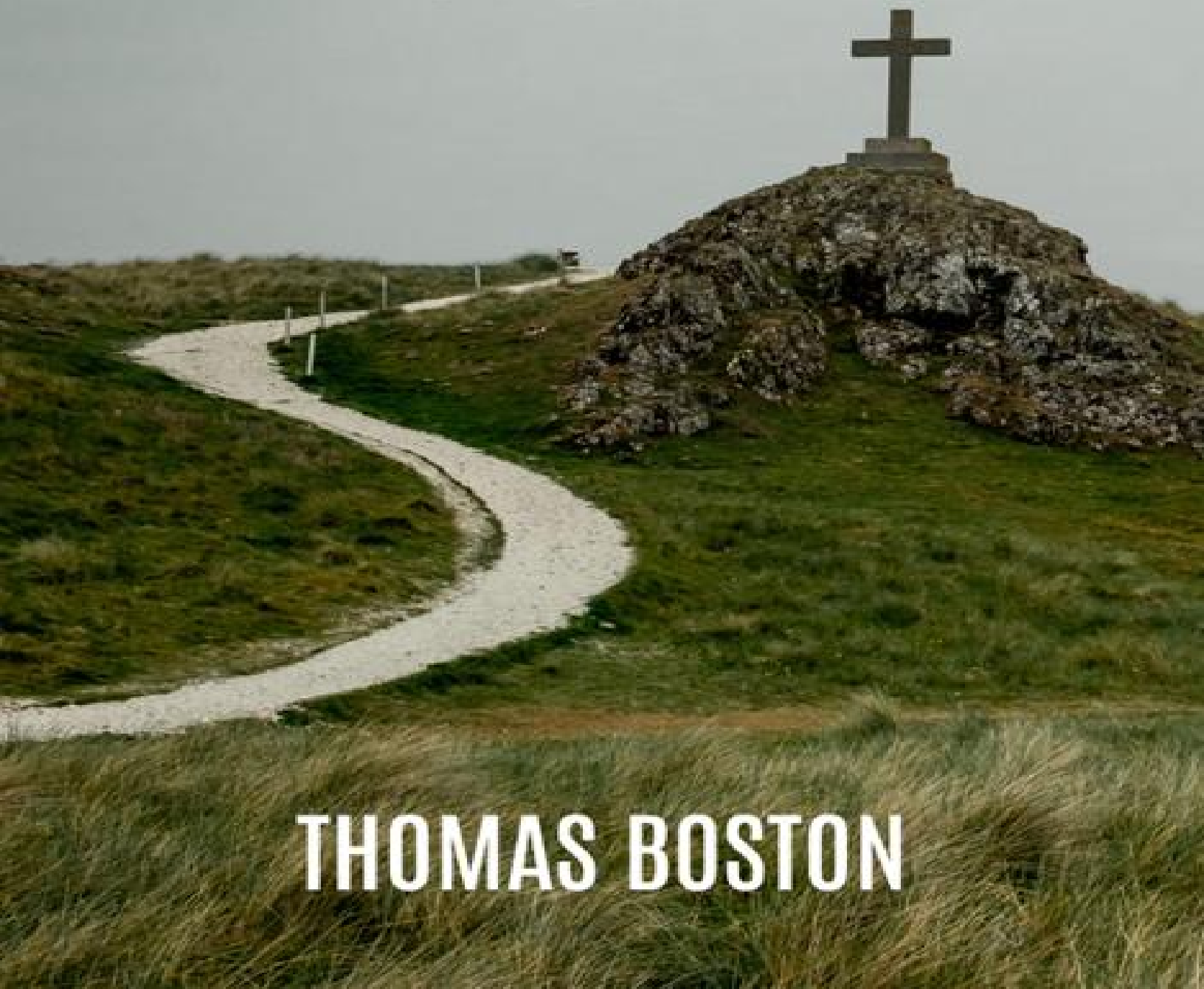


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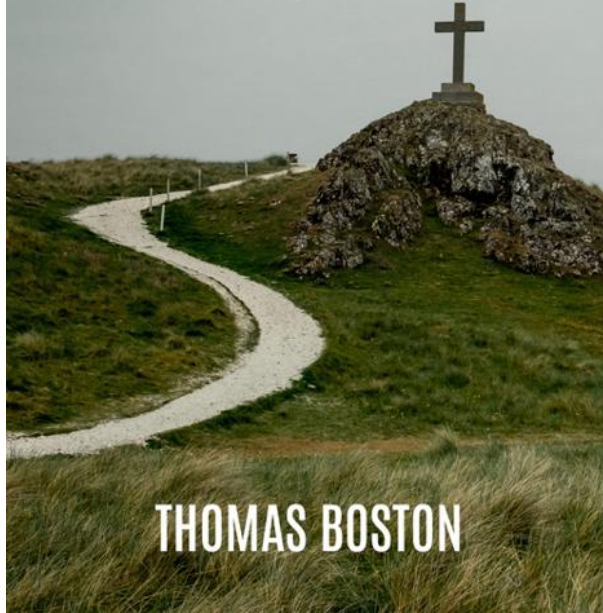
**THE WAY TO LIFE AND
THE WAY TO DESTRUCTION
UNFOLDED**



THOMAS BOSTON

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**The Way to Life,
and the Way to Destruction
Unfolded**

by Thomas Boston

EDITED BY THE

REV. SAMUEL M'MILLAN

VOL. X.

ABERDEEN:

GEORGE AND ROBERT KING, ST. NICHOLAS STREET

M.DCCC.LI.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. MATTH. 7:13, 14,

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

MEN in this life are but on their way, not in their home-house, where they are to abide; and it nearly concerns all, since life on the one hand, and destruction on the other, are before them, having their different gates and ways leading to them, to take heed which gate, which way they choose, to enter and go by. "Enter ye in at the strait gate," &c.

The scope of these words is, to remove a great stumbling-block against serious religion, that lies in the way of the world; that is, the great difficulty there is in such a course of life, and the very small number of those that follow it. This makes terrible havoc in the world, and time after time men fall over this stumbling-block. Our Saviour had been preaching his sermon on the mount, wherein he gives such a view of true and real religion, as could not miss to be very unacceptable to carnal men. They were ready thereupon to say, These were hard sayings, few will ever fall in with them; the vote of the plurality of men is against that way, and points to a far easier course; and can we imagine but there is safety in the trodden path, and shall we forsake it for an overgrown one? To remove this, our Saviour peremptorily determines the wide and beaten road, wherein the throng of the world goes, to be the way to destruction; and that the way to life is a very narrow one, hard to find, and hard to walk in; and therefore, from the necessity there is of obtaining eternal life, and escaping eternal destruction, at any rate, cost what it will, exhorts us to enter in at the strait gate.

In the words we have two things.

I. An exhortation and warning how to direct our course for the other world, which this world and life is but the avenue to; "Enter ye in at the strait gate," &c. And here we have,

1. The course pointed out to us which is the safe one, "the strait gate." A gate is properly the port of a city, as Acts 12:10, or of a court, as Acts 3:10, but I do not find it used for the door of a house. So here it is plain there is a metaphor; and some think the metaphor is double, namely, (1.) That heaven is here compared to a house, into which a strait gate leadeth; (2.) To a city, to which is a narrow way. But if heaven is here compared to a city, hell is so too for there is a wide gate, and a broad way leading to destruction, as well as a strait gate and a narrow way leading unto life. But I think it is not the scripture way to speak of hell under the notion of a city. I judge, then, the metaphor is one: that heaven is here compared to a house; as Luke 13:25, "When once the master of the house is risen up," &c.; as hell also is, being held out under the notion of a prison, pit, dungeon, &c.; but such a house as has a court before it where is the gate which they must enter by that would enter into the house. So it is plain, that the "gate," the "way," and "the entering in at the gate," is in this world, and in this life, Gen. 28:17. And so it is in the case of hell. Wherefore the godly, true converts, are, as it were, in the outer court of heaven; the ungodly and unregenerate in the outer court of hell; both making forward to their place.

2. A course hinted at which is unsafe. For speaking of the strait gate, he supposes there is also a wide gate, the which also he directly teaches after. So there are two gates before us, very different in themselves, and leading to very different ends.

3. Our duty and interest with respect to these gates. It is to enter in at the strait one. Here the Lord directs our choice as to these gates. As soon as we begin to discern betwixt good and evil, we begin, as it were, to enter at one of these gates; and we will be sure to choose the wide one as easiest, till we hear the voice of Christ, and be persuaded to change our course. Satan invites to the wide one, the world

throng in at it, it is most agreeable to the flesh; but our Saviour bids us choose the strait one, warns us to beware of the wide one. This is a shocking call and warning to nature, hard to digest. Who would choose to thrust in by a strait gate, where there were a broad one in which one might have full scope? Therefore we have

II. A reason for this exhortation and warning, consisting of two parts.

First, That though the other gate is easy, and much frequented, yet it is most dangerous; and they are fools that prefer the road unto destruction, to the road unto life, because the former is easier than the latter; for what wisdom can there be is fondly embracing that present ease, which must end in eternal agony? Here, then, our Saviour points out the opposite gate, the gate opposite to the strait one, that we may avoid it; and he points it out, together with the way conformed thereto. The gate and the way, I think, are not to be conceived as separate things, as a way leading to a city, and a gate leading into a house, but as an undivided space; however, the gate and the way may be distinguished; they are to be conceived as making one undivided space, for our Saviour speaks of them as one, "that go in thereat," or "by It," not "by them."

Some take the way in this metaphor for the space between the two sides of the gate, at which rate the gate contains the way. But this makes the gate the immediate entrance into the house, which I do not find that word used for; for certainly the way lands one in the house, according to the text. Besides, the mention of the way of the same nature with the gate, would at this rate be superfluous; for wherever there is a wide gate, there must be such a broad space; and where a strait gate, there must be such a narrow space; for it is the broadness or narrowness of the space left betwixt the sides of the gate, that makes the gate broad or strait. Wherefore I judge the gate

and the way are to be conceived as a continuous space, the one terminating in the other.

Some conceive the way to lead to the gate, and so to be first in order. But this still makes the gate the gate of the house, or the door of it, which, we have found, cannot be admitted; and our Saviour himself distinguishes these two, Luke 13:24, 25.

Wherefore I conceive, that, according to the order of the text, the gate is before the way; so that entering in by it, we enter into the way, as one going in at the gate of an outer court, and passing through it, passes on the way into the house. And thus ye have the metaphor stated, which is necessary for understanding the mind of the spirit in the text, as to the spiritual doctrine taught thereby. Now here we have,

1st, The nature of the gate opposite to that we are called to enter in by, and of the way joining it.

1. The gate is a wide one. The entrance into the way to hell is very easy. It is a room port and spacious, whereat multitudes may throng in, without troubling one another. None will need to thrust through here, it will admit them with all ease; for it is perfectly agreeable to the flesh, to the natural inclinations. It is so wide, that people may close their eyes, run at random, and not miss it; even young ones may get in at it without difficulty.

2. The way that joins it is broad. When they are through the gate, they are on a way that is a broad one, where they will get full scope and elbowroom. They will not find themselves pent up there, as in a narrow road. There they are not hampered in their natural inclinations, by conscience, Bible, & c., but get full scope for the

vanity of their mends, the aversion of their wills to good, and proneness to evil, and all their disorderly affections.

2dly, The use made of it. It is much frequented; "many there be which go in thereat." The wideness of the gate, and breadth of the way, affording so much ease to passengers, invite people to it: and it takes so, that the throng of the world goes that way. There are many different dispositions of carnal men, these contrary one to another; there are covetous and prodigals, profane and formalists, &c., but however opposite they are one to another, they meet there; and the gate and the way are so wide, that there are roads therein for each of them.

3dly, The end of it, and tendency. The end of it is destruction, and to that it tends, (Gr.) leads away. However easy the gate and way are, every step taken therein is a step to eternal ruin. So, however inviting the beginning and progress in it be, the end of it is frightful. There is a pit at the end of the broad way, which may scare men from entering on it.

The second part of the reason is, That though the gate we are called to enter in by is indeed difficult, yet it is safe, and a happy one.

1st, The nature of the gate and way joining it.

1. The gate is strait. The entry into the way of religion is difficult; it will require a great deal of resoluteness to get in by it. Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." One must thrust through it, cast off their burdens; they will not get in with them on their backs, they must bring themselves into a narrow compass, leaving all superfluity of naughtiness at the entry. The Jewish doctors speak of the gate of repentance, the gate of prayer, and the gate of tears. These and the like are indeed the gate we are to enter by; and they are strait.

2. The way joining it is narrow, (Gr.), afflicted or compressed. It is like a strait shoe that presses the foot. It is not easy walking in it, more than in such a shoe, or in a way where there is little room for the foot. Afflictions and temptations beset it, and it leads over the belly of natural inclinations; which march cannot be easy.

2dly, The unfrequentedness of it; few find it. There is no difficulty to find the wide gate, it glares in the eyes of every passenger; and no difficulty of entering by it. But there be few that so much as find the strait gate; they seek it not; blinded with corrupt lusts, they cannot take it up; and, consequently, few enter by it; either they perceive it not, or if they do, the straitness of it frights them.

3dly, and Lastly, The happy tendency and end of it, notwithstanding; (Gr.) which leadeth into life. It is not a stepping into it, but a going to it in a continued course. It leads away from the devil, the world, and the flesh; and brings at length through many a weary step into eternal life in heaven. So all the hardship of the gate and way is recompensed at length in the end.

Several doctrines are deducible from the words.

DOCTRINE I. Whosoever would direct their course aright for the other world, must necessarily enter in by the strait gate.

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall,

I. Shew what is supposed in it.

II. Consider this strait gate.

III. The entering in by it.

IV. Lastly, Apply.

I. There are some truths supposed in this. It supposes, that,

1. All men here are on their journey to the other world; Eccl. 9:10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." This life is but the avenue to the other life, and this world but a thoroughfare to the other world; like a town lying on the road to a city, which passengers go through on their journey; Eccl. 1:4. However men talk, none have a tack of life. The young are but on their journey, even as the aged. All know what part of their way is passed, but none knows what remains.

2. We will all get there at length one way or other, without all peradventure. There is no doubt of finding a course that will carry us thither; all the difficulty is in falling on and steering the right course; Psalm 49:10. Many have taken journeys which they have never got to the end of; many have been baulked of the end of their intended journey, because they took the wrong way. But right or wrong, we will all get to the other world.

3. There is a wrong course for the other world, which we are in hazard of taking. It is a wrong one, as leading, though surely enough to the other world, yet to the wrong part of it, the land of death and destruction eternal; "for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." And we are in hazard of taking that road; for the natural bent of our spirits lies that way. Satan is busy to decoy us into it, and the example of the throng of the world has great influence.

4. Yet there is a right course for that world too; a way to it opened, which if we can fall on, it will bring us safely to that part of the other world that is the land of eternal light and life. It is true, it was once blocked up; but Christ, by his obedience and death, hath opened it;

Heb. 10:19, 20. This should be gladly received by us, since it is of such a vast moment to us.

5. It is possible we may fall on this right course. It is true, we cannot without serious consideration, and applying ourselves thereto; we will never stumble on it, nor snapper on it going at random, as we may on the course of destruction; but if we will hear the voice of Christ our director, and direct our course accordingly, we will not miss it; Prov. 9:4–6; Psalm 119:9.

6. But naturally we are off that course: we have our entrance on it to make. Adam, and in him all mankind, was once upon the straight road to life: but there was such a mist raised by the breath of the old serpent, that he lost his way; and so we in him were led off the way; Rom. 5:12, "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." And now in the first place we are wandering on the mountains of vanity; there Christ finds us as strays, and gives us direction how to direct our course, where to enter, what to stand off from.

7. The gate we must enter by, is a strait one, not easily found, hard to enter by. The course to hell, is wide at the beginning of it, strait at the end, exceeding strait; Rom. 2:9, "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil," &c. The course to heaven is strait at the first, and broad at the end; Rev. 21:7, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." Happy they who digest the straitening at first! they are in the way to eternal liberty; Rom. 8:21.

8. Lastly, There is no gate but the strait one, to enter on that course by. There is no choice here, for heaven; for however men may imagine wide gates to it, the scripture acknowledges only a strait gate leading to it; so that he who cannot endure to think to be abridged of

his liberty, or to thrust in by a strait gate, must give over thoughts of life in heaven.

II. We shall consider this strait gate. And here we shall shew,

1st, What that strait gate is.

2dly, What makes it so strait.

First, What is that strait gate? According to what was said in the explication of the words, it is the entrance into religion, whereby men become really religious; John 10:9, "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved," &c. Heb. 4:3, "For we which have believed, do enter into rest," &c. This is conversion unto God, by faith in Jesus Christ; Hos. 14:1, compared with John 14:6. Hence the "door of faith;" Acts 14:27, is expounded of conversion; chap. 15:3. This is the gate we must enter by. For,

1. This is the gate of the outer court of heaven, which one having entered through, he is immediately in the court of heaven; Heb. 4:3, forecited. And he is so in the court of it, that he cannot miss it in the end; Phil. 1:6. No converts nor true believers can perish more than one can pluck out of Christ's hand what he minds to hold; John 10:28. And therefore they are reckoned "fellow-citizens with the saints;" Eph. 2:19, making up one family with those above, chap. 3:15. For the one are but within the house, the other are in the court of the house.

2. This is the gate by which men are set on the way to heaven, and begin their journey thitherward. They that have passed through this gate are travellers to Immanuel's land, now fairly upon the road; Cant. 8:5, with the smell of heaven about them; chap. 3:6. They are

come out of Egypt, they have passed through the Red sea, and they are now in the wilderness, in their way to the promised land.

3. This is the gate that looks directly to the door of heaven, and by the way lands them in it. As the wide gate looks directly to hell, and lands the passengers there, if they go forward; so the entrance into real religion, by conversion, through faith, looks to heaven, and lands the passengers there.

4. This is the gate by which men turn their backs on the wide gate and broad way; for it is just opposite to them; Heb. 4:10. Men may shift about from one way and course of life to another; but till they enter this gate, they are still in the broad way to destruction; Matth. 18:3, where there is room enough to shift to opposite sides. But once entered here, they are fairly separated from the world lying in wickedness, and joined in with the family of God; 2 Cor. 6:17, 18, and they shall never mix with them again; Psalm 12:7, "Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever."

Now, this gate is a strait gate. The entrance into a course of ungodliness is not strait; nay, the entrance into a form of godliness is not strait; men may be got in there by the gentle bow of good education, like Joash; by a common easy work of the Spirit on their affections by the gospel; Matth. 13:20, 21; by the current example running strong that way at a time, like Simon; Acts 8:12, 13. The straitest entrance into it, is by an abortive law-work, as the Israelites; Exod. 20:18, 19. But even that is so wide, that it does not press the unholy heart to purity; Deut. 5:27, 29.

But the entrance into real religion by a sound conversion, is a strait gate, in these respects.

1. It is so strait that it is not easily taken up by the eye; Matth. 7:14, "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Most part of the world never notice it, more than if there were not such a gate at all. How many live joyfully year after year, never once troubling their heads with the question, What conversion is? whether they be as yet converted or not? When the Spirit of the Lord begins to deal with others, they mistake it for melancholy fancies. Yea, many times the parties themselves do not know what it is that is dealing with them, for a time, and it remains still a mystery in great measure, John 3:8. Masters in Israel this day own it not; but instead thereof set up the reforming of vicious habits, and applying to the practice of virtue, with as little success towards reforming the generation, as there is truth in the principle; though, if we had it, it would not carry us beyond the length of some Pagan moralists.

2. It is hard entering into it at all. Many seeing it at a distance, are frightened from it by the straitness of it, John 6:60, 66. Many entered actually, come out again, and make their escape from it, unable to bear the pressure of the very first entry, like Felix, Acts 24:25, who trembled at Paul's preaching, and said to him, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Sound conviction of the sin of our life and nature, with the misery we are therefore liable to, will bring a man to his knees, and straiten and press him sore; like those, Acts 2:37, who "were pricked in their heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Many a man in the entry of it comes to think, that he will never get through, but that he will certainly die in his birth.

3. The passage through it is difficult. Sometimes it is shorter, sometimes longer; and often does men's want of wisdom make it

longer than otherwise it would be, Hos. 13:13. But short or long, it is difficult for the time.

(1.) For men cannot get the scope there, that they were wont to have. They are abridged of their sinful liberty. Hence they give many a greedy look back to the flesh-pots of Egypt; which they would actually turn back to, were there not a strong hand pushing them forward, 2 Thess. 1:11.

(2.) They cannot get up their head there; but must as it were creep through on their knees. There is a power from heaven that brings down the man from his former heights. The converting word to Zaccheus was a humbling word, "Come down," Luke 19:5. And if there was no mystery in these words, but they only looked to his coming down from the tree, whence arose that mighty change immediately wrought on him? Nay, converting work is soul-humbling work, Acts 9:6; 2 Cor. 10:4, 5. And they will never get up their head, till they be through at God in Christ by faith, Acts 15:11.

(3.) They are pressed there, to the laying aside of all their superfluities that they were wont to carry along with them, James 1:21. There is no room in the gate for them, and these too. Christ says, "If ye take me, let these go away." Hence the wise merchant sells all, and buys the pearl. It presses not only to the purging of the life of some sins, but all sins, even the darling idol among the rest; and not of the life only, but the heart too, Psalm 24:3, 4.

Secondly, What makes this gate, the entrance into religion, so strait?

1. The mighty contrariety of our nature to it, Rom. 8:7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Take a fish out of the water into the open fields, it is restless; it pants as if it were pent up in the narrowest

space. There is a strong propensity in our nature to evil, and aversion to God and goodness; so that much of the power of converting grace is employed in making the soul willing, Psalm 110:3. And when it is made willing, it is presently through the gate; the main work is done, the soul readily comes to God through Christ.

2. The various lusts hanging about the soul. The gate is room enough for receiving the man; but it is strait and pinching to him, when he comes with all these about him.

(1.) There is a variety of these lusts unmortified about every unrenewed man, Tit. 3:3. They hang about him like a numerous family to be fed, crying, Give, give. When the man comes to the gate, he finds it strait, for there is an old man with him, that is to be put off, which there is no access for into the house, Eph. 4:22. But they are loth to part.

(2.) These lusts are of a swelling nature at all times. They are the ill weeds in the ground of the corrupt heart, that wax well. He brings with him wide desires, that would require much room, Hab. 2:5. And therefore because they must be pressed till they be contracted, and brought to one for all, the gate feels strait, Psalm 27:4.

(3.) They swell in a particular manner when one is entering the gate; Rom. 7:9, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." The law, closely applied to an unrenewed heart, has an irritating power upon it; that is, lusts, that, in time of security, lay dormant, awaken for their own defence, when there is an attack made on them to throw them out. They lift up themselves then, and move like an ant's nest stirred and disturbed; and like a furious horse, that rages the more he is checked.

3. The keen opposition made by Satan to the soul's entry. When the soul begins to entertain thoughts of turning to God, hell is alarmed, and its forces brought out to oppose with all vigour, Rev. 12:12. They whom he disturbed not, while his goods were in peace, are then dogged with temptations, and all ours are laid to the water to row them against the stream that flows from the Spirit of God to carry them into real religion. Satan plies then with,

(1.) The force of the example of the multitude, Acts 28:22. He presses them with the odiousness of being singular in the world; that if there were such danger in the broad way, it could not be so throng, that with the multitude there is safety, and if it be ill with them, it will be ill with many. That failing, he plies the temptation,

(2.) Of time enough after, what needs to turn to such a strict course so soon? The young get, by the sleight of hell, a fair broad view of many years they have to come, wherein they may get all done at leisure, in time enough; and by that means the time of youth is given up with many to the broad way; the entering on religion in earnest being put off, till once they be settled in the world. When that is come, then they find they have another thing to care for, for that time, Luke 14:20; and it is put off to old age, which most part never see. But if they do, custom in sin has taken away the sense of it; and it is put off to a death-bed; and if they get it, there the toss of sickness renders them incapable; or when their time comes at last, the wind from heaven rises not; so they sink in the harbour, never get away to the gate. But if that will not do,

(3.) They are plied with their being too-long a-doing, and that the time is past, the day of grace over; to drive them to despair with Judas. Satan will run with them from one extreme to another; and from defender of the secure, he will turn accuser of the awakened. He

will preach to them then the justice of God, to persuade them he will be inexorable; he will muster up their sins before them, to render them hopeless; and shew them their repeated slights of Christ, to bear them in hand that they have forfeited the benefit of his mediation.

(4.) Lastly, And for that cause he will dog them with temptations to sin, more than ordinary, that finding corruption more strong and prevalent than before, they may be brought to quit hopes of ever obtaining the victory.

4. The enmity of the world against religion, 1 Cor. 16:9, "There are many adversaries." These are set up to nip the work of heaven in the bud, and to mar any good work as it begins to appear, Cant. 2:15. The carnal world is the great agent for Satan, and carries on his work in this case by giving instruction causing to err, by force, or by fraud, by mockeries, or by slight healing of the wounded.

5. Lastly, The nature of the thing makes it a strait gate. A law-work cannot miss to be straitening to a sinner. Conviction of sin, of heart, lip, life, and nature, cannot but press sore; the spirit of bondage, girding the soul with the cords of death, and the curse of the broken law, makes a strait entry, Rom. 8:15. And it will be a hard pull for an awakened, law-condemned, and self-condemned creature, to gripe, and hold the gripe of the promise of grace in Christ.

III. We shall consider the entering in by the strait gate. And here three things must be spoke to.

1st, What they enter into by it.

2dly, How they enter in.

3dly, What this entering bears.

First, What do they enter into by the strait gate? They enter by it,

1. Immediately into the narrow way of the practice of religion, in a holy life and walk suited to the Gospel, Acts 2:41, 42. There it is the strait gate sets them. How long there way may be from the gate to the house, they know not; but once entered, they hold on,

(1.) In a new road, a quite new one; 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are past away, behold all things are become new." They enter into a new road they never travelled before, where they have a new rule to walk by, new company to walk with, a new guide to follow after, a new scope and end to aim at. And thus are they entered, as it were, into a new world, being no more of this world, though in it.

(2.) In a safe road, however unacquainted with it they were before; Prov. 1:33, "Whoso hearkeneth unto me, shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." Before they entered the strait gate, they were in a most dangerous road, however easy and safe it appeared, Prov. 9:17, 18; but then they are entered into a safe one, however dangerous it appears. It is covered above, that no storms of wrath can fall there; and what rises from below, they will get safely through, Cant. 3:11.

2. Mediatly, they enter by it into heaven. That is the house the strait gate looks to, which none can come into but by that gate; and all that come in by that gate do certainly reach it at length, Matth. 18:3, Acts 3:19. Thus entering by the strait gate, they enter at length,

(1.) Into a roomy-house; John 14:2, "In my Father's house are many mansions." How strait soever the gate is, there is no straitening in

the house; while they that took the wide gate, shall when they come to their house, be straitened like prisoners crammed together in a pit; they that enter the strait gate, shall in their house walk at liberty in white.

(2.) Into a house of all ease and fulness, Rev. 21:7. There will be nothing wanting there for their satisfaction. If it was with much anxiety, fear, and sorrow, they got through the strait gate; yet there will not be the least vestige of these things there; Rev. 21:4, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away;" but they will, by entering the strait gate, enter into joy; whereas others, by entering the wide one, shall enter into eternal anguish.

Secondly, How do they enter in by this gate? They enter in by it,

1. Coming out of themselves, Matth. 16:24. God by his spirit sets fire to their nest, and brings them out there. He opens their eyes in conviction, pricks them to the heart in compunction, brings them down to the dust in contrition and humiliation; till he overturns the foundations of the house of their former rest, and leaves them not a foot to stand on. They are made to despair of salvation by themselves. Their former gain is counted loss, Phil. 3:7, 8, and they are carried off their own bottom, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life in heaven.

2. Coming to Christ in the free promise of the Gospel by faith, John 10:9. Many think this an easy step; but so far from it, that if there is not an arm of omnipotence to thrust the soul forward, it will never make that part of the strait gate, Isa. 53:1. Meanwhile, the Spirit of God deals with the enterer rationally; so that seeing all refuge else failed, he cannot go back, but thrusts forward to Christ in the free

promise, Jer. 2:22, 23, like the drowning man cleaving* to the rope at all adventures.

3. Coming unto God by Christ; Hos. 14:1, compared with John 14:6. This is conversion, which true coming unto Christ always terminates in; Heb. 7:25. For man having by sin turned away from God as his God, Lord, Lawgiver, and Master; the Mediator Christ was sent, to bring us back to him again; 1 Pet. 3:18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." And by faith in Christ we do come back to him, to live to him, and for him; Acts 20:21. This shows the faith of many in Christ to be but pretended; while by it they do not return to God as their Lord and Lawgiver, to live to and for him; Matth. 13:20, 21.

Thirdly, What does this entering bear which we must set ourselves for?

1. A discerning of the gate, the strait gate; Matth. 7:14. Many had travelled over that spot of ground called Bethel; Gen. 28., who never discerned the gate of heaven there; but Jacob saw it, verse 17. So, many go up and down the world, come to ordinances, where the gate is pointed out; and yet are never able to take it up. Nay, that gate is to us like the well to Hagar; Gen. 21 never seen by us till the Lord open our eyes. O pray, that God may discover this gate to you.

2. A finding of an absolute necessity of entering by it; Luke 15:17. We will never enter there, while we are careless and indifferent about our state in the other world; while we have the folly to think, that we may get a wide gate to heaven. This foolish imagination ruins thousands. What need they straiten themselves, entering by the strait gate, while a more roomy one will do as well? But ye must be convinced, that the strait gate, and it only, is that by which you can ever get there.

3. Resoluteness for a happy arrival in another world at any rate; Matth. 11:12, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Till once men come to this, they will never enter the strait gate; or if they do, they will never go through. The enterers are all such as must be forward, cost what it will; because they see they are ruined for ever, if they get not forward; Luke 15:17, 18.

4. A contentment to forego our present ease, in order to our getting safe to the other world; Matth. 26:24, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." This life is appointed of God for our trial with hardship and labour, and the place of rest for the labourers is in the other. But O how hard is it to bring sinners to be content to forego their ease for the present! They hang by the soft easy course till their nest be fired, and their bed of sloth be strewed with thorns and briars, that there is no rest there any longer; Prov. 6:9, 10; Acts 2:37. But till once they are brought content to sacrifice their ease, there is no entering.

5. A resolute entering into the gate; Luke 15:18. However strait and uncouth it appears, they will not be frightened from it. They dare no more meddle with the wide gate, considering whereto it leads. The soul in this case is like the slayer fleeing to the city of refuge, who, whatever difficulties be in the way, breaks through their, till he be within the gates of it.

6. Lastly, A resolute going through it, without turning back from it, as Felix did; Acts 24:25; or sticking in it as Ephraim; Hos. 13:13. However strait the gate is, the true enterer will thrust forward, striving against all difficulties, and restless till he get forward to God in Christ; Luke 13:24. For he sees, that till he be there, there is no safety, how easy soever the blind world is.

USE 1. Of Information. This informs us, that,

1. No body walking carelessly, inconsiderately, and at all adventures, will ever get a safe arrival that way in the other world. They may go to the pit that way; for sleeping or waking they go with the stream, and it will carry them down; but the course to heaven is rowing against the stream, that will never do at this rate. Wherefore there is need of consideration, and working out our salvation; Phil. 2:12.

2. They must begin well who would end well; and enter by the strait gate, who would lodge for ever in the roomy and spacious house above. It is the narrow way that leads to life, the strait gate that enters into the narrow way. To expect life then without entering by the strait gate, is a vain thing; it is in effect to think that holding the course to hell in this life, we shall for all that land in heaven at death. "But (Gal. 6:7) be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." An ungodly life will make a wretched end.

3. There is a necessity to bestir ourselves, lay salvation to heart, and see what course we take for the other world. The secure sinner must awake, lest he sleep the sleep of death; 1 Cor. 15:34, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not." The careless, thoughtless about eternity, must begin to look to himself, that he do not perish; Prov. 6:9, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" There is a strait gate before us, which we will not get into sleeping; and if we get not into it, and through it too, we are gone.

4. There is an absolute necessity of conversion for every one of us; for that is the strait gate we must enter by, if ever we come to heaven; Matth. 19:3, "Except ye be converted, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." If there is not a work of converting grace wrought on us, we will never get to glory. We are so totally corrupted by nature, that

if there is not such a change made on us as amounts to a new birth, we cannot see heaven; John 3:5, 6, "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." We are so far off the way naturally, that we must be converted.

5. They do but deceive themselves, who imagine they are in the narrow way to life, who are yet strangers to a work of conversion. That is an entering into religion, without coming in by the door, but climbing up some other way. And to such may that be applied; John 10:8, "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." It is lamentable, that so few appear to betake themselves to the way of religion; and that among the few who do, there are so many who miss or neglect the first step. Many come too easily by their religion; and so fares of it, it comes to no good account in the end.

6. Lastly, Vain are their pretences to religion, and vain are their hopes of heaven, who are so prejudiced at religions strictness, that they cannot endure it, nor think of being bound up to it. What is that, but to be utterly averse to the strait gate and narrow way? And where is such people's religion for the present, and what hopes can they have of heaven for the future? Will the course of the world, the wide way, ever bring them thither? Will men pretend to be followers of Christ, and yet be loathers of religious strictness? Or will they think to be partakers of heaven, and yet not be followers of Christ?

USE 2. Of Reproof. It serves to reprove,

1. Those who are unconcerned to direct their course aright for the other world. And such are all they who make no inquiry for the strait gate, nor trouble their heads about it. It is an evidence they are not for Zion; Jer 50:4, 5. It had been better for these had they never heard the gospel; for at this rate they slight the warning Christ has

given; they neglect the gate he is pointing out to them; and they say in effect, What needs all this ado about the other world, and the safe gate to it?

2. Those who keep by the wide gate, despising the strait one, and hope to do well enough in the end too. Truly this is to hope that the Bible will be found a fable; and all the warnings of danger to sinners, mere scarecrows. Such may read their doom; Deut. 29:19, 20, "And it come to pass when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst; the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book, shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven." And in end they will find it not a sound of big words, but such as will press them down for ever.

3. Those who will neither enter themselves, nor suffer others so far as they can hinder them; Matth. 23:13. There is a generation of enemies to the strait gate, who do what they can to keep others from it, as well as themselves, and so vent the malignity of their disposition against religion. They lay all the hindrances in their way that they can; take all opportunities to discourage them in any attempts that way; they lay out themselves to tempt them to evil, and lead them into sin. Alas! whose work is it ye do, when ye do so? Is it God's work, Christ's work? Surely ye cannot imagine that. Nay, it is Satan's work, who himself is busy at it, whom you serve; and your reward will be accordingly. Particularly,

4. Mockers of religions exercise, who make a jest of seriousness and of serious persons. We are warned, that in the last days there should be such; 2 Pet. 3:3, 4, "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the

last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Observe of them that they were profane; for none but those of very profane spirits will dare to jest on sacred things. They are atheistical; for none that have the belief of the being of a God to judge them, and of the Bible's being really his word, will be a scoffer at others for regarding it. O that such would consider their danger, the bands that are abiding them for their looseness; Isa. 28:22, "Be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong."

5. Lastly, Those who being employed to direct others what course to take for the other world, make no conscience of directing them to the strait gate. They call to them continually, Do, do this and the other duty, exercise this and the other virtue, without endeavouring to lead them to Christ in the first place, and the great duty of believing in him; as if men needed nothing but application or plying themselves to make them Christians. But conversion to God by his Spirit is overlooked; and vital union with Christ, the necessary spring of all holy obedience; John 15:5, is neglected; Eph. 2:10.

USE 3. Of Exhortation. Then, as ever you would direct your course aright for the other world, enter ye in by the strait gate. I shall branch out this in two particulars.

First, As ever ye would direct your course aright for the other world, lay aside your prejudices against religious strictness; lay your account with, and peremptorily set yourselves for thrusting through the strait gate into the narrow way, that so ye may get to heaven, bidding farewell to the wide way of the world. This exhortation is,

1. For the young that are setting out in the world. I would have you to set out in the mean time for the other world too; because whether

you do it or not, ye are really going thither; and how soon you may be there, you know not. And pray take heed how you direct your course at that time of day; for according as ye begin then, ye will readily hold on after; Prov. 22:6, "Train up a child in the way that he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." O have a care that prejudices against religious strictness get not a seat in you; but be ye reconciled to it, and set to it in earnest.

2. For the aged that are gone out into the world. I would have you to set out at length for the other world also, directing your course aright thither; the rather that ye are far on already in the way to it, and for the most part off the right way as yet. It is high time you were began to change your course, lest, if ye go on any longer, ye harden in an ill course without remedy.

Many are the prejudices both old and young have against religious strictness, the conceited hardships of it, the singularity and unfashionableness of it, and many others I shall not now stand upon. But pray, let what our Saviour here advances against them, serve to strike the bottom out of them all; that is, the absolute necessity of it. In vain do men dispute about a way to a place, and object against it as rough, &c, when there is no other way to it; for in that case it is plain, they must either take the way as it is, or give over thoughts of the place.

Now, our Lord has told us, "The gate is strait;" and I would therefore have you to set yourselves for it, strait as it is; and peremptorily to lay your account with enduring hardness now, in firm hope that so you may safely arrive at length in the other world, where ye shall walk at liberty. Bid an eternal farewell then to the wide gate and way, and be resolute to enter and go through the strait one.

MOTIVE 1. All prejudices you entertain against religious strictness, are in favour of the corruption of your nature; and does that need any thing to feed and strengthen it? 2 Thess. 2:12. Do but impartially consider any one prejudice you have against it; and you will find it is in favour of some one lust or other, and that it is a screen to defend it; Rom. 1:18, compared with Jer. 2:25. It is the corrupt affection biasseteth the judgment, and sets men on palliating licentious courses, and unfavourably representing religious strictness. And judge ye, what must be the issue of feeding the corruption of our nature which is to be mortified.

2. All the difficulty of religious strictness ariseth only from corruption in ourselves and others; Rom. 7:14, "For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin." Religious strictness is in heaven carried to its utmost pitch; Rev. 21:27, "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Yet there they are at perfect liberty; Rom 8:21. Why? because corruption is purged out. Learn therefore, that any uneasiness there is in religious strictness, the blame of it is not to be laid at religion's door, but our own. Religious strictness grates only on,

(1.) Our own corrupt hearts; as the shoe straitens and pains the sore foot, and cannot be suffered on it, though it was very easy while the foot was whole; Rom. 7:23, 24. Though we would think it intolerable to be held any considerable time in the water, the fish are not at all straitened in it; for it is agreeable to their nature; and so would the way to holiness be to a holy heart. Now, a course of life grating on the corruptions of our hearts, is even as necessary for our partaking of Christ's eternal salvation, as Christ's course of suffering in his life

and death was for the purchase of it; Gal. 5:24, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts."

(2.) A corrupt sinful world; Rev. 6:10. They cannot endure it; they wonder what should carry any unto it, and they are apt to reproach one for it; 1 Pet. 4:4, "Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, "speaking evil of you," No great wonder the dempster's voice grate on the malefactor's ears; for he pronounceth his doom; and so do the godly by their religious strictness pronounce doom against the wicked; Heb. 11:7. But why do we care to please the world lying in wickedness, in those things that will sink them in ruins? or seek to walk with them with whom we should not lodge at the journey's end?

3. The greatest difficulty in religious strictness, is at first entering into it. It is with religion as with other useful and profitable courses of life, trades, or employments; the greatest hardship is at the beginning; afterwards it becomes more easy through use; Matth. 11:29, 30. May be some's experience may contradict this; it is a good while since they attempted, and it is as hard this day as then. What is the reason of that? Ye are ay but beginning, ye do not hold close to it. So it fares with you as with children at school, who being every now and then kept at home, learning is a constant pain to them; whereas it turns easy to them that are held close to it; Prov. 2:1–6. Therefore be peremptory, and resolute, and constant; and of a truth it will be otherwise.

4. Whether would ye choose your eternal state with the religiously strict, or with the more gay and world-like part of mankind, that walk more loosely? No doubt that will be the language of every heart; Numb. 23:10, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Then pray live with them, and walk with them. If ye

like their end, lay by your prejudices against their way, in which they walk unto it. If ye have a horror of the end of them that walk loosely, and yet like their way best, ye will be self-condemned. If ye would go east, ye would not travel with the company going west.

5. Lastly, Religious strictness is the only course in which any will get to heaven; the loose course will land men in destruction. The text is very express; and makes no exception of great or small, rich or poor, young or old. There is no body, but will be straitened sometime or other; it is impossible that any should get always walking at liberty. Choose ye then, whether ye will take your straitening before or after death, for time or for eternity.

If ye imagine that some were far from religious strictness, that yet got to heaven at length, consider then they were brought to repentance for their neglect of it. And will ye follow a pattern, that those who gave it bitterly repented of? If ye do, ye must follow it out in repentance too, else ye are ruined. And is it a wise course, to be laying up matter for repentance, and to stand off from a course, the neglect whereof ye must repent, or ye perish? Pray consider that repentance will be more easy now than on the brink of eternity; and it will be more sure too, for it is what very rarely is reached at that time of day.

As for some directions or helps, I offer only these two.

1. Set before you, in the first place, the death of Christ, for your justification and reconciliation with God, deliverance from the curse and eternal wrath; and by faith flee in under the covert of his blood, for these effects. Without these men may reach civility, the moralist his practice of virtue, the legalist a form of godliness; but no true religious strictness, more than the cursed fig tree could ever bear fruit after, Luke 1:74, 75.

2. Set before you the life of Christ in the world, as the rule, the reason, and the endearment of religious strictness. Every Christian should set before him the life of Christ, and often view it, for it is,

(1.) The rule of religious strictness, the example and pattern we are to copy after, John 13:15, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:6. Here it is we have the perfect draught of religious strictness. The strictest of the saints have had their out-of-the-way steps; vain men have pieces of strictness, which is not according to this pattern, being nothing but the product of their blind and proud minds. But in the example of Christ we have a perfect pattern of religious strictness; for in him we see what is the sort of walk really pleasing to God, in as much as we see there how God himself become man did walk. And when he has condescended to this, will we not eye it?

(2.) The reason. We have the naked divine authority, call, and command to religious strictness in the law. In the life of Christ we have that authority enforced by his own example, obliging us the more forcibly unto it. The example of superiors is an additional law, binding the inferiors to conformity. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme, the most high God, as well as he is man; and since he was man, he was religiously strict; certainly, for that very reason we should be so too.

(3.) The endearment. How forcible is that exhortation to religious strictness! Eph. 5:1, 2, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour." There is no such powerful remedy against prejudices at religious strictness, as the believing consideration of the death of Christ. Is it possible that faith's view of the death of Christ should leave us indifferent to, and far more averse to the life of

Christ? No, sure; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live, should not live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Let your consciences be sprinkled with his blood, and your hearts will be knit to religions strictness. But alas! it is want of faith in his death, that makes us so indifferent to the imitation of him in his life of religions strictness.

Secondly, As ever ye would direct your course aright for the other world, be concerned, that, in the first place, ye may be truly converted; that ye may be found converts in the first place, entering the strait gate by a work of thorough conversion wrought on you.

MOTIVE 1. Consider the necessity of conversion to God. It is absolutely necessary by our Saviour's declaration; Matth. 18:3, "Except ye be converted, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and by the nature of things too; for how is it possible they should walk with God in the narrow way, who have not entered by the strait gate, being once truly turned to God? This is the beginning of the Christian course, without which it is impossible there should be any progress in it, or happy end thereof.

MOTIVE 2. To think to be truly religious, without being once true converts, is a vain thing, a delusion, because a contradiction. It is a building on the earth without a foundation; Luke 6:49, which can tarn to no good account in the end. True religion is to walk in Christ; but one must first be in him; Col. 2:16, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." It is to walk in newness of life, but we must be new creatures first; Rom. 6:4. It is to walk with God, but we must first be converted to him.

MOTIVE 3. Without it all your religion will amount to no more but a form of godliness destitute of the power; 2 Tim. 3:5. It will be but as a body without the soul; and all your services will be but bodily exercise, that will profit little. "For God is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in truth," John 4:24. But how can that be without conversion? Phil. 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit." Though the wall is fair plastered, it is loose in the heart; and so makes but a fair show, like a whited sepulchre.

MOTIVE 4. Lastly, The want of it is a spring of apostasy; 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us." How many do for a time blossom fair in religion, who at length totally wither? They give their names to Christ pretending to have separated from the world; but afterwards they turn deserters, and get away to the enemy's camp. Why, truly, if they had ever by sound conversion come out from among them, they had never gone back; Psalm 12:7, "Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." But the axe of converting grace never went to the root of the tree with them; wherefore though some branches of sin were lopt off, the root of bitterness untouched, spreads again. For your help here, labour to impress your hearts with concern to have a good foundation laid. And,

1. Think it not enough to reform your lives, and to cleanse the outward man. Remember religion is the hidden man of the heart; 1 Sam. 16:7. So the power of the natural enmity must be broken, and the heart reconciled to the holy law, not in some, but in every point thereof known to you; Heb. 8:10, "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will

put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." For this only is true conversion, the heart being turned back again to God; 1 Kings 18:37, in cordial reconciliation with and absolute resignation to his holy will expressed in his law.

2. For this cause, ye would study to discern the law in its spirituality and vast extent, and closely apply it to your own soul's state and case. Here Paul's conversion began; Rom. 7:9, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." By this means ye will be convinced of the total corruption of your nature, heart, and life; what a gulph of guilt ye are sunk in under the curse; the which may fill you with fear, sorrow, and anxious concern what course to take to be saved. Then study to discern the promise of the gospel in its sufficiency and suitableness to your case; and to see Christ in it; and closely apply that to your own soul. For this is it that completes conversion; Heb. 7:19, "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." By this means ye will be enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, as a suitable Saviour, having a fulness of grace in him to be communicated for your regeneration, and a fulness of merit to carry off your guilt; which will be a fit means to raise in you a desire of him, and hope of remedy through him; and so to draw you to him by faith, and by him unto God.

DOCTRINE II. There is a wide gate to enter by, and a broad way joining it; but it leads away to destruction.

Here we shall consider,

I. The wide gate there is to enter in by.

II. The broad way joining the wide gate.

III. This way's leading away to destruction.

IV. Lastly, Improve the subject.

I. We shall consider the wide gate there is to enter in by. Were there no other but the strait gate in the course to the other world, then there would be no fear of going wrong, all behoved to go that way, or not at all; and it would have been so, if there had been no part of the other world but the happy one. But there is another part of that world, a hell as well as a heaven; and so there is a gate towards the former as well as the latter; and that is the wide one, which we are to beware of.

According to what is said of the strait, the wide gate is the entrance into a course of ungodliness, whereby men become actually ungodly. Thus men set their face towards hell, and begin to move toward the land of darkness; Eph. 2:1, 2. Whensoever this entrance is made, then they are on the course whose end is destruction; and it is made very early.

And that entrance or wide gate, is the gate of the corrupt natural inclination of the heart; Prov. 4:23; Mark 7:21–23. This gate begins to open to us with the first dawns of reason, and opens wider and wider as we grow up; Gen. 8:21. Our first looks in the world are asquint; we discover a cast to the wrong side, an averseness to good, and proneness to evil; Rom. 8:7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." That is the natural inclination of the heart, that soon shows itself in what we call the innocent babe, and widens more and more through the several periods of childhood, youth, and manhood; Prov. 22:15.

This gate was set up by Adam's fall; Rom. 5:12. He breaking the first covenant, broke out this gate to destruction, to and in himself and all

his posterity; and mankind naturally rush in at it, not considering whereto it leads. Besides this, there had never been another gate to the other world, for fallen man, had not Jesus Christ by his suffering, life, and death, opened it.

This gate is a two-leaved gate, opening wide.

1st, On the one hand, it opens wide toward the creature, away from God; Jer. 2:13. That is the way the natural inclination of the heart lies. When God made man he gave him a set of heart towards himself as his rest and happiness; Eccl. 7:29, "God made man upright:" without any motion towards the creature, but in God and for God; and good reason, for all the good of the creature lay there, it being otherwise but a cypher signifying nothing without him; Matth. 19:17. But Satan in the first temptation set up the creature separately from God, and over-against him; and though so it was mere emptiness, he blew it up with wind from hell, and made it appear a rest for the heart, and cheated our first parents into a choice of it for their rest; Gen. 3:6. So the first leaf was opened, and has stood open to this day with mankind. And this I say,

(1.) Opens wide towards the creature, the vain and empty creation; Hab. 2:5, compared with Prov. 30:15, 16. As the beasts incline to the earth, the birds to the air, and the fishes to the water; so does fallen man to the creature. He knows no other happiness naturally, desires no other, cannot understand how there can be another. He falls as naturally to seek it here, as the infant to suck the breasts that bare it.

This is a broad leaf, opening very wide; because of the boundless desires of the heart to be satisfied, the vast variety of the creatures to try the experiment on, and the insufficiency and unsatisfactoriness of them all; Eccl. 1:2; Isaiah 55:1, 2. The wide hungry heart that is

without God, the wide world filled with nothing but vanity and lies, makes the leaf of the natural inclination to the creature very wide.

(2.) It opens a way from God; Heb. 3:12, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." It is not possible, but that the heart turning to the creature for a rest and happiness, must turn away from God; Matth. 6:24, "For no man can serve two masters." The heart of man naturally contracting a friendship with the world, states and declares an enmity against God; James 4:4, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." And the children of men setting out in the world, while they set their face thus to the creature, cast God behind their back; Ezek. 23:35. They know him not, desire him not; it is a mystery to them, how the enjoyment of him can make one happy; they are apt to think it is but a fancy; Psalm 4:6.

Thus this natural inclination of the heart to the creature is the one leaf of the wide gate. But here it is

OBJECTED, How can the inclination of the heart to the creature be accounted a leaf of the gate to hell, when every creature of God is good, and we are allowed the enjoyment of it, and an inclination towards it is lawful, and in several cases expressly required?

ANSW. The creature may be considered two ways. (1.) By itself, separately from God. (2.) In God and for him. The first way it is regarded as a fountain and original spring to drink at for satisfaction; in the other, as a stream only coming from God, and leading back to him. Now, it is not in the latter, but the former respect, that we call the inclination to it a leaf of the broad gate. And it is in that first respect that the heart is naturally inclined to it. Upon it, separately from God, the heart naturally fixes, looking for that from it, which it

should only look for in God; whereby it is put in the room of God. And this godless pursuit of the creature, separately from God, not in him; for itself, and ourself, not for God, was never allowable, and is no other but the course of them that are gone in at the wide gate; Eph. 4:17, 18. Consider here,

1. The inclination to it separate from God, plainly discovering itself, in either a profane neglect of him, or else a crafty shifting of him, in our desires after, or enjoyment of the creature. No doubt one may lawfully have an inclination towards health, wealth, relations, &c. But then it should be in God; in his fear, regulated by his word; but as an incast to the great bargain of his favour, not as a principal. But the generality of men quite neglect him in these, Psalm 10:4, while others that have some principles formed in them, craftily lay the thoughts of him aside in these things, that they may not be hampered in their desire or enjoyment of the creature; Jer. 9:6. A glaring evidence of inclination to it separate from God.

2. The inclination to it for it or ourselves, not for God, discovering itself, in that there is no regard had, in the desire, or enjoyment, to the honour of God to be advanced thereby, but to please ourselves merely; though (1 Cor. 10:31,) "whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God." It is purely something in the creature itself, not any thing of God about it, that grounds the inclination to it; and that is a piece of spiritual idolatry, and a debasing of the soul, to desire any creature for itself merely.

2dly, On the other side, it opens wide towards sin, away from the holiness of God expressed in his law; Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray, as soon as they be born, speaking lies." When God made man, he gave him a set of heart towards holiness, Eccl. 7:29, so that as God himself was the rest of

his heart and portion, so his holy will and law was the rule of his walk. But the heart of man falling out of its rest in God, unto the godless pursuit of the creature, the yoke of obedience to him came to be thrown off. So the natural inclination of the heart opens wide,

(1.) To sin; Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" The taste is quite vitiated; nothing relishes with men naturally but sin. As, on the one hand, they go to the creature, to suck its dry breasts; so, on the other, they are bent on the fulsome breasts of their corrupt lusts; Eph. 2:3. These corrupt lusts as so many brats of hell, naturally bred in the heart, open their mouths wide, crying, Give, Give; and nothing can satisfy them, but the puddle waters of sin, which are agreeable to their nature.

(2.) Away from the holiness of God expressed in his law; Rom. 8:7. There is not only a carelessness or an indifferency to holiness, but an aversion to it; such as an untamed bullock has to the yoke. Hence holy walking and spiritual exercises, are naturally burdensome to the corrupt heart, which loves sinful liberty, and hates to be hampered by the holy commandment. So that what of these the man is in a sort brought to, it is but bodily exercise, the heart is not in it, Ezek. 33:31.

This also is a broad leaf, opening very wide. For the corruption of nature is an unfathomable gulph, that there is no filling up of; the sinner may be surfeited, but never can be satiated. The way of sin, as being the way of error or wandering, has no end; one evil step still leading on to, and making way for another. Thus ye see the wide gate, that, opening to all the children of fallen Adam, they are all ready disposed to inter into. Which entering is next to be noticed.

The entering into this wide gate is, the giving way to the corrupt natural inclination of the heart; the not resisting of it, but yielding

unto it; Rom, 6:12, "Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." This gate should of right be closed; the bitter fountain should be stopt immediately, the weeds of corruption should be nipt in the bud, and men should presently begin a war with themselves in mortification of their lusts. But instead of that, they soon begin to follow the corrupt natural inclination; and that in,

1. Giving way to the vanity of their minds; Eph. 4:17. They find in them a restless heart, and they go in pursuit of that rest, not to God, but to the creature. Man's mind is naturally blinded; and what it points out to him for happiness and satisfaction, he pursues; the heart going as the vain mind leads. Thus men are lured on. The vain mind first points out a satisfaction to us in meat, then in gay clothing, then in mirth and jollity; at length it opens as we grow up, into the wide field of pleasures, profits, and honours; and here men wander as in a wilderness, seeking rest, thinking to find it in this and the other vanity, and still disappointed; yet after all disappointments, the vain mind still has a new vanity to present unto us, and we go to it with new hopes of satisfaction; Isa. 57:10, "Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope; thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved." Now, the engaging in this pursuit is entering the wide gate with a witness.

2. Giving way to the corrupt bent of the heart towards sin, and against the way of holiness; Rom. 3:11, 12, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doth good, no not one." Lusts begin to stir in the heart, and crave of them; and instead of starving them, they begin to think of feeding and satisfying them. So they break over the hedge of the divine law, and get into the devil's ground, omitting their duty to

God, and committing sin against him, in compliance with the natural inclination. This also is a plain entering of the wide gate. Now, there is a twofold entering this wide gate.

1st, One that is more secret and undiscerned to the party himself. Thus we are all once entered into it, ere ever we are aware, by the early sproutings of corruption in childhood; doing sinfully and corruptly ere ever we begin to consider what we are doing, Psalm 58:3; Prov. 20:11. Thus we are entered into the service of sin and Satan, ere we begin to consider who or what they are. And where pains are not taken by good education to curb these early sproutings, they grow readily too strong afterwards to be holden down, either by one or other; Prov. 29:15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."

2dly, Another that is more deliberate, and of choice. Thus when the children of men are come to the years of discretion, and can discern between good and evil, they see on the one hand the strait gate of religion, and the wide gate of sin and vanity; and having a bias and cast in their nature to the wrong side, they refuse the strait gate and choose the wide one as the most agreeable to them, Jer. 2:25. Of this there are three more notable kinds.

1. The throwing off the bonds of good education, as things wherewith they are hampered. Thus many set out into the broad way, and land in destruction at length, Prov. 5:11–13. Parental government is the first government that God puts us under; therefore in the Proverbs written to give the young knowledge the very first exhortation is; ver. 8, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." How dangerous must it then be, either to throw it off before God takes it off; or when he has, to throw off the impressions

made thereby? None of them can be, but in compliance with the corrupt natural inclination to give it the swing.

2. Casting one's self into ill company. The second exhortation in the Proverbs respects that; ver. 10, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." We are so ready to be cast into the mould of the company we choose, especially if it be ill, that when one is so engaged, he may be reckoned to be gone in at the wide gate. If he had no mind to go with them, why would he choose their fellowship?

3. Apostatizing from a profession and appearance of religion; when one having for some time given promising tokens of a religious disposition, throws off all, and goes plainly into the way of the profane world; Heb. 10:38, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

The snare leading to this is readily the predominant sin. That makes its entrance most easily unto us, and most powerfully prevails to carry us into the broad way.

II. We shall consider the broad way joining the wide gate. Agreeable to what is said of the gate, the broad way joining it is the way of men's own heart; Isa. 57:17, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart:" Which heart being naturally a corrupt heart, is the way of irreligion and ungodliness, Psalm 1:1. As soon as men have entered the gate of the corrupt natural inclination, giving up themselves thereto, they are on the broad way, the way of their own heart. And here I shall shew,

1st, That the way of one's own heart or natural inclination, is indeed the broad way.

2dly, What are the parts of this broad way leading to destruction.

3dly, Speak of the broadness of this way.

First, I shall shew that the way of one's own heart or natural inclination, is indeed the broad way. This appears,

1st, From that corrupt set or bent which the hearts of men have got by Adam's fall. Whatever vain men give out concerning the dignity of human nature, the testimony of God concerning the heart of man is quite otherwise; Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Our Saviour represents it as a poisoned fountain, Mark 7:21, 22, and what poisoned it, was the fall of Adam, Rom. 5:12. The way then that it leads, must needs be the broad way to destruction, and therefore "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way," Isa. 53:6. In that set,

1. There is a bending away from God, who originally was, and of right is our chief end, Psalm 14:3, Jer. 2:13. The heart of man has not only left its rest in God, but is filled with natural enmity against him, Rom. 8:7; has a dislike of his nature, which is holy, and of his law, which is a transcript of his holiness. There is a downright contrariety in his nature against the nature of God, and in his will against the will of God; Job. 21:14, "Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

2. A bent towards the creature as the chief good, in the room of God, Jer. 2:13. Hence the natural voice of the heart in man is, "Who will shew us any good?" Psalm 4:6. For Adam falling from God, betook himself to the creature, to get out of it that satisfaction, which he was to have had from God; and in this case he left us; and naturally we go on that way, till powerfully turned to God again by grace.

3. An aversion to good, such as an untamed bullock has to the yoke, Jer. 31:18. It is a pain to the natural man to admit the yoke of Christ; Hos. 4:16, "Israel slideth back, as a backsliding heifer." So that a slavish fear of punishment, and a servile hope of reward, are the main things that can move them to duty; whereas, if the heart were left to its free choice, without these extrinsic motives, they would never yoke with it.

4. A proneness to evil; Hos. 11:7, "My people are bent to backsliding from me; though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him." The bias of the heart lies that way, so that it is the very first way the children of men go; Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray, as soon as they be born, speaking lies." None need to teach them the way of sin; leave them to their choice, they will as naturally go that way, as water will go downward, or sparks of fire upward. Who then can doubt, but the way of the heart is the broad way?

2dly, This appears from the necessity of regeneration, which is absolute and universal; John 3:3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." Men must be made new creatures ere they can do good works, Eph. 2:10; united to Christ by faith, ere they can do any thing to purpose; John 15:5, "Without me ye can do nothing." This necessity springs from the total corruption of our nature, whereby it is indisposed to all good; John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh." Whence it is evident, that the natural way of the heart is the broad way; for that which is wholly corrupt, cannot act but corruptly; and that nature which must be made new, ere it can do good, must needs, till it be renewed, be still going wrong.

3dly, Lastly, This appears from the difficulty there is in the conversion of sinners unto God; Jer. 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Great is that difficulty. Mercies will not do it, judgments will not; the sinner will trample on the goodness of God leading to repentance; he will go on in sin, though the fire of wrath is flashing on his face. A preacher from the dead would not convert a sinner; Luke 16:31. It is only the irresistible power of grace changing the heart that will do it; Jer. 31:18. This speaks the natural way the heart goes to be the broad way, and no other.

Secondly, We shall consider "the parts of this broad way leading to destruction." It is so very broad, that we cannot enter into a detail of the particular parts thereof. But in the general there are two parts of it. 1. The way of vanity; and, 2. The way of vileness.

1st, The way of vanity; Eph. 4:17. As soon as one has entered by that part of the wide gate of the natural inclination, opening toward the creature, away from God, he is upon the way of vanity, a broad, spacious way to destruction. He then begins a vain life, a course of vanity of conversation; 1 Pet. 1:18. And in this way most men, yea all, but regenerate men, are going. And it is,

1. A way that sets a man farther off from God. With the prodigal, he is then on his journey into the far country; Luke 15:13. Every step in this way is a step farther away; and the older he grows in it, the relative distance betwixt God and him is increased. God and the sinner part at the point of original corruption; and the sinner taking the way of vanity, is soon far from him.

2. A way wherein he applies himself close to the creature for his chief good; Jer. 2:13. Having left God, he takes up with the empty creation, to hammer a happiness to himself out of creature-comforts; in

imitation of fallen Adam embracing the forbidden fruit instead of a God. And here four things are to be considered,

(1.) The man is sensible of a want; Psalm 4:6, "Who will shew us any good?" He is conscious to himself, that he is not self-sufficient. There is an empty space in his heart, which he must needs labour to have filled up. And it cannot be otherwise, since he has lost God, and is without him in the world; Eph. 2:12; and that God is the only object capable of filling the heart, an infinite good only being commensurable to the boundless desires of the soul.

(2.) Having lost sight of God as man's happiness, he looks about through the creation for the supply of his want, for a match to his soul, which he finds cannot live alone by itself; Eccl. 6:9. Though the man has lost God, if he had not lost his eyes too, he would see there was no way for him, but to see to recover the enjoyment of God again. But his eyes are darkened in this broad way, that he cannot see how God, and God only, can be a happiness to him; 1 Cor. 2:14. The word of the gospel tells him this of God, and Christians tell it him from their experience; but he cannot comprehend it; therefore he looks about for it elsewhere.

(3) In this case the creature shews fair; the world appears in its beauty and gaudy dress. It displays its wealth at a distance, and looks out with all its charms, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life;" 1 John 2:16. And the man is taken thinking if he had it he would be well. He looks on it as a fit match for his heart, and is not without hopes of gaining his point. And Satan is busy here to forward the project, representing the creature most speciously, and inflaming the sinner's desire after it. See Matth. 4:8.

(4.) The sinner being taken, falls a-courting of the creature, for the enjoyment of the wanted happiness in it; Psalm 4:6. Flushed with big

hopes, he sets out on this project, and plies it closely. And this is the broad way of vanity, in which he travels endlessly, till either the grace of God open his eyes, and turn him back to God; or else that in hell he lift up his eyes, and see he has been ruined with courting all along a deceitful shadow.

This courting of the creature to be a match for the heart, is not slightly managed. But,

1. It is begun early; Psalm 58:3. As soon as ever the children of fallen Adam are sensible of a want, they go to that door for supply; while as yet there are no desires after God, they are gaping wide after the creature. Behold the little children, how fond of things grateful to the taste, and pleasant to the eye, while the compass of their understanding reaches no farther! What a mighty satisfaction do they promise themselves in these! And as they grow up, and the world opens out to them, and spreads its deceitful glories; how do their desires after it, and hunting for them, increase proportionally!

2. It is prosecuted assiduously, no time being lost for the thing purposed. The project is closely pursued, that if it prove successful, it is not through carelessness; Isa. 57:20; Psalm 127:2. They are early and late at the creature's door. Whatever disappointments they meet with, it makes no change of their mind, nor do they go to another airth for their happiness; Rom. 6:20.

3. It is managed vigorously. They are not indifferent about their success, but in good earnest; their heart is wholly set on it. The most valuable talents they have, are laid out upon it; Isa. 55:2. They take true pains upon it; they are not loiterers, but labour to gain their point; Isa. 55:2; Matth. 11:28, and that to weariness in the midst of difficulties; Hab. 2:13. They are like hewers in stone, on the matter; Jer. 2:13; and strike on rocks till the fire flash in their faces.

4. Lastly, It is continued all along, till the Lord from heaven put a stop to it; either in mercy, shewing them their error, and bringing them back unto God in Christ, to take up their rest in him; or else in wrath, taking them away from it by death, and so plucking up their hopes by the roots; Matth. 25:45, 46; Luke 12:20.

Now this way is the way of vanity, in that,

1. It is a false and deceitful way, Psalm 119:128, and can take with men only by means of darkness, blindness, and ignorance, ver. 104. In it shadows are proposed to the heart instead of a substance, the creature promising that which it is not able to perform; causing men to expect that out of it that is not in it. In it the bait appears; but the hook is hidden, which yet effectually ruins; 1 Tim. 6:10. And in it men hunt their own sorrows and destruction.

2. It is an unprofitable way. In it a life is spent to no valuable purpose, and at the end it appears to have brought no lasting advantage; Rom. 3:12. But thus men are running in the broad way, wearying themselves for a thing of nought; like children running in a sunny day catching butterflies, missing many of them, and the beautiful coloured wings of those they catch going to ashes between their fingers. It is unprofitable,

(1.) In that they quite fall short of the great end God proposeth to men, viz. his glory; Rom. 3:23. Instead of living to his honour, they live to his dishonour, preferring the creature to the Creator, and putting it in his room as their chief good. And that must needs be a vain life, which does not reach the chief end it was given for. What then can be expected, but the doom of the unprofitable servant?

(2.) In that they quite fall short of the end they propose to themselves, viz., happiness, or a rest to their hearts; Hos. 8:7. This is

what all their days they seek, but never get in any of their days, nor at the end; nor is it possible to get it in that way; for it is the way of vanity. And is not that a vain life, where one must die disappointed of the great thing they mainly sought all their life?

3. It is a trifling way, in which one trifles away a lifetime, busy doing nothing, no substantial lasting good, nothing that will give comfort in a dying hour, nothing for the better world; Psalm 90:9. God has sent us into this world, to do business for eternity, to pass trials for the happy world to come; but men going the broad way, forget their business, and trifle away time; it lies like lumber on their hand, and they are fain to go in quest of this and the other vanity, to get it driven off, as if they had nothing to do.

4. It is a restless way; Matth. 11:28, 29. Solomon speaks of a vanity tossed to and fro; Prov. 21:6. Such is the whole life of one in the broad way. There is no rest for the heart in this way. Whatever amusements for a time they may get in it, they can never lay the heart to rest. Laying down the head upon one vanity to rest, the pillow is soon drawn away; or there is a thorn of uneasiness found in it, and they must shift themselves to another vanity, which quickly proves as unsatisfying as the other. So that they are like one on the top of a mast, they can get no rest.

5. Lastly, It is a way of endless wandering, through repeated disappointments. Here men are like the Sodomites about Lot's house, struck with blindness. They are going about for satisfaction, and groping for it every where, but can never find it; wearying themselves to find that door, but all in vain. But there is no end; but after a thousand disappointments a new vanity is tried, and the experiment made on another; Isa. 57:10. And so men are still going the round of vanities; till either grace is dropped into their hearts,

turning them to rest in God; or else they drop into the grave, dying disappointed.

2dly, The broad way is the way of vileness; Psalm 14:1. As soon as one is entered by that part of the wide gate of the natural inclination opening towards sin, away from the holiness of God expressed in his law, he is upon the way of vileness leading straight to destruction; Tit. 1:5, 16; Rev. 22:15. And it is,

1. A way wherein men vile by nature soon grow more vile, and loathsome in God's sight, by going farther away from the holiness required in his law; Jer. 9:3, "They proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord." Here actual sin is heaped on original sin, a sinful life added to a sinful nature, and the natural corruption spreads itself in heart, lip, and life; so the farther they go in it, the farther from all good.

2. A way wherein they apply themselves to the satisfying instead of starring and mortifying their lusts; Psalm 58:3. Having no heart for the way of holiness, they set themselves to the way of sin, and pursue the same at the expense of the honour of God, and the wounding of their own consciences, till in end they land in the pit of destruction at the end of the way, if repenting not. And here four things may be considered,

1. The heart of man is naturally possessed with a fry of sinful corrupt lusts craving to be satisfied. See what proceeds out of the heart; Mark 7:21, 22, "Evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness." And if they were not in it, they would not come out of it. They are bred in the womb of the corruption of our nature; and by influence from hell they are soon

brought to spread out themselves. These gape and open wide to be satisfied with what is agreeable to their nature.

2. The sinner, instead of starving them, sets himself to make provision for them, instead of denying them to gratify them; Psalm 78:18. And this is a hard task, the hardest that ever one took in hand; for it is like feeding of a fire, that never saith, It is enough. Lusts may be surfeited, but will never be satisfied. So it is a weary task the sinner has, Jer. 9:5, and a laborious one, as in a close battle, James 4:1–3.

3. The creature lying within the bounds of the law, cannot satisfy them; and no wonder, for it was never appointed to be satisfactory to us, so as to afford the rest of the heart. Even in paradise there was a want, which nothing but the enjoyment of God could fill up. The regular desires of a heart housed in God, and centering in him, the creature may satisfy in the regular use of it; but nothing regular will satisfy irregular lusts.

4. Wherefore the sinner breaks over the hedge unto that lying without the bounds of the holy law; and the satisfaction not found in allowed, it seeks in forbidden fruit, Prov. 9:17. Thus the man wandering in the way of vanity, is every now and then turning to the way of vileness; he is like the hungry beast on a bare pasture, that having ate up all within the hedge to the red earth, at length breaks over the hedge; as Dinah gadding abroad in the way of vanity, at length fell into a pit of vileness and defilement. And here two things present themselves for the entertainment of these vile lusts.

1. The desires of the flesh to be fulfilled; Eph. 2:3. And here is a mire of vileness for the sinner to wallow in, in the broad way, called the filthiness of the flesh; 2 Cor. 7:1. In it are to be seen drenched drunkards, gluttons, unclean persons, filthy speakers, and all

sensualists, whose great business it is to gratify their senses, neglecting their souls; as if they were nothing but living flesh, or their souls only as salt to keep their bodies from corrupting.

2. The desires of the mind to be fulfilled; Eph. 2:3. This mire is called the filthiness of the spirit; 2 Cor. 7:1. Here are endless depths of enmity against God, rancour of spirit against and distaste of true holiness and purity, unbelief of the gospel, pride and selfishness, covetousness and earthly-mindedness, and innumerable evils more, in which sinners indulge themselves in the broad way.

These two issue in a fourfold road of the broad way, in each of which are many walking.

1. Black ignorance, wherein not a few rest satisfied without a tolerable knowledge of the foundations of religion; Psalm 82:5. They are taught to work, but not to read; if they were, either they forget it, or else they make no due use of it. The desires of the flesh and mind wholly take them up; and they neither have, nor desire to have the knowledge of God and his ways; Job 21:14. They know it would but hamper them in those things which take best with darkness, and cannot abide the light; John 3:20, "For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." But alas! they consider not, that it will end in everlasting darkness; Hos. 4:6; Isa. 27:11.

2. Bare morality, lying in conformity to the letter of the ten commandments; whereby they keep some decency in civil society, but are utterly estranged from religion, and have not so much as an appearance of it. They are good neighbours, but no good Christians; deal fairly in things of this world, but have no dealing with things of the other world; mind their business and affairs of life, but quite forget the one thing needful. Their greatest excellency lies in

negatives, like the Pharisee; Luke 18:11, "I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican;" as if they did not look on themselves obliged to honour God, farther than not to affront him openly. This is a road of the broad way; Matth. 5:20, "For except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

3. A form of godliness wherein men go the outward round of, the duties of religion, but still continue strangers to the life and power of it, 2 Tim. 3:5. These are the whited sepulchres, men who tack a new life to the old heart; who sometimes have taken up from their extravagancies, but were never truly converted; who with their religion, such as it is, still retain the predominant love of sin; and always have some beloved lust, in the room of God in Christ. They are like those beasts, of which there is nothing good but the skin; and hence so many apostates, who turning their back on religion, and proving scandalous and profane in their lives, do but appear in their native colours, and what they always were, before they cast off their mask. Let such consider these scriptures; Psalm 125:5, "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity." Matth. 24:51, "The Lord shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

4. Open profanity; wherein men bear the devil's mark on their foreheads, giving themselves the loose in the open course of scandalous enormities, Gal. 5:19–21. These are they that "declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not" who take pleasure in making themselves vile; scorn to be hampered with the rules of religion, sobriety, and decency; who make a mock of sin, and are going to destruction jovially, as with tabret and pipe. This surely is the broad

road in the broad way; and they cannot be thought to be deceiving themselves with hopes of heaven, for they cannot think it a place for dogs and swine. If they do, they will be disappointed; Rev. 22:15, "For without are dogs." &c. A profane life will make a miserable end; Eph. 5:6, "Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

Now this is the way of vileness, wherein men render themselves loathsome in the sight of God; their souls in this way still gathering more defilement to them, and all the defilement sticking, none carried off, while they are upon it. Every sin leaves a blot on the soul whereby it is laid under pollution agreeable to its nature. Thereby,

1. The soul is rendered unlike God; and the more sinful, the more unlike him in his moral perfections. Now, God cannot but love himself, and his own purity; and therefore he cannot but hate and loathe what is made unlike him, and contrary to him.

2. The soul being made unlike God, its beauty is marred, and it becomes loathesome. Holiness is the glory or beauty of God; Exod. 15:11, "Who is a God like unto thee, glorious in holiness?" and God being the supreme pattern of all perfection, holiness must also be the beauty of the creature; and consequently sin must be the deformity of the soul.

Thirdly, We shall consider the broadness of this way; which we may take up in these two things.

1. There is large room in it for passengers to walk in. The vain and vile mind is an unfathomable depth; and the way to destruction is of an unmeasurable breadth. So the mind has room to wander up and down, and to range to and fro in the broad way. Endless vanities

present themselves there, innumerable vilenesses are to be found there, according to Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" so that he who has disrelished one, may betake himself to another; and every lust of the heart may find wherewith to gratify it there.

2. There is no hampering with hedges in it. It is the way of lawless liberty; the very nature of it is to lay aside all restraints, and to allow all licentiousness. In that way the bands are broken asunder, and the cords cast away from the travellers. Bible-rules, dictates of conscience, and suggestions of the Spirit of holiness, are laid aside in that way, as things that would narrow it. Hence,

1. It is easy to fall on it. It is such a broad way, that there is no difficulty to hit it, Psalm 58:3. Though one shut his eyes, and walk at all adventures, he will not miss it; because it is the way of natural inclination; so all the difficulty is to keep off it.

2. It is easy walking in it. There is full room there for all the sinner's vain and vile inclinations. They go with the wind while they are on it; they row with the stream; for the natural bent lies that way, Jer. 4:22. They have no more ado but follow it.

3. It is not easy to get off it; Jer. 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Many seem to themselves and others for a time to leave it; and yet they do not change their way, but only their road; going off from one road of the broad way to another, as from profanity to formality.

III. We shall consider this way in its leading away to destruction.

Here we shall,

1st, Shew the import of it.

2dly, Confirm it,

First. We shall shew the import of this. It imports, that,

1. Destruction is at the end of this way, however the travellers notice it not; Prov. 9:17, 18, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell." As sure as heaven's happiness is at the end of the narrow way, hell and destruction are at the end of the broad way. There is no separating what God has thus joined.

2. The farther one goes in that way, the further away he is from safety, and the nearer to destruction. Progress in the broad way carries one still farther from God, from holiness, and from salvation; Psal. 119:155, "Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes." They are far from the God of salvation, the way of salvation, and so from salvation itself; and still they draw nearer to destruction.

3. Holding on the way, they cannot miss of destruction; Rom. 3:16, 17, "Destruction and misery are in their ways." They will land at length in the place of destruction. Psal. 9:17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." They will find themselves in the state of destruction, Matth. 25:46. A destruction of their well-being, not of their being; for they will not be substantially destroyed, or annihilated, to make an end of their being; but destroyed as to their comfort and ease, or tormented, to make an end of their well-being. What is destroyed, is not therefore annihilated, Luke 4:34; compared with Matth. 8:29. Annihilation properly is momentary, their destruction will be everlasting, 2 Thess. 1:9;

annihilation brings into a state of negative rest, but they will have no rest, Rev. 14:11; but be tormented for ever and ever; chap. 20:10, "Their worm that dieth not," must have a subject to live in; and the fire is not everlasting, but for everlasting punishment, Matth. 25:41, 46.

Secondly, To confirm that this way leads to destruction, consider,

1. This is the constant voice of the word. God himself at the beginning spoke it first of all; Gen. 2:17, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The text is Jesus Christ's declaration of it. It was the common and constant voice of all the prophets and apostles, to be found in almost every leaf of the Bible. Thus the truth of God insures it; and if men will promise themselves peace in it over the belly of all this, what help is there for it? But they will be miserably disappointed; Deut. 29:19, 20, "The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven."

2. The rectoral justice of God demands it, Gen. 18:25; compared with 2 Thess. 1:6, "He that ruleth among men must be just;" and therefore must punish crimes, as well as reward good services; and must not the ruler and judge of the world do justice too? Yea, his own honour, and the good of mankind, require it; and it is the intimation of that justice that keeps some decency in the world. We see very well, that some men have a sunshine of peace in the broad way, while others have much adversity in the narrow way. There must then be a judgment for punishment at the end of the broad way. And some sinners are punished now in their way, as an earnest of it; but all are not, for assuring it.

3. The nature of things, duly considered, manifests it. The soul of man is immortal, and dropping the body, still lives. God alone can be our happiness, as being alone commensurable to the boundless desires of our souls. Now the broad way leads away from God, consequently away from happiness; and the future state being not a state of trial, but of recompence, the separation from God there must be total and final, and consequently the misery of the rational creature complete. What can be the end of the way of vanity, but absolute disappointment, cutting and galling of the soul; how can that disappointment be evited, when men pass away out of this world, and this world shall perish, and so they can never have more of what they sought their satisfaction in? What can be the end of the way of vileness but destruction, while nothing of their vile ways remains with them, but the lust after them, the cutting remembrance of them, without any possibility of gratifying their lusts more?

4. Lastly, The voice of the natural conscience confirms it; Rom. 1:32; and 2:15. There is something within the sinner that forebodes destruction to him in this way; though through the violence of lusts it prevails not, or is not heeded; Job 15:21. It is their consciousness of this that makes them always in a hurry, and to stave off serious communing with themselves; for if they would descend into themselves, and give the broad and narrow way a fair hearing, they would find conscience within them frightening from the former, and pressing to the latter.

USE 1. Of information. Hence we may learn,

1. That the way of one's setting out in the world is a matter of vast consequence. It is of great weight how one begins his course of life. If it is begun well, it will readily end well; if the beginning be ill, the end will be conform, if there is not a sound change. made. Ye see there is

a wide gate to enter by, and it sets on a broad way leading to destruction. What need then is there to enter right, since if we enter wrong, we cannot proceed right till we enter again by a new gate? This calls aloud to,

(1.) The young to look well at what gate they enter, how they begin their course, and set off in the world; Eccl. 12:1, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." This for the most part is little considered; but the young go forward at random, thinking it of little moment how their first years be spent, hoping their riper years may be spent regularly. This is to enter the wide gate, leaving your soul in pawn, that ye may come back again, and will not go forward. But one step makes way for another, and the return for the most part is forgot, and the pawn lost.

(2.) The aged to review their entering; and now that they are far on in their way, to consider what gate they entered by. It is impossible ye can be on the right way, whatever your way is, if ye entered not by the right gate. Maybe your way now is not quite so dirty as your entrance was; ye have perhaps left the follies of an ill-spent youth, and taken up yourselves; but ye may have done all that, and yet be on the broad way. Is there a sound work of conversion in your case? Are ye become new creatures? 2 Cor. 5:17. If not, ye are still in the old way.

2. That giving scope to the natural inclination of the heart, sets one surely on the broad way to destruction. For that inclination is the wide gate, which the broad way joins, the former issuing in the latter. People generally think little of the opening of their hearts towards the creature, and towards sin; but if there is not a struggle begun against both, but way given to any of them, the party is entered by the wide gate, and is on the broad way. Our worst enemy is within:

and that heart will ruin a man, that is not struggled against, but yielded to, and carries a man in its way. The pliability that way is frowardness against God; Isa. 57:17.

3. Lastly, The way and course of life that is most grateful and easiest to our corrupt nature, is most dangerous; it is the way to destruction. Nature likes not to be hampered, but to go at liberty, ranging the treasures of vanity, and wallowing in the mires of vileness. But that present ease is a pledge of future destruction; that lawless liberty betrays one into eternal confinement; that casting off of the bands of duty, prepares one for the bands of wrath in the end.

USE 2. Of Exhortation. And,

1st, Consider your way, what way ye are on, whether on the broad way or not; Hag. 1:5, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways." Should one cry to you, that about the place where ye are going there is a way that is deadly dangerous, ye would certainly look to your feet, to see that ye were not on it. Here is a voice from heaven telling you, that in this world where ye are, there is a way leading to destruction; O then, be not secure, but consider seriously what way ye are on, whether on it or not. Lay then this matter to heart, examine your state and way, and put this question to yourselves, What way am I on?

MOTIVE 1. This is a piece of duty ye owe to God, in return of all the calls of heaven to you by ordinances and providences; Mic. 6:9; Rev. 3:20. Sometimes he speaks to you by his word, sometimes by providences; will ye not give him a hearing, standing and considering what way ye are on, and whither it leads? It is dangerous to give a deaf ear to all; Prov. 1:24.

MOTIVE 2. It is a piece of justice ye owe to your own souls, 2 Cor. 13:5. Were a man driving a parcel of beasts, and one should tell him, There is a way thereabouts that ends in a precipice, he would certainly consider whether he were on it or not. But it is sounded again and again in men's ears, that there is a broad way that leads to destruction; yet they will not do their souls the justice once seriously to consider whether they were on it or not, but just drive forward at all adventures.

MOTIVE 3. As is the way ye are on, so will the end be. Death and life hang on the way ye are on. If ye are on the broad way, ye are on the way of death and destruction; if not, ye are on the way of life, and is not that worth your considering the matter?

MOTIVE 4. Lastly, It would be of great use to have that point cleared. Should ye find yourselves not on the broad way, ye might have the comfort of it, that ye are in the way to life, and shall certainly get thither. If ye were convinced of your being in the broad way ye might get off from it yet, and so escape being ruined by it. Some need be at no great pains to find out this, if they would but consider things calmly and impartially. But I shall drop these few things about it.

1. Those that never saw themselves on the broad way, and destruction awaiting them at the end of it, are certainly upon it, by that token that they are going on their way blindfolded, 2 Cor. 4:3, 4. Unconvinced sinners are surely unconverted; for who will ever go right that once are wrong, till they see themselves wrong?

2. They that have not entered by the strait gate of conversion and regeneration, but have climbed up another way to the way they are in, Matth. 18:3; John 3:3. They who, whatever changes have been made in their head, in point of light to discern the truth; in their affections, in point of relish of it; and in their life, in point of

escaping the pollutions of the world; yet their nature has never been changed, never got the new heart impressed with inclination towards the whole law, and reconciled to the whole yoke of Christ, but the predominant love of sin still remains in them, are certainly on the broad way.

3. They that have a reigning disgust at the narrow way, whether in themselves or others, Rom. 8:7. There is a generation that choose such a measure of religion for themselves, but they can have no more of it, they cannot think to be bound up to all the rules of it; they hate it in others, and cannot admit it in themselves. These are in the broad way, by this token, that all the saints aspire to a perfection of holiness, and love it, Phil. 3:13, 14.

4. Lastly, They whose choice is a loose and licentious way, in the way of vanity or vileness, and can find no pleasure but in such a way, Rom. 8:15. This argues a temper of spirit wholly carnal, and estranged from the life of God; that cannot favour the things of God, but of the flesh; and that is a deadly condition, Rom. 8:5, 6. To such heaven, as a holy place, would be a prison, a place wherein they could have no pleasure, and they may be sure they shall never be brought thither; since they are not by heavenly dispositions made meet for it, Col. 1:12, 13.

2dly, Ye that are brought off the other way, be suitably affected with, and walk worthy of the deliverance, as being brought off the way of destruction. And,

1. Be thankful to God for it, who by his grace drew you off from it, Psalm 107:20, 21. Look back to the precipice that ye were once carelessly standing on, to the way of destruction that ye were securely going forward in; bless him that opened your eyes to see your danger there, and to see another way safe, however narrow; that

by his grace determined you to forsake the broad way, and choose the narrow; and by the power of his Spirit drew you off the one, and set you on the other.

2. Entertain no hankering after that way again; beware of giving rueful looks back to it. It is an exhortation given to those espoused to Christ; Psalm 45:10, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house." And it is not given in vain; for in the best there is an old man remaining corruption, which perceiving the free and unhampered gate of the carnal world in the way of vanity and vileness, is apt to envy them in a sort, and secretly to wish they had the same scope with them; Prov. 23:17, "Let not thine heart envy sinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." This is most dangerous, which, if not timely suppressed, will inflame the whole soul, and lay it in ruins; Numb. 11:4–6, 33, 34, therefore "remember Lot's wife," Luke 17:32.

3. Do not grudge your difficulties and hardships in the narrow way; 1 Pet. 4:12; James 1:2–4. In it you meet with correction, but in the other ye would have met with destruction; and there is no more reason to grudge, than one brought off a way where he would have broke his neck, has no grudge to breaking his toes on the safe way that he is brought on. The hardships of the broad and narrow way differ as much as the curse and the cross, as the killing sword and the surgeon's lance, as eternal wrath and God's fatherly rod.

4. Lastly, Pity them that are on the broad way, and be concerned for their recovery. Pity them; for alas! they know not what they do, where they are, the deadly danger they are in. Be concerned for them; for they are going to destruction and are not aware of it; Prov. 7:22, 23, and 9:17, 18. How can ye miss to be so affected towards them, if ye are sensible what once was your own case; Tit. 3:3, "For

we ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another."

3dly, Sinners on the broad way turn off from it as the way of destruction. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" Ezek. 33:11.

MOTIVE 1. There is no escaping of destruction continuing on it, whatever ye may imagine; 1 Thess. 5:3. God has said it; how can ye hope for safety in that way, over the belly of an express declaration from heaven?, He is infinite in knowledge, ye cannot outwit him; in power, and ye cannot outbrave him; he is essentially true, and ye will not be able to make him a liar; Numb. 23:19. See Deut. 29:19, 20.

MOTIVE 2. It will be a total destruction it will bring you to; 2 Pet. 2:12, 13. A destruction of your souls, bodies, and comforts; Prov. 6:32, and 8:36; Isaiah 66:24; Luke 16:24. Look as it was with Sodom when it was utterly overthrown, there was nothing left, but they and all theirs were destroyed; so will the end of the broad way be to you.

MOTIVE 3. It will be an eternal destruction; 2 Thess. 1:9, "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." A destruction not of your being indeed, but of your well-being; ever dying, but never dying out; Matth. 25:46; Rev. 14:11; and 20:10. Your way may be long indeed, but the destruction at the end of it will be longer; ye will compass your way at most in a few years; but the destruction will never end, but go on through eternity.

MOTIVE 4. Ye may get off it now, and so escape destruction in it; Ezek. 18:30. Satan and an evil world may persuade you to go on in it, but they cannot force you thereto. There is no necessary connection

betwixt your having gone in it hitherto, and your going on in it still. It is a course that may be broken off; the grace of Christ is able to bring you off it; and if ye be truly willing, will bring you off it; Jer. 31:18, 19.

MOTIVE 5. God is calling you to turn from it and leave it; Ezek. 33:11. Christ has opened to you another way, a way of life, and is inviting you earnestly into it. He is proposing himself as the way; John 14:6, and calling you to him; Matth. 11:28. This his voice sounds in the way, and reaches your ears while ye are on it, the broad way; Prov. 9:5, 6. But it is not to be heard at the end of the way. Therefore it is said, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice." At the end of the way the voice of the Lamb of God ceases as such, and becomes the roaring of the Lion of the tribe of Judah; Luke 19:27.

MOTIVE 6. Lastly, The calls you have to turn from it will be an aggravation of your destruction if ye go on; Matth. 11:22. The remembrance of them at the end will be cutting and galling, when there will be no remedy. It will be the never-dying worm that will gnaw for ever; to think, that, for the pleasure of walking at your liberty in the broad way for a few years, ye brought yourselves to be shut up in the pit of destruction for ever. Therefore (Heb. 12:25), "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven;" lest (Prov. 5:11, 12) "thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof?"

Now, if ye would change your way, and leave the wide gate,

1. Be peremptory in it, and resolute for it; for ye will not want opposition. Satan will oppose the change violently by his

temptations; the carnal world will oppose it; your former licentious companions will be sure to counsel, and mock you from it if they can; and your own lusts within will be an active party against it. But remember (Matth. 11:12) "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

2. Do not delay it, but turn immediately, as the psalmist did; Psalm 119:60, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." If your resolutions for it be sincere, they will not admit of a moment's delay, more than the casting of a burning coal out of your bosom. If ye delay till the next day or the next hour, ye may be at the end of your way before that time; and what avails your purpose of turning then? As when the cry of fire in a house is made, men go immediately to quench it, knowing that every minute the fire is proceeding and gaining ground; so when men are convinced in earnest, they will forthwith set to turn.

3. Set yourself by all means for the strait gate, and do not think of getting over into the narrow way at the broad side; Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." This is a fundamental mistake in the conduct of many; whereby, leaving the way of looseness and carelessness, they commence mere moralists or legal formalists, but no more true Christians than they were before. Satisfy not yourselves without a deep conviction of your sin and misery, faith in Jesus uniting you to him, true repentance and conversion unto God by Christ.

4. Lastly, Be not frightened at, discouraged by, or made to turn back because of the straitness of the gate; but peremptorily enter, and resolutely thrust forward, till ye be quite through on the narrow way of holiness; Luke 13:24, forecited.

DOCTRINE III. The wide gate, with the broad way joining it, does so take with mankind, that the multitude of the world goes in by it, at all adventures.

In discoursing this subject, I shall,

I. Explain the point.

II. Confirm this sad truth, That the multitude of the world go in by the wide gate into the broad way.

III. Shew how it comes to pass, that the multitude take the broad way, notwithstanding of the destruction at the end of it.

IV. Lastly, Apply.

I. We shall explain this point. And we may take up the sense and import of it in these four things, all of them the genuine import of the text.

First, There is among mankind a going in at the wide gate. However dangerous it is, yet it is frequented by poor unthinking souls. Though of right it should be loathed for the pollution of it, and should be shunned with a horror of it for the danger thereof, yet men do go in at it. That is,

1st, They enter and pass through the wide gate, giving way to the corrupt natural inclination of their hearts, when they begin their course of life in the world, Psalm 58:3. This, according to what was said, lies in two things.

1. Giving way and scope to the bias of their heart towards the creature, away from God. The children of fallen Adam naturally go away from God, when they begin their course, Psalm 14:2, 3; and

they go to the creature in his room and stead, Jer. 2:13. They find they want, they need, and cannot but desire to have supply; they want a rest to their hearts, a match for their souls, something that may satisfy their desires. But what door go they to for the supply of their want? Not to God's, but to the creature's, Psalm 4:6, John 5:40. There they fasten on the dry breasts, refusing the Lord's offers, Isa. 55:1, 2.

2. Giving way to the bias of the heart towards sin, away from the holiness required by the law. God in Christ calls them to take on his yoke, Matth. 9:29, but they cannot submit their necks to it, Rom. 8:7. They choose sinful liberty, and look asquint on the way of God's commandments. Beginning their course in the world, and sinful liberty and religions strictness being both before them, they reject the latter, and readily embrace the former. Sin appears delightful and pleasant, holiness rugged and unsightly to them; so they go with the bent sail of their hearts towards sin, hoping to find there what will satisfy.

2dly, Passing through the wide gate, they are set on the broad way; they go in thereat, viz., into the broad way, which the wide gate is the entry to, and so they go on,

1. Walking in the way of vanity, Eph. 4:17. They spend their lifetime in a vain pursuit of happiness in the creature, which all along disappoints them, and in the end worst of all; Jer. 2:5, "Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" They weary themselves in the pursuit, and in end obtain nothing that can satisfy, Hab. 2:13. Their whole life is filled up with mere amusements; and beyond this they reach not to any solid and

lasting happiness, which can only be had in the enjoyment of a God in Christ, Luke 17:28, 29.

2. Walking in the way of vileness, Eph. 2:3. The creature within the hedge of the divine law not affording the desired satisfaction, they break over the hedge, and range up and down among forbidden profits and pleasures, if so be that stolen waters may make up to them what is wanting in allowed ones. And none of these answering expectation neither, they go from one act of vileness to another; and the disappointment still renewed, their lusts crave anew of them, and they seek afresh to satisfy them. Thus their life is spent, till their way is at an end, and in the end they fall into destruction. This is the going in thereat.

Secondly, They go in thereat at all adventures, rashly and heedlessly, without considering. Great is the danger of that way, destruction being at the end of it. They are told their danger; conscience tells them of it; they are warned of it from the word; providence sets many frightful examples before them, one being made example to another, but all in vain. Their vain minds and corrupt lusts hurry them forward; they fix their eyes on the bait that is pleasing, but notice not the ruining hook; and so they go on at all adventures, whatever be the issue.

Thirdly, They are many that thus go in at the wide gate into the broad way. As destructive as it is, there is a multitude of the children of men on it. Whoever mind for it, they need not fear want of company of fellow-travellers therein. They are many,

1. Absolutely. There is never wanting on the broad way a number of travellers, to encourage one another. There is a multitude to do evil. There they are of all ranks and qualities, great and small, of all professions, ages, and sexes.

2. Comparatively, in comparison of those on the narrow way. So saith the text. There is such an odds between the two parties, that the broad way-men make the many, the other but a few. If the broad way of sinful liberty, and the strait way of religion and godliness, were put to the vote in the world, the former would undoubtedly carry it; those for it being so far superior in number to those for the other.

Fourthly, The wideness of the gate and broadness of the way influenceth this. The agreeableness thereof to the corrupt minds of men, inviteth powerfully to enter and come on; and being entered and come on, it keeps them from going back, and prompts to go on. It is a powerful influence, which the destruction at the end of the way is not able to balance.

II. We shall confirm this sad truth, That the multitude of the world go in by the wide gate into the broad way. This may appear from,

1st, Scripture testimony, which is the testimony of God himself, who neither can deceive, nor be deceived. Scripture light all along discovers the multitude of the world to be on the broad way. This it doth several ways; and particularly,

1. Witnessing the universal corruption of human nature; Psalm 14:2, 3, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doth good, no not one." If ye think this was meant only of those in the Psalmist's day, ye may be cured of that mistake, by the apostle's application of it to all the world; "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doth good, no not one. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." This

speaks it to be natural to man to betake himself to the broad way, though not primitively natural; for, Eccles. 7:29, "God made man upright;" yet secondarily, and accidentally, as our nature was corrupted in Adam, John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh." Job 14:4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." So that this is the first way all men go, and in which they hold on till turned by grace.

2. Witnessing the general depravity of men's lives. How forcible is that testimony;. 1 John 5:19, "The whole world lieth in wickedness?" The godly are such a small number in the world, that the name of the world is left to the corrupt part; and they are so very corrupt, that they are said to lie in wickedness. The straying in the broad way begins very early; Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies;" and God's elect ones are once engaged therein as well as others; Isa. 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray;" and go on till returned unto Jesus Christ; 1 Pet. 2:25, "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the shepherd and Bishop of your souls." But still the multitude strays on, Phil. 2:21, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

3. The constant call to the multitude to repent and turn. That call supposes them to be quite wrong, and out of the way; Matth. 9:13, "I am come to call sinners to repentance." It was the sound the prophets and apostles made in the world, each of them in their time, where they executed the commission. So the house of Israel is bespoken; Ezek. 33:11, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" So saith the apostle; Acts 17:30, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men

every where to repent." And in all ages the necessity of this call to repent does continue, there being but few who answer it.

4. Lastly, The sweeping judgments a holy God has at times sent on the world, were sure tokens of the multitude being on the broad way. Once the whole inhabitants of the earth, save eight persons, were destroyed by a deluge of water. Sodom and Gomorrah were consumed with fire from heaven, only Lot and his family escaping; whereas God was ready to have spared the whole, if there had been but ten righteous ones in the place. The destruction of Jerusalem was another dispensation of that kind, of which our Saviour saith, Matth. 24:21, 22, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." And the burning up of the world with fire at last, is a speaking evidence that still the multitude will take the broad way.

2dly, From our own observation, if we will but take a view of the world, as we have access to be acquainted with it by seeing and hearing. I shall not speak of the many nations lying in Pagan idolatry, nor others without the verge of the visible church. It is plain, that among those that have the light of the gospel shining among them, the multitude is on the broad way.

1. Every body may see, how quite unlike to the rules of the gospel are the lives of the generality that hear it; Tit. 2:11, 12. Sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, are taught by it; but few learn the lessons. What excess of passions and vanity of mind carry most men beyond all bounds of sobriety, to their own hurt? What unrighteousness prevails to the injuring of others, so that in every society, greater and lesser, there are heavy complaints of this kind?

And how little regard to God, his honour, his law, and interests, is to be seen among men, to the provoking of the eyes of his glory? If the multitude is not on the broad way, how is it thus? Truly, if ye see not that the multitude is upon it, it is an evidence ye do not know it by that name, and are unacquainted with the narrow way.

2. They that have eyes to see may see, how rare experimental religion is in the world. The multitude trouble not their heads about it; but live at ease, without any saving acquaintance with Christ, ignorant of the life of faith, and struggle against the body of sin and death. Conviction of one's lost state by nature is very rare; the work of conversion is yet more rare. Few have a profession or appearance of religion; and among those that have it, how many are utter strangers to the power of godliness? The truly serious will be convinced of this; for they must be ready to take up Micah's lamentation; Mic. 7:1, 2, &c. See it.

III. How comes it to pass, that the multitude take the broad way, notwithstanding of the destruction at the end of it? This may be accounted for, if we consider these following things:—

1. It is the most agreeable way to their corrupt nature. It is the very way of their heart; Isa. 57:17. The heart of man naturally is a treasure of vanity, a fountain of vileness; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21. How can the broad way of vanity and vileness miss to be agreeable to it? Likeness begets love and liking; so their souls natively choose the broad way, wherein are to be found what things promise, though deceitfully, satisfaction to the vanity of their minds, and the corrupt lusts of their hearts.

2. The blindness of their minds; Eph. 4:17, 18. They see not the danger, to fright them from it; they cannot, they will not see it. Their unmortified lusts cast up such mists as darken the eyes of their

mind; that though the danger is told them a thousand times, they cannot perceive it; Prov. 9:17, 18, will not believe it; Deut. 29:19, 20, they see not any of those things that might draw them from off it; 1 Cor. 2:14. There is an attractive virtue, beauty, and glory in the contrary way, Prov. 3:17, but they do not perceive it.

3. Prejudices against the narrow way. They not only have not a good opinion of it; but they have an ill opinion of it, are prejudiced against it; Acts 28:22. It appears to them an overgrown, rough, and frightful path; which, if they consult their interest, they must hold off from. Christ's yoke is taken for an uneasy yoke, his burden for a very heavy one. And so they determine against it, without giving it a fair trial.

4. The broad way is really easier for the time; "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." In it one has no more ado, but to follow the inclination of his own heart; but to go with the wind of corrupt passions and affections; but in the narrow way he will have that wind in his face, and must keep up a struggle against his lusts, to mortify them. Thus present ease engages them to that way that ends in destruction, and present difficulty frightens them from the way that leads to life in the end.

5. Satan, the enemy of their salvation, has a mighty influence on them to carry them to, and keep them on that way. He is "the god of this world;" 2 Cor. 4:3, 4, and men are naturally under his power; Acts 26:18. He has a favourable party within them; so that the way he would have them go, is the way their natural bent lies. Hence he has easy work to prompt them forward, for he rows with the tide. Add to this his subtilty, whereby he can easily overreach them; and his diligence, whereby he slips no occasion to put them on; and no wonder he drives the multitude before him.

6. Example contributes exceedingly to it; Matth. 18:7. One goes into that way, another follows, and so on. It is true, there are examples on the other side too; but good example has not such influence as bad; because men are naturally corrupt, and therefore want but one to go before, that they may follow according to their natural inclination, like water going down a hill, where the passage is cleared. But it is against the grain to follow good example.

7. Lastly, Want of consideration; Luke 15:17. Few are at pains to weigh things, and deliberately to choose their way; but they take the broad way upon trust, as that which first offers to them. They look not afar off, beyond the present time; they consider not what the end will be, but embrace the fair appearance for the present before them. They are engaged in the broad way ere they are aware; "for childhood and youth are vanity;" Eccl. 11:10. Youth is headstrong; and men are hurried on with strong and impetuous passions, till they have got a set they cannot throw off; Jer. 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin? or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

USE 1. Of Information. Hence we may learn, that,

1. Prevailing sloth, and love to carnal ease, makes terrible havock in the world. These are they that make the wide gate and broad way so taking, that the multitude go in thereat; and consequently this betrays them into utter ruin; Prov. 6:9–11. Sloth so prevails, that they cannot think to abide a stress, no not for things of the greatest weight; but what is easiest, and requires least pains, that is accounted best; and they cannot be moved with the after-reckoning.

2. The broad way that leads to destruction, is the throngest way in the world. Some take another way indeed, but the multitude is on the broad way. Many are the civil and religious differences among men;

but here the multitude meet altogether upon one way, notwithstanding all their differences. There are different roads in this way, for the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the professor and the profane; but their way is one, and leads to the same place, where these differences will subsist no more; Psalm 125:5; Matth. 24:51. At present they join to make up the multitude in the broad way.

3. What a poor defence of one's way and manner of life is it, That it is the way that generally prevails, that the most part follow? Alas! is not the multitude on the broad way? But will that make it a way for our imitation? The apostle, describing the walk of the Ephesians when they were dead in sins, tells us, it was "according to the course of the world;" Eph. 2:2. And he urges the Romans not to "conform to it;" Rom. 12:2. That way is to be suspected that is the most taking with the multitude.

4. What it is that keeps sin and iniquity in countenance in the world. It is the multitude of its followers; 1 Pet. 4:4. Sin has a baseness or filthiness about it, which is a spring of shame; yet men will refuse to be ashamed of their vile and corrupt courses; Jer. 8:12; and some will pride themselves in them, glorying in their shame Why? The multitude stamp these courses with their authority; and so they may appear with open face; for blackness is no reproach among blackmoors. But Christ appearing in the glory of his Father, and all the holy angels, with him, in the end, will sink the glory of the authority of the multitude; then shame will cover them; Dan. 12:2.

5. No wonder the serious godly have a lonely, uncomfortable, and despised life in the world. Israel was a type of them in that case; Numb. 23:9, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." Micah laments his lonely case,

because of the multitude being on the broad way; Micah 7:1, &c.; he could have few to take part with him, few to unbosom himself to. Hence God's people are the world's wonder; Zech. 3:8; Psalm 71:7. They are despised as an humoursome, odd, fantastic kind of people, addicted to singularities; because the multitude is on another way they dare not take.

6. The church's peace and prosperity in the world cannot be long lasting; for the corrupt party in the world bears the sway, the multitude being on the broad way; Cant. 2:2. So "the silence in heaven is but for half an hour," Rev. 8:1; the corrupt multitude soon fill all with confusion again. Hence,

(1.) Her peace has oftentimes been broken with persecution, the prevailing multitude crying "Crucify him, crucify him." The multitude then like swelling waters go over the head, and threaten to swallow her up, to raze Jerusalem to the very foundations. And had not the Lord been on her side, they had destroyed her quite and clean long ere now.

(2.) Her peace restored, her purity is removed; Cant. 1:6. The multitude on the broad way deface her glory and beauty, and she is made to "lie among the pots;" for a corrupt multitude will still do corruptly, and like the mixed multitude infect all societies, till the infection spread, and the corruption become universal.

We see it is our case this day. Time was when persecution, blood, and violence rode in triumph; and nothing was heard from the multitude in church and state, but crucify, raze, &c. Now that humour is changed, and the persecutors as well as the persecuted are despised; but there is a general corruption in principles and practice, whereby truth and holiness are wounded in the vitals; a hundred times more dangerous to the church than the persecution was.

USE 2. Of exhortation. As ever ye would escape destruction in the end, do not go the way of the multitude, the way the most go. And,

1. Believe it, that the multitude is on the broad way to destruction. Believe it, since Christ has said it. Open your eyes, and ye may see it. Ye have the more need to be fixed in this principle, that we are naturally prejudiced in favour of a multitude, and to think, that the truth and goodness of a cause must needs be on the side of the many. And if that obtain with us in this case, we will be ready to embark, and go down the stream with them.

2. Never think to shelter yourselves in an ill way, among the throng of them that are on it. The throng there may blind you as to the destruction at the end of the way, but can never afford you protection. If the whole world were on the broad way, they could not alter the nature of it, and make that which is evil and destructive, good and safe.

3. In your course of life, follow not the multitude of the world, but distinguish yourselves from them, though ye should undergo the censure of being singular; Exod. 23:2; Rom. 12:2. Make not the many in the world your pattern; but choose that way which the best, not which the most are on.

MOTIVE 1. Consider the way of the multitude is the way to destruction, as is clear from the text; and however people may please themselves with companions in sin, it will be no comfort to go to hell with company, as may be learned from Luke 16:28. Why should regard to a multitude prevail with us, to go to destruction with them?

MOTIVE 2. There will be no getting to heaven without striving against the stream of the multitude of the world; Eph. 6:12. God calls you to come out from among them, 2 Cor. 6:17; to forget your people,

Psalm 45:10; yea, to save yourselves from them, as from a company of destroyers, Acts 2:40. Ye must fight your way through them, if ever ye would receive the crown; resolute not to go along with them, cost what it will; as our Lord teacheth; Luke 14:26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

MOTIVE 3. This was the way the cloud of witnesses went before us, refusing the way of the multitude. Thus did Noah in the old world; and thus did Abraham, Moses, and all the prophets. Thus our Saviour himself had the multitude against him, he and they walking in a way and manner of life quite opposite; and so all his apostles. Can we think to travel with the multitude, and lodge with the saints in the end?

MOTIVE 4. What is a multitude against God? Job 9:4. Is it reasonable that the authority of men should take place against the authority of God? All men are liars; God neither can deceive, nor be deceived. Why then should not his word be our rule to be stuck to in all things that it requires or forbids, say the contrary who will? Can a multitude secure you from the punishment of sinful ways? No; they cannot secure themselves; Psalm 9:17.

MOTIVE 5. Lastly, To follow the multitude, is to strengthen the conspiracy against God. And how will ye answer it to him, that when ye saw the stream going against him, his work, and his way, in the world, ye went along with it, and so added to the force of it? In such a case, he is saying, "Who is on my side? Will ye also go away?" It concerns all to see what they will answer to this.

ADVICE. Let not the scarecrow of singularity frighten you into the way of the multitude. Noah was a very singular man in the old world,

and Lot in Sodom; and had they not been so, they had perished with the rest. None will see heaven, but a singular kind of folk; Mark 8:38.

DOCTRINE IV. It is a strait gate and a narrow way that leadeth unto life.

In speaking to this, we will consider,

I. The strait gate.

II. The narrow way leading away unto life.

III. Lastly, Apply.

I. We shall consider the strait gate. And having spoken of this already, I shall here drop but a few things of it,

1st, The strait gate is the entrance, and the only entrance into the narrow way that leadeth unto life. This speaks four things.

1. That mankind naturally are off the way to life; Rom. 3:12. And if they hold on the way they begin, they will never see it There is an absolute necessity for all men once to choose a new way, and turn off from the way they are naturally going in. God set upright Adam on a way to life, the way of perfect obedience; Eccl. 7:29; but he left it, and all his posterity in him; Rom. 5:12. There is a new and living way opened by Christ, the way of walking in him; Col. 2:6. This is the narrow way; and that unbelievers were never on.

2. There is access for sinners off the way to life, yet to get on it; Prov. 9:4–6. Wanderers may yet set right; they that are going in the way of death may yet be set on the way of life. While they are not arrived at their journey's end, there is still hope; therefore, Matth. 5:25, "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him,"

&c. But once come to the journey's end by death, there is no more hope; Eccl. 9:10.

3. There is a gate, though a strait one, by which they may get through to the narrow way to life. This is the appointed entrance into it; whoever would be in on it, must go about, and enter by it; and going through the gate, they shall be undoubtedly on the way; John 10:9. Look about then to discern it.

4. Lastly, There is no getting on the narrow way, but by the strait gate, John 3:5. To climb up another way, is a vain and fruitless attempt. As is one's entrance, so will his progress be. The actions must needs be of the nature of the principle; and there will be no bringing forth of good fruit in the narrow way, till once the tree be made good by entering in at the strait gate, Matth. 7:17.

2dly, The strait gate being the entrance into the way leading to life, it is, in plain terms, an inward and thorough change, relative and real, made on a sinner. For this is it, without which there is no reaching the way of true holiness, the way leading to life. I say,

1. It is a change made on the sinner, whereby he is not what he was before; 2 Cor. 5:17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." This cannot be refused by any, who acknowledge themselves born sinners. To continue and go on in sin, in vanity and vileness, is inconsistent with entering on the narrow way to life; Rom. 8:13, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." You must then undergo a change, from what you naturally are and incline to, if ever you mind for life.

2. It is an inward change; Ezek. 36:26, 27. An outward change without that will not do. A new life and conversation pinned to the

old corrupt heart and nature, will make but a painted sepulchre, that can never be pleasing to him, who "sees not as man sees, but looks to the heart;" 1 Sam. 16:7; Matth. 23:27, 28. True holiness lies inwardly, though it shines forth in the outward man; 1 Pet. 3:4; and without an inward gracious principle, all is hypocrisy, mere form and show.

3. It is a real change, affecting one's nature, and making it new; 2 Pet. 1:4. There must be a new temper of spirit, with a new bent and set of the heart; whereby one is made to incline to the way of holiness he was averse to before; and disinclined to the vanity and vileness he was prone and bent to formerly. Therefore it is called a "being born again;" John 3:3, a "a putting on the new man;" Eph. 4:24. And there is a necessity for such a change, in order to holiness of life; for there must be new gracious qualities in our nature, to be a principle of holy walking.

4. It is a relative change, affecting one's state; 1 Cor. 6:11. Children of wrath will always be children of disobedience; and cursed trees will never bring forth blessed fruits. They must be in a state of grace and favour with God, standing in new relations, who shall walk with God, in the narrow way to life; Rom. 8:1. To expect that those who are not children of God, will obey him; that those who are not at peace with him, shall serve him acceptably; that they who are under the curse of the broken law, shall walk in the way of life, is vain. The first covenant may have children; but they will be bond-children; to be cast out, not to be heirs; Gal. 4:24, 30.

5. Lastly, It is a thorough change; 2 Cor. 5:17. It must go through the whole man; every part being sanctified, though in this life no part be wholly sanctified; 1 Thess. 5:23. Light let into the head, while there is no gracious change in the heart; a casting away some sins, while others are still stuck to; a taking of some scrapes of the law for the

rule of our life, while another part of it is staved off; is a plain evidence, that one is not entered by the gate.

Thus ye see the gate by which one enters the narrow way; thus ye have a general prospect of it. To describe it more particularly, there are these seven steps of it:—

1. Conviction, conviction of sin and misery. This is the very first step, the awakening of the sinner, and coming to see himself all wrong. A new light shining from heaven, the man by it sees his sin as he never saw it before; John 16:8. His sins are set in order before him, and stare him in the face like a ghost. He sees his actual sin, and his original sin; the evil of them, and their contrariety to the holy' nature and law of God. He sees his misery, he beholds himself lost and undone; Luke 15:17; Rom. 7:9, under the wrath of God, the curse of the broken law, and the bands of death.

2. Saving illumination in the knowledge of Christ; 2 Cor. 4:6. This is the merchantman's finding the one pearl; Matth. 13:46. Hereby the sinner sees a Saviour in the transcendent glory of his person and offices, able and willing to help him out of his state of sin and misery; a Saviour suited to the divine perfections, and to his own case; on whom therefore he may freely venture his salvation. This is a higher step of the gate, whereon the sinner is brought in sight of the narrow way.

3. Renewing of the will, whereby the sinner is made pliable to the gospel-call; Ezek. 36:26; Psalm 110:3. The iron sinew in the neck is hereby broken; the sinner called by the gospel, is hereby drawn with cords of love and bands of a man. Christ seen in his glory, captivates his heart; John 12:32. By this saving work on the mind and will, the dead sinner is quickened; there is a vital principle put in the soul, whereby the soul is both persuaded and enabled to go up a step.

4. Faith in Jesus Christ, believing on his name; John 1:12. Thus the merchantman buys the one pearl; Matth. 13:46. The soul being drawn comes to Christ, and comes away to him freely, taking him for all, and instead of all; Psalm 73:25. The soul bids an eternal farewell to the way of vanity and vileness, no more to go in quest of happiness there; Jer. 16:19, looks for the supply of all its wants in and from Christ alone; for by faith we are married to Christ, and so come to rest in him.

5. New relations to heaven. This is a glorious step which a sinner gets up to by faith; and it lies here. The sinner having believed in Christ, is united to him; Eph. 3:17; being united to him, is justified; 1 Cor. 6:11; being justified, is reconciled to God; Rom. 5:1; being reconciled, is adopted into the family of heaven; Eph. 2:16, 19; being adopted, God is his God; John 20:17. Whereas formerly being out of Christ, he was a condemned creature, an enemy to God, a child of the devil, without God in the world.

6. Habitual sanctification, the sanctification of our nature; Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 6:11. Hereby the sinner's nature is renewed; Eph. 4:23, 24, his whole person, soul and body, is sanctified; 1 These. 5:23. New qualities are infused into the mind, will, and affections; whereby he becomes a new creature, formed after the image of God, because formed in a likeness to the man Christ, by receiving out of his fulness grace for grace; John 1:16. Thus the seeds of all graces are planted in him, new habits, habits of grace, the immediate principles of every gracious action.

7. Lastly, Repentance unto life, true gospel-repentance; Jer. 31:18, 19; Ezek. 36:31. This is the highest and last step of the strait gate, which immediately sets the man on the narrow way leading to life. It is not that legal repentance, which being the effect of a work of

conviction by law, judging and condemning the sinner, falls in with the first step of the strait gate. But it is that whereby a sinner, not only convinced of his sin and misery, but illuminated in the knowledge of Christ, having his will renewed, believing, new related to heaven, and having his nature sanctified, does turn from sin unto God, out of love to God, and hatred of sin, as contrary to his holy will and nature; which is the only repentance acceptable to God. And before a sinner is thus furnished for it, it is impossible he can reach it.

But until one is brought to this repentance, he can never set a foot on the narrow way of holiness leading to life; Acts 2:18. For before one can go right, he must needs turn right; and he can never turn right from sin unto God, till he turn thus. The whole gate is a strait gate, and this is a strait step; but no man, without making it first, shall ever go a step in the narrow way; Luke 13:3.

II. We shall consider "the narrow way leading away unto life." And here we shall consider, 1. The narrow way itself. 2. Its leading away unto life.

First, The narrow way itself. That is the way into which the strait gate sets a person; the gate leads him on the way, so that having passed through the gate, he is on this way. Here consider 1. What this way is. 2. The parts of it. 3. The narrowness of it.

1st, What is this way? This way is the way of holiness; Isa. 35:8, "An highway shall be there, and a way, and its hall be called the way of holiness." The broad way is the way of one's own heart; the narrow way is the way according to the heart of a holy God; the broad way is the way of vanity and viieness; the narrow way is the way of purity and holiness; Psalm 24:3, 4.

There is a twofold holiness, habitual and actual. Habitual holiness is holiness of nature, in a holy new frame and disposition of soul, whereby the man is reconciled unto the holy law, which he was at war with before; the heart inclining unto those things which the law commands, and disinclining to, and having an aversion to the things that it forbids, Hence it is expressed by "the law written on the heart;" the renewed heart and the law lying both one way, and agreeing as an honest man's thoughts and written words whereby he expresseth his thoughts; Heb. 8:10, "For this is the covenant which I make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and will write them in their hearts," &c. But this belongs to the strait gate, being that which the entering in at the strait gate issues in.

Actual holiness is holiness of life, in thoughts, words, and actions of a holy kind; whereby a man walks up in some measure to the holy principles and dispositions of the new nature, and so adds a new life to his new nature; 2 Pet. 1:5–7; that is, having gone through the strait gate, he walks on the narrow way. So, more particularly,

The narrow way is the way of obedience; 1 Pet. 1:14, 15. That is the way that leadeth to life; even as Jesus Christ was, during his life in the world, obedient even to the death of the cross, and then was received up into glory; whom therefore we must follow in this way, if we mind to be with him in the end; Heb. 12:1, 2. Now, there are two things that go to the constitution of the way of holy obedience.

1. For the matter thereof, it is the way of God's commandments; Psalm 119:32. It is the holy law that chalks out this way to us, in the several command of God therein. Where there is no commandment, there can be no obedience. Whatever shew of holiness there may be in things that God has not commanded, it is but superstition, not

holy obedience; Matth. 15:9. Where there is a transgressing of the commandment, by omission or commission, there is a going off the way of holy obedience, which is bounded on every side by the holy commandment. Thus the narrow way is distinguished from the way,

(1.) Of profanity; wherein men walk after their own lusts, casting God's commandments behind their backs. These refuse to be narrowed in their walk by the rule of life given in the word; they look upon it as a thing that would hamper them, and therefore practically say, as Psalm 2:3, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." Their lusts, not the holy law, is their rule.

(2.) Of superstition; wherein men, without the commandment of God, pretend to serve and obey him in a holy manner. This is a narrow way of men's own making, Matth. 5:2. They themselves devise commands of their own hearts, and make things duty or sin, which God has not made so, Col. 2:20–22.

In opposition to both these, the narrow way is the way of God's commandments; that, and that only, which is pointed out to us by the authority of God in the moral law of the ten commands; the which the profane man neglects, and the superstitious adds unto; but the true Christian takes, as it stands, for the rule, and the only rule of his life, afraid either to neglect it, or add unto it.

2. For the form thereof, it is the way of walking in Christ, Col. 2:6. Without this, the walking in the way of the commandment is no holy obedience, but a legal selfish course of life, which, though it may be of use in society among men, yet is not acceptable to God, because it savours not of Christ, John 15:5. This makes it true Gospel obedience, the only obedience that a sinner can expect to have taken off his hand with acceptance in the court of heaven. It lies in these four things:

(1.) In taking the law as out of the hand, not of an absolute God, but of a God in Christ, Matth. 17:5. Natural men, because of their spiritual blindness, receive the law as innocent Adam did, from God, without eyeing the Mediator as the channel of its conveyance; hence they set themselves to obey it as they can and think meet, that they may have life by their obedience to it. This mars their obedience, makes it servile, and unacceptable to God, Gal. 4:24, 30, because it is not perfect. But the true Christian receives the law from a God Redeemer and Saviour in Christ, Exod. 20:1, 2. Hence receiving life by faith in the free promise, they set themselves to obey out of love to a reconciled God, in point of gratitude to the Redeemer, and as the way in which he has appointed them to walk towards the perfection of that life he has purchased, and bestows of free grace.

(2.) In depending on Christ for strength for every step of their way, as branches that must bring forth fruit by communication of sap from the stock, John 15:6. This the Apostle exhorts to; 2 Tim. 2:1, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Hence the Christian goes out in the way of holy obedience, as David went out against Goliath, "in the name of the Lord of Hosts;" 1 Sam. 17:45; "in the name of the Lord Jesus," Col. 3:17. Therefore in his obedience he is self-denied, and humble, acknowledging himself an unprofitable servant when he has done all.

(3.) In depending on him for acceptance of all their obedience, not daring to trust the acceptance thereof to the nature of the work itself, Gen. 4:4, compared with Heb. 11:4. This is a difficult step in the narrow way, which none but true Christians do make, Phil. 3:3. To be denied to our obedience when it is done, to lay no stress of its acceptance, on our diligence, sincerity, and attainments in it, is not easy. However, it is certain, that the acceptance is for Christ's sake only, 1 Pet. 2:5.

(4.) Lastly, In daily recourse to Jesus Christ for purging away the errors of our way, Zech. 13:1. There are none that walk so exactly, but they are still making wrong steps, and contracting new defilement, which cannot be purged but by the application of the blood of sprinkling; nay, there is not one step the best make, but there is some defilement cleaves to them in it, so that still they need to wash their feet, John 13:10. This, then, is the daily exercise in the narrow way; and there is no walking in it but in Christ.

The sum of what is said, is, That the narrow way is the way of holy obedience, wherein one walks in Christ, in the way of God's commandments. And this way of holy obedience may be taken up in these two.

1. The way of doing or working, in obedience to the preceptive will of God, Eccl. 9:10. God sets every man the work he has to do, his salvation work, and his generation work; in every relation wherein we stand to God or men, our duty is set us by his commandment; he has appointed us what we have to do for his honour, and the good of ourselves and others. And to the performance of every part thereof we are to set ourselves, in obedience to his will, and that in Christ Jesus.

2. The way of bearing or suffering, in obedience to his providential will, Matth. 16:24. God allots to every one their particular burden of crosses and afflictions; and requires them to go on their way under them, for their trial. Here is exercise for the bearing graces, faith, self-denial, patience, hope, &c. And we must set ourselves to the Christian bearing of these things, in obedience to his will, and that in Christ Jesus.

Thus shall we walk in the narrow way, doing and bearing in Christ, taking our duty and our trial as out of his hand, and going on with

both in a believing reliance on him.

And this way bears a two-fold set of marks upon it, all along from the beginning to the end of it.

1. The footsteps of the flock, Christ's flock, Cant. 1:8. It is the way wherein the company of the saints have travelled in all generations; so that those who will see, may see the prints of the feet of Christ's flock on the narrow way, as those of the devil's drove are to be seen on the broad way. On the former you will see the prints of the feet of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, ail the Old and New Testament saints; on the latter you will see the prints of the feet of Cain, Pharaoh, Judas, and all the wicked in all generations. The habitual practice of the saints is what makes these footsteps in the narrow way, consisting of two discernible parts.

(1.) The fore-part, viz., faith, faith in Christ, and the promises through him. This is the fore part of their footsteps, that being it by which the saints from Abel, in all generations, did and suffered great things, Heb. 11:1–39. They believed, and worked their good works; believed, and bore their trials and afflictions. The promise of Christ was given, Gen. 3:15, to set them at first on the way, and the very first motion on it was Adam and Eve's believing it; and so it has been in every footstep of the flock since, and will to the end, Gal. 2:20.

(2.) The hind part, viz., sincere obedience. This is the print of the heel, Heb. 11:4, 5, 7, &c. Believing the truth, they conformed to it in their lives being cast into the mould of it; receiving the promise by faith, they sincerely obeyed the command; embracing the Gospel, they took the law for the rule of their life, making no exception of any of its commands, as seeing them all stamped with the authority of their God, Creator, and Redeemer; baying received Christ the Lord, they walked in him in all holy obedience.

Thus the footsteps of the flock are distinguished from all other. Many a different footstep is on the broad way, but none of them all are of this make. The footsteps of atheists and infidels are to be seen there, of profane ones, mere moralists, formalists, and hypocrites; but as the fore part of all their steps is unbelief, so the hind part is profanity, or mere external hypocritical obedience, unacceptable to God. Either they are legalists, pretenders to obedience, and neglecters of faith; or carnal. Gospellers, pretenders to faith, making no conscience of good works, or universal obedience; or they are profane contemners of both. But the footsteps of the flock consist of both together, James 2:18.

2. The footsteps of Christ himself; 1 Pet. 2:21. All mankind having gone off their way, and not knowing how to find it again, it pleased the Father to send his own Son in our nature into the world, that, by his walking in the world, men might see, in a bright example, the way of walking acceptable to God. Accordingly he came, and entering on the narrow way, he walked it all along, and left the prints of his feet thereon from the beginning to the end thereof; Phil. 2:8. In the example of the best of the saints, there are some wrong, out-of-the-way steps; but his footsteps are perfectly regular, without the least imperfection, or the least part of a step out of the way. And they also consist of two parts.

(1.) Faith in God his Father, and the promises of the covenant made to him. Christ in his divine nature is the object of faith; John 14:1, compared with Jer. 17:5; but in his human nature he was a subject of faith. The man Christ believed in God his Father, trusted in him perfectly, and relied on him, upon the ground of his faithfulness; Psalm 22:8, 9; Heb. 2:13. He had promises of assistance; Isaiah 42:6, acceptance and a glorious reward; chap, 49:8; Heb. 12:2. And accordingly he waited for the fulfilment of them, and was not

disappointed; Psalm 40:1, and declares the divine faithfulness from his experience; verse 10. Yea even now in his exaltation at the right hand of God, he continues his faith and assured hope of what of the promises remains to be accomplished; so that the man Christ in glory is a believing waiter, still, Heb. 10:12, 13; which should endear to us waiting on God, since the man Christ himself was, and still is one of the company of believing waiters on God. And this shows us how Christ came to receive the seals of the covenant, the sacraments, viz., to confirm his faith in God.

Here then we have the print of Christ's own footsteps in believing, which also makes the fore-part of them; for the man Christ believed, and so obeyed; which is lively set forth, Isaiah 50:5–7, "The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellions, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." Hence when he came into the world, he was circumcised on the eighth day; before he entered on his public ministry, he was baptized, had the voice from heaven, and then was carried to the wilderness; Mark 1:9–12; and before he entered on the hardest piece of all his work, he received the sacrament of the passover and of the supper.

(2.) Perfect obedience. As his faith was, so was his obedience perfect, every way complete and sinless; 1 Pet. 2:22. It was perfect in parts; Matth. 3:15, he fulfilled all righteousness. In the doing part, he accounted nothing too hard, loving his very enemies; in the suffering part, he went through the hardest pieces mildly and, patiently; Phil. 2:8; 1 Pet. 2:23; perfect in the degrees of it, everything carried to the utmost pitch; Isaiah 42:4; in the principle of it, love to his Father's

glory, and the salvation of sinners; perfect love appearing in the greatest possible instances; Psalm 40:6–8; and in continuance from the cradle to the grave; Phil. 2:8.

Thus Christ walked the narrow way; and, by the prints of his feet, put another set of marks on it, whereby it is more fully and clearly distinguished from all other ways. The imperfections that attend the saints' walk, leave the matter of the way in some obscurity; so that carnal men noticing them, from thence would make the narrow way very broad, since in many paths of destruction, they can discern the footsteps of saints. The adulterer sees David's footsteps in his way, the drunkard, Noah's; the curser and swearer, and apostate, Peter's; not considering that these were the out-of-the-way footsteps, from which they turned back by bitter repentance, in which steps they neglect to follow them. But the footsteps of the Shepherd of the flock, puts the way beyond all doubt; that it is the way of purity and holiness, the way of faith and obedience, that has nothing in common with the broad way, the way of sin.

Secondly, What are the parts of this way, the narrow way? Many are the steps or pieces of the way, from the beginning of it at the point of conversion to God, unto the end of it at death; and it is longer to some than to others, partly because of the various lengths of men's lives, partly because some are so happy as to be more easily converted than others; which two things make an unequal length of the way. But longer or shorter, it consists of two parts.

1st, The way of mortification; Rom. 8:13, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." This is a part of the narrow way, which lies all along from the beginning to the end of it, in which therefore the saints going towards life must still be making progress, since they will never come to the end of it till death. The

strait gate of conversion and regeneration sets one upon it, because these are not perfect; but still there is a mixture of the old with the new nature; of sin and corruption with holiness. It lies in these two.

1. Mortification to the creature, in opposition to the way of vanity. This is begun in the soul's coming to Christ; Jer. 16:19, and is to be carried on all along the believer's life after; Cant. 4:8, till he be without the reach of an enchanting deluding world, no more to be moved either with its smiles or frowns. Paul was on that way when he said; Gal. 6:14, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The Lord carries on his people in it, by ordinances, giving them there lively views of creature vanity and emptiness, in the glass of the word, sacraments, prayer, meditation, &c.; by providences laying gall and wormwood on the breasts of the creature, till the believer be as a weaned child; Psalm 131.

2. Mortification to sin, in opposition to the way of vileness that unregenerate sinners walk in, Rom. 6:6, 7. This is to get the mouth out of taste to the pleasures of sin, to be dying to it, to be rooting up the weeds of sin daily, that grow up in the soil of an evil heart. And it reaches to the whole body of the sins of the flesh, if it be genuine mortification, Col. 2:11. If any one is known and spared, it is no true mortification; the man is in the way to death and destruction, as the ship to sinking where one leak is neglected to be stopped, Psalm 119:6. Particularly, it reaches to,

(1.) Particular lusts and corruptions, the members of this body; Col. 3:5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." These are many, and of divers kinds, fleshly lusts, and spiritual lusts; pleasing lusts, and tormenting

passions. All come under the name of worldly lusts, which the gospel teaches to deny the cravings of, Tit. 2:12. On every one of them, men in the way to life keep a watchful eye, to knock them down as they begin to set up their heads; to wrestle against them, seeking their death and destruction.

In a special manner, that lust which one is most addicted to, commonly called one's predominant; whether it be the sin which one's constitution, calling, circumstances, or anything whatsoever, makes most easily to beset him, Heb. 12:1; that must be mortified, though it be as hard to compass as to pluck out a right eye, or cut off a right hand, Matth. 5:29, 30. And none can prove himself on the narrow way, without the mortification of that, Psalm 18:28. And we may judge of our progress in the narrow way, by our progress in that.

(2.) The sin of our nature, the body itself whereof these particular lusts are the members, called the flesh, Gal. 5:24. That sinful disposition that is born with us, making us prone to evil, and averse to good; ready to comply with temptations to sin, hard to be brought up to our duty; holding fast ill impressions made, and letting good ones easily slip. The axe of mortification must be laid at the root of the tree, if we would take the narrow way.

Now these are mortified by refusing compliance with them, and acting the graces contrary to them, Gal. 5:16, 17. Hereby they are starved and weakened, and grace is cherished and strengthened, Rom. 13:14; Heb. 5:14.

2dly, The way of vivification, or newness of life, Rom. 6:4; in the practice of good works, Tit. 3:8; that is, thoughts, words, or deeds agreeable to the will of God, and pleasing in his sight. This is another part of the narrow way, which lies all along from the strait gate to the end of the way at death; which the grace implanted in the heart in

regeneration exerts itself in; for the new nature must have its fruit in newness of life, whereby a man lives to the honour of God, his own good, and the good of mankind. It also lies in two things.

1. Living to God, in opposition to the creature, Gal. 2:19. The unregenerate man is dead to God, but alive to the creature; all the inward motions of his soul are towards the creature, not towards God. It is his portion; his joy is in the having of it, and his sorrow in the want of it. He has no kindly motion towards God for himself, more than they that are in the grave. But entering the strait gate of regeneration, one becomes alive to God, Rom. 6:11; and dead to the creature, Col. 3:3. And so he goes on the narrow way, as dying to the creature, so living to God; resting in him as his portion, seeking him always as his chief good, loving him above all, joying and delighting in the enjoyment, of him, sorrowing for the want thereof, and for sin that mars the light of his countenance, Col. 3:1–3. All this the tenor of his life witnesseth, Psalm 30:5; and 4:6, 7.

2. Living to righteousness, in opposition to sin, 1 Pet. 2:24. The unregenerate are dead to righteousness, but alive to sin, Rom. 6:20; as free from righteousness as those in the grave from what is done on the earth, they meddle not with it, Eph. 2:1. But entering the strait gate of regeneration, they are put in a state of death to sin, and of life to righteousness, Rom. 6:4; Col. 3:1; they awake to it, 1 Cor. 15:34. And so they go on in the narrow way, living to it as servants of it, Rom. 6:18. And this their living to righteousness extends to the whole will of God known to them, Acts 13:22; Col. 4:12; and makes their obedience universal, Col. 1:10. It lies in these following things.

(1.) Living to righteousness towards God; that is, living godly, Tit. 2:12. There is a duty that in justice we owe to God immediately, as our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer; that is, the duty of piety, in all

the instances thereof required in the first table. Whoso walk on the narrow way, live to pay that duty, as owing, in point of righteousness and gratitude too. Therefore they are concerned to live to honour him in the world, taking that for their chief business in it, Phil. 1:21; and see no comfortable use they are for in the world, if they get him not honoured in their stations. So they look on their interest as twisted with the interests of his glory.

(2.) Living to righteousness towards ourselves; that is, living soberly, Tit. 2:12. We owe a duty to ourselves, and it is bound on us with a bond of justice or righteousness, in as much as we are not our own, but the Lord's. That duty is required of us in the second table obliging us to consult the good, honour, and welfare of our own bodies, to treat them as the temples of God, and therefore to hold off from all things that may be hurtful or defiling to them; and to advance the good of our own souls, by aiming at and pursuing after their perfection in truth and holiness, Phil. 3:14; and to hold off from what may darken or pollute them. And this is a great part of the business of the life of those on the narrow way.

(3.) Living to righteousness towards our neighbour; that is, living righteously, strictly so called, Tit. 2:12. We are not born for ourselves, but for others also; and we owe a duty to mankind, our fellow-creatures, according to the several instances thereof required in the second table. Since we are men, we must always keep on, never cast off humanity towards any of our kind, be they rich or poor above us or below us. We should breathe an universal good-will toward mankind, seeking the good of our kind, and disposed to acts of beneficence towards them, as we have ability and opportunity. This humanity requireth, justice makes a debt, and Christianity inspires men with, who are on the narrow way, Gal. 6:10; Luke 6:36. Ah! how will we answer to our common Father, if we take no care to be useful

to, and in our generation? What stock have we laid up for the other world, if we have not laid out ourselves for the good of others in this? Luke 16:9. That temper of spirit whereby one is selfish, concerned for none, but his sweet self, is a flaming evidence of being on the broad way; and much more that whereby one is disposed to run down all about them, to spread their terror around them, to be a plague to society, disturbing all that are near them, Eccles. 9:18. If those in that temper see heaven, we must give up the Bible as a fable, and confound heaven and hell, Isa. 11:6; Tit. 3:3; James 2:13; Rev. 13:10.

Thus ye see that those on the narrow way look upward, inward, and outward, labouring each of these ways to be useful, and to fill up their room in the world; so living to righteousness.

And these two parts of the narrow way Christ hath chalked out to his followers by his death and resurrection, which are the exemplary causes of mortification and vivification.

Thirdly, Let us consider the narrowness of the way to life. This narrowness of the way is not absolute, but respective, in respect of the imperfection of our present state; for the boundaries of it are eternal, it being for substance the very same the saints will walk in through eternity, when they will walk at greatest liberty. But a way may be very narrow and pressing to one, that will be perfectly large and easy to another, in regard of the very different sizes the passengers may be of. So a shoe may be very strait for a swelled foot, that will be large abundantly for the same foot, when it is hale and sound. The glorified saints have a hale foot; so the way is large and broad enough to them in life; we have the swelled one; so the way, though for substance the same, is narrow to us going to life. Now the narrowness of the way to life rises from a complication of these three.

1st. The exactness and purity of the law that bounds this way of holy obedience, Psalm 119:4. No sinful latitude is allowed here; every wrong step is condemned by it. It hems in the traveller on every side, and that,

1. To the right matter of obedience; which is not to be measured by man's choice but God's command; Matth. 15:9. If it is devised by a man's own heart, whatever species pretext of sanctity it has, it is rejected with a "Who hath required this at your hand?" Isaiah 1:12; and far more if it is forbidden of God, it is an abomination to him, though one should be so blind as to think it good service; John 16:2. There is no holy obedience but in what is commanded of God.

2. To the right manner of obedience. Suppose it be a thing that in itself is duty, yet if it is not done in a right manner, it is no walking in the narrow way. Here the traveller is hemmed in to,

(1.) The love of God, as the principle of his obedience. His labour must be a labour of love, else it is lost labour; Heb. 6:10. Love to God himself must dispose us to obey him, else he will not reckon we obey him at all; for he sees the heart; and what is not with the heart can never be acceptable; 2 Cor. 8:12.

(2.) The will of God must be not only the rule, but the reason of our obedience; Eph. 6:6, 7. It is no true faith, but where one believes because God has said it; nor holy obedience, but where the thing is done because God has bid it. So one may do what God commands, and yet not obey him, if he does it not in obedience to his command.

(3.) To the glory of God as the chief end of his obedience; 1 Cor. 10:31. If any thing else have that place, God will not reckon it obedience to him; Zech. 7:6. So there is much lost labour, where though the thing in itself be duty, yet it is marred by the low and

selfish ends it is done for; Matth. 6:1. Thus ministers may lose their preaching, people their prayers, any body whatsoever good they do, doing the same for selfish ends.

(4.) Lastly, Faith in God through Christ, as that which casts their obedience into the mould of gospel-obedience, the only holy obedience of a sinner; Col. 3:17. The work of faith in the case is to fetch in strength from Jesus for holy obedience; 2 Tim. 2:1, and so to perform it, Phil. 4:13; and then to lay it over on Jesus for acceptance with God, Heb. 11:4, 6.

2dly, The bias of the heart that lies away from and contrary to the holy law. This the apostle complains of as what made his walking in the way uneasy; Rom. 7:21. There are notable remains of the natural enmity in the best while they are here, a woful disposition not liking to be bounded by the pure commandment. There are lusts of the heart that bend forth on every side, and cannot be hedged in without pain. Hence the way appears narrow, and feels strait and pinching; and the walking in it is indeed one continued struggle to the end; the way of holy obedience lying quite cross to the natural inclination, over the belly of which the traveller must go. Now there being nothing of this in heaven, the way of obedience will not be narrow to the saints there.

3dly, The many embarrassments in this way from without. Our text (Gr.) calls it an afflicted or compressed way. Had the children of God no more ado but to make their way forward in the path of God's commandments, over the belly of their own corruptions, they might have enough ado with it. But that is not all; whatever impediments or entanglements Satan and an evil world can get laid in their way, will be sure to be found there. Hence they have thickets of temptations, tribulations, discouragements, &c., to break through. Sometimes the

smiles of the world are fain to flatter them off their way; sometimes its frowns to frighten them from it; and sometimes a speat of ill example is like to carry them off their feet. Besides all this, there are trials from the hand of God to be met with in it. So that it is a way beset with briars and thorns; Eph. 6:12; John 16:33. Hence, Heb. 12:1, 2, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Secondly, We are to consider this way its leading away to life. And here I will show, 1. What is that life it leads to. 2. How the narrow way leads to it.

First, What is that life the narrow way leads to? That is in a word, a happy life in the other world; Mark 10:30. Entering the strait gate, the dead sinner gets life, else he could never go on the narrow way; and the life then received is eternal; for from the moment it is received, it shall never be extinguished through the ages of eternity. But there is so great a difference, in degrees and attending circumstances, betwixt the believer's life here, and in heaven, that this last is called life by way of eminency. For,

1. Heaven is the region of life where no death can enter; but whosoever is there, lives; Rev. 21:4. This world at best is a mixture of the dead and the living, even above ground; and more than that, the dead always are the far greater part in the mixture, which makes this world an unsavoury, melancholy place to them in whom spiritual life is begun; Psalm 120:5. But when they come there, they will find themselves in the land of life, where there is no winter, but an eternal spring; no dead, but all living.

2. Their life will be perfected there; Heb. 12:23. It is begun here indeed; but yet there is a great mixture of death with it, even in the liveliest saints here; they have a whole body of death carrying about with them; Rom. 7:24. But there will not be the least member of it about them there. Even their life of comfort will be completed there, though they may have much ado to keep it from extinction here.

3. Lastly, No death can ever have access there; but there life will be spun out in joy and comfort to all eternity, without any interruption. While they are here they still know that death is abiding them; but when they arrive there, they know they are for ever beyond its reach any more. They are set down there by the fountain of life, and allowed a full participation of the waters of life, that they can die no more.

Secondly, How does the narrow way lead to life? And,

1st. NEG. Not by way of merit, proper or improper. Proper merit is what arises from the intrinsic worth of the thing done, fully proportioned to the reward. Such is the merit of Christ's obedience and death. But no such merit can be in our works; for there is no proportion between our obedience and eternal life, whatever the papists pretend; Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17; and whatever they be, they are due from us to God; Rom. 8:12; Luke 17:10. Improper merit is what arises from paction ensuring such a reward on such a work as the condition thereof; so that the work being performed, the reward becomes a debt. So Adam's perfect obedience would have been meritorious, namely by paction. But no such merit is in our works. Legal protestants advance this, though they do not call it merit, while they pretend that God has promised eternal life on condition of our obedience; thinking it enough to free them from the doctrine of merit, that they do not pretend to an intrinsic worth in the works,

proportioned to the reward. But what more do they yield in this, than innocent Adam behoved to have yielded, had he perfected his obedience? Do they not hereby confound the two covenants? for all the difference remains only in degrees, which do not alter the kind. The scripture rejects this as well as the other; Rom. 4:4, and 6:23. Paul would not lippen to it; Phil. 3:9.

2dly, Positively, The narrow way leads to life by way of order and connection. It leads thereto,

1. By way of order in the nature of things, whereby one thing necessarily goes before another. Thus the beginning of a thing goes before the end of it; and there is no reaching the end without beginning it. So the narrow way is the beginning of the Christian course, eternal life in heaven the end of it, Rom. 6:22. Thus the sun rising must go before its getting to the meridian, the seed-time before the harvest, and the first fruits before the whole. So walking in the narrow way must go before life in heaven, Prov. 4:18, Psalm 126:5, Rom. 8:25. This establishes infallibly the necessity of holy obedience, it being as impossible for subjects capable of holy obedience to see life without it, as to reach the end without beginning the work, &c., Heb. 12:14. But will any say, that the beginning, the sun rising, &c., are the condition upon which the end is given, the sun is set to the meridian, &c.?

2. By way of connection, whereby one thing is knit with another, whether in the nature of things, or by special appointment. Thus the means and the end, the way and the journey's end, are connected in the nature of things; that whoso neglects the means cannot reach the end; that whoso takes not the way cannot reach the journey's end. So the narrow way is the mean or mids to be gone through, the way to the journey's end eternal life, Phil. 3:13, 14. Thus the wrestling and

the prize, the Christian fight and the crown, are connected by divine appointment; but the former does neither properly merit the latter, nor is it the condition thereof, 2 Tim. 4:7, 8, compared with Rev. 4:10. In the narrow way there must be fighting, because there is opposition; but if ye go along that way, ye will get to life, even as if ye go by such and such places, ye will get to such a city; yet is not the going that way the condition of admission into the city.

The true state of the matter lies here. Eternal life is freely given to the soul here in the first moment of believing; it is begun in them, John 3:36, and 5:24, 1 John 5:12. It exerts itself, and hath its operation and progress in the walking in the narrow way; and death being the end of the way, where the body of death is dropt, the soul then comes to have that life completed, as one having perfected the journey enters the city. The which overthrows all merit and conditionality of works as to eternal life, and in the meantime infallibly establishes the necessity of them to it, viz., considered in its perfection in heaven.

Practical inferences may be deduced from the whole.

First, An easy entrance on religion is somewhat suspicious like and needs to be examined; because it is a strait gate that leads to life. I will not take on me to deny a sovereign gospel-way of conversion, that swallows up any notable law-work, though I have no experience of it. A sovereign God must not be limited; but I may say this,

1. It is not the ordinary way. Ordinarily a law-work, greater in some and lesser in others, goes before, according to that Gal. 3:24, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Thus the converts, Acts 2, Paul, the jailor, and others. And hereto I believe the experience of Christians generally does agree. As for Lydia, she was a convert before, a Jewish proselyte, Acts 16:14.

2. The easy way of entering on religion is a flaw in the foundation, in the case of some; Matth. 13:20, "But he that received the seed in stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it." Where observe, (1.) There is a receiving the word of the Gospel at first brush, anon. (2.) There is a mighty stir in the affections at that reception; the party is transported with joy. (3.) The flaw lies in the superficialness of the work, its not going deep enough, verse 5, viz., by the digging work of conviction and humiliation, Luke 6:48, so that the party hath no root, Matth. 13:21. (4.) Lastly, As it came lightly, it goes lightly, *ibid*.

3. Whoever pretend to it, ought well to examine it before they sit down contented with it. And this may be done, to the sufficient clearing of the matter.

(1.) By considering what their entrance, whatever it was, set them into. If it set them into a sound and thorough repentance for sin, the matter needs no more dispute; if not, their pretences are vain. If their repentance was sound and thorough, whatever they had or had not before, they then got a piercing sight and sense of the sin of their lives, and sin of their nature too, and sincerely repented of both; Gal. 5:24, and particularly of their predominant, from which their hearts would then be loosed in a particular manner; Luke 19:8.

(2.) By considering what way they are on. If their habitual tract and course of life is a course of holy obedience, let them not disquiet themselves as to the manner of their entry; for it is not possible to get on the narrow way, but by the right gate; Psalm 119:6. But as the straitest law-work issuing in a loose course of life, will be found to have been but a foretaste of hell; so an easy way of entering on religion, followed with a loose and licentious course of life, will be found to be the wide gate and broad way to destruction. That was the

religion of some, whom in our fathers' days they justly called Antinomians and Ranters, who, pretending to a sovereign gospel-way of conversion, gave the swing to their lusts, and led scandalous lives, a reproach to the gospel. But if that be the gate to life, we may throw by our Bibles, and regard them no more; but (2 Pet. 2:17.) "these are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever."

Secondly, Strictness in religion, nice, exact, and pointed walking therein, is not only justifiable, but necessary; for narrow is the way that leads unto life, and it will not allow wide steps. It is the way of the world to expose the entering by the strait gate under the name of "melancholy, madness," and "distraction;" and strict walking on the narrow way, under the name of "fantastic singularity, preciseness, and needless nicety." But let the world cry it down as they will, the Bible, and particularly our text, cries it up as not only justifiable, but necessary.

But before I come to justify it, and shew the necessity of it, I must first fix the true notion of it. For there is a spurious strictness in religion, which is oft mistaken for the genuine strictness, especially by the parties themselves; whereas the former belongs to the broad way, the latter only to the narrow. That there is such a spurious strictness, is without controversy; Acts 26:5, "After the strictest sect of his religion, Paul lived a Pharisee;" and therefore the apostle's caution is very necessary; Gal. 4:18, "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." Now,

1. This spurious strictness in religion, which is to be rejected as a work of the flesh, is a strictness of men's own making. It is not God's commandment that girds them so strait; but where God leaves them at liberty, they bind up themselves; and so their strictness is

downright superstition in the sense of the Bible, however they may pretend to be enemies to superstition; Matth. 15:9; Col. 2:20–22. And so it is, though they may take themselves to be bound to it, by God's commandment, while in reality there is no such thing; John 16:2. For an erring conscience taking that for God's command which is not so, can never make it so; Acts 26:9. It may be discerned by,

(1.) Its disproportionableness, making men more strict in these things, than they are in the things unquestionably commanded of God; Matth. 23:25. Nature is always fond of its own brats; and will treat them as one does his own children, while uncontroverted duties are treated like step-children; even as the earth gives its strength to the weeds, while the flowers have much ado to fend.

(2.) Its justling out some substantial duties of religion; Matth. 15:2–6. So the apostle teaches that the spurious strictness of some clashed with the sixth command; Col. 2:22, 23. No duty can be contrary to another. When therefore some point of strictness clashes with some moral duty of the ten commands, carrying one off from it, be sure it is strictness of the wrong sort. Thus while men's strictness bars them from the ordinary means of grace, in which Christ feeds his people, and from the duties of love and beneficence towards their neighbours, we may be sure it is spurious.

3. Lastly, Its giving a set to men's spirits quite unlike the spirit of the gospel. Spurious strictness ariseth from a legal disposition, and gives the spirit a legal set and bias, reckoning highly on their strictness; Phil. 3:6, 7. It puffs up with pride and self-conceit; Col. 2:18, fills with bitterness of spirit: Tit. 3:3, and gives a fireiness of spirit, inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel, which is a spirit of love and meekness: Jam. 3:17. This strictness is to be avoided, as

dishonouring to God, injurious to one's own soul, and hurtful to our neighbours.

2. But there is a genuine strictness for all that, the which is recommended in our text. And it is a strict walking up to the revealed will of God, so far as we know it, in all things; not daring to come and go on these points, but sticking close to them, though to our loss in the world; being inflexible in them, over the belly of temptations, the world's contrary example, its fairest smiles, and bitterest frowns.

What girds the man here, and makes him inflexible, is, the authority of God on his conscience; Acts 4:19, 20. Wherefore, be the thing in itself never so small, and the loss or hazard in cleaving to it never so great; yet being commanded of God, he must stick to his point. It is enough to him; Psalm 119:4, "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently."

There is a twofold measure of this strictness; and all that is in or over it, is condemnable as looseness.

1. The law of God, the law of the ten commandments; James 1:25; Ezek. 18:5–9. That is the eternal rule of righteousness, which no circumstances whatsoever can make cease to bind. What in our practice comes short of that, whether with respect to our duty to God, ourselves, or neighbour, is a defect of true strictness, and what is over, is spurious strictness, unacceptable to God; for there is no wisdom in being wise above what is written.

2. The example of Christ; 1 Pet. 2:21. Herein we have the former set before our eyes, that we may the more clearly discern it, and find it the more powerfully enforced. Our Lord Jesus was in his life the perfect pattern of true strictness; 1 Pet. 2:22. He was indeed, by a spuriously-strict generation of legalists, accused as not strict enough,

because he observed not the traditions of the elders, would not go to their heights to refuse tribute to Cæsar, scrupled not the society of publicans and sinners, that he might do good to their souls, nor to make clay on the Sabbath-day to advance a moral duty of the sixth command. But in all these things he was the strict party, walking closely up to the law of God; they were the loose party, as going aside from it. And so will they be found, who, under pretence of strictness, bind up themselves from those things wherein they have his example to follow. The closer we are to Christ's example, the more truly strict are we.

This strictness may be discerned by,

1. The uniformity of it, Psalm 119:6. Truly strict in one, strict in all, James 2:11. For a man to pretend to be strict in some opinions, and loose in his practice; strict in duty to God, but loose in duty to man, is abominable. The truly strict will be a strict observer of his words and thoughts as well as his actions; of his relative duties to man, as a parent, child, master, servant, &c.; as well as of religious duties to God, praying, reading, &c.; of truth between man and man, as well as of the truth of religious principles.

2. The due proportion kept in it, proportioning the concern to the weight of the matters. The neglect of this is taxed; Matth. 23:23, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." As the least filing of gold is gold; yet the greater the weight the more is the worth, and ought to be the concern for it. So though no revealed truth, nor commanded duty is to be slighted; yet religion and reason say that according to their weight and worth our concern for them should be

regulated. And it is as absurd to let our zeal run out so on circumstantial truths, as to swallow up our concern for fundamentals; to show more concern about ceremonial duties, than the substantial duties of morality; as it is to guard the feet and legs, and to leave the heart open to the sword of the enemy.

3. Lastly, The gospel-spirit where with it is managed, Phil. 3:3. True strictness ariseth from faith in Christ in the heart, 2 Cor. 4:14, 15. So the man walks strictly, as if he were to win heaven by his strictness; meanwhile he quits it all in point of confidence, as if God had not required it. Hence true strictness is always attended with a gospel set of spirit; whereby the man is jointly concerned for the honour of the holy law, and of the grace of the gospel; is adorned with self-denial, humility, meekness, love to God, and love to mankind, good-will and beneficence to his fellow creatures.

Now, the true notion of strictness thus stated,

1st, It is altogether justifiable, however it is run down in the world, and looked on with an evil eye. To justify it, consider,

1. The infinite majesty of God, whose commands are here strictly stuck to, Exod. 20:2. Will any man come and go upon his prince's orders given him, whatever he do with what he is bid by others? The infinite distance betwixt God and us, fully justifies a precise regard to all his commands, an inflexible adhering thereto in every point, though the whole world should countermand them. And were it duly considered, it would oblige to exactness of obedience without disputing, without shifting, Acts 4:19.

2. The risk that is run by tampering in these matters, Matth. 10:28. Let the matter be weighed in an even balance; put the greatest loss and hazard in the world in the one scale, to bring off from strictness;

the displeasure of God must be laid in the other; and is not that sufficient to downweigh the former, and to determine a wise man to the side of strictness. So, as long as God's frowns are more terrible than the world's, religious strictness will be justifiable.

3. The life of Christ in the world. Was it a strict life or not? It certainly was; for he could say, "I do always those things that please the Father," John 8:29. Was it justifiable or not? Was he to be condemned as too precise? If his life was justifiable, how can they be condemned for strictness, who make it their pattern? especially considering, that he left us an example to follow, and that they do not fully come up to the strictness of it. Truly the wounds the carnal world give to the strictness of Christians, go through their sides to Christ himself, who was vastly stricter than they can reach; and they will reckon for them; Jude ver. 15.

4. Man's state of perfection. Every being is allowed to aspire towards its perfection; and shall it be a crime in a man to aspire towards his? Now, man's perfection lies in the religious strictness described before. This appears from this, that the glory of God is the chief end of man, and man glorifies God by conforming to his law, the eternal rule of righteousness; so that the more exact that conformity is, the more does he reach that end; and when he is arrived at a fully strict conformity to it, then he is at his perfection. This was the road God set innocent Adam on, who fell by letting down his strictness. This is the point the glorified saints in heaven are arrived at, where there is perfect strictness, without the least deviation. How then comes strictness to be so treated in the world? Are they angry that some endeavour to get out of their ruins, going, though, alas! slowly, in the way towards their perfection?

2dly, It is not only justifiable, but necessary,

1. In respect of the command of God; Psalm 119:4, "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently," [Heb. exceedingly;] q. d. to a degree, a pitch of exactness. And what that is, we see, Mark 12:30, 31, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The apostle wills Christians "to walk circumspectly;" Eph. 5:15. [Gr. exactly, nicely, precisely;] q. d. going up to the utmost of every thing. The pure law requires the utmost purity and exactness; and it is blasphemy to think or say, that Christ has relaxed any thing of the purity required in every command. Therefore strictness is as necessary as the authority of God can make it.

2. In respect of its being commanded on our utmost peril; Matth. 5:19, 20, "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do, and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Should we leave ourselves loose in any one point, we risk our salvation, as the ship does sinking wherein one leak is left unstopped, ver. 29. No length of time will excuse our giving ourselves the loose; Matth. 24:13, nor no hazard in the world whatsoever; Mark 8:38.

3. In respect of our necessary conformation to Christ; 1 John 2:6, "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." How necessary it is that we be conformed to Christ, the apostle teaches; Rom. 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might

be the first-born among many brethren." Our baptism shews it; Gal. 3:27, "For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ." And that we cannot be if we are not strict in religion. By a loose, careless course, we carry the image of the first Adam; and by a strict course of life, we must bear the image of the second Adam.

4. Lastly, As an evidence and character of sincerity; Psalm 119:6, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments." The reason hereof is manifest from James 2:10, 11, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery; said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." For if any command is respected as the command of God, all his commands will be so; since they all bear the impress of the same divine authority. And one's taking it on him to come and go on God's commands, is an evidence that God's authority has no due weight with him. See the touchstone of sincerity; John 15:14, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

I shall give you the following advices for true strictness in religion.

1. Begin your strictness at the right end, in entering the strait gate by a sound conversion; Luke 13:24. Unconverted strict folk their case is most hopeless; Matth. 21:31, 32. Solomon gives the reason; Prov. 26:12, "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

2. Set before your eyes the true rule of strictness, namely, the law of God and the example of Christ. The constitutions of churches, opinions, practices, and examples of parties getting the room of these, have in all ages bred much spurious strictness. But "to the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is

because there is no light in them," Isa. 8:20. If we be Christians, let Christ's example be our rule.

3. Put on the bands of true strictness, being impressed habitually with the authority of God on your consciences, and the constraining love of Christ in your hearts. These are the straitening bands of God's making; Exod. 20:2, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

4. Be well apprized of the matter of true strictness. It lies only in things wherein God has bound us up, not in things wherein we bind up ourselves without his authority. And ye may know it by these two marks:

(1.) It bears hard on the natural inclination and lusts of the heart. These find themselves straitened by the band; Matth. 5:29, "If thy right eye offend thee pluck it out," &c. Whereas spurious strictness is agreeable to these, and feeds and nourishes them. So the former is difficult, the latter is easy to the natural man. What an easy thing is it to maintain a strict opinion, to separate from a church, when there is no hazard? But to maintain a strict practice in the substantial duties of religion, to separate from the unregenerate carnal world in one's state and frame of life, is not easy.

(2.) It is a promoter of sanctification of the soul, and makes one a better man, advancing the strength of grace, and conformity to the image of God in the whole man; Rom. 14:17. What the better were the Pharisees that they would not eat with unwashed hands, nor go near publicans and sinners? How much more may strictness be known to be trifling and spurious, that has a native tendency to bring leanness on the soul?

5. Lastly, Be strict in the faith and a holy life. And,

(1.) Let every truth be dear to you, sticking to it on all hazards, without giving up with it; Prov. 23:23, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." For none of the truths of God, but are more precious than all we have to lose for them. But it is a weakness to think that there is no keeping of the truth without breaking of the peace with them that differ; Rom. 14:14, compared with ver. 3; Phil. 3:15, 16, while the foundation-truths remain for the bond of it.

(2.) Be strict in inquiring into sin and duty in particular cases, habitually; Prov. 3:6. Ye profess to take Christ for your leader; then consult him in all things, that ye may know what he calls you to by his word and providence. That is a strict man that observes the motions of the pillar of cloud and fire, and its rests, that he may move thereby or rest.

(3.) Act in all things by a religious principle; Col. 3:17; 1 Cor. 10:31. Since the law of God is a perfect rule, it cannot but reach all human actions; either by particular precepts, or general ones, such as Phil. 4:8, and these reaching temporal as well as spiritual matters. It is true strictness then to act so.

(4.) Never consider for your practice, whether a thing be but a little sin or a great one. If it be a sin at all, avoid it, tamper not with it; 1 Thess. 5:22, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Jude ver. 23, "Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." Be it never so little, it will leave a great stain on the soul; which, if not purged by the blood of Christ, will drown it in perdition. And little sins make way for greater.

(5.) In doubtful practices, wherein ye are not clear, choose always the side safest for the conscience, whatever there be to draw you to the other. If there is a case wherein ye are not sure whether the doing of

such a thing is sinful or not, ye are sure there will be no sin in forbearing it? Then let it alone; Rom. 14:5, 23.

(6.) Be strict observers of your duty to God, in all the instances thereof required in the first table. Do not make light of dropping a duty now and then, a prayer in secret, or in your family, a sermon, &c. The case and loss of Thomas deserves consideration here; John. 20:24, 25, "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." If providence bars you from it, it is not you that drop it, but God ceaseth to require it.

(7.) Be pointed and nice in your duty to man, in all the instances thereof required in the second table. Remember the flaw in the Pharisees' strictness; Matth. 23:23. Walk precisely by the rules of justice towards others; being readier to quit a halfpenny to them, than to keep two pennies off them, as ye would rather abide a stress by cold, than take a burning coal into your bosom. Be just and faithful in your business, whatever it is, as knowing that whatever is gained by unfaithfully-done business, is unjustly got, and stolen with you. Stick precisely to truth, hate and despise lying. Loose talkers, that have not a strict regard to truth in common life, whatever regard they pretend to divine truths, are and shall have their part with the abominable; Rev. 21:8. More particularly,

(8.) Be conscientiously strict in the duties of your relations, as knowing your relational stations are those wherein God has set you for the time, to take trial of you. If ye are a parent or child, a husband or wife, a master or servant, closely live up to the duties of your

relation; and let your strictness be of a piece, and let not a but fall in your relation; a very good man or woman, but a tyrannical husband, &c. And where undutifulness of your relatives mar the exercise of softer principles, learn to act by a principle of justice and reason.

(9.) Have a strict and awful regard to the character of superiority that God has given to any over you; for that superiority is a piece of the divine image. It is looseness of conscience, not true strictness, that takes away all sense of that, and allows no regard to them that bear it, unless their personal character be winning; that is in effect, they will regard them for their own sake but not for God's sake; Jude ver. 8; 1 Pet. 2:18.

(10.) Be the same in secret as in public. Let your strictness take place where no eye sees but God's, as well as where the world's eye is on you; for if it be of the right stamp, it will be so; Acts 24:16. For the law and conscience are the same, and God is the same in secret as before men; and if you are not the same, you are strict only to be noticed by men.

(11.) Lastly. Be strict observers of your own heart, as well as your life; Prov. 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." If ye be never so strict in your outward man, it will be loathsome hypocrisy if the inner man is not watched; Matth. 23:27, 28; Rom. 2:29.

Thus ordering your life, ye will be persons of Christian strictness, whom Christ will own, and which he will approve at the last day, when the looseness of the world, and their spurious strictness, will both appear naught.

DOCTRINE V. Last. Few of mankind find the strait gate, and narrow way leading to life.

In discoursing this subject, I shall,

I. Explain the doctrine.

II. Confirm it.

III. Give the reasons of it.

IV. Lastly, Apply.

I. To explain this point, we shall, 1. Consider how few find the strait gate and narrow way. 2. Show in what respects they are few.

First. We shall consider how few find the strait gate and narrow way. And it may be taken up as importing these three following:

1. All are naturally off from it, Rom. 3:23. Mankind was carried off from it in Adam, even all of them to a man, ver. 12. And man's natural state is a state of wandering, wandering on the mountains of vanity, in the wilderness, like lost sheep, straying passengers; and behold the end of their course, Prov. 21:16, "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding, shall remain in the congregation of the dead."

2. It is not easily found out by any, 1 Pet. 4:18. In all cases the best things are hardest to reach; so while the wide gate and broad way are fallen on with all ease, the strait gate and narrow way are a darned road that one cannot easily light on. We are so liable to passions, prejudices, and misapprehensions about it, it is so far above our natural capacities, that there is no finding it out without the Spirit of Christ pointing it out to us effectually.

3. It is but few that discover it, so as on good grounds to be able to say, This is it. There are so many false gates and ways, that seem to

be it, but are not, that they are rare persons who are not deceived by one or other of them.

4. Few enter by the strait gate, and travel the narrow way, though there is no other passage for sinners unto life. It is a gate and way but little frequented. It is not many that are brought within sight of them; but of these many draw back, and but few enter and go on. There are but few regenerate persons, sound converts, truly holy ones, in the world. The most part go in the way of sin, few in the way of holy obedience, walking in Christ, in the way of God's commandments.

5. Lastly, Howbeit there are some that do enter by that gate, and travel that way. In the worst of times there are always some sound converts, truly holy in the world, and will be to the end, Matth. 16:18. When their number is completed, few as they are, the world will be at an end.

Secondly, In what respects are they few?

1. They are not few absolutely, or considered in themselves. If we consider the general assembly of them, Heb. 12:23, them that have, do, and shall find it, they are a goodly company. They are a great multitude, so great that they pass all human numbering, Rev. 8:9; they are so many, that they are like the stars, innumerable, Gen. 15:5, compared with Gal. 3:29. The shed blood of a Saviour springs up in an innumerable issue.

They are upon the way but by parcels, being like an army who began their march at the sounding of the march, (Gen. 3:15.) to the heavenly city, have continued it all along since that time to this day, and will continue it yet for a time, viz., to the end of the world. It is now four thousand years and more, since the van, the first

generation, ended their march, and were settled in the city, the righteous Abel being the first man that entered it; and since that time all along the following have been entering in their order. There is a part of that host now upon the way, advancing to the city; but the rear is not as yet began to move. They that are upon the way at a time, are in different nations and parts of the earth; they in the same country are often but few of them together upon one spot. Hence speaking what they see and feel, their mouths are filled with such complaints of solitude as these; Psalm 12:1, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men." Mic. 7:1, "Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage." But stay till the whole host have finished their march, and appear in one body in the heavenly city, they will be there such a vast multitude as no man can number, but the man Christ their captain, whose understanding is infinite, because he is God.

Let not the fewness of them that find it, frighten any from it, because they cannot think of being solitary, wanting much company. For it is but for a little by the way that they will be tried with solitariness. They that live godly in the lonliest abode, shall ere long be for ever in a glorious throng, where they will have glorious company.

2. They are, nevertheless, few comparatively, in comparison with those that, entering by the wide gate, go the broad way. Though considered by themselves, they are a great multitude, yet compared with them in number, they fall far short of them. The regenerate are few in comparison with the unregenerate, sound converts with the unconverted, the truly holy with the unholy, saints with sinners, those that find the strait gate with those entering the wide gate.

II. To confirm this heavy truth, we shall take a twofold view to clear it. 1. A view of the scripture-account of this matter. 2. A view of the world.

First, We shall take a view of the scripture-account of this matter.

1. Our Lord expressly tells us, that of the many called few are chosen, Matth. 20:16, and 22:14. Now, all those that enter the strait gate, and are on the narrow way, are chosen, Rev. 17:14. Faith is the faith of God's elect, Tit. 1:1, and they only are brought unto holy obedience, 1 Pet. 1:2. All the elect are called, Rom. 8:30. But all the called externally by the Gospel are not elect or chosen; on the contrary, many are called that way, and but few chosen; so that of those to whom the Gospel-call comes, there are but few chosen and brought in by the strait gate to the narrow way; the multitude of them still wander. And then many are not even externally called.

2. Christ's flock is of those, who, entering by the strait gate, go the narrow way, following him, John 10:27, Cant. 1:8. But his flock is a very little one, viz., in comparison of the devil's drove; Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." In vain will one pretend to restrict that to the disciples or believers then present; since it agrees to all his to the end of the world, verse 35–40. His children are comparatively so few in the world, that they are for signs and wonders; Isa. 8:18, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs and for wonders in Israel." A certain evidence that they are very rare. And that this is meant of Christ is clear, from Heb. 2:13, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given me." Israel was a typical people, chosen out of the world, few in comparison of the rest of the world; and Christ's flock are his Israel.

3. The scripture represents them under such terms as respect a greater multitude from whom they are distinguished. They are the first-born, Heb. 12:23; and how few the first-born are in comparison of other children, every body knows, being but one of each family, even of the most numerous families: the first fruits, Rev. 14:4, James 1:18. But how small are these in comparison with the whole harvest? So the Scripture-account states them but few.

Secondly, Let us take a view of the world. In whatever period we cast our eye on it, we will find that still the broad-way men were the multitude, the other the few.

1. The generation before the flood was such. Good men were rare in it, but evil men abounded exceedingly. What a character have they? Gen. 6:11, 12, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." And the flood sweeping all away but eight persons, clears it demonstratively, that there were very few, if any, godly among them. The apostle calls them the world of the ungodly, 2 Pet. 2:5.

2. From the flood to the calling of Abraham, how few were good men! That mighty apostacy, headed by Nimrod, who with his followers built the tower of Babel, demonstrates this, Gen 11; they being such a vast company, that they were divided into many nations, with the confusion of their languages, while the original holy tongue remained with the race of Shem, that had no hand in that rebellion against Heaven; as it did also, I think, with the Canaanites that were engaged in it. But then even Shem's race was fearfully degenerate when Abraham was called; Josh. 24:2.

3. From Abraham to Moses, what a doleful case was the world in, sunk in idolatry and profanity! I will by no means say, that in these

days there was no true religion or godliness, but in Abraham's family; Melchizede, Ishmael, &c., were good men; but certainly they were very few in these days; ten could not be found in Sodom. In Jacob's family itself Rachel had stolen her father's images, Jacob had occasion to purge his household of strange gods. How low was religion sunk, even with them, while they were in Egypt? See Ezek. 20:6–8, Rom. 5:13.

4. From Moses to Christ, or from the erecting of the Jewish Church, and all along under the law, till the setting up of the Gospel-kingdom among the Gentiles, by the apostles, making the New Testament church, there was the same face of affairs in the world. The ceremonial law was the hedge of the church, separating her from all other societies, and enclosing her among the Jews, and the few proselytes that came to her from among the nations. The rest of the nations in the world at that time were sunk in idolatry, ignorant of the true God, and the acceptable way of worshiping him, Acts 14:15, 16. And what a figure made the Jewish church generally during that time, at every turn going off to idolatry, profanity spreading, formality prevailing, may be learned from their prophets, whom from time to time they murdered, till at length they murdered the Lord of glory, Matth. 23:31, 32, Acts 7:52. How few was the number of the truly godly even among them in all ages? What a heavy life had Moses among them? David complains, Psalm 12:1, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men." Isa. chap. 1:9, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." Jeremiah, chap. 9:2, "Oh! that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them; for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men." Micah, chap. 7:1, "Woe is me, for I am as when

they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape-gleaning of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat; my soul desired the first ripe fruit."

5. From the setting up of the New Testament church till the grand apostasy under Antichrist, the narrow way was still trode by few in comparison; as is evident from the accounts we have in the New Testament, the persecutions everywhere raised against the apostles, and the state of the churches quickly after their erection, as Corinth, Galatia, and the seven churches of Asia. For the first three hundred years Paganism continued the national established religion in the empire, and Christians were treated as slaughter-sheep. When peace was restored, and Christianity was established by law, damnable heresies broke in among them, and particularly Arianism overspread all; and the apostasy went on till it issued in the darkness and apostasy under Antichrist.

6. During the time of the reign of Antichrist, until the Reformation, a thick darkness overspread the Christian world. It so prevailed that "all the world wondered at the beast," Rev. 13:3, that is, the Christians, and particularly the European world. Those on the narrow way were so few, that they were represented by two witnesses prophesying in sackcloth; Rev. 11:3.

7. Lastly, From the Reformation to this day, is the last period the world has yet seen, and that we account our own times; which, howsoever they have increased the number of the ungodly, beyond what they were before the Reformation, yet afford but a melancholy view of the fewness of them on the narrow way. For,

1. There is not a third part of the world that professes Christianity at this day; so that were they all godly that are baptized, and profess the name of Christ, they would be but few. Nay, it is reckoned, that dividing the world into thirty parts, nineteen of these are inhabited

by Pagans, who know not the true God; six by Jews and Mahometans, who reject Christ, not acknowledging him the Saviour of the world. So five only of thirty remain professing Christianity.

2. Of these five, two are reckoned of the communion of the Greek church, who have a very miserable face of Christianity among them; denying the souls of the faithful departed to be admitted to the beatific vision till after the resurrection; praying for the dead; admitting children at seven years of age to the supper, thinking they then begin to sin; adorning their churches with pictures; ministers and people sunk in gross ignorance. The other remaining three parts are divided between the Popish and the Protestant churches, the former being idolaters and Antichristian.

3. Lastly, In the Protestant churches there are but few that appear to be on the narrow way, in comparison of those therein on the broad way. There are multitudes that are, according to the scripture, to be cast out of that happy number; such as,

1. Gross heretics, sunk in fundamental errors, denying the imputation of Christ's righteousness, his satisfaction, his Godhead, blaspheming the holy Trinity. Of which sort not a few are to be found in the Protestant churches; not to mention the deists, who regard neither Christ nor Antichrist, rejecting the bible and the gospel by the lump. These surely are none of the number; Gal. 5:19–21, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Jude verse 4, "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old

ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. The grossly ignorant. What swarms of these are to be found in the churches, who have no tolerable measure of the fundamental principles? We may, by observing how many such are among those on whom pains are taken to instruct them, guess how they abound in countries and congregations where no tolerable care is taken of that matter. So that the bulk of people in many places are careless about and quite rude in these things. Now, "it is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour," Isaiah 27:11.

4. The profane, who are openly vicious in their lives, walking in the broad way with a witness. These everywhere abound, having nothing of Christianity but the name, are a public nuisance to society, and therefore a scandal to the Christian profession; which has no doubt contributed to the bringing of Christianity under contempt; Gal. 5:19–21, forecited.

4. Mere moralists, who lead a civil life in the world, as good neighbours in society, but worship not God, if it is not in the public congregations, and have not so much as a form of godliness. These also must be cast out; Matth. 5:20, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

5. Lastly, Naughty professors of religion, such as,

1. Those who are a scandal to a profession, by their habitual course of untenderness of life. They will talk of religion, but in their walk there

is nothing of it to be seen. They will go about religious duties, but then their tongues, hands, and feet go at random all the rest of their time, as if they did these to get leave to walk licentiously, as was the case with the whore; Prov. 7:14, 15, "I have peace-offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee."

2. They who, though they are regular in the most of their way, yet vent their naughtiness in some one or other scandalous practice, hanging about them, such as injustice, lying, evil speaking, intolerable pride and self-conceit, deceitfulness, &c. This makes secret disgusts among professors, alienating their affections; Matth. 5:19.

3. Those who are as blameless in the outward man, as human frailty permits; yet still retain some idol or idols of jealousy in the heart, and never come to a sincere compliance with the whole will of God revealed to them; Psalm 66:18, and 119:6.

4. Lastly, Unexperienced professors, strangers to the work of grace on their hearts, and the life of God in their souls; who have no experience of converting, regenerating grace; and no acquaintance with the life of faith, the spiritual combat, and communion with God in duties; John 3:3. 2 Tim. 3:5.

Cast out these, how few do remain! So it is evident as the light that few of mankind find the strait gate and narrow way leading to life.

III. I shall give the reasons of the point: or, whence it is that few find the strait gate and narrow way. It ariseth from,

1. The natural blindness of men's minds; Eph. 4:17, 18. They cannot discern it in its heavenly excellency, beauty, and glory; 1 Cor. 2:14.

They hear of it, and are pointed to it, but their eyes are held that they cannot see it nor find it, as the Sodomites about the walls of Lot's house. And till the eyes of one's understanding are opened by the Spirit, he will never take it up; and that is the privilege of few; Isa. 53:1. Human learning, wit, and sense, avail not here.

2. The perverseness of men's wills; John 5:40. Men naturally have a listlessness for it; they care not for it, therefore they do not find it. Nay, they have an aversion to it, their hearts are set against it; Rom. 8:7. And till the will be renewed, they will never come on the narrow way. A day of power, the mercy of few, is necessary to bring them to it; Psalm 60:3. And when the Spirit is at work with them for that end, they struggle against it like a hooked fish in the water.

3. The natural bent, propensity, and attachment, to the broad way. That is the way of men's own hearts, as the way of water is to go down, not up the brae; so that let them alone, they would never choose, desire, nor seek another, Isa. 57:17, and in the depth of sovereign wisdom the multitude is let alone; they get their will with a vengeance. They will have head; Job 21:14, and get it; Hos. 4:17.

4. Satan is busy to keep them off from it; 1 Pet. 5:8. He is the great seducer, who bewilders sinners, leading them into byeways, according to their different tempers and dispositions. He represents the narrow way in frightful colours, the broad way as pleasant and safe; so fills them with prejudices against the former, and in favour of the latter. And if at any time a sinner is like to enter the strait gate into the narrow way, he doubles his diligence, and plies him closely to keep him off from it.

6. Lastly, Ill example falling in with the natural inclination, carries all headlong before it; Matth. 18:7. There is some good example too in the world; but then it goes against the stream of the natural

inclination, and so proves ineffectual. But ill example, going with the stream, easily prevails; men are apt to promise themselves peace in an evil way, on which they see others going, and enjoying peace too.

USE 1. of Information. Hence learn,

1. Most of mankind then must perish, since there is no getting to life but through the strait gate and narrow way, which few find. Proud men, from a conceit of their own excellency, cannot admit this, that God will cast away the most part; but the fallen angels were of greater excellency of nature than men; yet he casts them all away, saves none of them. They see not the consistency of it with his mercy; but mercy must be regulated with justice, otherwise it is a softness unbecoming the Judge of all the earth; and mercy will have its triumph in saving some, even all that take the way for it consistent with justice. They say, that then Adam will be more prevalent to ruin, than Christ to save; but it is more to save one sinner, than to ruin thousands, yea a world.

2. Saints then must needs be a singular kind of persons in the world, having a way of their own different from that the multitude go in; for they are few that find the narrow way. This cannot miss to make them look an odd sort of folk, fantastic, and humorous in the eyes of the world, Isa. 8:18, 1 Pet. 1:4. And whoso cannot digest that character from the world's hand, but must needs, for preserving their reputation, conform to the world, and the way in vogue with the multitude, are not fit for heaven. They are the fearful, Rev. 21:8, deniers of Christ, Matth. 10:33, as ashamed of him, Mark 8:38.

3. No wonder the interests of religion be low in the world: it has few cordial followers. Truth falls in the streets, and holiness of heart and life is rare; both are unfashionable, the guise of the world lies contrary to both; for few find the narrow way. That religion is greatly

run down, sometimes persecuted, always mocked and maligned, cannot miss, while the state of matters is such that few find the narrow way.

4. Lastly, Then certainly it is not easy to be a Christian, to fall on the strait gate and narrow way. The unconcernedness and carelessness of men about religion, as if they could hardly go wrong in that matter, is unaccountable. Can it rationally be thought an easy thing to hit that mark which the most part miss? to find that way which but few of mankind do find? But that fond conceit of the easiness of finding it, is one great reason why so few find it.

USE 2. Of Exhortation. And,

1st, Let all consider well and examine what way it is they are on. Ask yourselves, Am I on the broad way, or on the narrow? and endeavour to be clear as to that concerning point.

MOTIVE 1. This is a point of the utmost concern to you; death and life hang upon it. If ye are on the broad way, you are on the road to destruction, if on the narrow way, on the road to life. And will ye be careless as to such a weighty point? will ye not do your own souls the justice to consider of it?

MOTIVE 2. It is certain ye were once on the broad way, Eph. 2:3. The only question competent here, is, Whether ye are brought off from it into the narrow way, or not? If ye never saw yourselves on it, it is a sad token ye are on it still, though ye perceive it not; Rev. 3:17, 18. Though your eyes have been opened to see yourselves on it, and your danger on it, it is a question for all that, Whether ye are brought off it, or not?

MOTIVE 3. The most part are on the broad way, few have found the narrow one. Ye have the more need to consider which of them ye are on. If many had found, few missed the narrow way; yet since there are any who miss it, the matter being of such weight, might oblige you to put it to the trial as to yourselves; much more ought ye to put it to the trial, when they are so few that find the narrow way, and so many miss it.

MOTIVE 4. There are many ways taken for the narrow way, that are not it; and self-deceiving is rife in the world; Prov. 21:2, and none more confident than the fool, chap. 12:15. Therefore try your way, ere ye trust it.

MOTIVE 5. Lastly, It will be a fearful disappointment the careless sinner will meet with at last, a frightful awakening the sleepy thoughtless sinner will get, falling into destruction at the end of his way; Matth. 25:11, 12, "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Isa. 50:11. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." Awake therefore in time, and consider your way ere it be too late.

After what has been said on both the ways, I will only add two things.

1. If ye are on the narrow way, ye have entered by the strait gate of conversion to God; Matth. 18:3; ye have felt the bitterness of sin, and therein the bitterness of death; have been brought freely away out of yourselves to Christ by faith, and through him unto God by a sincere repentance.

2. If ye are on the narrow way, ye feel the narrowness of it, yet are resolute not to leave it, but go through with it; and so your life is a continued struggle; Phil. 3:14. The commands of God are your rule, the example of Christ your pattern, the will of God the reason of your walk, the honouring of God the end and design of your life, and the Christ of God the fountain of your strength for the way.

2dly Ye who are not yet on the narrow way, set yourselves to find it; use your utmost endeavours to get at it by the strait gate, for otherwise there is no reaching it. And,

1. Be not easy without, but seek to experience a work of sound conversion on your souls. Pray for it, hear the word for it, and muse on your own case for it, admitting conviction and cherishing it; labouring to get such a sight of Christ in his glory and beauty, as may lead you to thorough repentance.

2. Set yourselves for a life of holy obedience, following the footsteps of Christ himself, and the footsteps of the flock. Apply yourselves to the way of mortification, dying to the creature and to sin daily; to the way of newness of life, living to God in opposition to the creature, to righteousness in opposition to sin.

3dly, Lastly, Ye who are on the narrow way,

1. Bless God for it, and be thankful, that while he reveals it to few, he has revealed it to you; that ye are among the few, and not among the many.

2. Walk circumspectly. Satan will be laying snares for you, that ye may stumble and fall, and if possible to get you off from it. The fewer are on it, the world notices them the more, ready to improve their

wrong steps to the dishonour of the way. The greater will your sin be, if ye walk not worthy of such a rare privilege.

3. Walk on resolutely, however narrow and straitening the way be to you; for it leads to life; and the broad way, however easy, to death and destruction.

MONERGISM BOOKS

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