainly by means of this apostle that we have been brought into the Christian church. He was the great apostle of the Gentiles; the main instrument of that great work of God, the calling of the Gentiles. It was chiefly by his means that all the countries of Europe came by the gospel. And so it was through his hands that our nation came by the gospel. They either had the gospel from him immediately, or from those who had it from him. Had it not been for the labours of this apostle, our nation might have remained to this day in gross heathenism. This consideration should especially engage us to regard him as our guide, and should endear his good example to us.

The apostle often exhorts those churches, as the church of Corinth, Philippi, and others which he had converted from heathenism, and to which he had been a spiritual father, to be followers of him wherein he followed Christ. And we are some of them. We have been the more remarkably converted from heathenism by this apostle, and we ought to acknowledge him as our spiritual father. And we are obliged to follow his good example as children should follow the good example of their parents. I now proceed to a general.

Application

Of the whole that has been said on this subject, which may be by way of exhortation to all earnestly to endeavour to follow the good example of this great apostle. We have heard what a spirit the apostle manifested, and after what manner he lived in the world; how earnestly he sought his own salvation, and that not only before, but also after, his conversion, and how earnestly cautious he was to avoid eternal damnation, long after he had obtained a saving interest in Christ. We have heard how strong he was in faith, how

great was his love to his Lord and Saviour, and how he was not ashamed of the gospel, but gloried in the cross of Christ; how he abounded in prayer and praise; how he condemned the wealth, and pleasures, and glory of the world; how contented he was with the allotments of Providence; how prudent and cautious he was in giving an account of his achievements, lest he should represent more of himself in words than men should see of him in deeds. We have heard how much he suffered under abuses, how he loved his enemies, how he delighted in peace, and rejoiced with those that rejoiced, and wept with those that wept, and delighted in the fellowship of God's people, and how courteous he was in his behaviour towards others. We have heard of what a public spirit he was, how greatly concerned for the prosperity of Christ's kingdom and the good of his church, how diligent, laborious, and indefatigable in his endeavours to do good; how he studied for ways and means to promote this end, how he exercised his skill and contrivance, willingly foregoing those things that were in themselves lawful, and willingly enduring innumerable and extraordinary sufferings. My exhortation now is to imitate this example; and to enforce this, I desire that several things may be considered.

1. Let it be considered, why it is that we have so much written of the good example of this apostle, unless that we might follow it. We often read those things in the Holy Scriptures which have now been set before us on this subject; and to what purpose, unless we apply them to ourselves?

We had as good never have been informed how well the apostle behaved himself, if we do not endeavour to follow him. We all profess to be Christians, and we ought to form our notions of Christianity from what is written in the Scriptures by the prophets, and from the precepts and excellent examples that are there set before us. One great reason why many professors live no better, walk no more amiably, and are in so many things so unlovely, is, that they have not good notions of Christianity. They do not seem to have a right idea of that religion that is taught us in the New Testament. They have not well learned Christ. The notions that some persons entertain of Christianity are very distorted, and ill conformed to the gospel. The notions of others are very erroneous. They lay the chief stress wrong, upon things on which it ought not to be laid. They place religion almost altogether in some particular duties, leaving out others of great weight, and, it may be, the weightier matters of the law. And the reason why they have no better notions of Christianity is, because they

take their notions of it chiefly from those sources whence they ought not to take them. Some take them from the general cry or voice of the people, among whom they live. They see that others place religion merely, if not almost wholly, in such and such things. And hence their notions of Christianity are formed. Or they take their notions from the example of particular individuals now living, who are in great reputation for godliness. And their notion of Christianity is that it consists in being like such persons. Hence they never have just notions of religion: 2 Cor. x. 12. "They, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." If we would have right notions of Christianity, we should observe those in whom it shone, of whom we have an account in the Scriptures. For they are the examples that God himself has selected to set before us to that end, that from thence we might form our notions of religion; and especially the example of this apostle. God knows how to select examples. If therefore we would have right notions of Christianity, we ought to follow the good example of the apostle Paul. He was certainly a Christian indeed, and an eminent Christian. We have God's abundant testimony. But Christianity is in itself an amiable thing, and so it appeared in the example of this apostle. And if the professors of it would form their notions of it from such examples as those, rather than from any particular customs and examples that we have now, it would doubtless appear much more amiable in their practice than it now does; it would win others. They would not be a stumbling-block. Their light would shine. They would command reverence and esteem, and be of powerful influence.

2. If we follow the good example which this apostle has set us, it will secure to us the like comfortable and sweet influence of God, that he enjoyed through the course of his life. Let us consider what a happy life the apostle lived; what peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, he possessed: 2 Cor. i. 12. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience." How did he abound with comfort and joy, even in the midst of the greatest afflictions: 2 Cor. i. 3-5. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort. Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comforts wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth in Christ." In all his tribulation his joy was exceedingly great. He seems to want words to express the greatness of the joy which he possessed continually. He

says he was filled with comfort, and was exceedingly joyful: 2 Cor. vii. 4. "I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." How does the apostle's love seem to overflow with joy! 2 Cor. vi. 10,11. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things. O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged." How happy is such a life! How well is such happiness worth pursuing! We are ourselves the occasion of our own wounds and troubles. We bring darkness on our own souls. Professing Christians, by indulging their sloth, seek their own ease and comfort; but they defeat their own aim. The most laborious and the most self-denying Christians are the most happy. There are many who are complaining of their darkness, and inquiring what they shall do for light, and the comfortable presence of God.

3. This would be the way to be helped against temptation, and to triumph over our spiritual enemies as the apostle did. Satan assaulted him violently, and men continually persecuted him. The powers of hell combined against him. But God was with him, and made him more than a conqueror. He lived a life of triumph: 2 Cor. ii. 14. "Now thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ." Let us consider what an excellent privilege it would be thus to be helped against temptation. What a grief of mind is it to be so often overcome.

4. This would secure us honour from God, and an extraordinary intimacy with him. Moses enjoyed a great intimacy with God, but the apostle Paul in some respects a greater. Moses conversed with God in Mount Sinai. Paul was caught up to the third heavens. He had abundant visions and revelations more than he has told us, lest any should think him to boast. He was favoured with more of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit than any other person. And though we cannot expect to be honoured with intimacy with heaven in just the same way, yet if we in good earnest apply ourselves, we may have greater and greater intimacy, so that we may come with boldness, and converse with God as a friend.

This would be the way to make us great blessings in the world. The apostle, by means of such a spirit and such a behaviour as you have heard, was made the greatest blessing to the world of any who ever lived on earth, except the man Christ Jesus himself. Wherever he went, there went a blessing with him. To have him enter a city was commonly made a greater mercy to it than if the greatest monarch on earth had come there, scattering his treasures around him among the inhabitants.

Wherever he went, there did, as it were, a light shine about him, seemingly to enlighten the benighted children of men. Silver and gold he had none, but what he imparted to many thousands was worth more to them than if he had bestowed upon them the richest jewels of which the Roman emperor was possessed. And he was not only a blessing to that generation, but has been so since his death, by the fruits of what he did in his lifetime, the foundations he then laid, and by the writings which he has left for the good of mankind, to the end of the world. He then was, and ever since has been, a light to the church next in brightness to the Sun of righteousness. And it was by means of his excellent spirit and excellent behaviour that he became such a blessing. Those were the things that God made useful in him for doing so much good. And if we should imitate the apostle in such a spirit and behaviour, the undoubted consequence would be, that we also should be made great blessings in the world; we should not live in vain, but should carry a blessing with us wherever we went. Instead of being cumberers of the ground, multitudes would be fed with our fruit, and would have reason to praise and bless God that he ever gave us a being. Now, how melancholy a consideration may it be to any persons that they have lived to no purpose; that the world would have been deprived of nothing, if they had never been born; and it may be, have been better without them than with them! How desirable is it to be a blessing! How great was the promise made to Abraham, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed!"

6. For us to follow the good example of the apostle Paul would be the way for us to die as he did. 2 Tim. iv. 6–8. "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

7. This would secure us a distinguished crown of glory hereafter. It is thought by some, and not without great probability, that the apostle Paul is the very next in glory to the man Jesus Christ himself. This is probable from his having done more good than any, and from his having done it through so great labours and sufferings. The apostle tells us, "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."

I shall conclude with mentioning some things as encouragements for us to endeavour to follow the excellent example of this great apostle. Many may be ready to say that it is in

vain for them to try. The apostle was a person so greatly distinguished; it is in vain for them to endeavour to be like him. But for your encouragement, consider,

1. That the apostle was a man of like passions with us. He had naturally the same heart, the same corruptions; was under the same circumstances, the same guilt, and the same condemnation. There is this circumstance that attends the apostle's example to encourage us to endeavour to imitate him, which did not attend the example of Christ. And yet we are called upon to imitate the example of Christ. This is probably one main reason why not only the example of Christ, but also those of mere men, are set before us in the Scriptures. Though you may think you have no great reason to hope to come up to the apostle's degree, yet that is no reason why you should not make his good example your pattern, and labour, as far as in you lies, to copy after him.

2. This apostle, before he was converted, was a very wicked man, and a vile persecutor. He often speaks of it himself. He sinned against great light.

3. He had much greater hindrances and impediments to eminent holiness from without than any of us have. His circumstances made it more difficult for him.

4. The same God, the same Saviour, and the same head of divine influence, are ready to help our sincere endeavours that helped him. Let us therefore not excuse ourselves, but in good earnest endeavour to follow so excellent an example. And then, however weak we are in ourselves, we may hope to experience Christ's support, and be able to say from our own experience, as the apostle did before him, "when I am weak, then am I strong."