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A

**HALF CENTURY**

**SERMON,**

**DELIVERED AT WEST-HARTFORD,**

**ON THE 13th DAY OF OCTOBER, 1822 :**

**IN WHICH**

**A CHURCH AND CONGREGATION ARE**

**COMMENDED TO GOD, AND THE WORD OF HIS GRACE.**

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**BY NATHAN PERKINS, D. D.**  
◆ 12

**HARTFORD :**

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1822.



## **DEDICATION.**

**TO THE PEOPLE OF WEST-HARTFORD.**

As the following discourse, preached on the occasion of my having laboured among you in the Evangelical ministry, fifty years, is published at your request and expense, it seems altogether proper that it should be dedicated to you. I trust, you will, with me, review the kindness of God to you in the seasons of his grace, with which you have been favoured, with adoring gratitude. You have been a remarkably united people for the long time of my residence and labours among you. If you would wish to have pure and undefiled religion, as it is before God and the Father, flourish and prevail among you, you must still be a **UNITED PEOPLE**, and love the doctrines of grace, the peculiar glories of the gospel. For all your kindnesses to me, and they are many, I request you to accept my grateful acknowledgments. May a love to the doctrines of grace, and vital godliness, ever prevail with you, and in all our land, and in all the christian world. Believe me, you, and your children, will always have an interest in my prayers.

**NATHAN PERKINS.**

November 5th, 1822.

# SERMON.

ACTS XX. 32.

AND NOW BRETHREN, I COMMEND YOU TO GOD, AND TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP, AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED.

**T**O-MORROW will be the Half Century Anniversary of my consecration to the work of the Holy Ministry among you. Fifty years will then have rolled away since that event took place. Previous to it, I spent about nine months, as a candidate for a settlement among you, in the Gospel Ministry ; and on the fourteenth day of October, seventeen hundred and seventy-two, I was set apart to it, by fasting, prayer, and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. One only of the numerous council of pastors, who assisted in the solemnities of that day, still lives. All the rest have many years since gone down to the awful silence of the tomb. And but one, or at most, two members of the society, who acted on that interesting occasion, are now living, and not one member of the church, either male or female, is now living. The anniversary of my ordination to the office of a gospel minister, never returns without reminding me, in a solemn and affecting manner, that the vows of the Lord are upon me, and also of the weight of the charge of precious and immortal souls, together with the importance of fidelity in my sacred work to my divine Lord and Master, to the people of my pastoral care, and to my own soul. Having obtained help of the Lord, I live to this day, while many of my brethren and friends have died around me, on the right hand and on the left. And I am desirous to lead your minds to that serious train of reflection, which may be both profitable and edifying. The words now read, it was apprehended, were as well adapted to this purpose, as any which could be selected.

*And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

These are the words of the Apostle Paul in his official capacity, when he took his final and affectionate leave of the Elders of the Church at Ephesus, where he had laboured much, and been greatly successful. He solemnly warns them against errors, apostacies, and corrupt men, who would do all in their power to pervert them, and to introduce division, and false principles among them. A faithful minister is always afraid lest his people should be disunited, and corrupted in sentiment and practice by designing men, by dangerous errors, and by unsound writings. The longer he lives and labours in the Gospel with them, the greater is his attachment to them, the more ardent his affection for them, and the deeper his anxiety, to have them know, and love the truth as it is in Jesus. For he feels that it is a great and difficult thing to keep, even one large church and society in the right way of the Lord, in the order, faith and purity of the gospel; and to preserve them from false principles, from unscriptural modes and forms in worship, and from the arts of seducers. *For I know this that after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now brethren I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said it is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him. Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.*

What is further intended, in discoursing upon the words of

the text, is to explain what it is for a minister of the gospel to commend his people to God, and to the word of his grace. And, then, show how the gospel, or word of God's grace is able to form and prepare them for an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

It is, *first*, proposed, in our plan of discourse, to explain what it is for a minister of the gospel to commend his people to God, and to the word of his grace. *And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace.* How affectionate and kind is the Apostle in calling those, to whom he addressed himself, his brethren, brethren in the Lord, and in the faith and fellowship of the gospel. And now brethren I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace. To commend them to God is fully and cordially to give them up to him, and leave them with him, in tenderness of affection, and fervour of prayer. *The word of God's grace* is his gospel, which is the fruit of his rich mercy, flows from his grace as a stream from a fountain, displays his loving kindness, and in its nature and tendency is most beneficent. There is something extremely tender and affecting in commending an individual, a family or people to *God, and to the word of his grace.*

And, for a minister to commend his people to *God, and to the word of his grace* is to be much in prayer for them. All persons ought to be constant and abundant, in stated and daily prayer for themselves, for others, for friends, for church, and state. Solemn and stated prayer is a divinely appointed means of obtaining blessings for ourselves and others. All persons, therefore, whatever may be their standing and condition in the world, are under the strongest obligations to pray statedly and daily to a God of infinite glories and excellencies, both for themselves and others. We are bound not only by the general laws of benevolence, but by the special precepts of the gospel, to intercede for others, at the Throne of Grace, which is always accessible to us. Members of the church are particularly to pray for one another. Inhabitants of a parish, whose interests are, in some respects, very much the same,

are to pray for each other, for the welfare, peace, and spiritual good of the parish. Parents are to pray for their children, and children for their parents ; rulers for their subjects, and subjects for their rulers ; all orders and classes of men for each other ; and especially ministers and people are to remember each other in their addresses to a prayer-hearing God. And, unquestionably, many important blessings are conferred in answer to devout and fervent prayer. In a minister's commending his people to God and the word of his grace, is implied his abundant prayerfulness for them. When he addresses the Throne of Grace, in the family or closet, he is never to forget them, but to feel for them in all their wants ; to implore for them devoutly all needed mercies, both temporal and spiritual, especially spiritual ; that they may be built up in peace, in harmony, in love and friendship ; that vital piety may prevail among them ; that it may be revived ; that the preached word and dispensed ordinances may be accompanied by the power of the Holy Ghost ; that they may be kept from errors, and false principles, and from unscriptural practices ; that the church may flourish ; that God may be honoured ; that the pure doctrines of Christ may be clearly understood and loved ; that they may all love the word of God, the worship of God, the house of God, the sabbaths of God, the ordinances of God, and the people of God—that none of these, to whom he ministers in holy things, whether old or young, rich or poor, may be suffered to go on in folly, profaneness and vice, to final perdition ; but that all of them may become pious, that all their houses may be houses of stated family-worship, and all their hearts purified by the Holy Spirit. In this manner should a minister commend his people to *God, and the word of his grace*. *And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all.*

It is, further, obvious to remark, for a minister to *commend* his people to *God, and the word of his grace*, is to endeavour rightly to instruct them in the things of their salvation: This is a matter of infinite moment. Every thing depends upon his giving his people right instruction in religion, in doctrines

to be believed, in duties to be performed, and ordinances to be observed. To this end he is to devote himself to study. He must read extensively, and carefully search the holy scriptures. All his time, all his talents, and all his care are little enough rightly to perform the arduous and solemn duties of his pastoral office. He should be wholly devoted to his work, and be so well supported by his people as to give himself entirely to it. A people do not know how much they lose in withholding from him an adequate maintenance. For if he be driven to straits in order to obtain a bare subsistence, he cannot study; and his pulpit performances will, of course, be lean and ordinary. To prepare weekly, able and edifying sermons, requires great study and knowledge. A minister, therefore, must have all his time and learning employed in his work, if he would be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth; if he would come to his people in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ. He is to commend his people to *the word of God's grace*, as well as to *God himself*. Right instruction in the Gospel, is essential to this. The field of divinity is indeed wide. It must be duly explored. The doctrines to be taught are of the highest consequence. All of them are to be set in their due order before his people. From all vices and fashionable sins, he is to dissuade them. Against all errors he is to guard them. Divine ordinances are to be considered and pressed on the conscience. The real nature of religion, and all its truths, privileges and comforts, are to be illustrated. It is the saying of an eminent preacher, "that no person of competent abilities and learning, would dare to undertake the work of a Gospel minister, if he could know beforehand, the arduous and difficult nature of it." In our own country and age, where education is so much cherished by public opinion, and the mass of the population so well informed, it is rendered doubly difficult to preach the word of God's grace, the glorious Gospel of his Son, to acceptance and edification. Besides, a minister has all kinds of people, and tempers, and professions, to address and please. His constant endeavour, therefore,

should be rightly to instruct and indoctrinate them. But no people are rightly instructed in religion, where its real nature as distinguished from all counterfeits, is not accurately delineated ; its pure doctrines plainly unfolded ; its power clearly stated ; its essential and commanding truths affectionately urged ; and its holy sacraments tenderly recommended. A minister only rightly instructs his people, and commends them to *the word of God's grace*, when he faithfully and luminously, plainly and solemnly lays before them, the fulness and sufficiency of the holy scriptures, as the only rule of faith and morals, the primary guide in the way to glory ; the being of God, all his adorable and infinitely amiable attributes, his universal agency and providence, his absolute unity, and yet a threefold subsistence in his essence, commonly called a trinity of persons in the Godhead, the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ, the work, personality, and divinity of the Holy Ghost ; the entire moral depravity of the human heart, the moral agency and accountability of man ; the necessity of regeneration ; of repentance ; of faith in a Redeemer ; of a holy life or all good works ; the divine purposes ; the choice of his people to eternal life through sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth ; justification by faith, on account of a Mediator's righteousness ; the fulness of Christ's atonement ; the perseverance of the saints to final salvation in the way of obedience ; the nature and infinite evil of sin ; the resurrection of the dead ; the final judgment ; endless happiness to the righteous ; and endless misery to the wicked.

These grand and essential doctrines, and all others connected with them, are to be dwelt upon and urged, if a minister would rightly instruct his people, in the things of their salvation. To be saved in an essentially wrong belief is impossible, still we are unable to say precisely what degree of error is compatible with real piety of heart.

It is, again, added for a minister of the Gospel to commend to God, and the word of his grace, his people, is to use all the means in his power to keep them united among themselves, and above all united to God. Peace in a church and



society, is of interesting importance. A disunited and divided people, are always an unhappy people, and in a state unfavourable to the prevalence of religion, or a revival of it. Our Lord himself pronounced a beatitude on peace-makers.—*Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called the children of God.* And said, a house or kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. His inspired apostle Paul, has directed Christians to study the things, which make for peace, and wherewith one may edify another. If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men. One constituent part of Christ's kingdom is peace. *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* The same apostle has warned us to be on our guard against such as are, by plausible arts, striving to cause divisions. *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.* The Christian religion is a system of benevolence and peace. The Gospel, is the Gospel of peace. Christ is the Prince of peace. God, gracious and merciful, is the God of love and peace. And heaven is a world of eternal peace. It was said of the primitive Christians, by their enemies, "behold how these Christians love one another." The temper of the Gospel, is a benevolent, humble, self-denying, and peaceable temper; and is always to be cultivated. We are never, it is true, to give up duty and truth for the sake of peace. For we are to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; and to oppose such as contradict and renounce sound doctrine. All the members of a church, and inhabitants of a society, are to dread divisions and contentions; the causes of which, are commonly, ambition, spiritual pride, an uneasy and censorious temper. Where there is contention, there will, as the consequence, be much falsehood and slander. How needful, at all times, and in all places, the following counsel of the apostle Paul; *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-*

*speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* A minister of the Gospel, should do all, in his power, by prudence, conciliation and address, to keep his people united among themselves, and united in seeking and serving God. To this end he must bear much, and forbear long; be himself mild, benevolent, and condescending. It is no easy thing to keep a church and congregation in a state of happy peace and union even one year; how much pains then are required to keep them united for a long course of years, for half a century, when there are so many changes, moral, political, and literary; so many interfering interests, so many revolutions taking place, and so many selfish passions, which seek to be gratified, at the good of others.

It is still necessary to observe, for a minister of Jesus Christ to commend his people to *God, and to the word of his grace*, is faithfully warning them against fashionable and dangerous errors, and departures from God and his Gospel. *And they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.* The depraved human heart loves error; and is ever ready to embrace false principles. Therefore we are directed by the WISE MAN to *buy the truth and sell it not.* The word of God is plain. It lays before us the truth in the clearest manner. The light which shines upon us is bright. The path to heaven is most direct. Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it. But alas! on the subject of religion and morals, many errors have obtained, in all ages, and in all parts of the Christian world. It cannot be concealed, that in our own country, so distinguished by Christian privileges, many false principles have been invented, and propagated. Freedom of enquiry, and the rights of conscience are enjoyed, in the United States of America, to a greater extent than in any other Christian country. No man is restrained by public authority or public opinion, from adopting and disseminating vile errors. The natural consequence will be that absurd and fatal errors will spring up, and prevail for a time, and many precious and immortal souls will by

them be destroyed. Heresies and immoralities are ruinous to the souls of men. They mutually engender each other. Corrupt principles, always lead to vicious practices. How careful was the Apostle to warn the churches, planted and watered by him, against all dangerous errors, and designing perverters of the right way of the Lord! *For I know this, that after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch and remember by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears.* Proud minds, conceited and self-confident, destitute of religion, love to cause divisions, and to invent and spread error, and to draw away disciples after them. A minister cannot commend his people to *God and to the word of his grace* unless he be wise and diligent in warning them against errors, and apostacies, and backsliding.

It is, further, observed, for a minister to commend his people to *God, and to the word of his grace*, is to engage them, as far as he is able, to worship God stately in their houses and closets, and to abide in the love and doctrine of Christ. All, I conclude, who admit that there is a God, will not deny that he ought to be worshipped by his rational creatures. But alas! many families, in a gospel land, have no stated household worship. Even, in the most religious congregations, where there have been the most revivals of religion, still there may be found families, who did not share in the fruits of such revivals, who call not, morning and evening, on the name of God; the Bible is not daily read in the family, nor prayer offered to our Father in Heaven, our creator, preserver, and benefactor. There is no religion where he is forgotten, and not worshipped. The degree of religion among a people may be fairly ascertained by the number of praying families, and praying individuals. All heads of households are bound to maintain daily the worship of the one only living and true God. He is infinitely glorious: worthy of all our love and obedience, gratitude and homage. No family, and no person, therefore, should live forgetful of his being, and neglectful of

his worship. Nay, no one has any valid excuse for refusing, if in a family-state, in a family-capacity to adore and serve him, morning and evening. A faithful minister is anxious to have all the families and souls, under his pastoral charge, steady and constant in the worship of God. A neglect of this great duty is to be lamented in all, especially in any, who are professors of religion. How beautiful would be the sight, and how blessed the consequences, if all your dwellings had in them the fear and worship of Almighty God; and if each individual member of the parish would make conscience of attending all the means of grace. It is not only a duty, but a privilege to seek and serve God in a family-capacity. What blessings might come to you, and your children, as the fruit? What evils and vices might be prevented? Let your houses and closets, therefore, witness your addresses, each day, at the opening and close of it, at the throne of grace.

It is only subjoined, for a minister to commend his people to *God, and to the word of his grace*, is to press upon them the important duty of publicly owning Christ before men. None may refuse to do this, and to do it as they ought, in a right and acceptable manner. One as much as another is obliged to do this, and to do it from right motives, with a pious and holy heart. In order acceptably or in a right manner, to profess religion, you must become really pious. You must know, own, and receive the doctrines of grace, and experience the power and reality of religion, and live accordingly. All hearers of the gospel should immediately prepare themselves to seek God, and to devote themselves to him. No one has a right to delay his return to him, and his repentance, a moment. You say, "that you are not prepared to make a profession of religion, or fit to come to special ordinances." But are you prepared to enter into eternity? Are you fit to die, and to appear before your judge? No one has any excuse to offer for not now complying with all his duty. All are required, and all are bound to attend, first of all, to their salvation. You should now love God, repent of sin, believe in a Redeemer, and practise all duty. And, among the great duties incumbent on all adult persons, in a gospel land, is to

prepare themselves to make a profession of the Christian religion. All should feel this to be their duty. No one has any licence to remain in his sins, and in a rejection of offered salvation another moment. *Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, to-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts—*says our Saviour himself, *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven.* You are now to accept of salvation ; you enjoy the gospel ; it is the word of God's grace ; it flows from his mere mercy ; he passed by the angels that sinned ; he revealed no gospel to them ; no grace is manifested to them ; no Saviour is provided for them. But sinners of mankind are pitied ; you are remembered amid perishing millions ; you have the word of life ; a free and glorious salvation is tendered to you ; the messages of grace are sent to you ; the calls of the gospel are sounding in your ears ; a Saviour's voice reaches you, while millions and millions of our race never heard his name. The gospel is the word of God's grace. You are to love, receive and profess it—to own and acknowledge its divine Author, to embrace his offers of peace, of pardon, and of salvation. To it you are commended, as well as to God. You are commended to him as your God, your help, your portion and your dependence—to his power to protect you ; to his wisdom to guide you ; to his goodness to preserve you ; to his love to keep you from evil, from errors and false principles, and in the right path—to his mercy to forgive you ; to his Holy Spirit to sanctify you ; to the word of his grace to bless you, and to *build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

This introduces the *second* thing proposed, which was to show how the gospel, or word of God's grace is able to form and prepare us for an *inheritance among the sanctified.* An *inheritance among the sanctified* is the happiness of heaven. And the happiness of heaven is fitly and beautifully termed *an inheritance*, as an inheritance is an estate or possession descended to one by heirship, is given and not earned—so the happiness of heaven is given to the saints, not earned by their own works. And, it is enjoyed only by the sanctified. *To*

*be sanctified* is to be set apart for God, and made inwardly holy. All, who are matured for the blessedness of heaven are sanctified by the word and spirit of God. None, except the sanctified, can be prepared for it in the temper of the heart. All others must, of course, and in the nature of the case, be excluded. Only the sanctified can have the heavenly inheritance, or are fitted to enjoy it.

The enquiry now before us is, how is the word of God's grace or divine revelation *able* to form and prepare his people for the inheritance of the sanctified, *which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all that are sanctified.*

And it is *first, able*, as it teaches them the only way to salvation. All who shall ever reach the blessedness of heaven must be taught of God, must know the truth, by both the teachings of his word and spirit. *For it is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.* All must be taught the essential doctrines, duties and ordinances of religion in order to be saved. The gospel or holy scriptures only teach us the right way of the Lord. They only give us the true knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ, which is eternal life. They are the great means of the conviction and conversion of sinners, and of the comfort and edification of saints. They only give us the right knowledge of the character of God, of the character of Christ, of our own character, of the law of God, of the doctrines to be believed, of the duties to be performed, of the nature of holiness, and the nature of sin and its desert. The teachings of the word, it is never to be forgotten, are only rendered effectual by the teachings of the Holy Ghost. *Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth. Born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.*

*Secondly*, the word of God's grace, is *able* to form and ripen his people for glory, as by its motives and offers, it is calculated to induce them to seek above all, the heavenly inheritance. The motives and offers of the gospel are the best adapted to work a saving impression on the mind, of any which

could be either devised or used. Its offers are most worthy of our attention. It offers us life, peace, pardon, and glory. It offers us the influences of the spirit necessary to lead us to God, and to all duty. Its motives, likewise, to press us, first of all, to secure our salvation, are the most powerful which could be set before the human mind. All that is solemn ; all that is serious ; all that is sacred ; all that is dear to us is laid before us to prevail with us to attend supremely to our salvation. In this way is the word of God's grace *able* to build up his people in holiness, and to give them an inheritance among all them who are sanctified.

It is added, further, *thirdly*, the word of God's grace is *able* to form his people for the celestial inheritance, as by its special ordinances, it provides for their comfort and peace. It strengthens and refreshes them as they travel on to the heavenly Canaan, to their final home. All divine institutions are designed, and admirably calculated to teach, to quicken, to support, to comfort, and to guide his people, amid all the trials of this world, to eternal life. Especially, the two standing ordinances in the church, to the end of the world, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. How precious are all the institutions of God's holy word ! And how diligently and faithfully should they all be attended upon by all, who live under the light of the gospel ! *Ye are my friends*, says our divinely benevolent Redeemer, *if ye do whatsoever I command you*.

It is only, again, *fourthly*, observed, the word of God's grace is *able* to build up his people in holiness, to eternal life, as it tends, by the influence of his Spirit, to prepare them, in the temper of the heart, and tenor of their conduct, for the final abodes of the righteous. The power of divine grace produces all holiness in the creature, and by the agency of the good Spirit of grace, sanctifies all who are saved, in such a manner as is congenial to their rational nature, and moral agency. It is by his powerful influence that any sinners are awakened, are convinced, and are regenerated ; and that saints are comforted and edified, and are made meet for an inheritance in heaven. And, this influence is imparted, in an attendance on the gospel or word of God's grace ; and only, where that is known and

enjoyed.—*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness : but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

Thus you see, in what respects the word of God's grace is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

In reflecting on the subject, to which I have called your attention on this occasion, we see how much cause we have to admire the kindness of God, in giving us the word of his grace. It is our only infallible guide to him, and to eternal life. Without it we must for ever perish in our sins. The greatest mercy of God to our world is the gift of his Son to redeem it, of his word to teach us, and of his Spirit to renew us. How few of our race are thus favoured with revealed light, the word of God's grace ! The population of the globe is computed to be eight hundred millions. Six hundred millions of these, are now destitute of the word of God's grace, and the means of salvation. But we have the invaluable blessing. How ought we to admire and extol the distinguishing kindness of God to us. *O sing unto the Lord a new song ; sing unto the Lord all the earth. Sing unto the Lord ; bless his name : shew forth his salvation from day to day. He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation ; and as for his judgments they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.*

We may, again, from what hath been said, infer that we should no less admire the word of God's grace itself, than his goodness in giving it to us. It offers us all we want in order to make us happy. It is a full and perfect rule, both of faith and morals. It is the primary rule. It lays before us all we need to know and do, in order to be saved. In its very structure it gives glory to God, and opens a door of salvation for guilty, dying man. It contains a perfect remedy for all the moral disorders of the soul, and reveals a salvation exactly



adapted to our necessities, and contains a religion suited to all the exigencies of human nature. As we are ignorant, it teaches; as we are depraved, it sanctifies; as we are guilty, it pardons; as we are diseased, it heals; as we are afflicted, it consoles; as we are dying, it opens a door of life eternal. How should we, then, admire the word of God's grace, as well as his kindness in giving it. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey comb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping them there is great reward.*

Let me, *thirdly*, from what hath been offered, press all the audience to seek, above all, *an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*. Whatever you neglect, my dear people, see that you neglect not your salvation. Your salvation is to you all, the one thing needful. Whatever you refuse to seek, refuse not to seek an inheritance among them that are sanctified. The end of the gospel, the end of the means of grace, the end of all your religious advantages and privileges; the end of all divine providences towards you, whether mercies or afflictions, is to bring you to seek, supremely, this inheritance. Oh! hear while you may. No longer make light of Christ and salvation. I have often—and often attempted to prevail with you, in a long course of gospel ministrations, to seek above all an inheritance among the sanctified. If you have never begun the work of your salvation, begin it, I beseech you, this day. And, on this occasion, let the walls of this house witness the resolution formed in your souls, that you will no longer neglect a work so important, a work so indispensable—a work, if left undone, will be followed with final and endless misery. And, as an argument to prevail with you to commence an immediate attention to the things of your salvation, I proceed to lay before you, your own history as a

church and people for fifty years, the term of my ministry among you, and, also, of the church from its first formation.

The Church of West-Hartford was organized, and the ecclesiastical society established by the legislature, in the year 1713, February 24th, one hundred and nine years next February.

There have been two ministers of the gospel preceding myself, the Rev. BENJAMIN COLTON, whose ministry was forty-four years ; and the Rev. NATHANIEL HOOKER, whose ministry was only thirteen years. After his decease, the church and parish were vacant two years and an half, before my ordination to the pastoral office—in which term you had sixteen candidates on trial for settlement, each of whom, as was to be expected, would have some fast friends. In consequence of a measure of this nature, the church and society were miserably rent and divided. They were greatly divided, so much so, that neighbouring ministers, whom they consulted, advised them to dismiss all thoughts of settling any of the numerous candidates, whom they had already employed, and apply to one whom they had never seen, nor heard, as the most likely means to accomplish a union, if possibly a union might be accomplished. I had then just been licensed to preach the gospel, by the New-London Association of Ministers, and very lately come from the College of Nassau-Hall, New-Jersey, where I was educated, and where there had been a very great and remarkable revival of religion, in the last year of my collegiate life, 1770, in which I was brought to entertain a hope of salvation. I accepted the invitation to preach here, which I then received—and the people, in a kind providence, after their great division, were so well united, that it was deemed my duty, by the pastors of the churches in the vicinity with whom I consulted, to settle with them. But it was several years before individuals could *wholly* forget their past bitter contentions and divisions. On the 14th day of October, 1772, I was ordained to the work of the evangelical ministry, and installed pastor of this church and ecclesiastical society ; and here, through the goodness of God, have been continued till this day—a day, I trust, I shall not forget.

You have generally been a peaceable church and society from the beginning. It is, however, incumbent on me, if I would give a true account or history of the church, to mention one scene of contention for several years. I do it to shew the unhappy consequences of divisions and contentions in a church. During the Rev. Mr. Colton's ministry, the church and parish, as appears from authentic documents, had a most unhappy period, for four or five years, of very great and cruel divisions and contentions, which could not be healed and adjusted, but by calling in two whole consociations, that of Hartford County, and Litchfield County.

During the forty four years of the Rev. Mr. Colton's ministry, the additions to the church were two hundred and twenty seven. During that of Mr. Hooker's, thirteen years, and the interval from his death to my ordination, two years and six months, the additions were sixty nine. And since my pastoral relation to you, six hundred. The number of the baptisms since the first gathering of the church in 1713, February 24, is about two thousand ; and since my ordination, one thousand.

The number of deaths, since the first formation of the church and society, is fourteen hundred. And, since my ordination, eight hundred sixty six. I have endeavoured to keep an exact bill of mortality since the day of my ordination. I have put down not only all the deaths among us ; but the ages at which they die, and diseases with which they die. At much pains I have made the following computation. The number of deaths, since the 14th day of October, 1772, fifty years, is, as above stated, eight hundred sixty-six. Of this number, sixty-seven were between seventy and eighty years old ; thirty-nine between eighty and ninety ; eighteen between ninety and one hundred ; and two were above an hundred. The greatest proportion of deaths is from birth to ten years ; and the least from thirty to fifty. This information is important for you all to remember : and it is information which can only be gained by actually keeping such a bill of mortality as I have kept, and for a great length of time.

During my labours among you in the gospel, there have been six revivals of religion ; besides these, there have been,

in each year, often, instances of some convictions and hopeful conversions of sinners, and consequent additions to the church. By a revival of religion is meant, a season when the attention of a church and congregation is, in a special manner, called up to the concerns of their salvation, by the precious influences of the Holy Ghost, shed down upon them. The first season of a revival, in this church and congregation, of religion, was in 1787 : and there was never one before. As that season of special attention to the things of God's kingdom, began or took place previous to the numerous revivals in our state, and other sections of our country, no special religious meetings were held ; and little conversation was had respecting it. I visited the individuals who were enquiring what they should do to be saved ? and gave them counsel and instruction as their cases demanded. And, as the fruit, eighteen were added to the church.

The second was a very remarkable, and peculiar revival of vital godliness, in 1799 and 1800, extending all over the parish, and to most of the families. Religious meetings were held, besides meetings for the anxious, almost every day in the week. We could hardly in passing our streets, go by a house, where there were not one or more under deep conviction of sin, or hoping in a Saviour. The work continued a year and an half. One hundred and forty obtained a hope of forgiveness. The work was among all ages, old and young, male and female. On the first sabbath of 1801, I preached two sermons, giving an account of that wonderful work of divine grace, which were published, to which I refer you for a more particular account. The above noticed number united with the church, after much examination, and waiting some time to have opportunity to see if the work on their hearts had the marks of being genuine.

The third revival was in 1807, and was partial, extending only to one corner of the parish. In that season, it was computed twelve were gathered into a Saviour's kingdom, and, within a year, were added to the Lord.

The fourth was in 1809 and 1810, and was great and powerful, extending over all the parish. It was judged, that seven-ty obtained a hope of salvation, and experienced a saving

change of heart ; and, after sufficient time for self-examination, were admitted into the church.

The fifth revival of religion was in the latter part of the year 1815, and in the first part of the year 1816. This was not general, but small. It had all the marks of a genuine revival ; and twelve obtained a hope of salvation ; and were, in due time, united to the church, by a public profession.

The sixth revival of religion was in 1821, and about one hundred were brought hopefully to bow to the Saviour, and to accept of offered salvation. The past year, I need not inform my audience, was more distinguished by revivals of religion, than any ever before since Connecticut was first settled by our fathers. One hundred churches and congregations were visited with the showers of divine influence. We are about two hundred presbyterian churches and congregations in the State, in one hundred of which were precious revivals of religion the past year. We experienced the fulfilment of the promise in Isaiah xlv. 3.—*For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground : I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.* What a memorable year was the last, 1821, in the history of our churches, and annals of revivals of religion ! And, oh ! my hearers, you were not passed by, but you shared in these PRECIOUS REFRESHINGS from the presence of the Lord, which were like showers descending on grass newly mown. You will not soon forget how engaged the people were in the things of their salvation. How ready to attend religious meetings. Extra religious meetings were instituted in the year 1799, with us, and have been ever since maintained, and attended more or less frequently, as Providence seemed to point out as proper. In 1799 I also instituted a meeting, which I called an *anxious meeting*, designed only for such as were anxiously inquiring what they should do to be saved.— Besides these six revivals of religion among us, there have been, in almost every year, some instances of individual convictions and conversions, in the judgment of charity. Let all the glory be ascribed to God, whose mercy and grace have done great things for us. O ! that we might again see his

goings among us ! He hath the residue of the Spirit ; and to him must we look for its blessed effusions. The peace and union of this church and society for all the long period of my ministry, have been never interrupted, and uncommonly great,—greater than any other that I know of in our land.—Where can you name a church and society, as large and numerous as this, so perfectly united and orthodox, for such a great length of time as fifty years, and favoured with so many seasons of revivals of religion. In these seasons, my labours have been very arduous. I have preached at our extra meetings for religious worship, more than a thousand sermons extemporaneously. And, during all my ministry, I have composed and delivered three thousand five hundred and fifty. Our society has greatly shifted its inhabitants, but still harmony has been preserved. I have lived to see great revolutions in the world, in our own country, in commerce, in mediums of trade, in a depreciated currency, wherein my sufferings were great. I have seen peace and war ; and war and peace again. I have seen our country bleeding at every pore, and the prospect darker than midnight glooms. I have seen the mighty conflict which achieved our independence. I have seen a time of framing a national constitution of government ; when all wise men and able statesmen trembled. I have seen the church brought very low, and new lifted up. I have, alas ! seen the christian world all asleep, as to exertions to extend the glories of a Redeemer's name—no missionary society known ; no missionary's voice heard ; no bible society even dreamt of ; no tract society established ; no concert of prayer for Zion's prosperity. I have, with extacies of joy, seen the christian world awaking, arising, praying in concert, and by many pious designs and wise establishments, systematically marching on like a well disciplined army, to diffuse the gospel, and convert the pagan world to Christ. Eventful has been the day. A new era in the church has commenced, in revivals of religion, in missionary exertions, and in bible societies ; so that the age in which we live is the age of Bibles. God has already done wonders for Zion, let him have all the glory. Glory, glory, glory be to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the

Lamb for ever and ever. A man cannot live upwards of seventy years, and keep his eye on passing events, in nations, and in the world, and not see much. Permit me here to ask you, what changes have there been in your families, since I have resided among you, as your minister ! How many have emigrated from us, as many I presume, as are now residents on the soil ! How many have, also, come in to dwell with us ! I have visited almost all your houses, on occasions of sickness and death. I have condoled with you, under sore losses and trials. When I look round on the worshipping assemblies, on the Lord's day, my eye meets next to none, who assembled here to worship, when in youth, I was set over you in the gospel. You can better imagine my feelings, than I can describe them. In our fullest assemblies on the sabbath, do I see next to none, it may not be one, who helped to settle me. All, all are gone down to the dead. A new generation has come on the stage. In our sacramental sabbaths, I see not one communicant, who was a communicant when I was ordained. All are dead. Ah ! fugitive state of man ! Oh, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, pity, Oh ! pity dying man ! I speak to few, to whom I spoke from this sacred desk, when I was first introduced into the work of the ministry among you. My feelings on this occasion, cannot be uttered ; and I will not attempt to utter them. Changes upon changes rapidly take place in this changing world. One thing in a discourse on such an occasion, worthy to be noticed, and which ought deeply to affect the mind, is the different state of religion, in the rising generation, now, and when I first took the pastoral charge of this people upon me. There was not then, or for several years, one youth, hopefully pious, in all the congregation ; not one that had made a public profession of religion, or took a seat at the table of our Lord, to remember him, in his dying command ! Alas ! what a state of things ! Now, when I look round on the congregation, with pleasure, I see many, many youths, professors of the divine religion of JESUS, and on sacramental sabbaths, are found taking their seat at his table. To the best of my recollection, there was not one youth, in all the town, then, who was a member in full communion, in

either of the churches. Now, in the churches all around us, are many of the rising generation, professors of religion. This circumstance, so worthy of notice, presages good to Zion.

In the foregoing statement of the six revivals of religion among us, the whole number of admissions into the church was four hundred and fourteen, and the whole number since the year 1713, when the church was first formed, is nine hundred and forty ; nearly one half of all the admissions, was in these six revivals, occupying not more than nine years out of the hundred and nine. From this wonderful fact, you may, in some degree, learn how to appreciate revivals of vital godliness, though none can appreciate them high enough. How strange that any reflecting person, who knows any thing about a genuine revival of religion, should be an enemy to it. If the above account be just, the advantages for individuals to become pious, during a revival, are far, far superiour to what they are, in the ordinary times of the gospel. These are facts worthy to be remembered and known. But you may ask, are not the instances of apostacy and false conversions more numerous in revivals than at other times, in proportion to the numbers added to the church ? The true answer is, no ; they are not, as appears from the records of the church. How happy the people, therefore, who witness, and live in a revival of religion ! But how dreadful if hostile to it ; or if, as individuals, they remain unaffected, and continue impenitent ! These observations I wished to make : and it occurred to me, no opportunity could be more proper than in a half century sermon. Happy is that people, whom God visits by his grace and spirit ! When I shall have finished my course, and shall speak to you no more, may you be thus visited, as you have been under my ministry. I shall now conclude a discourse already extended, perhaps, to a length requiring apology, by requesting you to accept my thanks for your many kindnesses to me. *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified....Amen.*

24 JUL 18