

The Christian in Complete Armour - Part 18

by William Gurnall

William Gurnall emphasizes the vital role of prayer in supporting ministers and fostering community among believers.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:26

Topics: "Divine Revelation", "Power Of Prayer"

Description

William Gurnall preaches about the profound nature of the gospel as a mystery revealed by divine revelation, surpassing human understanding, known only to a few chosen by God, often despised by the world, and understood imperfectly by believers. He emphasizes the importance of prayer for ministers to have boldness in proclaiming the gospel, as it is a sacred duty to make known the truths of the gospel to others. Gurnall highlights the need for humility in seeking prayers from others, the power of prayer in preserving the liberty of the gospel, and the duty of believers to pray for their ministers to fulfill their divine calling with courage and effectiveness.

Transcript

Direction Twelfth.

The Duty of every Christian in complete Armour to aid by Prayer

the Public Ministers of Christ.

'And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly,

to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds'

(Eph. 6:19, 20).

The apostle having laid out this duty of prayer in its full compass, taking all saints within its circumference, he comes now to apply the general rule, and claims a share in it himself--'and for me.' When he bids them pray 'for all saints,' he surely cannot be shut out of their prayers who is not the least in the number. In the words there are four branches. FIRST. Here is an exhortation, or Paul's request for himself, and in him for all ministers of the gospel--'and for me.' SECOND. The matter of his request--'that utterance may be given unto me.' Not that he would confine and determine them in their prayers to this request alone; but he propounds it as a principal head to be insisted on by them on his behalf. THIRD. The end why he desires

this--'that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.' FOURTH. A double argument to back and enforce this request--'for which I am an ambassador in bonds'--First. Taken from his office. Second. From his present afflicted state.

BRANCH FIRST.

[The request of Paul as a minister of Christ,
for the prayers of believers.]

'And for me.'

Here is an exhortation, or Paul's request for himself, and in him for all ministers of the gospel--'and for me.' First. We may note here that people are to be taught the duty they owe to their minister as well as to others. Second. It is not only our duty to pray for others, but also to desire the prayers of others for ourselves. Third. We may note that the ministers of the gospel are, in an especial manner, to be remembered in the saints' prayers.

First. We may note here that people are to be taught the duty they owe to their minister as well as to others; though indeed no duty is harder for the minister to press or for the people to hear--for him to preach with humility and wisdom, or for them to receive without prejudice.

[It is our duty as well to desire the prayers
of others, as to pray for them.]

Second. It is not only our duty to pray for others, but also to desire the prayers of others for ourselves. If a Paul turns beggar, and desires the remembrance of others for him, who then needs it not? This hath been the constant practice of the saints. Sometimes they call in the help of their brethren upon special occasions to pray with them. Thus Daniel, ch. 2:18, when required to interpret the king's dream, makes use of 'Hananiah, Mishael,' and 'Azariah, his companions.' 'Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to these that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret.' Daniel would not give an answer to the king till he had got an answer from God. To prayer therefore he goes. No doubt he forgot not his errand in his closet when at his solitary devotions; but withal he calls in help to join in social prayer with him. He sends for them to his house; where, it is probable, they prayed together, for the mutual quickening of their affections and strengthening of their petition by this their united force. Wherefore, he acknowledgeth the mercy as an answer to their concurrent prayers: 'I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee,' ver. 23. This justifies the saints' practice when, in any great strait of temptation or affliction, they get some other of the faithful to give a lift with them at this duty. Sometimes we have them desiring their brethren's prayers for them when they cannot conveniently have it with them. Thus Esther sets the Jews in Shushan to prayer for her, Est. 4:16; so our apostle in many of his epistles desires the saints to carry his name with them to the throne of grace, Rom. 15:30; II Cor. 1:10, 11; Col. 4:3; Php. 1:19. And not without great reason, for,

First. God hath made it a debt which one saint owes to another to carry their names to a throne of grace. Now, not to desire this debt to be paid, which God hath charged our brethren with, is to undervalue the mercy and goodness of our God. Should a legacy be left us by a friend, were it not a despising of his kindness not to call upon the heir who is to pay it? Surely God accounts he doth us a kindness herein, and

therefore may take it ill not to ask for it. It is not our usage to lose a debt for want of a demand, and this is none of the least we have owing to us.

Second. Many are the gracious promises that are made to such prayers of the faithful one for another. 'If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them,' I John 5:16. But you will say, How can the prayer of one obtain the forgiveness for another? I answer, None is forgiven for the faith of another; this must be personal; but the believing fervent prayer of one is an excellent means to obtain the grace of repentance and faith for another, whereby he may come to be forgiven. So, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed,' James 5:16. Now, in not desiring our brethren's help in this kind, we make no use of these promises--the proper end of which is to encourage us to call in the auxiliary aid of others--as if such passages of Scripture might have been well spared for any need we have of them. Should you see a piece of ground never sown nor fed, you might well say the ground is barren or the owner a bad husband; either the promise is empty and useless, or we that do not improve it are worse husbands for our souls. But we cannot say so of the promise, if we consider the great fruit and advantage which the saints in all ages have reaped from it. Did not Daniel get the knowledge of a great secret as a return of his companions' prayers with him? Did not Job's friends escape a great judgment that hung over their heads at his intercession? What a miraculous deliverance had Peter at the prayers of a few saints gathered together on his behalf! Bring not therefore an evil report upon this promise, seeing such sweet clusters as these are to be shown that have been gathered from it.

Third. If we desire not others to carry our name to a throne of grace, we are guilty of quenching the Spirit of prayer; which may be done in ourselves and others also.

1. By this we may quench it in ourselves. Partly, because we neglect a duty. We are bid to 'confess our sins one to another,' and for what end but to have the benefit of mutual prayers? The same Spirit which stirs thee up to pray for thyself will excite thee in many cases to set others at prayer for thee; which, if thou dost not, thou overlayest his motions, and so committest a sin. Again, thou quenchest the Spirit of prayer in thyself by depriving thyself of that assistance which thou mightest receive in thy own prayers through theirs; for the Spirit conveys his quickening grace to us in the use of instruments and means. He that doth not hear the word preached quenches his Spirit, because God useth this as bellows to blow up and enkindle the saint's grace. So, he that desires not the prayers of others quencheth the Spirit of prayer in himself, because the exercise of their grace in prayer for thee may fetch down more grace to be poured in unto thee.

2. Thou mayest be accessory to the quenching of the Spirit in others, because thou hinderest the acting of those graces in them which would have been drawn forth in prayer for thee hadst thou acquainted them with thy condition. Fire is quenched by subtracting fuel as well as by throwing on water. By opening thy wants or desires to thy brethren thou feedest Spirit of prayer in them, as they have new matter administered to work upon; by acquainting them with the merciful providences of God to thee, thou prickest a song of praise for them. How many groans and sighs should God in prayer have had from thy neighbour-saints hadst thou not bit in thy temptations and afflictions from their knowledge! What peals of joy and thankfulness would they have rung hadst thou not concealed thy mercies from them!

Fourth. We are to desire others to pray for us, to express the humble sense we have of our own weakness, and the need we have of others' help. Humble souls are fearful of their own strength. They that have little, desire partners with them in their trade; but when they conceit their own private stock to be

sufficient, then they can trade by themselves. 'Now are ye full, now are ye rich; ye have reigned as kings without us,' saith Paul of the self-conceited Corinthians. The time was you thought you had need of Paul's preaching to you and praying for you, but now ye reign without us! O how many are there, when time was, could beg prayers of every Christian they met! Nothing but wants and complaints could be heard from them, which made them beg help from all they knew to pray their corruptions down and their graces up. But now they have left the beggar's trade, and reign in an imaginary kingdom of their self-conceited sufficiency. Certainly, as it shows want of charity not to pray for others, so no want of pride not to desire prayers from others.

Fifth. We are to desire others to pray for us, that we may prevent Satan's designs against us. He knows very well what an advantage he hath upon the Christian when severed from his company; wherefore he labours what he can to hinder the conjunction of his solitary prayers with the auxiliary aid his brethren might lend him. Samson's strength lay not in a single hair but his whole lock; the saint's safety lies in communion, not in solitude and single devotion. How many, alas! concealing their temptations from others, have found their sorrows grow upon them after all their own private endeavours and wrestlings in secret against them? like one who, when his house is on fire, tries to quench it himself, but is not able, and so hazards the loss of all he hath for want of timely calling his neighbours to his help.

Sixth. The love we owe to our brethren requires that we should desire others to pray for us. The saints here live where none else love them but themselves, therefore they need not make much of one another. Now this of desiring their prayers carries a threefold expression of love to them.

1. By this we acknowledge the grace of God in our brethren, or else it is supposed we would not employ them in such a work. He that desires a friend to present a petition to the king on his behalf, shows he believes him to be in favour, and one that hath some interest in the prince. Now, what more honourable testimony can we give to another than to own him as a child of God, one whose prayers are welcome to heaven? We are bid to 'prefer every one his brother in honour.' Now no one way can we do this more than by making use of their help at the throne of grace to be our remembrancers to the Lord.

2. By this we do our utmost to interest our brethren in the mercy we desire them to pray for. Were a merchant to send some commodity to Turkey or Spain which he knows will make a gainful return, it would be a great favour to take others into partnership with him in the adventure. And what voyage is gainful like this of prayer? and whoever shares in the duty is partner in the mercy.

3. By this we confirm them in a confidence of our readiness to pray for them. What consists good neighbourhood in but a readiness to reciprocate kindnesses one to another?--when that is at the service of one neighbour which is in the house of another? Now, who will be bold or free with his neighbour to take a kindness from him that is not willing to receive the like? Be ye strange to your friend, and you teach him to be so to yourself. Nothing endears Christians more in love than an open heart one to another. A friend should have no cabinet in his bosom to which he allows not his friend a key.

Objection (1.) But do we not, by desiring our fellow-saints' prayers, intrench upon Christ's mediatory office?

Answer. No; surely Christ would not command that which would be a wrong to himself. There is great difference betwixt our desiring Christ to pray for us and our fellow-brethren. We desire Christ to present our persons and prayers, expecting acceptance of both through his blood and intercession. But no such matter from the prayers of our brethren; we only desire them as friends to bear us company to the throne

of grace, there to present our prayers in a communion together, expecting the welcome of both their and our prayers, not from them, but from Christ --relying on Christ to procure the welcome both to our prayers and theirs at our heavenly Father's hand.

Objection (2.) But why, then, may we not desire the prayers of the deceased saints for the same purpose we desire the prayers of those that yet live with us?

Answer (1.) We have no precept or example for this in the word; and unbidden there in duties of worship, is forbidden. We must not be 'wise above what is written.' Not to use the means which God hath appointed is a great sin, which was Ahaz's case; but to invent ways or means more than God hath appointed is far worse. It is bad enough for a subject not to keep the king's laws, but far worse for him to presume to mint a law of his own head. The first is undutiful, but the latter is a traitor.

Answer (2.) We have no way of expressing our thoughts and desires to the saints departed. Why should we pray to them that cannot hear what we say? or where is the messenger to send our minds by? or which the word in Scripture that saith they hear in heaven what we pray on earth?

Answer (3.) It is the prerogative of Christ to be the only agent in heaven for his saints on earth. 'To which of the angels or saints did God say, 'Sit thou at my right hand?' In the outward temple we find the whole congregation praying, but into the holy of holiest entered none but the high priest with his perfume. Every saint is a priest to offer up prayers for himself and others on earth; but Christ only as our High-priest intercedes in heaven for us. The glorious angels and saints there no doubt wish well to the church below; but it is Christ's office to receive the incense of his militant saints' prayers, which they send up from this outward temple here below to heaven, and to offer it with all their desires to God; so that, to employ any in heaven besides Christ to pray for us, is to put Christ out of office.

[Use or Application.]

Use First. It reproves those into whose hearts it never yet came to beg prayers for their own souls. Surely they are great strangers to themselves, and ignorant what a privilege they lose! As Christ said to the woman of Samaria, If thou hadst known the gift of God, and who it is that asks, thou wouldst have asked, and he would have given. Did poor souls know who the saints are--what favourites with God, and how prevalent their prayers are with him--they would not willingly be left out of their remembrance. I never knew any but, as soon as God began to work upon them--though it were no more than to awaken their consciences--thought this worth the desiring. It is natural for man in straits to crave help. A servant or a child, when master or father are displeased and blows are threatened, if they know any that have interest in their favour, and are more likely to prevail with them than others, then they entreat such to become suitors for them. When hunger and want pinch the poor, then, if they have any neighbour to be their friend, to speak to the parish for them, he shall soon hear of them. Now, were the sense of their wants or troubles of a higher nature, would they not be as earnest to desire prayers for their souls as now they are to beg bread for their bodies? Well, you that fear God, and live among such, do your duty, though they have not hearts to desire it at your hands, pray over their stupid souls before the Lord. When a friend is sick, and his senses are gone, you do not stay to send for the physician till he comes to himself and is able to desire you to do it for him. You had need make the more haste to God for such as these, lest they go away in this apoplexy of conscience, and so be past praying for.

Use Second. It reproves those who desire prayers of God's people, but hypocritically; and they are such as set others on work, but pray not for themselves--a certain sign of a naughty heart. Thus pharaoh often

called for Moses to pray for him and his land; but we read not that ever he made any address himself to God, but thought it enough to send another on his errand; whereas a gracious soul will be sure to meet him he employs at the work. 'I beseech you,' saith Paul, 'to strive together with me' in your prayers to God for me. He did not slip the collar off his own neck to put it on another's, but drew together with them in it; else they that pray for thee may pray the mercy away from thee.

Use Third. It reproves such as desire prayers of others, but it is only in some great pinch. If their chariot is set fast in some deep slough of affliction, then they send in all haste for some to draw them out with their prayer, who, at another time, change their thoughts of the saints' prayers, yea, and of God himself. The frogs once gone, and Moses hears no more of Pharaoh till another plague rubs up his memory. Moses hears not Pharaoh cry till Pharaoh hears the frogs croak. Thus, as they say of coral, it is soft in the water where it grows, and hard when taken out; many, their consciences are soft and tender whilst sleeping in affliction, but hard and stout when that is removed. Pharaoh that so oft called Moses up to prayer, at last could not endure the sight of him, but forewarned him for ever coming in his sight. O take heed of this! When once the wretch came to that pass, and so strangely changed his note as to drive Moses from him, that had so often bailed and rescued him out of the hands of divine vengeance, then he had not long to live, for he removed the very dam, and lift up the sluice to let in ruin upon himself.

Use Fourth. It reproves such as desire others to pray for them, but vaingloriously--to gain a reputation for religion. Beware of this; yet charge not all for the hypocrisy of some, neither deprive thyself of the benefit of others' prayers out of an imaginary fear lest thou shouldst play the hypocrite therein. Watch thy heart, but waive not the duty. Because some have strangled themselves with their own garters, wilt thou therefore be afraid to wear thine? Or because some canting beggars go about the country to show their sores, which they desire not to have cured, wilt not thou therefore, when wounded, go to the surgeon?

[Ministers of the gospel have a special claim

on the prayers of believers.]

Third. From this request of the apostle we may note that the ministers of the gospel are, in an especial manner, to be remembered in the saints' prayers; and that,

First. In regard of God, whose message they bring. They come about his work and deliver his errand. Not to pray for them will be interpreted you wish not well to the business they have in hand for him. They do not only come from God, but with Christ. 'We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain,' II Cor. 6:1. Christ and the minister go into the pulpit together. A greater than man is there; master and servant are both at work.

Again, the blessing of the minister's labour is from God; not the hand that sets the plant or sows the seed, but God's blessing, gives the increase, I Cor. 3:6. When Melancthon was first converted, the light of the gospel shone so clear and strong a beam on his own eyes, that he thought he should convert all he preached unto. He deemed it was impossible his hearers should withstand that truth which he saw with so much evidence; but he afterwards found the contrary, which made him say, 'I see now that the old Adam is too hard for the young Melancthon.' God carries the key by his girdle that alone can open hearts, and prayer is the key to open his. When Christ intended to send forth his disciples to preach the gospel, he sets them solemnly to prayer, Matt. 9:38. Many are the promises which he hath given to the ministers of the gospel for their protection--that he will keep these stars in his right hand, or else they had been on the ground and stamped under foot long ere this--for their assistance and success in the work: 'I will be with

thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,' Ex. 4:12. 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...I am with you alway, unto the end of the world,' Matt. 28:19, 20. Wherefore are these promises, but to be shot back again in prayers to God that gave them?

Second. In regard of the ministers themselves. There is not a greater object of pity and prayer in the whole world than the faithful ministers of Christ; if you consider,

1. The importance of their work. It is temple work, and that is weighty; which made Paul, that had the broadest shoulders of all his brethren, cry out, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' 'I am doing a great work,' said Nehemiah, Neh. 6:3. But what was that to his? No work more hazardous to carry in than this. It is sad enough to drop to hell from under the pulpit--to hear the gospel, and yet to perish; but O how dismal to fall out of it thither for unfaithfulness to the work! The consideration of this made Paul so bestir him; 'knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.'

2. It is a laborious work. 'Know them which labour among you...and admonish you,' I Thes. 5:12; those who labour in the word and doctrine, @Ë 6@B4ä<J,H--which labour to weariness. He that preaches as he should, shall find it a work, and not play. Not a work of an hour while speaking in the pulpit, but a load that lies heavy on his shoulders all the week long; a labour that spends the vitals, and consumes the oil which should feed the lamp of nature; such a labour, in a word, as makes old age and youth oft meet together. The Jews took Christ to be about fifty years old when he was little above thirty, John 8:57. I find some give this reason of it, because Christ had so macerated his body with labour in preaching, fasting, and watching, that it aged his very countenance and made him look older than he was. Other callings are, many of them, but as exercise to nature; they blow off the ashes from its coal, and help to discharge nature of those superfluities which oppress it. Who eats his bread more heartily, and sleeps more sweetly, than the ploughman? But the minister's work debilitates nature. It is hard for him to eat and work too. Like the candle, he wastes while he shines. Whatever work is thought harder than other, we have it borrowed to set forth the minister's labour. They are called soldiers, watchmen, husbandmen, yea, their work is set out by the pangs of a woman in travail. Some of them indeed have easier labours than other--those who find more success of their ministry than their brethren; but who can tell the throes that their souls feel who all the time of their ministry go in travail and bring forth dead children at last?

3. It is opposed work by hell and earth.

(1.) It is opposed by hell. The devil never liked temple work; he that was at Joshua's right hand to resist him, is at the minister's elbow to disturb him, and that both in study and pulpit also. 'I would have come,' saith Paul, 'but Satan hindered.' Who can tell all the devices that Satan hath to take the minister off or hinder him in his work? One while he discourageth him, that he is ready with Jonah to run away with his charge; another while he is blowing of him up with pride. Even Paul himself hath a thorn given him in his flesh to keep pride out of his heart. Sometimes he roils him with passion, and leavens his zeal into sourness and unmercifulness. This the disciples were tainted with, when they called for fire to come down from heaven upon those that stood in their way. Sometimes he chills their zeal, and intimidates their spirits into cowardice and self-pity. Thus Peter favoured himself when he denied his Master; and when at another time he dissembled with the Jews, to curry their favour.

(2.) It is opposed by the wicked world. 'To be a minister,' said Luther, 'is nothing else but to derive the world's wrath and fury upon himself.' How are they loaden with reproaches! This dirt lies so thick nowhere as on the minister's coat. What odious names did the best of men, the apostles themselves, go under?

And it were well they would only smite them with the tongue; but you shall find in all ages persecutors have thirsted most after their blood. The persecution in the Acts begins with the cutting off of James' head. Seven thousand could lie better his in Jezebel's time than one prophet. These are the burdensome stones which every one is lifting at, though none can do it without bruising his own fingers. In every national storm almost, they are taken up to be thrown overboard for those that raised it. How many are there of an opinion that nothing keeps them from seeing happy days but the standing of them and their office? O miserable happiness, which cannot be bought and purchased but with the ruin of those that bring the tidings of peace and salvation to them all! Such a happiness this would be as the sheep had in the fable, when persuaded to have the dogs that kept the wolves off killed; or as the passengers at sea would have when their pilot is thrown overboard. In a word, such a happiness as the Jews had when Christ was taken out of the way by their murderous hands. They slew him to preserve themselves from the Romans destroying their city, but brought them with irreparable ruin by this very means upon their own head.

4. That which adds weight to all the former is, that the men who are to bear this heavy burden, and to conflict with all these difficulties and dangers, are those who have no stronger shoulders than others; for they are men subject to the like infirmities with their brethren. Now, will not all this melt you into compassion towards them, and your compassion send you to prayer for them? Shall they stand in the face of death and danger, where Satan's bullets, and man's also, fly so thick, and you not be at the pains to raise a breastwork before them for their defence by your prayers?

Third. In regard of yourselves. Love to yourselves will plead to pray for them.

1. Consider their ministry is an office set up on purpose for your sakes. It was never intended for the exalting of a few men above their brethren, but for the service of your faith. The gifts that Christ hath given to men, Eph. 4--that is, their office and abilities to discharge it--are both for the edifying of the body of Christ, and will you not pray for those that from one end of the year to the other are at work for you? If you had but a child or servant sent abroad about your worldly business, would you not send a prayer after him? Thus did good Jacob, when his children went on his errand to Egypt: 'God Almighty give you mercy before this man.' Will you not do thus much for your poor minister, and pray God Almighty go with him, when in his study to prepare, and when in the pulpit to deliver what he hath prepared for our souls?

2. The ministers' miscarriage is dangerous to the people; therefore pray for them, lest you be led into temptation by their falls. The sins of teachers are the teachers of sin. If the nurse be sick, the child is in danger to suck the disease from her that lies at her breast. If the minister be tainted with an error, it is strange if many of his people should not catch the infection; when, if he be loose and scandalous in his life, he is like a common well or fountain, corrupted and muddied, at which all the town draw their water. The devil aimed at more than Peter when he desired leave to try a fall with him. 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat,' Luke 22:31. He knew his fall was like to strike up the heels of many others. The minister's practice makes a greater sound than his doctrine. They who forget his sermon, will remember his example to quote it for their apology and defence when time serves. Peter withdraws, and 'other Jews dissembled with him,' Gal. 2:12, 13. Truly, friends, your ministers are but men, and of no stronger than yourselves--men subject to the like passions. He among them that presumes he shall not slide into an error, or fall into a sin, is bolder than any promise in the word gives him leave. They need your prayers as much as any, and those most that fear their danger least.

3. By praying for the minister you take the most hopeful way to profit by his ministry. Such a soul as this may come in expectation to have a portion laid on his trencher; his meal is spoke for; and such guests as

send to heaven before they come to an ordinance are most likely to have the best entertainment. He that hears a sermon, and hath not prayed for the minister, and the success of his labours, sits down to his meat before he hath craved a blessing; he plays the thief to his own soul, while he robs the minister of the assistance his prayers might have brought him in from heaven. Pinch the nurse, and you starve the child. The less the minister is prayed for, the less, it is to be feared, will the people profit by him.

4. By praying for the minister you do not only render the word he preacheth more effectual to yourselves, but you also interest yourselves in the good his ministry does to others. As there is a way of partaking in others' sins, so in others' holy services. He that strengthens the hands of a sinner any way in his wicked practices, makes his sin his own, and shall partake with him in the wages due to the work when the day of reckoning comes. So he that strengthens the minister's hand in his holy work, whether by prayer, countenance, or relief of his necessities, becomes a partaker with him in his service, and shall not be left out in the reward, Matt. 10:40. We read there of 'a prophet's reward' given to private Christians; they who communicate with the minister in his labour, by any subserviency to it, shall share in the reward. When God comes to reward his prophets for their faithful service, then Obadiah that hid them from the fury of their persecutors--then Onesiphorus that refreshed their bowels--yea, then all those faithful ones that put up their fervent prayers for the free course of the gospel in their ministry--shall be called in to share with them in the reward. He that hath but a fifteenth part in a ship is an owner as well as he that hath more; and, when the voyage is over, he hath his share of the return that is made proportionable to his part. O what an encouragement is this to have a stock going in this bottom!--yea, to venture than ever at the throne of grace for the now despised ministers of Christ, seeing heaven's promise is our insuring office to secure all we send to sea upon this account.

BRANCH SECOND.

[The matter of Paul's request, as a minister
of Christ, for the prayers of believers.]

The second branch in the general division of the words follows, and contains the matter of the apostle's request to the church of Ephesus, or what he desires them to mention to God in his behalf--'that utterance may be given unto me.' Where observe, First. The spirituality of his desire. He sets them not a praying for carnal things, the world's honour or riches; no, we hear him not so much as mention his necessities and outward wants, which he, being now a prisoner, it is like, was no great stranger to; but they are spiritual wants he most groans under. He desires the charity of their prayers more than of their purse.

Second. Observe the public concernment of that he begs prayers for--'that utterance may be given me.' This is not a personal privilege, that would redound only on his own private advantage, but which renders him useful to others--that which may fit him for his public employment in the church; from which we may gather this note.

[What the minister of Christ chiefly
desires believers' prayers for.]

Note. A faithful minister's heart runs more on his work than on himself. That which he chiefly desires is how he may best discharge his ministerial trust. No doubt Paul spake out of the abundance of his heart. That comes out first of which his heart was most full, and for which his thoughts were most solicitous; as if

he had said, If you will take me into your prayers, let this be your request, 'That utterance may be given me.' Wherever, almost, you find him begging prayers, he forgets not this: 'Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course,' II Thes. 3:1; 'Praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ,' Col. 4:3. Admirable are the expressions whereby this holy man declares how deeply his heart was engaged in the work of the Lord. He tells them that his very soul and spirit was set upon it: 'Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son,' Rom. 1:9. Never did any more long for preferment in the church, than he to preach the gospel to the church. 'I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift,' ver. 11. He professeth himself a debtor to all sorts of men; he hath a heart and tongue to preach to all that have an ear to hear: 'I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise,' ver. 14. Yea, he was 'ready to preach the gospel' ver. 15, where he should stand in the mouth of death and danger. This so took up his thoughts, that for it he threw all his worldly concernments at his heels. As for the world's riches, he professeth he proggged[1] not for it: 'I seek not yours, but you,' II Cor. 12:14. He had a nobler merchandise in his eye. He had rather preach them into Christ, than their money into his purse. And for their respect and love, though it was due debt to him, yet he lays it aside, and on he will go with his work, though they give him no thanks for his pains: 'I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.' His duty he will do to them, and leaves them to look to theirs to him. The nurse draws forth her breast to the child, though froward, because she looks for her reward, not from the child, but its parent. God will reward the faithful minister, though his people will not thank him for his labour.

In a word, his very life was not valued by him when it stood in competition with his work: 'But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus,' Acts 20:24. And not without great reason is it that ministers should prefer their duty above all temporal respects. They are servants to God; and a servant must look to his work, whatever becomes of himself. Abraham's servant would not eat till he had done his message; and when it sped, neither would he stay then to lose time, but posts back again with all expedition to his master, Gen. 24:33. He said well who was employed to relieve the city of Rome with corn, who, when the master of the ship would have had him stay for fair weather, answered, 'It is necessary that we sail, not that we live.' It is necessary the minister should fulfil his ministry, not that he should be rich, not that he should be in reputation. The incomparable value of souls is such as should make hazard our whole temporal stake to promote their eternal salvation. He that wins souls is wise, though he lose his own life in the work. But we come to a more particular inquiry into these words, what the apostle means by 'utterance,' which he desires may be given him. A parallel place to this we have, Col. 4:3, 4. Three things we may conceive the apostle drives at in this his request.

[Threefold import of Paul's request, when he desires that utterance be prayed for.]

First. By 'utterance' may be meant liberty to preach the gospel;--that his mouth might not be stopped by the persecutor, who had him already his prisoner. Now he desires they would pray for him, that he might not be quite taken off his work: where,

1. Observe what a grievous affliction it is to a faithful minister to be denied liberty to preach the gospel. So long as Paul might preach, though in a chain, he is not much troubled; the word is free, though he be bound. But, to have his mouth stopped, to see poor souls ready to perish for want of that bread which he hath to give out, and yet may not be allowed this liberty, goes to his heart. 'O pray,' saith he, 'that

utterance may be given.' If he may not preach, neither should he live; for upon this account alone he desired life--the furtherance of their faith, Php. 1:25. O how far are they from Paul's mind, to whom it is more tedious to preach than grievous to be kept from the work! How seldom should we see some in the pulpit, were it not a necessary expedient to bring in their revenue at the year's end!

2. The liberty of the gospel, and of the ministers to deliver it, are in an especial manner to be prayed for.

(1.) Because this is strongly opposed and maligned by Satan and his instruments. Wherever God opens a door for his gospel there Satan raiseth his batteries. 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries,' I Cor. 16:9. No sooner doth God open his shop-windows, but the devil is at work to shut them again, or hinder the free-trade of his gospel. Other men's servants can work peaceably in their master's shop, but as for God's servants, every one hath a stone to throw in at them as they pass by. When Paul began to preach at Thessalonica, the city was presently in an uproar and cry, 'These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also,' Acts 17:6. Indeed they said true; let the gospel have but liberty and it will 'turn the world upside down.' It will make a change, but a happy one. This the devil knows, and therefore dreads its approach.

(2.) Because it is the choicest mercy that God can bless a nation with. Happy are the people that are in such a case. It is the gospel of the kingdom; it lifts a people up to heaven. We could better spare the sun out of its orb than the preaching of the gospel out of the church. Souls might find the way to heaven, though the sun should not lend them its light; but without the light of truth they cannot take one right step towards it. Work, saith Christ, 'while ye have the light,' John 12:36. Salvation-work cannot be done by the candle's light of a natural understanding, but by the daylight of gospel revelation; this sun must rise before man can go forth to this labour.

(3.) It is God's power to preserve the liberty of his gospel and messengers, in spite of the devil and his instruments. Therefore, indeed, Paul sends them not to court to beg his liberty, but to heaven. God had Nero closer prisoner than he had Paul. 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it,' Rev. 3:8. At Ephesus were many adversaries we heard, yet the door was kept open. Christ carries the keys of the church-door at his girdle: 'He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth,' Rev. 3:7, 'the key of the house of David,' so Isa. 22:22. The church is Christ's house, and the master sure will keep the key of his own door.

(4.) Prayer hath a mighty power with God to preserve or restore liberty to his gospel and messengers. It hath fetched home his servants from banishment, it hath brought them out of their dungeon. The prison could not hold Peter when the church was at prayer for him. It hath had a mighty influence into the church's affairs when at the lowest ebb. It was a sad world to the church in Nero's time, when Paul set the saints a praying for kings and those that were in authority; which prayers, though they were not answered in Nero, yet I doubt not but afterwards they were in Constantine and other Christian princes, under whose royal wing the church of Christ was cherished and protected.

(5.) Pray for their liberty, because, when the gospel goes away, it goes not alone, but carries away your other mercies along with it. The hangings that are taken down when the prince removes his court. Where the minister hath not liberty to preach the truth, the people will not long have liberty to profess it. When it went ill with James the apostle, it went not well with the church at Jerusalem, Acts 12:1, 2, nor can that place look long to enjoy its outward peace. When God removes his gospel, it is to make way for worse company to come, even all his sore plagues and judgements, Jer. 6:8.

Second. When the apostle desires 'utterance' to be given him, he may mean that he may have a word given him to preach--"μ@Â *@2,0 8`(@H, according to that which Christ promiseth, 'It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak,' Matt. 10:19. From which we may note:

1. That ministers have no ability of their own for their work. O how long may they sit tumbling their books over, and beating their brains, till God comes to their help; and then, as Jacob's venison, it is brought to their hand! If God drop not down his assistance, we write with a pen that hath no ink. If any in the world need walk pendantly upon God more than others, the minister is he.

2. Observe that those who are most eminent for gifts and grace have meanest thoughts of themselves, and are acquainted most with their own insufficiency. Paul himself is not ashamed to let Christians know that if God brings it not into him he cannot deal out to them; he cannot speak a word to them till he receives it from God: 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament,' II Cor. 3:5, 6. He is the able minister whom God enables.

3. Observe, the meanest Christian may, by his faithful prayers, help to make the minister's sermon for him. 'Pray,' saith the apostle, 'that utterance may be given unto me;' that I may have from God what I should deliver to others. O what a useful instrument is a praying Christian! he may not only help his own minister, but others even all the world over. Paul was now at Rome, and sends for prayers as far as to the saints at Ephesus.

Third. By 'utterance' he may mean a faculty of speech--a readiness and facility to deliver to others what he hath been enabled to conceive in his own mind of the will of God. Many eminent servants of God have been very sensible of, and much discouraged for, their impedit speech and hesitant delivery. Now this may proceed from a natural cause, or supernatural.

1. From a natural cause. As,

- (1.) From a defect in the instruments of speech; which some think was the cause of Moses' complaint, 'I am not eloquent,...but I am slow of speech,' Ex. 4:10. And this discouraged him from being sent on God's errand. But God can compensate the hesitancy of the tongue with the divine power of the matter delivered. This Moses, who was so 'slow of speech,' yet was 'mighty in words,' Acts 7:22, able to make Pharaoh's stout heart to tremble, though he might stammer in the delivery of it. God promised indeed to be 'with his mouth;' yet, it is probable, he did not cure his natural infirmity, for we find him complaining afterwards of it. Such natural imperfections, therefore, should neither discourage the minister nor prejudice the people; but rather make him more careful that the matter be weighty he delivers, and them that their attention be more close and united.

- (2.) From a weak memory. He that reads in a bad print, where many letters are defaced, cannot read fast and smooth, but will oft be stopped to study what is next. Memory is an inward table or book, out of which the minister reads his sermon unseen. If the notions or meditations we have to deliver be not fairly imprinted on our memory, no wonder that the tongue is oft at a stand, except we should speak to no purpose. If the hopper be stopped, the mill cannot grind; or if the pipe that feeds the cistern be obstructed, it will be seen at the cock. When God hath assisted in the study, we need him to strengthen our memory in the pulpit.

(3.) From fear. If the heart faint, it is no wonder the tongue falters. This, it is like, was at the bottom of Jeremiah's excuse: 'Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child,' Jer. 1:6. That is, I want the courage and spirit of a man to wrestle with these oppositions that will certainly meet me in the work. That this was his infirmity appears by the method God takes for the cure: 'Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee,...be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee,' ver. 7, 8.

2. From a supernatural cause; where none of these defects are, but the minister stands best furnished and in greatest readiness for his work. Yet, let but God turn the cock, and there is a stop put to the whole work. Not only 'the preparations of the heart,' but 'the answer of the tongue,' both are 'of the Lord,' Prov. 16:1. God keeps the key of the mouth as well as of the heart; not a word can get out, but sticks in the teeth while [i.e. until] God opens the doors of the lips to give it a free egress. He opened the mouth of the ass, and stopped the mouth of that wicked prophet its master. Hear him confessing as much to Balak: 'Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak,' Num. 22:38. Never man desired more to be speaking than he; that which should have got him his hire, the wages of unrighteousness, for he loved it dearly. But God had tongue-tied him. Nay, even holy men, when they would speak the truth, and that for God, cannot deliver themselves of what they have conceived in their inward meditations. Hence David's prayer: 'Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.' Ezekiel he would 'make his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth;' he should not reprove them though he would, Eze. 3:26.

[Use or Application.]

Use First. To ministers. Do ministers depend thus on God for utterance? This speaks to you, my brethren in the Lord's work. Do nothing for which God may stop your mouths when you come into the pulpit.

1. Take heed of any sin smothering in your bosoms. Canst thou believe God will assist thee in his work who canst lend thy hand to the devil's? Mayest thou not rather fear he should hang a padlock on thy lips, and strike thee dumb, when thou goest about thy work? You remember the story of Origen, how after his great fall he was silenced in the very pulpit; for, at the reading of that, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?' Ps. 50:16, the conscience of his sin would not suffer him to speak. O it is sad when the preacher meets his own sin in his subject, and pronounceth sentence against himself while he reads his text! If thou wouldst have God assist thee, be zealous and repent. When the trumpet is washed, then the Holy Spirit, thou mayest hope, will again breathe through it.

2. Beware thou comest not in the confidence of thy own preparation. God hath declared himself against this kind of pride: 'By strength shall no man prevail,' 1 Sam. 2:9. A little bread with God's blessing may make a meal for multitude, and great provision may soon shrink to nothing if God help not in the breaking of it. It is not thy sermon in thy head, or notes in thy book, will enable thee to preach except God open thy mouth. Acknowledge therefore God in all thy ways, and 'lean not to thy own understanding.' The swelling of the heart as well as of the wall goes before a fall. Did the Ephraimites take it so ill that Gideon would steal a victory without calling them to his help? How much more may it provoke God, when thou goest to the pulpit, and passest by his door in the way without calling for his assistance?

Use Second. To the people. Take heed you do not stop your ministers' mouths. This you may do,

1. By admiring their gifts and applauding their persons; especially when this is accompanied with unthankfulness to God that gives them; when you applaud the man, but do not bless God for him. Princes have an evil eye upon those subjects that are over-popular. God will not let his creatures stand in his light,

nor have his honour suffer by the reputation of his instrument. The mother likes not to see the child taken with the nurse more than with herself. O how foolish are we, who cannot love, but we must dote; not honour, what we adore also! He that would keep his posey fresh and sweet, must smell and lay it down again--not hold it too long in his hand, or breathe too much upon it; this is the way soon to welter it. To overdo is the ready way to undo. Many fair mercies are thus overlaid and pressed to death by the excess of a fond affection; or when it is accompanied with detracting of others--the abilities of one are cried up to cry down the another. 'I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos.' Thus the disciples of either advanced their preacher to hold up a faction.

2. You may provoke God to withdraw his assistance by expecting the benefit from man and not from God; as if it were nothing but to take up your cloak and Bible, and you are sure to get good by such a one's ministry. This is like them in James, that say, 'We will go into such a city, and get gain;' as if it were no more to hear with profit than to go to the tap and draw wine or beer in your own cellar! It is just thou shouldst find the vessel frozen--the minister, I mean, straitened, and his abilities bound up--because thou comest to him as unto a God who is but a poor instrument. O say not to him, Give me grace, give me comfort, as Rachel asked children of her husband; but go to thy God for these in thy attendance on man.

3. You may provoke God to withdraw his assistance by rebelling against the light of truth that shines forth upon you in his ministry. God sometimes stops the minister's mouth because the people shut their hearts. Why should the cock run to have the water spilt upon the ground? Christ himself did 'not many mighty works'--'he could not,' saith Mark--in his own country, 'because of their unbelief.' Dei justitia non permittebat, ut sanctum canibus daretur, saith Brugensis upon the place--it is just God should take away the ministry, or stop the minister's mouth, when they despise his counsel, and the word becomes a reproach to them. I am sure it is a sad dump to the minister's spirit, that preacheth long to a gainsaying people, and no good omen to them. The mother's milk goes away sometimes before the child's death. God binds up the spirit of his messengers in judgment: 'I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house,' Eze. 3:26.

BRANCH THIRD.

[The end in Paul's request as a minister
of Christ for the prayers of believers.]

'That I may open my mouth boldly, to make
known the mystery of the gospel.'

The third branch in the division of the words presents us with the end why he desires their prayers for utterance to be granted him, expressed in these words--'that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel;' where there are these three observables. First. The sublime nature of the gospel--it is 'a mystery.' Second. Wherein lies the work of a gospel minister--'to make known the mystery of the gospel.' Third. The manner how he is to perform this work --'that I may open my mouth boldly.'

[What is meant by a 'mystery,' and in
what respects the gospel is one.]

First Observable. The sublime nature of the gospel--it is 'a mystery.' The Greek word $\mu\lambda\text{FJZD}4\text{T}$ some derive from μLXT , to teach any secret belonging to religion; others of μbT or $\mu\text{b.T}$, to shut the mouth, because those that were initiated or admitted to be present at the religious rites and mysteries of the heathens--who were called μbFJ "4 --might not reveal them to those that were $\bullet\mu\text{b}<\text{J}@4$, or not initiated. Therefore they had an image before the temple, holding his finger upon his mouth, to put them in mind as they went in and out of keeping secret what was done within. Indeed the mysteries in their idolatrous worship were so impure and filthy that nothing but secrecy could keep them from being abhorred and detested by the more sober part of mankind; and it is not unworthy of our noting what I find observed to my hand by a learned pen--that the Spirit of God should make choice of that word in the New Testament so often to express the holy doctrine of truth and salvation contained in it, which was so vilely abused by those heathenish idolaters; surely it shows them to be over‑scrupulous that judge it unlawful any way to make use of those names or things which have been abused by heathens or idolaters. (R. Sanderson on I Tim. 3:16.) But, to return to the word 'mystery;' it hath obtained in our usual speech to be applied to any secret, natural, civil, or religious, which lies out of the road of vulgar understandings. In Scripture it is generally used for religious secrets; and it is taken both in an evil sense and in a good.

[What is meant by a 'mystery.']

First. The word mystery is used in an evil sense. 'The mystery of iniquity doth already work,' II Thes. 2:7; whereby is meant the secret rising antichristian dominion, whereof some foundations were laid even in the apostle's days. Error is but a day younger than truth. When the gospel began first to be preached by Christ and his apostles, error presently put forth her hand to take it by the heel and supplant it. The whole system of antichristianism is a mystery of policy and impiety. Mystery is written upon the whore of Babylon's forehead, Rev. 17:2. And Causabon tells us the same word was written upon the pope's mitre; if so, it is well he would own his name. 'My soul, enter not thou into their secrets.'

Second. In a good sense. Sometimes for some particular branch of evangelical truth. Thus the rejection of the Jews and calling of the Gentiles is called a 'mystery,' Rom. 11:25; the wonderful change of those that shall be upon the earth at the end of the world, I Cor. 15:51; the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, I Tim. 3:16; with others. Sometimes it is used for the whole body of the gospel; as to the doctrine of it, called a 'mystery of faith,' I Tim. 3:9; as to the purity of its precepts and rules for a holy life, a 'mystery of godliness;' as to the author, subject, and end of it, called 'the mystery of Christ,' Eph. 3:4--it was revealed by him, treats of him, and leads souls to him; and lastly, in regard of the blessed reward it promiseth to all that sincerely embrace it, called 'the mystery of the kingdom of God,' Mark 4:11. This gospel is the glorious mystery we are now to speak of; and we will show in what respect it is a mystery, or why so called by the Spirit of God.

[Why or in what respects

the gospel is a mystery.]

First. Because it is known only by divine revelation. Such a secret it is that the wit of man could never have found out. There are many secrets in nature, which, with much plodding and study, have at last been discovered, as the medicinal virtue of plants and the like; but the gospel is a secret, and contains in it such mysteries as were omni ingenio altiora--beyond the reach of all genius, as Calvin saith. What man or angel could have thought of such a way for reconciling God and man as in the gospel is laid out? How impossible was it for them to have conjectured what purposes of love were locked up in the heart of God

towards fallen man, till himself did open the cabinet of his own counsel? Or had God given them some hint of a purpose he had for man's recovery, could they ever have so much as thought of such a way as the gospel brings to light? Surely as none but God could lay the plot, so none but himself could make it known. The gospel therefore is called 'a revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,' Rom. 16:25.

Second. Because the gospel when revealed, its truths exceed the grasp of human understanding. They are the eye of our reason as the sun is to the eye of our body, such a nimium excellens--exceeding excellency, as dazzles and overpowers the most piercing apprehension. They disdain to be discussed and tried by human reason. That there are three subsistences in the Godhead, and but one divine essence, we believe, because there revealed. But he that shall fly too near this light, as thinking to comprehend this mysterious truth in his narrow reason, will soon find himself lost in his bold enterprise. God and man, united in Christ's person, is undeniably demonstrable from the gospel. But, alas! the cordage of our understanding is too short to fathom this great deep. 'Without controversy,' saith the apostle, 'great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,' I Tim. 3:16. It is a truth without controversy, Òµ@8@(@LµX<TH--it is confessed of all, yet such a mystery as is not fordable by our short-legged understanding. That there is no name but the name of Jesus by which we can be saved is the grand notion of the gospel; but how many mysteries are wrapped up in this one truth? Who that should have seen the babe Jesus when he lay in the manger, and afterward meanly bred under a carpenter, and at last executed for a malefactor, could have imagined, as one saith, that upon such weak hinges should move such a glorious design for man's salvation? But who dares think it unreasonable to believe that upon God's report to be true, which we cannot make out by our own understanding? Some things we apprehend by reason that cannot be known by sense--as that the sun is bigger than the earth; some things by sense, which cannot be found out by reason. That the lodestone attracts iron, and not gold, our eye beholds; but why it should, there our reason is dunced and posed. Now if in nature we question not the truth of these, though sense be at a loss in one and reason in the other, shall we in religion doubt of that to be true which drops from God's own mouth and pen, because it exceeds our weak understanding? Wouldst thou see a reason, saith Augustine, for all that God saith? look into thy own understanding, and thou wilt find a reason why thou seest not a reason.

Third. It is a mystery in regard of the paucity of those to whom it is revealed. Secrets are whispered into the ears of a few, and not exposed to all. 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God,' Mark 4:11. Who were those 'you,' but a few disciples who believed on his name? The greater part of the world were ever strangers to this mystery. Before Christ's time it was impaled within a little spot of ground of the Jewish nation. Since it came abroad into the Gentile world, and hath been travelling above these sixteen hundred years hither and thither, how few at this day are acquainted with it! Indeed, where its glorious light shines long, many get a literal notional knowledge of it--it were strange that men should walk long in the sun and not have their faces a little tanned with it; but the spiritual and saving knowledge of this mystery is revealed but to few, for the number of saints is not great compared with the reprobate world.

Fourth. It is a mystery in regard of the sort of men to whom it is chiefly imparted--such as are, in reason, most unlikely to dive into any great mysteries; those who are despised by the wise world, and the great states of it, as poor and base. 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,' I Cor. 1:26, 27. If we have a secret to reveal, we do not choose weak and shallow heads to impart it unto; but here is a mystery which babes

understand and wise men are ignorant of: 'I thank thee, O Father,...because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' The people who were so scorned by the proud Pharisees, as those who knew not the law, John 7:49, to them was the gospel revealed, while these doctors of the chair were left in ignorance. It is revealed to the poor many times, and hid from kings and princes. Christ passeth often by palaces to visit the poor cottage. Herod could get nothing from Christ--who out of curiosity so long desired to see him, Luke 23:8; whereas the poor woman of Samaria with a pitcher in her hand, Christ vouchsafeth her a sermon, and opens to her the saving truths of the gospel. Pilate missed of Christ on the bench, while the poor thief finds him, and heaven with him, on the cross. Devout women are passed by and left to perish with their blind zeal, while harlots and publicans are converted by him.

Fifth. It is a mystery in regard of the kind of knowledge the saints themselves have of it.

1. Their knowledge is but in part and imperfect. The most of what they know is the least of what they do not know. The gospel is as a rich piece of arras rolled up; this God hath been unfolding ever since the first promise was made to Adam, opening it still every age wider than other; but the world shall sooner be at an end than this mystery will be fully known. Indeed, as a river--which may be breaks forth at first from the small orifice of a little spring--does widens its channel and grows broader as it approacheth nearer the sea; so the knowledge of this mystery doth spread every age more than other, and still will, as the world draws nearer and nearer to the sea of eternity, into which it must at last fall. The gospel appeared but a little spring in Adam's time, whose whole Bible was bound up in a single promise; this increased to a rivulet enlarged itself into a river in the days of the prophets; but when Christ came in the flesh then knowledge flowed in amain. The least in the gospel state is said to be greater than the greatest before Christ. So that, in comparison of the darker times of the law, the knowledge Christians now have is great, but compared with the knowledge they shall have in heaven, it is little, and but peep of day.

2. It is mysterious and dark. Gospel truths are not known in their native glory and beauty, but in shadows. We are said indeed 'with open face' to 'behold the glory of God,' but still it is 'as in a glass.' Now, you know the glass presents us with the image, not with the face itself. We do not see them as indeed they are, but as our weak eyes can bear the knowledge of them. Indeed this

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