

A Soliloquy¹
on the
ART OF MANFISHING
By **Thomas Boston**²

Written in 1699

[For a pattern to every preacher of the Gospel.]

Formatted, modernized, and annotated by
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Contents

Preface	2
Ques. 1: What is Our Duty, and What is Christ’s Promise?	3
I. How Christ makes men fishers of men.....	3
II. But why are unconverted men compared to fish in the water?	5
III. Ministers are fishers by Office.	6
Ques. 2: How May I Come By This Art?	9
I. What following Christ supposes and implies.	9
<i>First.</i> Following Christ presupposes spiritual life.	9
<i>Secondly.</i> Following Christ implies a knowledge of the way that Christ took.....	13
<i>Thirdly.</i> Following Christ supposes a sense of weakness, and the need of a guide.....	13
<i>Fourthly.</i> Following Christ implies a renouncing of our own wisdom.	14
II. In what things is Christ to be followed?	17
<i>First.</i> Christ did not take up the work of preaching the gospel, without a call.	17
<i>Second.</i> Christ designed his Father’s glory in the work.	18
<i>Third.</i> Christ had the good of souls in his eye.....	20
<i>Fourth.</i> Christ not only had the good of souls before his eyes, but he was much affected by their case; it lay heavy on his spirit.	22
<i>Fifth.</i> Christ, was much in prayer before he preached (Luke 9.18).	25
<i>Sixth.</i> Christ scorned the world.....	28
<i>Seventh.</i> Christ was useful to souls in his private converse.....	32
<i>Eighth.</i> Christ laid hold of opportunities for public preaching.	33

¹ *Soliloquy*: a speech you make to yourself; many of these collected thoughts are taken from Boston’s diary.

² Thomas Boston (1676-1732) served as minister at Ettrick, Scotland. Author of the influential *Four States of Man*.

Preface

*AH! Lord, who has believed our report?
And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* ^{Isa 53.1}

This day seems to be a day of darkness and gloominess; the glory is departed even to the threshold of the temple. We may call ordinances *Ichabod*; and name the faithful preachers of Scotland no more *Naomi*, but *Marah*,¹ for the Lord deals bitterly with them for so forsaking His ordinances as they do this day. The Lord has forsaken them in great measure, as to any success attending their labours. They toil all night; but little or nothing is caught; they can find few or none to come into the net. So that Jeremiah's lament is theirs, 'If you will not hear it, my soul will weep in secret places for your pride; and my eye will weep sorely, and run down with tears' (Jer 13.17).

And you may make this *your* lament, O my soul, if you had a heart that could mourn either for yourself or others. Though indeed it is no great wonder that God does not countenance the likes of me with much success, I who am (if I may or dare class myself among those who are faithful), the lowliest, the most unworthy of them all — not worthy to take His covenant in my mouth.^{Eze 3.1} I am a child in piety and in the mystery of godliness, though not in years. I am a poor fool, having a weak heart and a shallow head. I might rather be learning from others than teaching them. I can but wade about the outer parts of that depth into which others can enter far. I have so little love to Christ,² and so little pure zeal for His glory. I can say so little for the truth, and so little against error. I am altogether unworthy and insufficient for these things. No wonder I say that God does not countenance me, when others who are like tall cedars in the Lord's vineyard do so little good, even others who are great men in the church for piety and learning. Yet, seeing that I am called to preach this everlasting gospel, it is my duty to endeavour — and Lord, you know it is my *desire* — to be a fisher of men.

But, alas! I may come with my complaints to my Lord, that I have toiled in some measure, but caught nothing (for all I know) as to the conversion of even one soul. I fear (I may say) that I have almost spent my strength in vain, and my labour for nothing, for Israel is not gathered.^{Isa 49.4-5} O my soul, what may be the cause of this? Why does my preaching do so little good? No doubt part of the blame lies in myself, and a *great* part of it too.

But who can help in this case, except the Lord himself? And how can I expect help from Him except by prayer, and faith in the promises, and by consulting his word where I may, by his Spirit shining on my heart (shine, O Sun of righteousness),^{Psa 37.6} learn how to carry, and what to do, to the end that the gospel that is preached by me may not be unsuccessful?

Therefore my heart cried out after Christ this day, and my soul was moved, when I read that sweet promise of Christ: *Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men* (Mat 4.19), directed to those who would follow him. O how gladly my soul would follow him! As it does on other accounts, so on this one, that I might be honoured to be a fisher of men. Therefore my soul would gladly know what sort of "following Christ" this is, to which this sweet promise is annexed. Lord, you know

¹ *Ichabod* meaning *without glory*; *Naomi* meaning *pleasantness*; *Marah* meaning *bitter*.

² *Love to Christ*: a common Puritan phrase, meaning a demonstrated love towards, love for, or love of Christ.

that I would know it, that I might *do* it, and so catch poor souls by the gospel — and that I might know whether I have a right to this promise or not. O let your light and your truth shine forth, that they may be guides to me in this matter; and let the meditations of my heart be according to your mind, and directed by your unerring Spirit. Grant light and life, O Lord my God.

Ques. 1: What is Our Duty, and What is Christ's Promise?

Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

In these words there are two things to be considered.

1. There is a duty, *Follow Me*.

In this, consider,

(1) the object, *Me*, even the Lord Jesus Christ, the chief fisher of men, who was sent by the Father to gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel, who was and is the infinitely-wise God. And so He knew the best way to catch men, and can instruct men how to be fishers of others.

(2), consider the act, *Follow* (Gr. *come after*) *me*: Leave your employment and come after me. Though no doubt there is a direction here to all the ministers of the gospel who have left their other employments, and taken to preaching the word, namely, that if they would do good to souls and gain them by their ministry, then they are to imitate Christ in their carriage and preaching, to make Him their pattern, to duplicate His way, as a fit means for gaining souls.

2. There is a promise annexed to the duty.

In this we may consider:

(1) The benefit promised — that is, to be *made fishers of men*. I take this to be not only investing them with authority, and calling them to the office, but also a promise of the success that they would have. The fishing of men should be their employment. And they would not be employed in vain; but in following Christ, they would indeed catch men by the gospel.

(2) The fountain-cause of this is Christ himself — *I will make you*; none other but Me can make you fishers of men.

You may observe first then, O my soul, *that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who makes men fishers of men*. Here I will show:

- I. How Christ makes men fishers of men.
- II. Why unconverted men are compared to fish in the water.
- III. That ministers are fishers by office.

I. How Christ makes men fishers of men

In answer to this question, consider spiritual fishing two ways: first, as to the *office and work* itself; and second, as to the *success* of it.

First, he makes them fishers as to their *office*, by His call. This is twofold, outward and inward. It is by setting them apart to the office of the ministry. And it is your business, O my soul, to know whether you have this call or not. But more about this afterwards.

Secondly, he makes them fishers as to their success. That is, He makes them catch men to Himself by the power of His Spirit accompanying the word they preach, and the discipline they administer:

The preaching of the cross —

“To us who are saved, it is the power of God” (1Cor 1.18).

“Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1The 1:5).

He is the one who brings sinners into the net which ministers spread; and if He is not with them to drive the fish into the net, they may toil all night and all day too, and catch nothing.

1. O my soul, see then that gifts alone will not do the business. A man may preach like an angel, and yet be useless. If Christ withdraws His presence, all his efforts will be to no purpose. If the Master of the house is away, the household will loathe their food even though it drops down around their tent-doors.

2. Why then should you be lifted up, on the one hand (as you sometimes are), when you preach a good and solid discourse, in which your gifts appear, and you get the applause of men? Why, you may do all this, and yet be no fisher of men. The fish may see the bait, and play around it as a pleasant thing, but this is not enough to catch them.

On the other hand, why should you be so discouraged (as is often the case), because your gifts are so small, and you are like a child in comparison to others? Why, if Christ will, he can make *you* a fisher of men, as well as the most learned rabbi in the church: *Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have ordained strength* (Psa 8.2). Yes, haven't you observed how God used a man very weak in gifts, and made him more successful than others who were far beyond him in skills? Hasn't God put this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the power might be seen to be from Him? Lift yourself up then, O my soul, for Christ can make you a fisher of men, however weak you are. *Follow Him. My soul desires to follow hard after you, O God!*

3. Be concerned then, in the first place, O my soul, for the presence of God in the ordinances, and for His power that will make a change among the people (Psa 110.3). When your discourse, though ever so elaborate, will only be a lovely song, O set yourself most for His power. When you study, send up ejaculatory prayers to your Lord for it. When you write a sermon, or ruminates on it, then say to God, 'Lord, this will be altogether weak without your power accompanying it.'

O power and life from God in the ordinances is sweet. Seek it for yourself, and seek it for your hearers. Acknowledge your own weakness and uselessness without it, and so cry incessantly for it, so that the Lord may drive the fish into the net when you are spreading it out. Have an eye to this power when you are preaching; and do not think to convert men by the force of reason. If you do, you will be beguiled.

4. What an honourable thing it is to be fishers of men! How great an honour you should esteem it, to be a catcher of souls! *We are workers together with God*, says the apostle.^{2Cor 6.1} If God has ever so honoured you, O that you knew it, so that you might bless His holy name, that He ever made such a poor fool as you to be a co-worker with Him. God has allowed you to do good to those who

were caught before. *O my soul, bless the Lord.* Lord, what am I, or what is my father's house, that You have brought me to this?

5. Then don't you see here what is the reason that you toil so long, and catch nothing? The power doesn't come along. Men are like Samuel who, when God was calling him, thought it had been Eli. So when you speak, many times they do not discern God's voice, but yours; and therefore the word goes out as it comes in.

6. O my soul, do not despair then of the conversion of anyone, however profligate they may be. For it is the power of the Spirit that drives any person into the net; and this cannot be resisted. Mockers of religion, even blasphemers, may be brought into the net. And many times, the wind of God's Spirit in the word, knocks down tall cedars in sin upon the ground, when those who seem to be low shrubs in comparison to them, stand fast upon their root. *Tax-collectors and harlots will enter the kingdom of heaven before self-righteous Pharisees.* ^{Mat 21.31}

7. What do you think, O my soul, of that doctrine that lays aside this power of the Spirit, and makes moral persuasion all that is requisite to the fishing of men? That doctrine is hateful to you. My soul loathes it as attributing too much to the preacher, and too much to corrupt nature, in overcoming its natural impotency to do good. It is against the work of God's Spirit, and contrary to experience. And to me, it is a sign of the rottenness of the heart that embraces it. Alas! that it should be admitted by any among us, where so much of the Spirit's power has been felt.

II. But why are unconverted men compared to fish in the water?

Among other reasons, they are like fish,

1. Because just as water is the natural element of fish, so sin is the proper and natural element for an unconverted soul. Take the fish out of the water, and it cannot live; and take from a natural man his idols, and he is ready to say with Micah, *you have taken away my gods, and what else do I have?* ^{Jdg 18.24} The young man in the gospel could not be persuaded to seek treasure in heaven and lay aside the world. ^{Mar 10.21-22} The only delight of natural men is in sin; they have no more delight in holiness, than a fish has in lying on the ground, or a sow in a palace.

Oh, the woeful case of a natural man! Bless the Lord, O my soul, that when that was your element as well as that of others, Christ yet took you in his net, held you, and would not let you go. He put another principle in you, so that now it is a burden for you to wade much less swim in these waters.

2. The fish on a sunny day are seen playing in the water. So too with the unregenerate. Whatever grief they may seem to have in their spirits when a storm arises — either externally by outward troubles, or internally by conscience-gnawing convictions — yet when these are over, and they are in a prosperous state, they again play in the path of sin. They take their pleasure in it, not considering what it may cost them in the end. Oh! how prosperity in the world ruins many a soul! The prosperity of fools will destroy them. And how destructive prosperity would have been to you, O my soul, if God had given it to you when many times you would have it! Bless the Lord that He was ever pleased to hinder you in a sinful course.

3. Just as fish greedily look after and snatch at the bait, not minding the hook; even so natural men greedily drink sin in, like the ox drinks in water. They look at sin as a sweet morsel; to them it is

sweet in the mouth, though bitter in the belly. They play with it, like the fish plays with the bait; but, Oh! alas, when they take the serpent into their bosom, they do not pay attention to the sting (Pro 9.17-18). The devil knows well how to dress his hooks; but, alas! men by nature do not know how to discern them.

Pity then, O my soul, the wicked of the world, whom you see greedily satisfying their lusts. Alas! they are poor blinded souls; they see the bait but not the hook; and therefore they are even seen, as it were, dancing around the mouth of the pit; therefore they rush on to sin like a horse to the battle, not knowing the hazard. ^{Jer 8.6} O pity the poor drunkard, the swearer, the unclean person, etc., that is wallowing in his sin.

Bless the Lord also, O my soul, that when you were playing with the bait, and as little minding the hook as others, God opened your eyes, and let you see your madness and danger, that you might flee from it. And now be careful that you snatch at none of the devil's baits, lest he catch you with his hook. For though you may be restored again by grace, it will not be without a wound — just as the fish sometimes slips the hook, but goes away wounded. This wound may be sad to you, and a long time in healing. And this you have experienced.

4. As fish in the water love deep places and wells, and are most frequently found there, so wicked men have a great love for carnal security, and have no will to strive against the stream. Fish love deep places best, where there is least noise. Oh, how careful natural men are to keep everything quiet, so that there may be nothing to disturb them in their rest in sin! They love to be secure, which is their destruction. O my soul, beware of carnal security, of being secure, even though you are plunged in sin, over head and ears.

5. Fish are altogether unprofitable as long as they are in the water. So too, wicked men in their natural estate can do nothing that is really good. They are unprofitable to themselves, and unprofitable to others. What good they do to others is more *per accidens* than *per se* ¹ (Rom 3.12). How far they must be mistaken, then, who think the wicked of the world are the most useful in the place where they live! They may indeed be useful for carrying on designs for Satan's interest, or their own vain glory; but really, they cannot lay themselves out for God.

III. Ministers are fishers by Office.

They are catchers of the souls of men, sent 'to open the eyes of the blind, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God,' Act 26.18. Preachers of the gospel are fishers, and their work and that of fishers agree in several things.

1. The design and work of fishers is to catch fish. The work that preachers of the gospel have taken in hand, is to endeavour to bring souls to Christ. Their design in their work should be the same. Tell me, O my soul, what is your design in preaching? For what end do you lay the net in the water? Is it to show your gifts, and to gain the applause of men? Oh, no! Lord, you know my gifts are very small; and if I had some other thing than these to lean on, I would never have gone to a pulpit. I confess that, for as small as they are, the devil and my corruptions sometimes present them

¹ That is, whatever good there is, is more *by accident* than the act being good *in itself*. **Rom 3:12** "They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

to me in a magnifying glass, and so they would blow me up with wind. But Lord, you know it is my work to repel these motions. See an instance of this in my Diary.

2. Their work is hard work; they are exposed to much cold in the water. So is the minister's work.
3. They will venture out in a storm that will frighten others, so that they may not lose their fish. So preachers of the gospel should do.
4. Fishers catch fish with a net. So preachers have a net to catch souls with. This is the everlasting gospel, the word of peace and reconciliation, with which sinners are caught. It is compared to a net with which fishers catch fish,

(1) Because it is spread out, ready to catch all who will come into it: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he that has no money, come, buy and eat; yes, come buy wine and milk, without money, and without price" (Isa 55.1). God excludes none from the benefits of the gospel who will not exclude themselves; it is free to all.

(2) Because just as fish are caught unexpectedly by the net, so sinners are caught unexpectedly by the gospel. Zacchaeus was little thinking of salvation from Christ when he went to the tree. Paul was not thinking of a sweet meeting with Christ, whom he persecuted, when he was going post-haste on the devil's errand; but the man was caught unexpectedly. Little were you thinking, O my soul, on Christ, heaven or yourself, when you went to the Newton of Whitsome to hear a preaching, when Christ first dealt with you; there you got an unexpected cast. ¹

(3) Just as fish sometimes come near and touch the net, and yet draw back, so many souls are somewhat affected by hearing the gospel, and yet they remain in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. ^{Act 8.23} So Herod heard John the Baptist gladly, yet the poor man was not caught. Do not wonder then, O my soul, that you see some who are affected at the time of preaching, and yet, once they are away from it again, all is worn off.

(4) Some fish that have not been taken hold of fast enough by the net, struggle and get out again. So some souls have their convictions and may seem to be caught; but alas! they stifle all their convictions, and stay in the place of breaking out. Their goodness is like the morning cloud, and the early dew that soon passes away. Therefore, O my soul, if you ever encounter exercised consciences, take care that you do not apply the cure before the wound is deep enough. Take all means to understand whether the soul is content to take Christ on His own terms or not. Alas! many, by having the wound covered over this way, are killed rather than cured.

(5) All that are taken in the net, struggle to get free. Even so, everyone whom the Lord deals with by his word and Spirit, makes some kind of resistance before they are thoroughly caught. Augustine says, "And this you also know, O my soul, how you would have been content to have been out of the net." ² Oh! the wickedness of the heart of man by nature! It is opposite and an enemy to all that may be for its eternal welfare. There is indeed a power in our will to resist; yes, and such a power as cannot help but be exercised by the will of man, which can do nothing but

¹ That is, the cast of a net. As a young boy, Thomas Boston sat under the preaching of Henry Erskine at Whitsome.

² *Cras, Domine, et modo, Domine, donec, modo non haberet modum.*

resist, till the overcoming power of God, the *gratia victrix*,¹ comes and makes the unwilling heart willing (Phi 2.13).

(6) Yet this struggling will not do with those which the net holds fast enough. So neither will the resistance do that is made by an elect soul, whom God intends to catch: *All that the Father has given me, shall come to me* (Joh 6.37). Indeed, God does not convert men to himself against their will; he does not *force* the soul to receive Christ; but He conquers the will, and it becomes obedient. He that was unwilling before, is then willing. O the power of grace! When God speaks, then men shall hear; then it is that the dead hear the voice of the Son of Man, and those who hear do live.

(7) In a net there are many meshes in which the fish are caught. Such are the invitations made to sinners in the gospel, the sweet promises made to those who will come to Christ; these are the meshes with which the soul is caught. This, then, is gospel-preaching: to thus spread out the net of the gospel, in which there are so many meshes of various invitations and promises which, if the fish come to it, they are caught.

(8) Lest the net float on the water, and thus not be fit for taking in fish — the fish ignore it and pass under it — there are some pieces of lead attached to it to hold it right in the water, so that it may be in front of them as they come. So too, lest invitations and promises of the gospel be ignored, some legal terrors and law-threatenings must be used to drive the fish into the net. You see then that both the law and the gospel are to be preached — the law as an accessory of the gospel-net which makes it effectual; the law being a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

(9) The meshes must not be over-wide, lest the fish run through them. So neither must your doctrine be general, without particular application, lest you be no fisher of men. Indeed men may be better pleased when you preach doctrine in such a way that wicked men may run in and out through it, than when you make it so as to take hold of them. But do not be a servant of men.

(10). Neither must these meshes be too neat and fine, and intricately worked, lest they keep out the fish. So take care, O my soul, of striving to make any fine and intricate discourse by your wit, which your hearers cannot understand. More about this afterwards.

5. Fishers observe in what places they should cast their nets, and where they may expect fish. So too, O my soul, should you observe where you may catch souls.

There are two pools in which the net should be set:

(1) In the public assemblies of the Lord's people. It was there that Lydia's heart was opened. The pool of ordinances sometimes is made healing water to souls pining away in their iniquity.

(2) In private conference. Many times the Lord is pleased to bless this for the good of souls. Some have found it so.

But more of these things afterwards, when I come to following Christ.

¹ *gratia victrix* – conquering grace

6. *Lastly*, Fishers may toil long, and yet catch nothing; but they do not therefore lay aside their work. So may preachers preach long, and yet not catch any soul (Isa 49.4, and 53.1); but they are not to give up for all that.

O my soul, here you are sometimes checked for your behaviour, feeling the absence of Christ from the ordinances, when you are ready to wish you had never taken it in hand. This was my sin — may the good Lord pardon it. It better becomes me to lie low under God's hand, and to inquire into the causes of His withdrawing His presence from me and from the ordinances, and yet to hold on in my duty till He is pleased to lay me by. Take care against that, O my soul, and do not let such thoughts and wishes possess you again. Do not forget how God made you read this, your sin, in your punishment (Diary, Nov. 13, 1698).

Hold on, O my soul, and do not give way to these discouragements. You don't know if Christ may come and teach you to let down the net at the right side of the ship, and you may yet be a fisher of men. Trust God that you shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance as you have done, and perhaps for some souls that you may yet be honoured to catch.

Ques. 2: How May I Come By This Art?

And thus I have briefly considered these things. But the main question that I would have resolved is, How may I come by this art? What way I shall take to be a fisher of men? How I may order and set the net, that it may bring in souls to God? This the great Master of assemblies sets down in the first part of the verse. From this,

Observe, O my soul, that the way for me to be a fisher of men, is to follow Christ. Show me what it is to follow you, O Lord; and, Lord, help me to do it.

Here two things are to be considered:

- I. What following Christ supposes and implies.
- II. In what things Christ is to be followed.

I. What following Christ supposes and implies.

First. *Following Christ presupposes spiritual life.*

A dead man cannot follow any person; a dead preacher cannot follow Christ; there must be a principle of life, spiritual life in him, or else he is nothing. Therefore I have said and maintained that a man cannot be a minister *in foro Dei* [in the forum of God], even if he may *in foro ecclesiae* [in the forum of the church], without grace in his heart. This is a *spiritual* following of Christ; and therefore it presupposes a spiritual and heavenly principle in him.

Tell me then, O my soul, what state are you in? You once were dead, that is sure; *dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2.1). Are you raised out of your grave? Do you have a part in the first resurrection? Has Christ breathed on your dead and dry bones? Or are you still void of spiritual life? Are you rotting away in your iniquity? What do you say to this? If you are still dead, your case is lamentable; but if you are alive, what signs of life are there to be seen in you?

I have my own doubts about this, because of the prevailing of corruption. Therefore I will see what I can say to this.

A man who has the Spirit has life (Rom 8.2,9); and I think I have the Spirit: *ergo*, I have life. I conclude that I have the Spirit, from the following grounds.

1. I have light that sometimes I did not have.

“The Comforter ... shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said to you” (Joh 14.26).

I now see otherwise than I sometimes saw. Once was I blind, but now I see, ^{Joh 9.25} though I see men but as trees. ^{Mar 8.24} Once was I darkness, but now am I light (though weak) in the Lord. ^{Eph 5.8} This light makes me see:

(a) My former darkness, the sad and miserable state that once I was in, ignorant of God, Christ, and religion, except going to the church, and keeping from cursing and swearing, etc., which I was restrained from, from childhood. This makes me see my present darkness (1Cor 13.12). How little a portion do I know of You, O God? My knowledge is but as the twilight.

(b) It lets me see my heart-sins, my imperfections and shortcomings in the best of my duties; so that God might damn me for them. The hypocrites say, *Why have we fasted, and You do not see?* (Isa 58.3). It lets me see the wanderings of my heart in duty and out of duty, yes, the sinfulness of the first risings of lust in my heart (Rom 7). And it is still revealing the baseness of my heart to me, so that I am forced to think and say that at best, I am unclean, unclean.

(c) It makes me see Christ as precious (1Pet 2.7), altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand, preferable to all the world; for whom if my heart doesn't deceive me (Lord, you know), I would undergo the loss of that which I most esteem in the world. ‘Whom do I have in heaven but You? and there is none on earth that I desire besides You.’ For indeed, ‘My heart and flesh faint and fail; but You are the strength of my heart, O LORD’ (Psa 73.25-26).

(d) It lets me see my need of Him; so that I am persuaded that nothing else but Christ can help me. When I have done all I can, I am but an unprofitable servant. ^{Luk 17.10} If I should do a thousand times more than I do, I count it all but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord. ^{Phi 3.8} My soul cries out for you, O God, and follows hard after you. ^{Psa 63.8}

(e) The knowledge that I have of Christ makes me trust in Him in some measure (Psa 9.10), even though alas! my evil heart of unbelief creates a great deal of difficulty for me in doing that. I find Him a present help in time of trouble; ^{Psa 46.1} therefore I endeavour to cast my burden upon Him. ^{Psa 55.22} I know him to be a good Master, and therefore I lean on Him for help for His own work. I know his grace is sufficient for me; ^{2Cor 12.9} therefore in temptation and trials, I endeavour to lift up my soul to Him.

2. I feel help in my duty from the Spirit.

I don't know what I should pray for; but the Spirit helps my infirmities (Rom 8.26). Many times I have gone to prayer very dead, and have come away with life; I have gone with a drooping and fainting heart, and come away rejoicing; with a heart that is closed, and have come away with a heart enlarged, and have felt enlargement both as to words and affections. And this has made me

both thankful and more vile in my own eyes, that God should have done so with the likes of me (1Chr 29.14).

He that has sense and feeling, has life; and I have sense and feeling; *ergo*, I have life (Eph. 4.19). My sins are a burden to me (Mat 11.28). Lord, you know my omissions and commissions, the sins of my thoughts and of my life, the sins of my youth, and above all, that which is my daily trouble — an evil, backsliding and base heart, which I find deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. 17.9). This body of sin and death makes me groan, and long to be rid of it (Rom 7.24). And what a load it was to me this day, God knows. I feel God's presence, which makes me rejoice sometimes; at other times again I feel His absence. You, O Lord, hide your face, and I am troubled (Psa 30.7). His smiles are sweet as honey from the comb, and his frowns are bitter as death to my soul.

3. He in whom there is heat has life; and I have heat in my soul; *ergo*, I have life. I find a threefold flame, though weak, in my heart.

(1) *A flame of love to Christ* (Rom 5.5)

My soul loves him above all; and I have felt my love to Christ more vigorous during this short while, than for a considerable time before. Lord, put fuel to this flame. I have a love for His truths that I know, for what God reveals to me from His word (Psa 119.19). I sometimes find his word sweeter to me than honey from the comb (Psa 19.10). It comforts and supports me. I cannot help but love it; it stirs me up, and quickens my soul when it is dead. I love His commands, even though striking against my corruptions (Rom 7.22).

I love the promises, as sweet cordials to a fainting soul, as life from the dead to one who is trodden underfoot by the apprehensions of wrath, or the prevailing of corruption. I love his threatenings as most just; my soul heartily approves them. *If any man does not love the Lord Jesus, let him be anathema, maranatha.* The least part of truth that God makes known to me, I love; and by grace, I would endeavour to adhere to it. I love those in whom the image of God appears, though they are otherwise mean and contemptible, my heart warms towards them (1Joh 3.14). I love His work, and I am glad when it thrives (Rom 1.8), even though alas! there is little ground for such gladness now. I love His ordinances (Psa 84.1) and what bears His stamp. Even though all of this is but weak, I love His glory, that He should be glorified, whatever may become of me.

(2) *I find in my heart, a flame of desires.*

(a) For the righteousness of Christ (Mat 5.6). My soul earnestly desires to be stripped naked of my own righteousness, which is like filthy rags, ^{Isa 64.6} and to be clothed and adorned with the robe of His righteousness. ^{Isa 61.10} This wedding garment my soul affects;¹ so I will be found without spot, ^{Eph 5.27} when the Master of the feast comes in to see the guests. ^{Mat 22.11} My soul is satisfied, and acquiesces in justification by an imputed righteousness, though, alas! my base heart would gladly have a home-spun garment of its own sometimes.

¹ *Affects* – a heartfelt longing to wear this wedding garment, and not merely as a pretense.

(b) For communion with Him (Psa 42.1). When I want it, my soul (though sometimes careless, yet, at other times) cries out, *O that I knew where I might find him!*^{Job 23.3} I have found much sweetness in communion with God, especially at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in prayer and meditation, hearing the word faithfully and seriously preached, and in preaching it myself, when the candle of the Lord shines on my tabernacle. Then it was a sweet exercise to my soul.

I endeavour to keep it up when I have it, by watching over my heart and sending up ejaculatory prayers to God. When I want it, I cry out to Him for it, even though, alas! I have been very careless for a long time. Sometimes my soul longs for the day when my minority will be past, and I am entered as the heir to *the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that does not fade away*; ^{1Pet 1.4} to be quit of this evil world; to be dissolved and be with Christ, which is best of all. ^{Phi 1.23} This is especially at three times:

1. When I get more than ordinarily near God, when my soul is satisfied as with marrow and fat, ^{Isa 25.6} when my heart is nobilitated and tramples on the world.
2. When I am wrestling and groaning under the body of sin and death, the evil heart. Then I would gladly be there, where Satan cannot tempt, and sin cannot enter — yes, when I have been much forsaken, at least as to comfort (Diary, August 2, 1696; this is the most eminent instance of it).
3. When I preach, and see that the gospel doesn't have success, but people are unconcerned, and continue in their abominations.

(3) *I find in my heart some heat of zeal for God, which vents itself,*

First, by endeavouring to be active for God in my station. So when I was at K. I endeavoured to do something for God, though, alas! it did some of them *no* good. Before I entered upon trials, one main motive was to have an opportunity to give a testimony against sin, and to see if I could be an instrument to reclaim any soul from their wicked way. As the Lord enabled me, I have done this since I became a preacher, testifying against sin freely and plainly, and as earnestly as I could, by grace assisting me, though in weakness. And Lord, you know that my great desire is to catch men, and for that end to get my whole furnishing from you, laying aside my own wisdom, And if I could do this, how satisfying would it be to my soul, which desires to do good to others, even if I myself should perish? Therefore I do not spare this weak body; and therefore I have desired never to be idle, but to go unsent sometimes. Yet my conscience tells me of much slackness in this point, when I have been in private with people and have not reprov'd them as I should when they offended. I am greatly plagued with a lack of freedom in private converse.¹ In the Lord's strength I have resolved against this, and have now amended it somewhat.

Second, it vents itself in indignation against sin in myself and others. Many times I have thought on that saying of the apostle, *Indeed, what revenge!* when I have been overcome by a temptation. I was content, as it were, to be revenged on myself, and content to subscribe a sentence of damnation against myself, and thus to justify the Lord in his just proceedings

¹ Boston was a very private man, shy and reserved. He struggled to be assertive, and to be sociable.

against me. And, *Lord, do I not hate those who hate you! am I not grieved with those who rise up against You? The reproaches cast on You, have fallen on me* (Psa 69.9). And my heart rises and is grieved when I see transgressors, that they do not keep Your law.

Third, it vents itself in grieving for those things that I cannot help. Lord, you know how weighty the sins of this land have been to me, how they have lain and do lie somewhat heavy on me. And at this time in particular, the laxness of many in joining with the people of these abominations, the unfaithfulness of some professors, the lack of zeal for God in not making a narrower search for the accursed thing in our camp — *now* when God's wrath is going out violently against us, and we are not acknowledging sins and renewing our national vows as our progenitors did — and many are thinking of the covenant with shame, as it were, of whom the Church of Scotland may be ashamed.

4. Growth and motion is evidence of life (Psa 92.12-14). I move forward toward heaven, my affections are going out after Christ, and endeavouring to make progress in a Christian walk. I think I discern a growth of *these* graces in me:

(1) A growth of knowledge and acquaintance with Christ (2Pet 3.18). I am more acquainted with Christ and his ways than I was before. Though I have not so taken up Christ as I should, yet I have done more than I did before in this respect.

(2) A growth of love. If my heart does not deceive me, I have found my love to Christ, within this month, to be livelier and more vigorous than before; my soul is more affected by His absence from ordinances than ever.

(3) A growth of faith. I can, I think, trust God more now than before. I have had more experience of His goodness, and more knowledge of His name; and therefore I think I can cast my burden on the Lord better than before. But it is easy swimming when the head is held up. Lord, increase my faith. *I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.*

(4) A growth of watchfulness. I have felt the sad effects of unwatchfulness over my heart in times past. I now feel the good of watchfulness; my soul is habitually more watchful than before; nor do I dare give such liberty to my heart as I sometimes gave. Yet for all this, the Lord may well complain of me, that He is heartbroken with my wanton heart. But, Lord, you know it is also heartbreaking to myself, that it is so. May the Lord seal these things to me.

(5) A growth of contempt of the world, which, blessed be God, is on the increase with me.

Secondly. *Following Christ implies a knowledge of the way that Christ took.*

No man can follow the example of another as such, unless he knows what way he lived. So neither can any man follow Christ with respect to catching men in particular, unless he knows Christ's way of catching souls; that is, so far as it may be followed by us. Acquaint yourself, then, O my soul, with the history of the gospel in which this appears, and take special notice of these things so that you may follow Christ. What a sad case they must be in, who are *not* acquainted with this!

Thirdly. *Following Christ supposes a sense of weakness, and the need of a guide.*

A man who knows a way and can do well enough without a guide, does not need to follow another. And surely the lack of this is the reason why many run before Christ, and go farther than his example ever called them; and others take a way altogether different from Christ's way, which is the product of their own conceited hearts and airy heads. But you, O my soul, acknowledge yourself as a child in these matters, that cannot go unless it is led; as a stranger in a desert place who cannot keep the right way without a guide. Acknowledge and be affected with your own weakness and emptiness, which you may well be persuaded of. And to this end:

1. Reflect seriously on that word, *Who is sufficient for these things?* (2Cor 2.16). No man is sufficient of himself; even the greatest of men come short of sufficiency. This may then affect you with your own insufficiency, who are so far below these men as shrubs are below the tall cedars; and yet they cannot teach this insufficiency, of themselves.
2. Consider the weight of the work, especially of preaching, which is all that you have to do now. It is the concern of souls. By the foolishness of preaching, it pleases the Lord to save those who believe; and as you thought yesterday (January 22, 1699) before you went to the pulpit, it may seal the salvation of some, and the damnation of others. To preach in the Spirit, in the power and demonstration of it, is no easy matter. Your pitiful gifts will not fit you for this.
3. Reflect on what you are when God is pleased to desert you — how then you tug and row — but it will not do, either in studying or delivering sermons. I think you have had as much of this as may teach you to beware of taking your burden on your own soul, but instead to cast it on the Lord. (See Diary, June 3, July 3, December 31, 1698; January 6, 1699, etc.)
4. Consider what a small portion you know of God. When you are at your best, and in your meridian, how low are you still? And how far short you come of what you should be doing.
5. Consider that even if you had gifts like an angel, you still cannot convert a soul unless Christ is with you to do the work. Therefore acknowledge that you are a weak creature, insufficient for the work; and do not go out in your own strength, but in the name of the Lord. And then, even though you are but a stripling, you may be helped to cast down the great Goliaths that defy the armies of the living God.

Fourthly. *Following Christ implies a renouncing of our own wisdom.*

It must not be the guide that we follow (Mat 16.24). Paul would not preach with wisdom of words (1Cor 1.17); he did not follow the rules of carnal wisdom. Therefore, O my soul, renounce your own wisdom. Seek the wisdom that is from above; seek to preach the words of the living God, and not your own. Since you were most set to take this way, and prayed most that you might not preach that which might be the product of your own wisdom and natural reason, but only that which might be given you by the Holy Ghost, you have found that God has signally countenanced you.

Do not take the way of natural wisdom; do not follow the rules of carnal wisdom. Its language will always be, *Master, spare yourself*; have a care of your credit and reputation among men. If you speak freely, they will call you a railer, and call your preaching mere reflections. Every parish will be scared of you as a monster of men, and one would preach them all to hell; and so you won't be settled. Some man or other who has great influence in a parish, will never like you. That way of

preaching is not the way to gain people; it startles them at first. You may bring them along little by little by being somewhat smooth, at least at first. For this generation is not able to abide the doctrine that you preach. ^{2Joh 1.9}

But hear and follow the rules of the wisdom that is from above. ^{Jas 3.17} For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God; that which is held in high esteem among men, is nothing in the sight of God. The wisdom that is from above will tell you that you must be denied, as to your credit and reputation, etc. (Mat 16.24; Luke 14.26). It will tell you, Let them call you what they will, that you must *cry aloud, and do not spare; lift up your voice like a trumpet*, etc. (Isa 58.1). It will tell you that *God has appointed the bounds of men's habitation* (Act 17.26). It will tell you that *not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called* (1Cor 1.26). *Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, you shall speak God's words to them* (Eze 2.7). It will show you rules that are quite contrary to those of carnal wisdom. Let me consider then what carnal wisdom says to me, and what the wisdom from above says.

CARNAL WISDOM

SPIRITUAL WISDOM

Your body is weak; spare it and do not weary it; it cannot abide toil, labour, and weariness; spare yourself then.

Your body is God's, as well as your spirit; do not spare it for glorifying God (1Cor 6.20). Labour 'in weariness and painfulness' (2Cor 11.27). 'He gives power to the faint; and to those who have no might, He increases strength' (Isa 40.29). This you have experienced.

Labour to get neat and fine expressions; for these very much commend your preaching to the learned; and without these they will think nothing of it.

Christ sent you to 'preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words' (1Cor 1.17). Do not go to them with 'excellency of speech, or of wisdom' (1Cor 2.1). Do not let your speech and preaching be with 'the enticing words of man's wisdom' (verse 4).

Endeavour to be somewhat smooth in preaching, and calm; and do not go on upon the particular sins of the land, or of the persons to whom you preach.

'Cry aloud, and do not spare; lift up your voice like a trumpet: show my people their sins' (Isa 58.1). 'Open rebuke is better than secret love' (Pro 27.5). 'Study to show yourself approved unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth' (2Tim 2.15).

If you will not do so, they will be irritated with you, and may create trouble for you; and what a foolish thing it would be for you to speak boldly to such a generation as this, whose very looks are terrible!

'Whoever rebukes a man, will afterwards find more favour than the one who flatters with the tongue' (Pro. 28.23). I have experienced this. 'Do not fear them, nor be afraid at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. I have made your face strong against their faces' (Eze 3.8, 9). Experience confirms this.

It is a dangerous way to speak freely, and to condescend on particulars; there may be more hazard in it than you are aware of.

'He that walks uprightly, walks surely' (Pro 10.9). 'Whoever walks uprightly shall be saved' (28.18).

You will be looked at as a fool, as a monster of men; you will be called a railer, and so lose your reputation and credit, and you need to preserve that. Men will hate and abhor you; and

'You must become a fool, that you may be wise' (1Cor 3.18). 'We are made a spectacle to the world' (1Cor 4.9, 10). 'The servant is not greater than his lord,' (Joh 15.20, compared with 10.20), 'He has a devil, and is mad, why hear him?' If you would be Christ's disciple, 'you must deny yourself' (Mat 16.24). 'If the world hates

why should you expose yourself to these things? you, you know it hated me before it hated you,' says our Lord. (Joh 15.18)

Great people, especially, will be offended by you, if you do not speak pleasantly to them and court and caress them. And if you are looked down upon by great people, who are wise and mighty, what will you think of your preaching? 'Favor no man, nor give flattering titles to man. For in so doing, your Maker will soon take you away' (Job 32.21-22). 'Few rulers believe in Christ' (Joh 7.48). 'Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called' (1Cor 1.26). 'Speak God's word to kings, and do not be ashamed' (Psa 119.46).

Our people have newly come out from under Prelacy, and they would not desire to have their sins told particularly, and especially to have their old sores ripped open. They cannot abide that doctrine. Other doctrine would take better with them. Hold off such things; for it may well do them harm. It will do them no good. 'You shall speak my words to them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; for they are most rebellious' (Eze 2.7). 'Give them warning from me. If you do not do it, they will die in their sins, but I will require their blood at your hand' (3.17, 18). 'Whatever the Lord says to you, *that* you will speak (1Kng 22.14).

If you preach such things, prudence requires that you speak of them very warily. Though conscience says you must, speak somewhat covertly, so that you may not sorely offend them, and especially with respect to those who are just coming in. Do not fill them with prejudices at first; for you may get occasion afterwards. 'Cry aloud, and do not spare (Isa 58.1). 'Cursed is he that does the work of the Lord deceitfully' (Jer. 48.10). 'Do not handle the word of the Lord deceitfully.' Peter, from the first, told the Jews that were but coming in to hear, 'Him (Christ) you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain' (Act 2.23). 'Work while it is called today; the night is coming in which you cannot work' (Joh 9.4).

Be pleasant, especially to those who have the power in parishes, till you are settled in a parish to get a stipend. If you will not do so, you may look for toiling up and down; for parishes will be scared of you, and will not call you, and then how will you live? And so such a way of preaching will be to your loss; whereas it might be better for you otherwise. 'To have the respect of persons is not good; for that man will transgress for a piece of bread' (Pro 28.21). 'The will of the Lord be done' (Act 21.14). 'God has determined your time, appointed beforehand, and the boundaries of your habitation' (Act 17.26). 'And his counsel shall stand, oppose it whoever will' (Isa 46.10). 'It is God that sets the solitary in families' (Psa 68.6). 'If you are faithful, you will abound with blessings; but if you make haste to be rich, you will not be innocent'

Thus you see, O my soul, how carnal wisdom — notwithstanding that it speaks well and with a good deal of seeming reason — is quite contrary to the wisdom that is from above. It promises fair things, but its promises are not always performed; it threatens painful things, but neither do its threatenings always come to pass. It makes molehills mountains, and mountains molehills. Therefore reject the wisdom of the world, for it is foolishness with God. Carnal policy would make you fear the one who can only kill the body — indeed, who cannot do so much now — and would make you cast off the true fear of God.

O my soul, remember this word, and make use of it for strengthening you: *The fear of man brings a snare; but whoever puts his trust in the Lord shall be safe* (Pro 29.25). Never seek temporal profit by putting your soul at risk, but *wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land* (Psa 37.34). For His way is the safest way, no matter how carnal wisdom may otherwise speak of it, and count it mere folly to follow it. But remember that *the foolishness of God is wiser than men* (1Cor 1.25).

5. *Following Christ supposes that we must not make men our rule, to follow them any farther than they follow Christ*

Be followers of me, says the apostle, *as I am of Christ* (1Cor 11.1). In whatever they follow Christ I may follow them, but in nothing else. All men are fallible; the greatest of men have had their own spots. Luther's opinion of Christ's corporal presence in the sacrament affords a notable instance of this. Therefore, O my soul, do not let man's authority prevail with you to go off the road at all. If Christ himself does not tell you, O my soul, where He feeds, then you may be left to turn aside to the flocks of his companions. Take care to put the servant of the Lord in his own room; but you follow Him.

II. In what things is Christ to be followed?

What are those things in him that I must imitate? What was the copy that he cast, which I must duplicate in order to be a fisher of men? What he did by divine power is inimitable; I am not called to follow him in converting sinners by my own power, nor to work miracles for the confirmation of the doctrine that I preach, etc. But there are some things in which he *is* imitable, and must be followed by preachers if they would expect to be made fishers of men.

First. *Christ did not take up the work of preaching the gospel, without a call.*

'For (he says) the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound' (Isa 61.1). In this he must be followed by those who would be catchers of men. He was sent by the Father to preach the gospel; he did not go to the work without his Father's commission. Men must have a call to this work (Heb. 5.4). Those who run unsent, who take on the work without a call from God, cannot expect to do good to a people (Rom 10.14; Jer. 23). *I did not send them; therefore they will not profit this people.* Tell me then, O my soul, whether you have thus followed Christ or not? Did you have a call from God to this work of the preaching of the gospel? Or have you run unsent?

In answer to this, I must consider that there is a twofold call, an extraordinary and an ordinary call. The first of these I was not to seek, nor may I pretend to it. The question then is, Whether or not I had an ordinary call from God to preach the gospel?

There are these four things which comprise an ordinary call.

(1) Knowledge of the doctrine of the Christian religion above that of ordinary professors (2Tim 3.16, 17). This I endeavoured to get by study, and prayer to the Lord; and attained it in some measure, though far below the extent I would prefer. My knowledge was lawfully tested by the church, and they were satisfied.

(2) Aptness to teach, some dexterity of communicating that knowledge to others (1Tim 3.2; 2Tim 2.2). This was also tested by the church, and they were satisfied. This has been acknowledged by others whom I have taught; and God has given me some measure of it, however small.

(3) A will that is in some way ready to take on the work of preaching the gospel (1Pet 5.2). This I had for all I know, since the Lord first dealt with my soul, unless it was in a time of distress. I

sat a long time on the call of the church, in not entering on trials when they would have had me.¹ Yet this was not for lack of will, but ability for the work, and lack of clearness for entering on such a great work at that time.

Notwithstanding, I had some desire for that work. This did not arise from the desire for worldly gain, to which my conscience bears witness. For I would have desired it then, and I would go on in the work now, even if there were no such thing to be had by it — even through grace; even if I would meet with trouble for it.

Neither was it the love of vainglory — Lord, you know. But it was that I might be capable to do something for God. I remember that when I was a boy at school, I desired to be a preacher of the gospel because, of all men, ministers were most taken up about spiritual things. My desire for the work then ran upon this.

(4) The call of the church, which I had without any motion from myself. This is not only to enter on trials, but being approved, to preach the gospel as a probationer for the ministry. This says that what I have done in this work, I have not done without a call from God in an ordinary way, and I have not run unseemly. For confirmation of this my call, I refer to my Diary. Some things to this purpose are noted there, all of which I cannot set down here. Perhaps, if leisure permits, I will extract them separately in order. Blessed be the Lord who made my darkness as noonday.

Second. *Christ designed his Father's glory in the work.*

It was not honour, applause, and credit from men that he sought, but purely the Father's glory. Men who do not design this, cannot be useful to the church, if it is not *per accidens* [by accident]. All actions are to aim at this; it is that which in all things should be designed as the ultimate end. *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* ^{1Cor 10.31}

You see then that you, O my soul, must follow Christ in this, if you would be a fisher of men. Lift up your heart to this noble end; and in all things, especially in your preaching of the gospel, keep this before your eyes. Beware of seeking your own glory by preaching. Do not look for popular applause; if you do, you have your reward (Mat 6.2); look for no more.

O my soul, do not invert the order: 'You, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those who keep the fruit of it, two hundred' (Sol 8.12). Beware of taking a thousand for yourself, and giving God only two hundred. Let his honour be before your eyes; trample on your own credit and reputation, and if need be, sacrifice it to God's honour. And to help you do this:

1. Consider that all you have, has been given to you by God. What do you have that you did not receive? ^{1Cor 4.7} What an unreasonable thing it is, then, not to use what He gives you, for His glory. Indeed, what ingratitude is it? And don't you hate the character of an ungrateful person? *Ingratum si dixeris, omnia dixeris.*²

2. Consider that what you have is a talent given to you by your great Master to invest till he comes again. If you invest it for him, then you will get your reward. If you make your own gain by it, and

¹ Boston was minister at Simprin, when he received a call to Ettrick, a large church. He delayed a year in responding.

² *Latin*: If you say this is unacceptable, you will say everything is.

what you should invest for Him, you invest for yourself, what can you look for if not that God will take your talent from you, declare you an unprofitable and unfaithful servant, and have you cast into utter darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth? ^{Mat 25.28-30}

God has given some great talents. If they employ them for their own vainglory, to gain popular applause, or the Hosannas of the learned, and so sacrifice all to their own net, then what a sad meeting such men will have at the great day with Christ. What master would endure that servant to whom he has given money to buy a suit of good clothes for his master, if he were to take that money and buy a suit for himself, which his master should have had? How can it be thought that God will allow to go unpunished, that preacher whom he has given a talent of gifts to, if he uses these merely to gain a stipend or applause to himself, not respecting the glory of his Master? Woe to you, O my soul, if you take this path in which destroyers of men's souls (and their own) go.

3. Consider that the applause of the world is worth nothing, and hard to get. For the applause of the unlearned is readily given to the one whom the learned despise; and the learned applaud the one for whom the common people do not care. And if it is gotten, what do you have? A vain empty puff of wind. They think much of you; you think much of yourself; and in the meantime God thinks nothing of you. Remember, O my soul, what Christ said to the Pharisees: 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men, is an abomination in the sight of God' (Luke 16.15). Let this scare you from seeking yourself.

4. Consider that seeking your own glory is a dreadful and abominable thing.

(1) In that you then put yourself in God's place. His glory should be what you aim at, but then your base self must be sacrificed too. Tremble at this, O my soul, and do not split on this rock, for otherwise you will be dashed in pieces.

(2) In that it is the grossest dissembling with God that is possible. You pretend to preach Christ to a people; but in seeking your own glory, you preach yourself, and not Christ. You pretend to be commending Christ and the ways of God to souls, and yet in the meantime you commend yourself. Will Christ sit still with such mocking of him? O my soul, beware of it. Do not look for your glory, but for His glory. Who wouldn't take it as a base affront, to send a servant or a friend to court a woman for him, if he were to court her for himself? And won't Christ be avenged on self-preaching ministers much more?

Third, in that it is base treachery and cruelty to the souls of hearers, when a man seeks to please their fancy more than to gain their souls; to get people to approve of himself more than to get them to approve themselves to God. This is a soul-murdering way; and applause that is won by the blood of souls, is dearly bought. O my soul, beware of this. Let them call you what they will, but *you* seek God's glory and their good.

5. Consider that to do so is a shrewd sign of a graceless, Christless, and faithless heart: *How can you believe, who receive honour from one another, and do not seek the honour that comes from God alone?* (Joh 5.44). A grain of faith will cure this lightness of the head and heart.¹

¹ *Lightness*: treating the things of God lightly (indifferently), in both thought and motive.

6. Consider, O my soul, your own vileness. What are you, but a poor lump of clay as to your body. It will soon return to the dust, and be a sweet morsel for the worms that now you trample upon! Haven't you seen how loathsome the body is many times in life, by filthy boils and other foul diseases; and after death, what an ugly appearance it has? Don't forget the sight that you once saw in the churchyard of Dunse, how a body, perhaps beautiful at one time, was like thin mortar, but much more vile and abominable. The time will come when you will be that way yourself.

And what are you as to your heart, if not a vile, base, and ugly thing — so many filthy idols to be found there, like a swarm of the worst of vermin? Are you not like a cage full of unclean birds! What did you think of yourself on Monday night, January 16, 1699? What unbelief did you see there, what baseness of every kind? And what day goes by, that you do not still see something in yourself to humble you? And what were you that God has employed in this work? Those who were at one time your fellows, are mean and despised. And for all this, would you seek your own glory? Woe to you if you do.

7. Consider, that 'those who honour God, God will honour; but those who despise Him, shall be lightly esteemed.' ^{1Sam 2.30} With Moses, O my soul, *regard the recompense of reward*, ^{Heb 11.26} and beware of preferring your own interest to that of Christ, lest you be classed among those who seek their own, and not the things of Christ.

8. Consider what Christ has done for you. Do not forget his goodness, his undeserved goodness to such a base wretch as you. Remember him from the land of the Hermonites, and from Mizar-hill (Psa 42.6). Let love to Him predominate in you, and you will then be helped to sacrifice all to His glory.

Third. *Christ had the good of souls in his eye.*

He came to seek and save that which was lost; ^{Luk 19.10} he came to seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ^{Mat 15.24} So he sent out the apostle to *open the eyes of the blind, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* ^{Act 26.18} Follow Christ in this, O my soul, that you may be a fisher of men. When you study your sermons, let the good of souls be before you; when you preach, let this be your design: to endeavour to recover lost sheep, to pluck some brands out of the fire; ^{Zec 3.2} to get some converted and brought to your Master. Let that be much in your mind, and be concerned for that, whatever doctrine you preach.

Consider, O my soul, for this effect:

1. What the design of the gospel is. What is it if not this? This is the *finis operis* [end task]; and if it is not the *finis operantis*, it is very lamentable. It is the everlasting gospel that Christ has made manifest, declaring the will of God concerning the salvation of man.

2. Consider why God sent you out. Was it to win a livelihood for yourself? Woe to those who count gain godliness; that will make the gospel merely subservient to their temporal wants. I would rather perish for want, than to win bread that way. Well then, wasn't it to the effect that you might labour to gain souls to Christ? Yes, it was. Take care then that you are not like some who go to a place, being sent there by their master, but forget their errand when they get there, and trifle away their time in vanity and fooleries.

3. Consider the worth of souls. If you remember that, you cannot help but have an eye to their good. *The soul is a precious thing*. This is apparent if you consider:

(1) Its noble endowments, adorned with *understanding*, capable of knowing the highest object; having a *will* to choose that object; *affections* to pursue it — to love God, and hate sin; in a word, to glorify God here, and to enjoy Him here and hereafter.

(2) It must live or die forever. It will either enjoy God through all the ages of eternity, or remain in endless torments forevermore.

(3) No worldly gain can counterbalance the loss of it. ‘What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’ ^{Mar 8.36f}

(4) It cost Christ his precious blood before it could be redeemed. It behoved him to bear the Father’s wrath — what the elect should have borne through all eternity — and nothing less would redeem it. So that the redemption of the soul is indeed precious.

(5) Christ courts the soul. He stands at the door and knocks to get in. The devil courts it with his baits and allurements. And will you, O my soul, be unconcerned for the good of that which is so much courted both by Christ and the devil? Be ashamed to stand by as an unconcerned spectator, lest you show yourself to be none of the Bridegroom’s friends.

4. Consider the hazard that souls are in. Oh! alas, most are going on in the highway to destruction, blindfolded. Endeavour then to draw off the veil. They are as brands in the fire: will you then be so cruel as not to be concerned to pluck them out? If so, you shall burn with them, world without end, in the fire of God’s vengeance, and the furnace of his wrath, that shall be seven times hotter for unconcerned preachers than others.

5. Consider what a sad case you yourself were in, when Christ concerned himself for your good. You were going on in the way to hell, blind as a mole. At last Christ opened your eyes, and let you see your hazard, by a preacher (worthy Mr. H. Erskine)¹ who was none of the unconcerned Gallios. ^{Act 18.10-17} He spared neither his body, his credit, nor his reputation, to gain you, and the likes of you. And will you preach unconcerned for others? I would abhor myself as the vilest monster in doing so. Lord, my soul rises at it when I think upon it. My soul hates and loathes that way of preaching. But without You, I can do nothing. Lord, strike me dumb,² rather than let me preach unconcerned for the good of souls; for if I am dumb, I would murder neither my own soul, nor those of others.

6. Consider that unconcern for the good of souls in preaching argues for these:

(1) A dead lifeless heart, a loveless soul, with respect to Christ. If you have any life or love to Christ, do you dare to be unconcerned in this matter? No. Surely the one who has life will move; and the one who has love will be concerned for propagating Christ’s kingdom.

¹ Several remarkable anecdotes of this eminent minister may be seen in Wodrow's *History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, vol. ii. page 256, and in Calamy's continuation of the account of the ejected ministers, vol. ii. page 678 et seq. Mr. Boston gives a particular account of his conversion in his *Diary and Memoirs*. – Ed.

² *Dumb*: unable to speak.

(2) Unbelief of the threatenings of God especially. For if you believe that the wicked will be turned to hell, with all the nations that forget God, then you cannot preach to them as if you were telling a tale. If you believe that they must depart into everlasting fire, then your heart will not be so frozen as to be unconcerned for them. The sight of it by faith will thaw your frozen heart.

(3) A stupid heart, and so, a hateful frame. Who would not abhor a watchman who saw the enemy coming, if he only generally bid them to provide to resist their enemies; or told them that the enemy was coming, with such unconcern, that they might see he didn't care whether they lived or perished? And what a hateful stupidity is it in a preacher of the gospel, to be unconcerned for souls when they are in such hazard?

7. The devil shames such preachers. He goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; and those who are set to keep souls, creep about like a snail. He is in earnest when he tempts; but they are unconcerned whether people hear or forbear to hear their invitations, reproofs, etc. Indeed, how concerned are the devil's ministers who minister his business for him? They will compass sea and land to gain one proselyte. And will the preachers of the gospel be unconcerned?

8. If you are unconcerned for the good of souls, then it seems you did not come in by the door, but have broken over the wall, and are but a thief and a robber: 'The hireling sees the wolf coming, flees, and leaves the sheep, and the wolf catches them' (Joh 10.1 compared with verse 12); 'The hireling flees, because he is a hireling, and doesn't care for the sheep' (verse 13). O my soul, if at any time you find your heart unconcerned, not having the good of souls before you, then remember this.

9. Lastly, you cannot expect God's help if you forget your errand. Haven't you known and experienced that these two — God's help in preaching, and a concern for the good of souls — have gone with you *pari passu* [at the same pace]? O my soul, then endeavour much to follow Christ this way, setting the good of souls before your eyes. If you do so, you may be a fisher of men, even if you don't know it.

Fourth. *Christ not only had the good of souls before his eyes, but he was much affected by their case; it lay heavy on his spirit.*

There are these four things in which this appeared, that occur to me, and with which he was much affected. ¹

1. He had *compassion* on the multitude, because they were as sheep without a shepherd (Mat 9.36). It affected him, that the people lacked true pastors. He had compassion on them. Follow Christ in this, O my soul; pity those who wander as sheep without a shepherd. Let this consideration move you when you go to preach in planted congregations, where you will see many who are wandering, even though they have faithful pastors. Look at them as sheep who are no better than if they lacked a shepherd. But especially when you go to vacant congregations, pity them, commiserate with their case, as sheep lacking a shepherd. This will no doubt be a notable means to make you well improve

¹ That is, he was affected emotionally; his affections and his compassion were aroused.

the little time allowed you for gathering them in. Be affected with their case. And to this end, consider:

(1) That they are in a perishing condition: *Where there is no vision, the people perish*. They are ignorant, no wonder, they have none to instruct them; they have lean souls, no wonder, they have none to break the bread of life to them; they wander from God's way, they have none to watch over them, and so the devil takes his opportunity.

(2) Consider that for the most part, here at least (this was written while I preached in the presbytery of Stirling) people are deprived of watchmen because of the malignancy and ticklishness¹ of their superiors. So that even if the people would ever so gladly receive someone to break the bread of life to them, they cannot get their will, because these men are keeping it from them.² It would make your heart relent if you saw a child who would be content to have a pedagogue guide him (seeing that he acknowledges he cannot do it himself), if notwithstanding this desire, his tutor would not allow him one, and stood in the way of it. And so the child would be lost for lack of a pedagogue. So, O my soul, commiserate with those who would gladly have someone to watch over their souls, yet those who should employ their authority, power, wit, etc., to find one for them, either stand by, or oppose it.

(3) Consider the many souls who enter eternity during the time that they lack a shepherd. They have none to instruct them, none to let them see their hazard, none to comfort them when death comes. But they slip away (many of them at least), like the brutes that perish. You have found this to be a cause for commiserating before now, when you have spoken to those who are dying. If this is well considered and laid to heart, you can but pity them on that very account. This will stir you up to employ the little time you have among them, so that they may be fitted for death.

2. Christ *weped*, because people in their day did not know, i.e. they did not do, the things that belonged to their peace (Luke 19.41-42). When he thought upon their stupidity,³ it made the tears trickle down his precious cheeks. O my soul, you have this ground of mourning, this day, wherever you go. Who are the ones that are concerned to do what is necessary in order to have their peace with God? Few or none are brought to Christ. It is rare to hear now of a converted soul. But most who are still sleeping in their sins today, are likely to endure the day of God's patience with them, till His patience is turned into fury.

Many heart-melting considerations to this purpose may be found. I shall only say this *in cumulo* [in a heap], that such a case is most deplorable in the noontide of the day, that people would risk a feud with such a dreadful enemy as God, and sit quietly even when the sword of vengeance is hanging by a hair over their heads — notwithstanding that every day may be their last, for all I know, and every sermon the last they will ever hear, and that before the next day these enemies will be made to encounter the terrible and dreadful Majesty, who will go through them like thorns

¹ *Ticklishness*: overly sensitive; offended by any hint that they might be inadequate.

² ¹ Some of the curates, through the favour of the great [i.e., the aristocracy], continued in their churches for many years after the revolution of 1688, in several parts of the kingdom, and particularly in some parishes belonging to the synod of Perth and Stirling, as well as in the north. – Ed.

³ *Stupidity*: acting as though in a stupor, lacking full consciousness; dull and unaware.

and briers, and burn them together by the fire of His wrath, world without end. O my soul, how can you think of this, and not be affected with the case of people as they are these days? Surely, if you could weep, here is ground enough for tears of blood.

3. He was *grieved* for the hardness of people's hearts (Mar 3.5). It was a ground of grief to the Lord Jesus, that people were so hardened that no means used for their amendment would do them good. Follow Christ in this, O my soul. Be grieved and affected with the hardness of the hearts of this generation. O what hardness of heart you may see in every corner where you go, and where you preach, most being as unconcerned as the very stones of the wall. And say what you will, either by setting before them alluring promises or dreadful threatenings, people remain hardened against both, none repenting for what they have done, nor even concerned about it, if you preached till your eyes leap out.

O happy are those whose time God has brought to a period, and taken to Himself! Happy are those servants whom God has called out of the vineyard before the ground grow so hard that almost all labour was in vain! This is a time of mourning for the preachers of the gospel, for people are strangely hardened. This is even more lamentable, O my soul, if you consider:

(1) What God has done even for this generation. He has taken off our necks the yoke of tyranny and arbitrary power, and has given deliverance from Prelatic bondage; and yet this generation is still hardened.

(2) How the Lord has been dealing with us by rods. For some time there was a great shortage of fodder for beasts; yet that did not stir us up. Afterwards there was the death of cattle, yet we have not returned to the Lord. Then followed the death of men, women, and children. He has sent destruction among our fields of grain. This is now, I suppose, the fourth year of our famine.¹ Despite all these things, we remain hardened. *O Lord, you have stricken them, but they have not grieved; you have consumed them, but they refuse to receive correction; they make their faces harder than a rock; they refuse to return.* ^{Jer 5.3} What will be the end of such hardness as this?

(3) It is even more lamentable, in regard to the plague of hardness, that it seems to be universal. It is not only the wicked or openly profane, or those who have no religion, but the professors of religion who are hardened in part. Oh! my soul, this is a day in which Scotland's pillars are likely to fail, a day in which the hands of our Moses are likely to fall, and Amalek is likely to prevail.

Many professors desire to have the causes of God's wrath searched into, but they are not mourning over them. Truly, it is most lamentable that those among us who, like so many Joshuas, would discover the Achans in our camp, who are the troublers of Israel, yet by a strange kind of

¹ The author mentions here the great famine that prevailed in Scotland for several years before the 1700, chiefly owing to unfavourable harvests. Accounts Of this melancholy may be seen in several pamphlets published at that time. Today it is too evident the Lord is exercising us in some measure with the same judgment, while still greater hardness of heart and impenitency prevails among all ranks, accompanied with monstrous luxury and abuse of mercies, greater than was ever known in this poor kingdom. God grant that we may not again experience this judgment, of the breaking of the staff of bread, in the same dreadful manner as our ancestors felt it. "Prepare to meet your God, o Israel." – Ed.

dealing, they are very wary in meddling with this, or showing them to the people.¹ It is much to be feared that there are some accursed things among us, that have not yet been found out.

O that God would put it in the hearts of Zion's watchmen to discover what these Achans are, and that preachers were obliged, even by the church, to speak more freely about the sins of the land. But alas! O Lord, why have You hardened all of us from fearing You?

(4) Consider that this hardness of heart is a token of sad things yet to come. *Who has hardened himself against God, and prospered?* (Job 9.4). Alas! it is a sad prognostic of a further stroke, that we will not be softened either by word or rod. Therefore the Lord will do thus to us; and seeing He will do thus, we may prepare to meet the Lord coming in a way of more severe judgment against us. It is sad already. Many families are in a deplorable condition, and yet nothing has been bettered by the stroke; and what a sad face this land will have if it is continued! Spare, O Lord, your inheritance, your covenanted people, and make us fall rather on those methods which may procure the removal of the stroke.

These, and many other things, O my soul, may indeed make you grieved for the hardness of this generation.

Fifth. *Christ was much in prayer before he preached (Luke 9.18).*

Follow him in this, O my soul. You have much need to pray before you preach. Be busy with God in prayer when you are thinking about dealing with the souls of men. Let your sermons be sermons of many prayers. Prayer well becomes every Christian, but much more a preacher of the gospel. Three things, said Luther, make a divine: *tentatio, meditatio, et precatio* [tenaciousness, contemplation, and prayer]. Be stirred up, O my soul, to this necessary work; and for this end:

1. Consider that you cannot otherwise say of your preaching, *Thus says the Lord*. How will you get a word from God, if you do not seek it; and how can you seek it except by earnest prayer? If you may get something another way, that is the product of your empty head — to mumble over before the people, and spend a little time with them in the church. But O, it is a miserable preaching where the preacher can say, *Thus I say to you*, but no more; and cannot say, *Thus says the Lord*.

2. Consider your own insufficiency and weakness, together with the weight of the work. *Who is sufficient for these things?* If you do them, you will not dare study without prayer, nor yet pray without study, when God allows you time for both. It is a weighty work to bring sinners to Christ, to pluck the brands out of the fire. Don't you have great need, then, to be serious with God before you preach?

¹ The author probably means some people who had felt the rigour of the persecution in the infamous reigns before the revolution. or were attached to the testimony of these sufferers, and were grieved that a more particular and full enumeration of the grounds of the Lord's controversy was not made in acts for fasts emitted by the church after the revolution — who, however, were not suitably employed in mourning over them. And he also insinuates that the policy of some leaders in the church, by whose means chiefly a thorough scrutiny into the grounds of the Lord's contending with the church and land at this time, was in a great measure impeded. But if there was ground for complaint about this, at that time, how sad is our present case, when there has not been a national fast for several years, and not one appointed by the church for more than forty! — Ed.

3. Consider that word, 'But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they would have turned them from their evil way' (Jer. 23.22). There is no doubt that preachers not standing in God's counsel this day, and not making men to hear God's words, is one great reason for the unsuccessfulness of the gospel. Now, prayer in faith is the most proper expedient for gaining acquaintance with the counsel of God. Do not neglect it, then, O my soul; but be much in the duty of prayer.

4. Remember that you have found much good from such a practice; and by so doing, you have found much of the Lord's help, both in studying and preaching. For this cause you allot the Sabbath morning entirely to that exercise, and to meditation, if you can get it done. Therefore, let this be your work. There are these things which you would specially mind to pray for with respect to this:

(1) That you may have a word from the Lord to deliver to them; that you may not preach to them the product of your own wisdom, and that which merely flows from your reason; for this is poor heartless preaching.

(2) That your soul may be affected with the case of the people to whom you preach. If that is lacking, it will be tongue-preaching, but not heart-preaching.

(3) That your heart may be inflamed with zeal for the glory of your Master — that your preaching may flow out of love to God, and love to souls.

(4) That the Lord may preach it into your own heart, both when you study and when you deliver it. For if this isn't so, you will be like someone who feeds others, but starves himself for hunger; or like a road sign that shows the way to men, but never moves a foot itself.

(5) That you may be helped to deliver it with a suitable frame, your heart being affected with what you speak. Do it faithfully, keeping nothing back that the Lord gives you. And do it without confusion of mind, or fear of man.

(6) That you may have bodily strength allowed for the work, so that your indisposition does not disturb you.

(7) *Lastly*, that God would countenance you in the work with His presence and power in ordinances, to make the spoken word a convincing and converting word to those who are outside of Christ; a healing word to the brokenhearted; a confirming word to the weak, doubting, and staggering ones, etc. — so that God himself would drive the fish into the net when you spread it out. In a word, so that you may be helped to show yourself approved to God, as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ^{2Tim 2.15}

After preaching, Christ was taken up in this work. *And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray* (Mark 6.46, Mat 14.23). Follow Christ in this, O my soul. It is better to do this, than go away with the great people in the afternoon, which I shun as much as I can. Any time I do it at, it is a kind of torment to me. I have shunned this, and resolve to shun it more. And if at any time I am required to go, I resolve that I will spend more time alone through grace.

Pray to God, O my soul, that your labours are not unsuccessful; that what you have delivered may not be like water spilled on the ground. Pray for pardon of your failings in public duties; and that God may accept your mite which you give with a willing mind. Pray that He would not withdraw his blessing because of your failings; but that he would be pleased to water with the dew of heaven, the ground in which you sowed the seed, so that it may spring up in due time. Pray that the word preached may be like a nail fastened by the Master of assemblies, so that the devil may not be able to draw it out.

Do not think, O my soul, that your work is over, and you have no more to do when the people are dismissed. No, no; it isn't so. Think to yourself, that the devil was as busy as you were when you were preaching; and that afterwards he is not idle. Will he be working to undo your work, and you will be unconcerned to hold it together? O no, it must not be so; God will not be pleased with this. And alas! I have been too slack in this point before now — Lord, help me to amend.

If a man had a servant who would go out and sow his seed very diligently and faithfully; but then would come in and sit down idle once it is sown, and forget to harrow and cover it with the earth — would the master be well pleased with him? Indeed, wouldn't he be highly displeased, because the fowls would come and pick it up? ^{Mat 13.4}

So too, O my soul, if you were ever so concerned to get good seed, and ever so faithful and diligent in sowing it — yet afterward you turned careless and didn't take measures to cover it by seriously seeking the Lord, praying that He may keep it in the hearts of people and make it prosper, then the devil may pick it all up. And where is your labour then? And how will the Lord be pleased with you? Therefore, pray more frequently, cry more fervently to God when the public work is over, than you have done beforehand. Endeavour to be as concerned when it is over, as you were when going to it. I do not doubt that many times when you preach, some people get checks and convictions of guilt; some perhaps are strengthened — but both impressions wear off very soon. I fear you must confess, and admit a sinful hand in this, in that you do not labour enough to get the seed covered when it is sown, and to get the nail driven farther in, once it is entered.

Though many times your body is wearied after the public work, yet surely you may do more than you do. And if your soul were more deeply affected, the weariness of your body would not be so much on your mind. Rather, you would trample on it, so that you might get good done by the work, and souls might not always be thus robbed by that greedy vulture and roaring lion, the enemy of your own salvation, and the salvation of others. Although he has been as busy all day to do harm to souls, as you have been busy to do good, he will not complain of weariness at night.

Take courage then, O my soul, and be strong in the Lord. Do not give way to this enemy; endeavour to hold him at staff's end. You have a good second;¹ Christ is as concerned for his own seed as you are. Go on then, and be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and let that ravenous fowl never take a grain away, as long as you can get it keep from him.

Thus follow Christ then, O my soul, in being taken up in so necessary an exercise as this. Your Lord and Master had no wants to fill; there was no fear of his failing in this work of the gospel;

¹ Alluding to a duel, in which the participant has an aide to prepare and counsel him.

and yet he prayed. It was to give all, and especially preachers of his word, an example. Do not lay not aside the pattern, then, but duplicate his copy even in this.

Sixth. *Christ scorned the world.*

He slighted it as not fit for any of his followers. He became poor, that we might become rich (Mat 8.20). He gave himself entirely, at least after his inauguration, to matters that concerned the calling that He had to the work of the gospel (Joh 9.4). All, especially preachers, are to follow Christ in this contempt of the world.

Yet we must beware of imitating him in those things which we are not commanded to follow, such as voluntary poverty. This was part of his satisfaction for the sins of the elect. Nor does this exempt the preachers of the gospel from a lawful provision of things that are necessary for themselves, or for others they are concerned with. For the apostle tells us that whoever does not provide for his family is worse than an infidel (1Tim 5.8), where churchmen are not excepted.

Indeed, it is clear that the ministers of the gospel may sometimes work with their hands for their maintenance, either when the iniquity of the times in which they live does not allow them what may be needed for their maintenance, or when taking it will hinder the propagation of the gospel, as is clear by the practice of the apostle Paul.

So that with respect to this, what you are to follow Christ in, O my soul, is that you do not needlessly involve yourself in worldly matters, to the hindrance of the duties of your calling and station. As you are a preacher of the gospel, other things must cede and give way to that. This is what our Lord teaches us: *You follow me; and let the dead bury their dead* (Mat 8.22); and the apostle: *No man who goes to war entangles himself with the affairs of this life* (2Tim 2.4). This was not observed by some, especially our bishops, who acted as magistrates as well as ministers; a thing which our Lord absolutely refused. *Who made me a judge or a ruler?* he asks. ^{Luk 12.14} Yet this is digested by them, and it is an infallible sign of their ignorance of the weight of that work. In my opinion, it is not observed either by some ministers today who, when they have glebes and stipends sufficient for their maintenance, notwithstanding take more land for farming.¹

For my part, I don't see how such men can be said not to entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, and go beyond what becomes them as ministers of the gospel. Neither of these are my temptation now, being a probationer. But seeing that I am unsettled, a corrupt heart and a subtle devil may take advantage of me if I am not wary; and by their arguments from my present state, they may knock me off my feet if I don't take heed. Therefore, O my soul,

1. Beware of preaching smoothly on account of getting a call from any parish. Have a care that the lack of that call does not push you to men-pleasing. No, no; that must not be your business. Remember, God provides for you liberally even now, as He sees fit. You don't want even so much of the world as is very necessary; He that has provided for you up to now, in fact took you, and has kept you, from the womb. He will not forsake you as long as you do not forsake Him, but remain faithful. Remember, God has set the bounds of your habitation, and determined the time. Though men and devils oppose it, they will not be able to hinder it. It is God himself who sets the

¹ *Glebe*: a vegetable garden that comes with the manse; the stipend refers to a paid church office.

solitary in families. And why should you go out of God's way to procure such a thing for yourself, or to antedate the time which is appointed by God? Go on in faithfulness; do not fear. God *can* make, indeed He *will* make a man's enemies to be his friends, when his ways please the Lord. And though their corruptions disapprove of your doctrine, and of yourself for it, yet their consciences may be made to approve it. And God may bind them so that they will not appear against you.

And what if you were never to be settled in any charge ¹ at all? Christ and his apostles were itinerants. If the Lord sees it is fit, why should you be against it? If the Lord has something to do with you in diverse corners of His vineyard, calling you sometimes to one place, sometimes to another, you are not to quarrel about it. Perhaps you may do more good that way than otherwise. If you had been settled at home, then some souls here, who perhaps have gotten good from your preaching, would have been deprived of it, at least as from you. God will always give you meat as long as He gives you work; and go where you will, you cannot go out of your Father's ground.

Further, if you were to take that way, and transgress for a piece of bread, you may come short of your expectation for all that, and lose both the world and a good conscience. But suppose you gained a call and a good stipend by that means; you would lose a good conscience, which is a continual feast. For how can such a practice be excused from simony, seeing that it is *munus a lingua* [a function of language], and a certain symptom that a preacher doesn't seek them, but what is theirs. And so you get it, and the curse of God with it. No; Lord, in your strength I resolve never to buy ease and wealth at such a dear price.

2. Beware, O my soul, that you accept no call on account of the stipend. Set that aside when you consider the matter. See what clearness you can get from the Lord when any call may be given to you, and walk according to His mind, and the mind of the church. Woe is me if a stipend should be what engaged me to a place. I would show myself to be a wretched creature. Consider matters then abstracting from that. For surely,

(1) This is direct simony; selling the gift of God for money. Let their money perish with those who would venture to do so. Such are buyers and sellers that God will put out of his temple. Such are mere hirelings, working for wages — and too much of Balaam's temper is to be found there.

(2) That will provoke God to curse your blessings, and to send a moth among that which you may get. And it will surely provoke God to send leanness to your soul, as He did with the Israelites in the wilderness when he gave them what they were seeking.

(3) You cannot expect God's blessing on your labours, but rather that you should be a plague to the people you so join with. In a word, you would go in the wrong way, and be discountenanced by God when you have undertaken the charge.

3. There is yet a third case in which this contempt or slighting of the world should appear in one who is sent to preach the gospel; that is, when a man is settled, and has encouragement or a stipend

¹ *Charge*: an assignment to a ministerial office.

coming in to him, and so he needs to have worldly business done.¹ This is especially true if he is not single, by which he is more troubled about this than any in my own circumstances are, for the time being. In such a case, a minister would endeavour to meddle as little as he can with these things, and to shun them as much as it lies in him to do so — especially if he has anyone to whom he can well trust the management of his affairs. For surely, making and pursuing bargains are not the fit object of a minister's employment. Not that I mean simply a man may not do that, and yet be a fisher of men; but that many times the man that takes such trouble in the things of the world to catch them, indisposes himself for the art of man-fishing. But this not being my case, I pass over it, referring any rules in this case of how to walk, till the Lord is pleased to try so me, if ever. Only you, O my soul, follow Christ in the contempt of the world. Do not regard it. You may use it as a staff in your hand, but not as a burden on your back; otherwise the care of souls will not be much in your heart. And to help you to gain this contempt of the world,

(1) Consider the vanity of the world. Solomon knew well what it was to have abundance, yet he calls *all vanity of vanities, all is but vanity*.^{Ecc 1.2} The world is a very empty thing, it cannot comfort the soul under distress. No; it can do not good to the body when sore diseases afflict it. The world cannot profit a man in the day of wrath. When God arises to plead with a person, his riches avail him nothing. When he lies down on a deathbed, they can give him no comfort, even if all his coffers are full. When he stands before the tribunal of God, they profit him nothing. Why then should such a useless and vain thing be esteemed?

(2) Consider that the love of the world, where it predominates, is a sign of want² of love to God: *If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*.^{1Joh 2.15} Yes, even in a gracious soul, so far as the love of the world sways the heart, that far the love of God decays. They are like the scales of the balance; as the one goes up, the other goes down.

(3) Consider the uncertainty of worldly things. They are like a bird that takes the wings of the morning, and flies away. Do not set your heart, then, on that which is not certain. How many and how various are the changes in a man's life, as to its outward state. The beggar may well say, *Hodie mihi, cras tibi* [It is my lot today, yours tomorrow].³ Sometimes vile men are exalted, honourable men are depressed; and the world is indeed *volubilis rota* [a rolling wheel] — that part which is now up, will be down before long. Don't you see that there is no constancy to be observed in the world, save a *constant inconstancy*! All things go on in a constant course of vicissitude. Nebuchadnezzar in one hour is walking with an uplifted heart in his palace, saying, *Is this not the great Babylon that I have built, etc.?*^{Dan 4.30} and the next hour he is driven from men, and made to eat grass like an ox. Herod in great pomp makes an oration; the people cry out, *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man*,^{Act 12.22f} and he is immediately eaten up by worms.

¹ This is said in the context of the previous section. He may have a stipend and a manse; but having a family, it may be inadequate to meet their needs. And so he feels pressured to provide, to invest, to save every penny, and even to seek outside employment. But this, says Boston, is exactly the situation in which he must choose to have contempt for the world, and not to rely on its provisions.

² *Want*: to come short of what is required, needed, or desired.

³ This is an epitaph found in Greyfriars' Churchyard in Edinburgh.

The rich man today fares sumptuously on earth, and tomorrow he cannot get a drop of water to cool his tongue. ^{Luk 16.19, 24}

4. Consider the danger that people are in by worldly things, when they have more than daily bread. The rich man in Luke 12 felt this was a stumbling-block on which he might break his neck. The young man in the gospel, for love of what he had from the world, parted with Christ, heaven, and glory; and so he made a sad exchange. Prosperity in the world is a dangerous thing; it is that which *destroys fools* (Pro 1.32). When Jeshurun grew fat, he kicked against God, and forgot the Lord who fed him (Deu 32.15). It was better for David when he was on one side of the hill, and his enemies on the other (and so in great danger), than when he was walking at ease on his housetop and saw Bathsheba. And, O my soul, you have experienced this.

Our Lord tells us that it is very hard for a rich man to be saved; and He teaches us that it is hard to have riches and not set our heart on them. What care and toil men take to get them! What anxiety they are exercised with, and how they torment themselves to keep them! And when they are gotten and kept, all is not *operae pretium* [worth the effort] to them. Many, by riches and honour, etc., have lost their bodies, and more have lost their souls. It exposes men to be the object of others, as Naboth was for his vineyard; and *who can stand before envy?* (Pro 27.4; See also 1Tim 6.9-10). This ruined Naboth (1 Kgs. 21) *Daebolum Belisario, quem virtus extulit, invidia depressit.*¹ So that whoever handles the world, can hardly come away with clean hands. It is a snake in the bosom, that if God does not prevent it by His grace, may sting your soul to death.

5. Remember the shortness and the uncertainty of your time. You are a tenant at will.² You don't know how soon you may need to move; and you can carry nothing with you. Therefore, having food and clothing (which the Lord does not let you be without), be content with it (1Tim 6.7-8). You are a stranger in this earth, going home to your Father's house where there will be no need of those things which the world affords. Why should you then, O my soul, desire any more than will carry you to your journey's end? Are you going to set up your tent on this side of Jordan, in order to dwell here? Are you saying, *It is good for me to be here?* Are you so well-entertained abroad, that you don't desire to go home? No, no. Well then, O my soul, gird up the loins of your mind. You are heading homeward, and your Father bids you to run and make haste. Go then, and take no burden on your back, lest it make you stop along the way, and the doors be shut before you reach home — and so you would lie outside through the long night of eternity.

To close it all up, remember that there are other things for you to set your affections on, than the things of this world. There are things above that merit your affections. Where is Christ, heaven, and glory, when you look upon the world, highly esteeming it? Do you see beauty in the world to ravish your heart? Surely the more you see in Him, the less you will see in the world.

And hasn't experience confirmed this to you? Alas, when the *beauty* of the upper house is in my offer, that I should ever have any kindness for the world, that vile dwarf and monster, that in the end will be seen by me all in fire. *Sursum cor* [Lift up your heart], O my soul! you look too low.

¹ "Belisarius the Devil, whom virtue had exalted, was brought down by envy." Belisarius was a Byzantine general under Justinian I; he recovered former Roman territories in northern Africa and fought against the Persians.

² *Tenant at will* is a legal term, meaning the renter has a month-to-month lease.

Behold the King in His glory. Look to Him who died for you, to save you from this present evil world. See Him sitting at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. Behold the crown in His hand, to give to you when you have overcome the world. ^{Rev 2.10} Behold the recompense of reward bought for you with His precious blood, if you overcome. ^{1Joh 5.4-5}

Ah! are you looking for toys, and going off your path to gather the stones of the brook, when you are running for a crown of gold, yes, more than the finest gold? Does this suit a man in his right mind? Indeed, doesn't it rather argue for madness, and for more than brutish stupidity? The brutes look down, but men are to look up. Men have a soul capable of higher things than what the world affords. Therefore,

When the rest of the animals look at the earth,
He gave a mouth to man on high, and heaven to protect;
He commanded, and lifted up his face to the stars.¹

So then, be of a more noble spirit than the earthworms. Let the swine feed on husks. Be of a more sublime spirit: trample on those things that are below. Are you clothed with the Sun? Then get the moon under your feet — despise it; don't look at it with love; turn from it, and pass it by. Don't let it move you if you are poor. Christ had nowhere to lay his head. Don't let the prospect of future troublesome times make you solicit ways to be carried through it. For 'you shall not be ashamed in the evil days, and in the days of famine you shall be satisfied.' God has said it (Psa 37.19), therefore believe it.

Do not be anxious about your provision for old age, for by all appearances you will never see it. It is more than probable that you will be at your journey's end sooner than that. The body is weak; it is stepping down to salute corruption as its mother, before it has well entered the hall of the world. Your tabernacle stakes seem to be pulling out little by little already. Courage then, O my soul. Before long, the devil, the world, and the flesh will be bruised under your feet; and you will be received into eternal mansions.

But even if the Lord lengthens out your days to old age, He that brought you into life will not forsake you then either. If He gives you life, he will give you food. Keep a loose hold of the world, then; despise it if you would be a fisher of men.

Seventh. *Christ was useful to souls in his private converse.*

He took occasion to instruct, rebuke, etc., from whatever things were offered. Thus he dealt with the woman of Samaria. He took occasion from the water that she was drawing, to tell her about the living water, etc. Being at a feast, he rebuked the Pharisees who chose the prominent seats, instructing them in the right way of behaviour at feasts.

O my soul, follow Christ in this. Be edifying in your private conduct. Any time you are in company, let something that smells of heaven drop from your lips. Where any are faulty, reprove them as

¹ Translated from Boston's Latin quotation of Ovid:
*Pronaque cum spectent animalia caetera terram,
Os homini sublime dedit, caelumque tueri
Jussit, et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus.* – Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, lib. i. ver. 76.

prudently as you can. If they appear to be ignorant, instruct them when need requires, etc. And learn that heavenly chemistry of extracting some spiritual thing out of earthly things. To this purpose, and for this end, endeavour for a heavenly frame which will, as fabled of the philosopher's stone, turn every metal into gold. When the soul is heavenly, it will even scrape jewels out of a dunghill. Whatever the discourse is, it will afford some useful thing or another.

Alas, my soul, that you follow this example so little! O what a shame it is for you to sit down in company, and rise again, and part with them, and never a word of Christ to be heard where you are. Be ashamed of this, and remember what Christ says: "Whoever confesses me before men, I will also confess him before my Father — but whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven" (Mat 10.32-33).

How many times have you been somewhat severe in your conversation when alone, but when in company, by the neglect of this duty (especially of rebuking), you have come away with loss and with a troubled mind because of your faintheartedness in this way? Amend this and make your conduct more edifying, and take courage to reprove, exhort, etc. You don't know what a seasonable admonition may do — the Lord may be pleased to back it with life and power.

Eighth. *Christ laid hold of opportunities for public preaching.*

This is clear from the whole history of the gospel. He gave a pattern to ministers to be ready in season and out of season. O my soul, follow Christ in this. Do not refuse any occasion for preaching when God calls you to it. It is very unlike Christ's practice, for preachers of the gospel to be lazy, or to slight opportunities for doing good to people, when the Lord puts opportunities in their hand. For this end consider:

1. Alongside Christ's example, you are worth nothing in the world, so far as you are lazy. What do we serve for, if we are not serviceable for God?
2. If you are not active, it may provoke God to take away your talent and give it to another. Whatever talent the Lord has given you, it must be employed in His service. He did not give it to you to hide it in a napkin. Remember what became of the unprofitable servant who hid his Lord's money. ^{Mat 25.25-30}
3. You don't know when your Master will come. *Blessed is that servant whom, when his Lord shall come, he shall find so doing.* ^{Mat 24.46} If Christ should come and find you idle, when he is calling you to work, how will you be able to look Him in the face? Those are well who die at Christ's work.

END OF THE SOLILOQUY.