

The Conversation, Mind, and Spirit of the Gospel of Christ

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"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."
Philippians 1:27

Have you ever observed the great stress which in the epistles of the New Testament is laid upon a walk and conversation becoming the gospel? I ask whether you have observed it, for very important points often escape observation until they are forced upon our attention by circumstances, or laid upon our conscience by the power of divine grace. A walk and conversation becoming the gospel flows indeed out of the special operations of God's grace, but is always in harmony with, and is guided by the precepts of the gospel. This should be carefully borne in mind; for Christian obedience and Christian fruitfulness do not consist in a mere strict consistency of life, or a performance of good works, both of which may spring from other motives and be directed to other ends; but are the fruit of the Holy Spirit bringing forth an obedience from the heart in the spirit and not in the letter, and as such, a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Let me then briefly trace out the way in which we are often brought to see the necessity as well as the blessedness of attending to gospel precepts, as well as of believing gospel truths, and experiencing gospel blessings.

1. Let us begin then at the beginning of the divine life, and see how far the precepts of the gospel are, in those days and

under that work, observed and followed. As these precepts are the precepts of the gospel, and not legal ordinances, it is very plain that they cannot be understood or apprehended before we know the truth and power of the gospel. Being under the law, and striving to obey it in our own strength and under the power and influence of a legal spirit, we are still entangled in legal bondage; and therefore the precepts of the gospel are rather burdensome than beneficial, and as viewed in the light of the law are felt a weight upon the conscience rather than a regulator of the life, or an integral part of the glorious gospel of the Son of God.

2. But the time comes when the legal scales drop from the eyes, and, by the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit, our understanding becomes enlightened clearly to see, and our heart opened to receive and believe the grand and glorious doctrine of salvation by grace. When then we are emerging out of the darkness and bondage of free-will and legal service, and are coming gradually, as is often the case, into a love of gospel truth, we are so taken up with the doctrines of the gospel, we see such blessedness in the truths therein revealed as with a ray of light, that the preceptive part of God's word does not seem to lie with much weight and power upon our mind. Running the way of God's commandments with an enlarged heart, feeling willing to make any sacrifice for Christ's sake, and enjoying the power of divine truth, we seem rather led by the spirit of the precept than guided by the letter of it. But not yet being led into paths of much trial or temptation, nor into much exercise of soul, they are not so much neglected by us, still less despised, as overlooked.

3. So also when the Lord has been pleased in some measure to grant us deliverance from legal bondage; when he has made his gospel known and precious, and indulged us with

walking in some degree in the sweet liberty of truth, then also the preceptive part of the gospel does not seem to lie with much weight and power upon the mind, because we feel so willing and desirous to do the thing that is right and walk tenderly in God's fear, that positive directions how to walk and act seem almost superfluous. It is not really so, because they are ever needed, and can therefore never be superfluous; but I speak merely according to our apprehensions of them.

4. But there is another state or stage, though rather a descending than an ascending one, in which there is a worse neglect of the precepts of the gospel. When, as is too often the case, we leave our first love; when our heart grows cold and dead in the things of God; when sin revives and begins again to manifest its hideous power; when the world attracts and allures; when our feet get entangled in the snares spread for them by Satan on every side, and we wander, as to our shame and sorrow be it spoken, from the Lord, leaving the fountain of living waters, and hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, which hold no water; then, too often, we neglect the precepts, because they are felt to be burdensome to us, or perhaps cut our conscience too closely. Under the law we fell into a legal and self-righteous spirit, and now perhaps, partly through ignorance, and partly through wilfulness, sometimes from faulty instruction, sometimes from falling under a wrong influence or wrong examples, we often drop into an Antinomian spirit. This is one of the most dangerous and one of the worst spots into which a child of God can fall.

5. But the Lord will not leave his people here. After a time we begin to see and feel the miserable consequences of not walking tenderly and conscientiously, and not acting consistently with our holy profession. Guilt falls upon our conscience; the Lord withdraws the light of his countenance;

much bondage falls upon our spirit, and like the chariot wheels of Pharaoh we drive heavily. Now we begin to see that it is an exceedingly evil and bitter thing to sin against the Lord; that we have not kept the precepts of the gospel as we should have done: that we have not attended to the Lord's direction, written as with a ray of light in the word of truth, with all that strict obedience that we ought to have given to them. As we are thus led and exercised we begin to see a new and fresh light cast upon the preceptive part of God's word; that much blame rests upon us for not paying greater heed to it; and that it would have been well for us if it had been more a lamp to our feet and light to our path. There is thus a mixture of admiration of the precept as a precious part of the everlasting gospel, and of self-condemnation for the neglect of it.

6. And now comes another means whereby it is both seen more clearly and attended to more obediently. This is when the Lord is pleased to smile upon the soul and draw forth faith, hope, and love upon his dear Son, and the grace and glory which shine forth in him. Then we see more clearly and plainly the blessedness of speaking and acting in the fear of God, living near to the Lord, keeping his commandments, doing his will, and walking before him tenderly, humbly, meekly, quietly, and consistently.

Thus by various exercises, some painful, others pleasurable, some attended with bondage, others with sweet liberty, we begin at last to see more clearly and plainly than ever we saw before the nature of gospel precepts, and how imperative it is on all that fear and love God and desire to know his will and to do it, to walk in obedience to them. It is in this way that God is glorified, and the power of his grace manifested. We must indeed read the Scriptures with a very negligent eye, or be sadly under the power of a loose,

careless, and unsubdued spirit, if we neither see nor feel the great stress which both our Lord in all his discourses, and his inspired apostles in all their epistles, lay upon fruitfulness in every good word and work. And nothing more clearly shows the low, sunken state of the Churches of Truth in our day than that the precepts of the gospel have been so neglected in their ministry by the professed servants of God, and the path of obedience so shunned by the people, as if to serve the Lord and seek to know his will and do it were miserable legality instead of being the special fruit of grace, and the highest expression of love and gratitude.

With these thoughts in our heart, and I trust some desire in our soul to hear what the Lord may speak to us out of his word in these important matters, let us now approach our text. But before I enter into the mind and meaning of the Spirit in the words before us, let me take a general view of the circumstances under which they were written to the Church of God at Philippi.

They were written from Rome by Paul when he was in bonds. But though his body was in prison, his soul was in sweet and happy liberty. Having received through Epaphroditus a present from the Philippian church to supply his temporal wants, his heart was melted and softened with a sense of God's goodness and mercy thus displayed to him in his prison-house. And remembering the season when he first preached to them at Philippi, and "their fellowship with him in the gospel from the first day until now," he sends them this epistle to tell them that God was his record how greatly he longed after them all in the bowels of Jesus Christ, adding that sweet prayer for them: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of

Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." (Phil. 1:9, 10, 11.)

As regarded himself he was in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which was far better, nevertheless to abide in the flesh was more needful for them. He therefore says, "And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again." (Phil. 1:25, 26.) He then adds the words of our text: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."

I am not Paul; I have not his grace; I have not his gifts; I cannot walk in the footsteps of this blessed man of God. And yet in my small way, as one who spent many years in your midst and in your service, preaching to you for more than a quarter of a century faithfully I trust, and experimentally, may I not take up in some degree the language of the Apostle before us? Let us then give ear and heart to this exhortation of the man of God, and may the Lord enable me to unfold it consistently with the mind of the Spirit, and give you grace to hear and receive it with humility and love into a believing, obedient heart.

I.—*First*, then, let me show you what is the *Gospel* of Christ, and what is the *conversation which becometh that gospel*.

II.—*Secondly*, what it is to *stand fast in one spirit*.

III.—*Thirdly*, what it is to *strive together in one mind for the*

faith of the gospel.

IV.—And I may add, *Fourthly*, may this be so wrought in your heart, and be so brought forth in your life, that *whether I come and see you*, as I hope if life be spared, or else be absent, being taken from you by the providence of God, I may hear of your affairs, and what I hear may rejoice my heart, and strengthen my confidence that the word I preached in your ears many years, not fall to the ground like water spilt, but had, did and still has, a place in your heart by the power of God.

I.—The Apostle does not insist upon a godly conversation based upon legal grounds. He does not speak of our doing this and that moral duty, or performing this or that good work as a means of recommending ourselves to the favour of God, or building up a ladder whereby to reach the skies.

His words are, "Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ." It is the gospel, therefore, which he sets before us—not the law with its curses, but the gospel with its blessings. And our walk and conversation is not to be such as becometh the law and its duties, but the gospel and its precepts; and therefore springing from gospel motives, through the power of gospel promises, and under the influence of a gospel spirit. It is this which makes gospel obedience so distinct from legal service, which is done for the most part in a spirit of bondage and servile fear, and is usually largely mingled with pharisaic pride and obstinate self-righteousness.

But let me, as I proposed, show you, as far as I know and understand it, what is meant by "The Gospel of Christ."

i. The first thing which meets us in this examination is the

meaning of the word "*gospel*." It is a good old Anglo-Saxon word, meaning good news, glad tidings, and as such it is a literal translation of the original. But these good news or glad tidings are only so far good and glad as they bring a message of mercy and peace from God to man. Thus, the angels said to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. The gospel, then, is a messenger of good tidings from God to man. And O, how condescending it is in the great and glorious Jehovah, the supreme Lord of heaven and earth, in whose eyes the heavens are not clean, and who chargeth his angels with folly, to send a message to guilty man; to look from heaven his dwelling place upon rebels, enemies, and aliens, and to send of his own free grace, of his own infinite mercy, to them a message of reconciliation and peace. Now, if we have ever felt our native misery, helplessness, and sinfulness, and our needy, naked, destitute condition has been made manifest to our conscience, how desirable it is that we should listen reverently and humbly to this message of mercy from the skies; and if we have seen any suitability, beauty, or blessedness in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Son of the Father in truth and love, to look up and say, "Let the Lord speak: here we are to hear. Has the God of heaven and earth sent us a message? Has he sent the Son of his love to bring tidings of peace and pardon to rebels, aliens, and strangers?" We are those rebels; we are those aliens; we are those strangers. Does the Lord speak to such, does he say "Return, ye children of men;" "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help; there is no Saviour besides me; I will be thy King?" Then let us listen to his voice. The first step is for us to listen. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak; for he will speak peace unto his people and to his saints." The Lord therefore says: "Incline your ear and come unto me; hear and your soul shall live." Immediately, then, that we have an ear to hear what the Lord speaks in his word, we are

sure, sooner or later, to find something suitable to our state and case, if truly convinced of sin, and we thus are brought to know that the gospel is truly a message of mercy, of glad tidings from God to man.

ii. But let me now show you why it is called "the gospel of *Christ*."

It is so called, first, because Christ is the grand *theme* of the gospel. The good news of reconciliation, pardon, and peace to guilty man, is so connected with the Person and work, the bloodshedding and obedience of God's dear Son, that it cannot be separated from it. Take Christ away from the gospel and it would be no gospel at all. It would be like taking the sun out of the sky, when the whole face of nature would at once be darkness and night, and all living things would perish and decay. So take Christ, the Sun of righteousness, out of the gospel and all is at once one dark, black night, forerunner and harbinger of the blackness of darkness for ever. But the Son of God, in his grace and in his glory, illuminates the gospel with the beams of this grace and the rays of this glory, and as the sun at noonday fills the sky with brightness and splendour, so the Son of God with the rays of his grace and the beams of his glory fills the gospel with light and blessedness. He is, therefore, the sole theme of the gospel. The gospel tells us he is the Son of God, the Son of the Father in truth and love, and as such, the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his Person. The gospel tells us that God made a covenant with his dear Son on behalf of a chosen people. The gospel tells us that the Son of God took our nature into union with his own divine person, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and thus became Immanuel, God with us. The gospel tells us that the Son of God travelled through this vale of tears as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and that by perfectly

doing the will of God, and by obedience unto death and bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, he put them utterly away. The gospel tells us that he did and suffered all this out of pity and mercy to our souls, and that love was the moving cause why he washed us from all our guilt and sin and shame, in the fountain of his most precious blood: "Who loved me, and gave himself for me." The gospel takes us to the tomb where the Son of God lay for a while in the bosom of the earth; and bids us wait for the resurrection morn, there to see him by faith rising out of the tomb in glory and power. It takes us, also, to the mount of ascension, to view him going up on high and sitting at the right hand of the Father, as the Mediator between God and man, the High Priest over the house of God, the great and glorious Intercessor who ever liveth to make intercession for us, and as such is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. Now, as the gospel thus presents him to our view, it says in a still, small voice, "This is the Son of God. In him there is salvation and in no other; for there is none other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved." And as it thus presents him to our view, this voice says to those that hear, "Believe in him, and ye shall have eternal life; for the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Not indeed that the gospel of itself can do this, or any part of this, but in the hands of the Spirit, as brought into the heart by the operation of his grace, it brings salvation with it. Well, therefore, may it be called "the gospel" or the good news "of Christ;" for it proclaims pardon through his precious blood, justification through his obedience, salvation through his finished work, and brings this glorious news to rebels, strangers, and aliens. What a glorious gospel, then, is the gospel of Christ. How suitable to our state and case: how glorifying to God, and how, in every respect, adapted to the wants of man.

2. Christ is also the *subject* of the gospel as well as the theme of the gospel. The gospel has no subject but Christ. In speaking of salvation, the gospel speaks of salvation only by the blood of Christ. In holding forth Christ as the subject of the gospel, the gospel tells us that all who look unto him shall be saved, and that all who believe in him are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. The gospel tells us there is no wrath in God for those that believe, for their sin is so put away by the sacrifice, blood-shedding, and death of Christ, and they so clothed in his robe of righteousness, that they stand before God without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. And as Christ is the grand subject of the gospel, so he is the grand subject of the ministry of the gospel. This made the apostle say: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block; and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1:23, 24.) And, therefore, he says "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." (Col. 1:28.) In fact, what other subject is fitting for us to preach or for you to hear? It is the salvation and sanctification of your souls that we desire and for which we labour; and this salvation and this sanctification are to be found only in Christ, for he "of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

3. And Christ is the *object* of the gospel as well as the subject, for he is the grand object of faith. All believing eyes are fixed on him; all hearts hang upon him; all believing hands touch him; all believing feet walk in his footsteps; and every faculty and member, so to speak, with every end and aim, wish and desire of a believing soul, look to Christ, cleave to Christ, and twine round him and him alone, so as to

say with the Bride, "I held him and would not let him go." This then is "the gospel of Christ" so far as I understand it, believe it, feel it, and preach it. Now the question for you to ask yourself is, whether you have received it into a believing heart, and whether it has been made the power of God unto your personal and individual salvation?

This gospel has been preached in your ears. For twenty-six years God enabled me often in weakness of body, more often in weakness of soul, to preach this gospel to you as a church and congregation, and now that I am no longer able from the infirmity of my health to labour among you I call you to witness on my present visit, whether I ever held forth any other way of salvation but through the blood of the Lamb. Did I ever tell you, you could be saved in any other way except through the blood-shedding and death of Jesus and his righteousness? "No," I believe you will answer, "we will bear you witness that whilst amongst us you preached salvation, not by the works of the law, but by the free grace of God through the blood of the Lamb, and preached the same gospel which we have heard from your lips this day." Now surely you must know whether you received that gospel or not as a message of mercy, as good tidings sent of God to you, for it is not to all places or to all persons that God sends the gospel of Christ. But as he sent it among you, surely you must know whether you ever felt the power of it in your heart; whether it ever came home to your soul as a word from God; whether it ever relieved your fears, comforted your heart, chased away the mists and fogs that gathered over your soul; supported you in seasons of trouble, and you felt an inward conviction that by it you could live and by it you could die? This, then, is the gospel of Christ.

ii. Now, says the apostle, "Only let your *conversation* be as it *becometh* the gospel." What is this conversation? The word

means the whole of your walk before God and before man. It is a very comprehensive term in the original, meaning, literally, "Conduct yourselves as citizens." It therefore includes the whole of our spiritual fellowship and daily intercourse with God and man. It thus views us as citizens of no mean city—as citizens, I may indeed say, of a heavenly city, the new Jerusalem; and it bids us walk and speak, live and act, as becometh citizens of a heavenly country. This, then, is the meaning of the word "conversation," in our text.

1. By it, then, we are called to *walk with God* as becometh this gospel. He has reconciled us to himself by the blood of his dear Son; and when we receive the atonement, or reconciliation, as the word means, then we can walk with God in peace, equity, and amity, for sin, which made the breach, is removed out of the way. So Levi, as ministering at the altar, and those near to God, walked of old. "My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity." (Mal. 2:5, 6.) This is walking in the light as he is in the light, and so far as we can do this, our fellowship is with the Father. (1 John 1:3-7.) And our conversation with God, our walk with God, must be as becometh the gospel of Christ. If we walk at freedom with God, in sweet liberty, with holy access, pouring out our heart before him, enjoying his presence, and having some discoveries of his goodness and mercy, then our conversation with God becometh the gospel. The gospel is a message of mercy. When then we embrace that mercy, and feel the power of it; when that mercy reaches our heart, melts our inmost soul, dissolves our doubts and fears, and removes legality and bondage, then we walk worthy of the gospel, as walking before God in the light of his countenance through

the power of the gospel. You will find that nothing but the gospel of Christ can enable you to walk before God in the light of his countenance. Whilst trusting to yourself, looking to your own vile heart, casting retrospective glances upon your past life, bondage and legality will shut up your soul, and you will not be able to walk with God, as reconciled and brought nigh by the blood of the Lamb. But when the free mercy, grace, and salvation of God shine forth in the face of Jesus Christ; when you can believe the pardon of your sins through his atoning blood; when you can rest upon his obedience as your justifying righteousness; when you have the witness of the Spirit to your spirit that you are a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus; when doubt and fear are chased out of your mind, bondage and legality taken out of your spirit, and you can walk before God reconciled through his dear Son, then you have your conversation with God as becometh the gospel of Christ; for if the gospel of Christ is such as I have described it to be, it becometh that gospel when we can take the whole benefit of it, and receiving it as a message of mercy, we accept it as a word from God to us, and come to him in the freeness and fulness of it. God does not send the gospel to condemn us, for "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit;" and they walk after the Spirit when they have access by him through Christ unto the Father.

Let us never think so meanly and so unworthily of the gospel as to believe it is sent to condemn us. Want of faith in it indeed may condemn us, as the Lord speaks: "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:17, 18.) Nor let us think

that the gospel is a hard service, or brings bondage with it. It is the law which brings bondage, barrenness, and death; but the gospel brings peace, light, life, liberty, and love. When then we believe the gospel, receive the gospel, and feel the power of the gospel, then we can walk before God in the light of his countenance. This is to have a conversation with God as becometh the gospel. I have spoken all the more fully and freely upon this point, because it is not so well understood as it should be, and for want of it we often walk in much darkness and confusion of mind.

2. We have, also, to walk before the *church*, for they are witnesses of our life and conduct; and as by it we are to glorify God and manifest ourselves as fruit bearing branches in the only true vine, our conversation or walk before the church should be as becometh the gospel of Christ. The gospel of Christ proclaims pardon to all that believe. When, then, those that believe are baptised, join a church, and thus walk in gospel ordinances, they become manifestly members of the mystical body of Christ; and if their life and conversation become their profession, they are received as pardoned and accepted in the Beloved. Our conversation, therefore, if it become the gospel of Christ, is to walk with them in a spirit of love and affection, because they have been favoured to know something of the goodness and mercy of God, and to receive the love of the truth into their hearts. This is a very comprehensive and copious subject, but I have not time to dwell upon it more now.

3. Our conversation also before the *world* should be as becometh the gospel of Christ. The world knows nothing of Christian motives, Christian feelings, Christian faith, hope, and love, and a living experience of the power of God's truth. All these things are viewed as enthusiasm in the eyes of the world; but they can note the consistent life and conduct of

those who profess to be Christians; they can mark integrity and uprightness of action; they can observe honesty and sincerity in faithfully adhering to engagements, and in the general transaction of the business of life; they know good servants, good masters, honest tradesmen; they see, in every profession, those who act uprightly and honourably: and when they observe one who professes the religion of Jesus Christ acting uprightly, consistently, and honourably, they will say, "We don't like this man's religion; we think him narrow minded and bigoted, and wonder how a man of his sense can be so weak as to believe that there are only a few people like himself going to heaven. But we must admire his upright, consistent, honourable conduct; we can depend upon his word, and trust him as sure not to deceive us, and in all business matters more likely to injure himself than injure us. Say what they will against him, we cannot but admire the uprightness of his conduct, and the general consistency of his life." To have this testimony shows a conversation becoming the gospel before the world.

4. And so with our *families*. As husbands, as wives, as masters and mistresses, as servants, there is a conversation becoming the gospel. A loving, affectionate husband; a tender, obedient wife; children that do their best to please their parents; parents that do their best to bring up their children in the fear and nurture of the Lord; mistresses kind to their servants; servants obedient and attentive to their duties,—all these things commend the gospel to those who know nothing of its power. Of those that so walk we may truly say, their conversation becometh the gospel of Christ; and though we are not saved by these things, yet as the Psalmist says of the statutes of the Lord, "in keeping them there is great reward," so we shall find the approbation of God in our consciences, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keeping our hearts.

But now will you let me ask you one question? It may be that sometimes your conversation is not as becometh the gospel; you are entangled, it may be, in trifling conversation; you are drawn aside from the strait and narrow path in mind and spirit, if not in word and action; the world seems getting fast hold of you, and there is a laxity of thought and feeling, if not worse; a want of that strictness, self-denial, and general consistency which you know one who fears God ought to manifest. How is it now with you in secret? How do you feel when you approach the throne? How do you stand in your feelings before the eye of God, who searches the heart? Do you feel no bondage, no condemnation, no doubt nor fear, no painful misgiving, no shutting up of your mouth in prayer, no darkness brooding over your mind? "O," you say, "indeed I do, painfully so, and I can trace it to that lightness of spirit in which I have been entangled. I can trace my present dark and gloomy path to my being entangled with this or that worldly person, whose company I ought to have shunned. Business and worldly cares have too much occupied my mind; I have given way too much to my temper, and been drawn aside to speak words that I know were inconsistent with my profession. And now I find and feel the sad effects. How lean it has made my soul; what guilt it has brought upon my conscience; how it has clouded all my evidences, so that when I come before the throne, all is dark and dreary, and the Lord seems to hide his face." Now you see that by not walking as becometh the gospel, you bring guilt upon your own conscience, darkness upon your mind, and distress upon your soul; you becloud your evidences and obscure your signs, and thus have to say, "Woe is me that I have not walked more consistently, more tenderly, with more godly fear in my heart, and greater circumspectness in my life and conduct." Do you not see, then, from your own experience, the benefits of the precepts of the gospel, and that they are

"profitable for reproof and for correction," as well as "for instruction in righteousness," and see also the blessedness of those who by grace attend to and walk in them? Then think me not legal, think not that I am laying a yoke upon you that you cannot bear, think not that I am insisting upon what the gospel does not hold forth, when I say, "Let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ." You profess to have received, and to believe, a pure gospel, a free gospel, a holy gospel. Let, then, your conversation be as becometh that gospel. You speak of liberty: then walk as those who are at liberty to serve God, not to serve sin. You speak of pardon: then walk as those whom God has pardoned freely by his grace. You speak of what Jesus endured to redeem and save your soul: then walk worthy of a Saviour, who sweat great drops of blood for you in Gethsemane's gloomy garden, and agonised for you on Calvary's cruel tree. You profess to have your hopes, desires, and affections in heaven, and that, when life comes to a close, you will be for ever with the Lord: then walk as those that are looking for heaven, as the blessed termination of your sorrowful pilgrimage. I am sure if the Lord enable you so to walk, and so to act, you will find the blessedness and benefit of so doing. I have seen or read of the end of many men, good and bad; and I have observed this, that those who live well die well, and those who live badly die badly. I have observed of those who walk during life tenderly, consistently, and in the fear of God, that when they came to a dying bed, God owned them, and blessed them, and spoke words of peace and comfort to them, and they left a sweet and satisfactory testimony behind them. And I have observed of those who walked crookedly and unbecomingly, though I would not cut them off, yet many have had a thorny deathbed, have had to repent of inconsistent conduct when nature was coming to its last gasp, and had to struggle hard with fears of death, because the sting was not yet taken

away. If you wish then and hope to die well, the Lord enable you to live well; and by his grace, for it is all of his grace, you will find that if you live, walk, and act in the fear of God, the Lord will never leave you upon a dying bed to grapple with Satan and despair, but will shed upon your soul beams of gospel light and love, and enable you to leave a testimony behind, to be a comfort to your friends, and edification to the church of God. Look at the Obituaries which we often find in the "Gospel Standard," and see how those who loved to walk in the fear of God, have left a blessed testimony that God was with them in life and in death; and as they served God in their day and generation, so he blessed them before he took them to himself.

II.—But let me pass on now to another part of our subject, as contained in the words, "Whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in *one spirit*." Let us consider this standing fast "in one *spirit*."

It is a great thing for a church and congregation to stand fast, not to be moved with every wind of doctrine, not to be driven here and there with every gust of error, but to know the truth in its purity and power, and to stand fast by what God has revealed in his word by his Spirit, and in their hearts by his grace. Whatever divine truth God has written upon your conscience, stand fast by it. When you hear the word of truth preached, or when in private you read the word with an understanding heart, and can say, "I have known this, I have tasted this, I have handled this, I have felt this; though I know but little, this I know because it has been commended to my conscience, and been written upon the tables of my heart:" then you will be able to add, "Here I stand; on this I build my hopes of everlasting life." Now stand fast by that. Have you received the grand and glorious truths of sovereign

grace into your soul; the doctrine of the Trinity; the true and proper Sonship of the blessed Lord; salvation by his atoning blood; and justification by his righteousness? Stand fast by what you have received as the truth of God, and what you have tasted, felt, and handled of the Word of life! Any deliverance you have received, any manifestations you have enjoyed, any testimonies from God, evidences, tokens for good, answers to prayer, marks of life,—whatever you have received into your conscience from God, stand fast by it. Let not sin, let not Satan, let not ungodly men, let not the gusts of error drive you from your standing. Stand fast by the gospel you have received as being the gospel of the grace of God. But mind this, you must stand fast *in one spirit*. Men may stand fast by the same truths, and yet be all in a wrong spirit. It was so with some in Paul's days. Men preached Christ and preached Christ truly, but in strife and contention, to add affliction to Paul's bonds. They held the truth, but held it in a wrong spirit. They preached Christ, but preached Christ in a wrong spirit. They had not the spirit of the gospel, as well as the letter of the gospel; they had not the sweet dew of the Holy Ghost resting upon them, to move their heart to gospel love, as well as to know gospel doctrines, and to hold forth gospel truths. It is the spirit which is the grand thing; in a congregation, in a church, in the pulpit, and in the soul, to have one spirit. I believe from what I have seen for many years, during my long profession of the things of God, that the spirit after all is of the deepest importance in the ministry of the word. If there be a good spirit, a true and right spirit, a gospel, loving, affectionate spirit from the pulpit, it will diffuse itself over the people; it will manifest itself in the church. But where on the other hand, there is a legal, narrow, contracted, bondageing, or angry, dividing spirit, it will manifest itself among the church and the congregation. Instead of the church standing fast in one spirit, the spirit of love and union, there may be a holding of

the same truths, but it will be in a spirit of strife, confusion, and discord. This is not a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ. If we stand fast it must be "in one spirit;" and if we have received the love of the truth, we have received the spirit with that love. Where there is one spirit, how it links together the people of God into one mystical band. How united they are when their spirits flow into each other in affection and love; when they not only receive the truth, but receive it in such love and affection that heart unites to heart, and spirit melts into spirit, and they all feel as one man in the sweet spirit of gospel love. This is that in which you are called upon to stand fast; and I would say to you, in the words of our text, "That whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit;" for that is the spirit of the gospel, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of love and power, the Spirit that baptizes every mystical member of Christ into one body, and is diffused through the whole body, animating it and guiding it, like the soul in the body of man.

III.—"With *one mind* striving together for the faith of the gospel." It is a blessed thing when there is "one mind" as well as "one spirit;" when all who fear God see eye to eye in the things of God, and not only feel heart to heart, but as taught by the same blessed Spirit, are united in one judgment. It is only by this union in mind as well as in spirit, that strife and division are prevented, and a church and people walk in the exercise of mutual esteem, love, and affection. There is no more fruitful cause of strife and contention than a difference of opinion in doctrinal points. Can two walk together except they be agreed? How then can a church or people walk together in sweet union and communion unless they be fully agreed in the grand points of divine truth? Then it is that they strive together for the faith of the gospel; pull together as one man in defence of the

faith once delivered to the saints. They do not pull, one way and another another, but being united together in one mind, they strive together as with a common effort to maintain the faith of the gospel which they have received into their heart. This "mind" is what the Apostle elsewhere calls "the mind of Christ." "But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:16.) It is not therefore their own mind in which they stand fast, but in the mind of Christ, and this they manifest by approving of what Christ approves of, loving what Christ loves, hating what Christ hates, and condemning what Christ condemns. Thus they have "one mind," because they have one Lord whose word guides them; whose Spirit teaches them; whose love constrains them; and whose power upholds them. Nothing can be stronger than this oneness of mind when it is the mind of Christ. It is not, therefore, a mere agreement in doctrine, or in a religious creed, or in a preference of the same kind for books or ministers. All this men may have, and yet know nothing of that oneness of mind by which the people of God, taught by the Spirit, strive together for the faith of the Gospel. Indeed, without this union of mind, there can be no true union of spirit; and if there be no true union of spirit, all mere external agreement in doctrine is no safeguard against internal division, or the introduction of soul-destructive error. It is therefore only as a people are knit together in one mind and in one spirit, that there is any peace of conscience, any true love to the brethren, or any firmness in maintaining the truth as it is in Jesus.

And here we see the connection of a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ with a striving together for the faith of the gospel. If any of you walk inconsistently or unbecomingly, it sadly impairs, if not destroy union in a church. It shakes confidence in a man's religion; it often introduces a party spirit into a people; some condemning,

others justifying, the offender; and when once party spirit gets into a church and congregation, farewell to all future union and peace.

By this union also, in one mind and spirit, there is erected a bulwark against error. When a church and people stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, there is no room for error to creep in. Those winds and gusts of error which carry away other churches from the faith of the gospel blow upon such a people without moving them from their firm standing in Christ; for their enlightened judgment, and their believing heart, reject those poisonous draughts whereby so many are intoxicated in the present day.

Now what shall we say to these things? You will, perhaps, in your own mind answer me thus, or rather speak to the Lord thus: "Lord, we see what is right, and we desire to do what is right, and what has been said upon these points has been commended to our conscience. But, what with ourselves and what with others, what with the perversity of our own flesh and the perversity of even good men and women, we find it very hard to put in practice what our conscience approves of. Though our will be right, we find it very hard to stand fast in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. Things occur in the church and congregation, difficulties arise, perplexing circumstances transpire which break that union of spirit, and keep us from standing fast as we should do, and desire to do." It is a good thing to see your shortcomings, to acknowledge them, and beg of the Lord to correct and amend them. The worst spot is to stand out obstinately against these humbling convictions, to have no desire to be led aright and kept in one mind and one spirit; but from obstinate pride, or miserable self-righteousness, or an angry, quarrelsome, contentious spirit,

to prefer our own way to the Lord's way, our own wisdom to the Lord's wisdom, and our own will to the Lord's will. And even worse than this, is that licentious Antinomian spirit which despises gospel precepts, and manifests no desire even to walk as becometh the gospel. Wherever we see either of these spirits, and they sometimes go together, it must be a subject of lamentation with those that fear God, and are jealous of his honour and glory.

But I am well convinced, in my own mind, that until men are brought down in their souls before God, to see and feel what the consequences are of not walking as becometh the gospel, and the misery of strife and contention from not being united in one mind and one spirit, there will be no submission to the precepts of the gospel; there will be no desire to glorify God by a life, conduct, and conversation becoming the truth; but there will be a seeking of self-interest and self-indulgence, the consequences of which will be darkness, barrenness, and death, bringing no glory to God, and yielding no profit to man. Be assured that, sooner or later, men will find that as they sow, so will they reap; that those who sow to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; while those that sow to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

IV.—And now let me say a few words upon that fourth and last point which I intimated that I should bring before you: the *desire* that Paul had of personally witnessing in his coming to see them, or hearing of their affairs when absent, that they thus stood fast in one spirit and in one mind.

Paul felt a great affection for, and a great interest in, the church at Philippi from his personal knowledge of them. Some churches, as that at Rome, Colosse, and Laodicea, he had never seen in the flesh, and therefore wrote to them more from the report of others than from personal

knowledge of them. I do not profess to have Paul's grace or the warmth of love and affection which he had towards the saints, whether known to him personally or not; but having been with you so many years, I should be very deficient in every right and gracious feeling, if now that I am separated from you, I should not still take great interest in your spiritual welfare. Of that spiritual welfare I may judge either by coming and seeing you, as I do now, or else may hear of your affairs from those on whom I can depend as speaking the truth in love, neither biased by undue partiality for some or influenced by unkind prejudice against others, sufficiently possessed of judgment to form and give a sound opinion, and sufficiently imbued with a spirit of love and affection to speak it with kindness and tenderness. It would then gladden my eyes when present, to see, and my ears when absent, to hear of your affairs that "you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel." If the truth of God is worth anything, it is worth standing fast by, and if you are bound together as a church and congregation in the faith of the gospel, it is worth striving for, and that together, for union is strength. Much may be accomplished by many which cannot be done by few, and still less by solitary individuals. If you have but grace and strength to put away all division and strife, and see such a beauty and blessedness in the gospel of the grace of God that you are striving for a deeper and fuller knowledge and enjoyment of it, this will induce and enable you to unite with those who are like-minded, and you will strive not who is to have the upper-hand amongst you, who is to be master or mistress, but that the Lord may be exalted, his people edified, and God glorified. And if so taught and led, and enabled so to act, the blessing of God will rest upon you and upon him who ministers stately among you.

I leave these things with you for your consideration and

meditation; receive them from my lips in the spirit in which they are spoken, which I believe is a spirit of love and affection. I wish you well; I wish that the blessing of God may rest upon you. If any think that I have spoken pointedly or personally, I would not deny the pointedness, for a sermon, like a sword, is useless if it have neither point or edge. The personality I will deny, for I have no unkind feeling, nor have I any right to have toward any one present; but my prayer and desire for you as a church and congregation is, that the blessing of God may attend you in life and death, in time, and to all eternity.