

Acts

This book unites the Gospels to the Epistles. It contains many particulars concerning the apostles Peter and Paul, and of the Christian church from the ascension of our Saviour to the arrival of St. Paul at Rome, a space of about thirty years. St. Luke was the writer of this book; he was present at many of the events he relates, and attended Paul to Rome. But the narrative does not afford a complete history of the church during the time to which it refers, nor even of St. Paul's life. The object of the book has been considered to be, 1. To relate in what manner the gifts of the Holy Spirit were communicated on the day of Pentecost, and the miracles performed by the apostles, to confirm the truth of Christianity, as showing that Christ's declarations were really fulfilled. 2. To prove the claim of the Gentiles to be admitted into the church of Christ. This is shown by much of the contents of the book. A large portion of the Acts is occupied by the discourses or sermons of various persons, the language and manner of which differ, and all of which will be found according to the persons by whom they were delivered, and the occasions on which they were spoken. It seems that most of these discourses are only the substance of what was actually delivered. They relate nevertheless fully to Jesus as the Christ, the anointed Messiah.

Chapter 1

Chapter Outline

Proofs of Christ's resurrection.	(1-5)
Christ's ascension.	(6-11)
The apostles unite in prayer.	(12-14)
Matthias chosen in the place of Judas.	(15-26)

Verses 1-5

Our Lord told the disciples the work they were to do. The apostles met together at Jerusalem; Christ having ordered them not to depart thence, but to wait for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This would be a baptism by the Holy Ghost, giving them power to work miracles, and enlightening and sanctifying their souls. This confirms the Divine promise, and encourages us to depend upon it, that we have heard it from Christ; for in Him all the promises of God are yea and amen.

Verses 6-11

They were earnest in asking about that which their Master never had directed or encouraged them to seek. Our Lord knew that his ascension and the teaching of the Holy Spirit would soon end these expectations, and therefore only gave them a rebuke; but it is a caution to his church in all ages, to take heed of a desire of forbidden knowledge. He had given his disciples instructions for the discharge of their duty, both before his death and since his resurrection, and this knowledge is enough for a Christian. It is enough that He has engaged to give believers strength equal to their trials and services; that under the influence of the Holy Spirit they may, in one way or other, be witnesses for Christ on earth, while in heaven he manages their concerns with perfect wisdom, truth, and love. When we stand gazing and trifling, the thoughts of our Master's second coming should quicken and awaken us: when we stand gazing and trembling, they should comfort and encourage us. May our expectation of it be steadfast and joyful, giving diligence to be found of him blameless.

Verses 12-14

God can find hiding-places for his people. They made supplication. All God's people are praying people. It was now a time of trouble and danger with the disciples of Christ; but if any is afflicted, let him pray; that will silence cares and fears. They had now a great work to do, and before they entered upon it, they were earnest in prayer to God for his presence. They were waiting for the descent of the Spirit, and abounded in prayer. Those are in the best frame to receive spiritual blessings, who are in a praying frame. Christ had promised shortly to send the Holy Ghost; that promise was not to do away prayer, but to quicken and

encourage it. A little company united in love, exemplary in their conduct, fervent in prayer, and wisely zealous to promote the cause of Christ, are likely to increase rapidly.

Verses 15–26

The great thing the apostles were to attest to the world, was, Christ's resurrection; for that was the great proof of his being the Messiah, and the foundation of our hope in him. The apostles were ordained, not to wordly dignity and dominion, but to preach Christ, and the power of his resurrection. An appeal was made to God; “Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men,” which we do not; and better than they know their own. It is fit that God should choose his own servants; and so far as he, by the disposals of his providence, or the gifts of his Spirit, shows whom he was chosen, or what he has chosen for us, we ought to fall in with his will. Let us own his hand in the determining everything which befalls us, especially in those by which any trust may be committed to us.

Chapter 2

Chapter Outline

The descent of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost.	(1-4)
The apostles speak in divers languages.	(5-13)
Peter's address to the Jews.	(14-36)
Three thousand souls converted.	(37-41)
The piety and affection of the disciples.	(42-47)

Verses 1-4

We cannot forget how often, while their Master was with them there were strifes among the disciples which should be the greatest; but now all these strifes were at an end. They had prayed more together of late. Would we have the Spirit poured out upon us from on high, let us be all of one accord. And notwithstanding differences of sentiments and interests, as there were among those disciples, let us agree to love one another; for where brethren dwell together in unity, there the Lord commands his blessing. A rushing mighty wind came with great force. This was to signify the powerful influences and working of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, and thereby upon the world. Thus the convictions of the Spirit make way for his comforts; and the rough blasts of that blessed wind, prepare the soul for its soft and gentle gales. There was an appearance of something like flaming fire, lighting on every one of them, according to John Baptist's saying concerning Christ; He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. The Spirit, like fire, melts the heart, burns up the dross, and kindles pious and devout affections in the soul; in which, as in the fire on the altar, the spiritual sacrifices are offered up. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, more than before. They were filled with the graces of the Spirit, and more than ever under his sanctifying influences; more weaned from this world, and better acquainted with the other. They were more filled with the comforts of the Spirit, rejoiced more than ever in the love of Christ and the hope of heaven: in it all their griefs and fears were swallowed up. They were filled with the gifts of the Holy Ghost; they had miraculous powers for the furtherance of the gospel. They spake, not from previous thought or meditation, but as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Verses 5-13

The difference in languages which arose at Babel, has much hindered the spread of knowledge and religion. The instruments whom the Lord first employed in spreading the Christian religion, could have made no progress without this gift, which proved that their authority was from God.

Verses 14–21

Peter's sermon shows that he was thoroughly recovered from his fall, and thoroughly restored to the Divine favour; for he who had denied Christ, now boldly confessed him. His account of the miraculous pouring forth of the Spirit, was designed to awaken the hearers to embrace the faith of Christ, and to join themselves to his church. It was the fulfilling the Scripture, and the fruit of Christ's resurrection and ascension, and proof of both. Though Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake with tongues as the Spirit gave him utterance, yet he did not think to set aside the Scriptures. Christ's scholars never learn above their Bible; and the Spirit is given, not to do away the Scriptures, but to enable us to understand, approve, and obey them. Assuredly none will escape the condemnation of the great day, except those who call upon the name of the Lord, in and through his Son Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of sinners, and the Judge of all mankind.

Verses 22–36

From this gift of the Holy Ghost, Peter preaches unto them Jesus: and here is the history of Christ. Here is an account of his death and sufferings, which they witnessed but a few weeks before. His death is considered as God's act; and of wonderful grace and wisdom. Thus Divine justice must be satisfied, God and man brought together again, and Christ himself glorified, according to an eternal counsel, which could not be altered. And as the people's act; in them it was an act of awful sin and folly. Christ's resurrection did away the reproach of his death; Peter speaks largely upon this. Christ was God's Holy One, sanctified and set apart to his service in the work of redemption. His death and sufferings should be, not to him only, but to all his, the entrance to a blessed life for evermore. This event had taken place as foretold, and the apostles were witnesses. Nor did the resurrection rest upon this alone; Christ had poured upon his disciples the miraculous gifts and Divine influences, of which they witnessed the effects. Through the Saviour, the ways of life are made known; and we are encouraged to expect God's presence, and his favour for evermore. All this springs from assured belief that Jesus is the Lord, and the anointed Saviour.

Verses 37–41

From the first delivery of that Divine message, it appeared that there was Divine power going with it; and thousands were brought to the obedience of faith. But neither Peter's words, nor the miracle they witnessed, could have produced such effects, had not the Holy Spirit been given. Sinners, when their eyes are opened, cannot but be pricked to the heart for sin, cannot but feel an inward uneasiness. The apostle exhorted them to repent of their sins, and openly to avow their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, by being baptized in his name. Thus professing their faith in Him, they would receive remission of their sins, and partake of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. To separate from wicked people, is the only way to save ourselves from them. Those who repent of their sins, and give up themselves to Jesus

Christ, must prove their sincerity by breaking off from the wicked. We must save ourselves from them; which denotes avoiding them with dread and holy fear. By God's grace three thousand persons accepted the gospel invitation. There can be no doubt that the gift of the Holy Ghost, which they all received, and from which no true believer has ever been shut out, was that Spirit of adoption, that converting, guiding, sanctifying grace, which is bestowed upon all the members of the family of our heavenly Father. Repentance and remission of sins are still preached to the chief of sinners, in the Redeemer's name; still the Holy Spirit seals the blessing on the believer's heart; still the encouraging promises are to us and our children; and still the blessings are offered to all that are afar off.

Verses 42–47

In these verses we have the history of the truly primitive church, of the first days of it; its state of infancy indeed, but, like that, the state of its greatest innocence. They kept close to holy ordinances, and abounded in piety and devotion; for Christianity, when admitted in the power of it, will dispose the soul to communion with God in all those ways wherein he has appointed us to meet him, and has promised to meet us. The greatness of the event raised them above the world, and the Holy Ghost filled them with such love, as made every one to be to another as to himself, and so made all things common, not by destroying property, but doing away selfishness, and causing charity. And God who moved them to it, knew that they were quickly to be driven from their possessions in Judea. The Lord, from day to day, inclined the hearts of more to embrace the gospel; not merely professors, but such as were actually brought into a state of acceptance with God, being made partakers of regenerating grace. Those whom God has designed for eternal salvation, shall be effectually brought to Christ, till the earth is filled with the knowledge of his glory.

Chapter 3

Chapter Outline

A lame man healed by Peter and John. (1-11)

Peter's address to the Jews. (12-26)

Verses 1-11

The apostles and the first believers attended the temple worship at the hours of prayer. Peter and John seem to have been led by a Divine direction, to work a miracle on a man above forty years old, who had been a cripple from his birth. Peter, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, bade him rise up and walk. Thus, if we would attempt to good purpose the healing of men's souls, we must go forth in the name and power of Jesus Christ, calling on helpless sinners to arise and walk in the way of holiness, by faith in Him. How sweet the thought to our souls, that in respect to all the crippled faculties of our fallen nature, the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth can make us whole! With what holy joy and rapture shall we tread the holy courts, when God the Spirit causes us to enter therein by his strength!

Verses 12-18

Observe the difference in the manner of working the miracles. Our Lord always spoke as having Almighty power, never hesitated to receive the greatest honour that was given to him on account of his Divine miracles. But the apostles referred all to their Lord, and refused to receive any honour, except as his undeserving instruments. This shows that Jesus was one with the Father, and co-equal with Him; while the apostles knew that they were weak, sinful men, and dependent for every thing on Jesus, whose power effected the cure. Useful men must be very humble. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name, give glory. Every crown must be cast at the feet of Christ. The apostle showed the Jews the greatness of their crime, but would not anger or drive them to despair. Assuredly, those who reject, refuse, or deny Christ, do it through ignorance; but this can in no case be an excuse.

Verses 19-21

The absolute necessity of repentance is to be solemnly charged upon the consciences of all who desire that their sins may be blotted out, and that they may share in the refreshment which nothing but a sense of Christ's pardoning love can afford. Blessed are those who have felt this. It was not needful for the Holy Spirit to make known the times and seasons of these dispensations. These subjects are still left obscure. But when sinners are convinced of their sins, they will cry to the Lord for pardon; and to the penitent, converted, and believing, times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord. In a state of trial and probation, the glorified Redeemer will be out of sight, because we must live by faith in him.

Verses 22–26

Here is a powerful address to warn the Jews of the dreadful consequences of their unbelief, in the very words of Moses, their favourite prophet, out of pretended zeal for whom they were ready to reject Christianity, and to try to destroy it. Christ came into the world to bring a blessing with him. And he sent his Spirit to be the great blessing. Christ came to bless us, by turning us from our iniquities, and saving us from our sins. We, by nature cleave to sin; the design of Divine grace is to turn us from it, that we may not only forsake, but hate it. Let none think that they can be happy by continuing in sin, when God declares that the blessing is in being turned from all iniquity. Let none think that they understand or believe the gospel, who only seek deliverance from the punishment of sin, but do not expect happiness in being delivered from sin itself. And let none expect to be turned from their sin, except by believing in, and receiving Christ the Son of God, as their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Chapter 4

Chapter Outline

Peter and John imprisoned.	(1-4)
The apostles boldly testify to Christ.	(5-14)
Peter and John refuse to be silenced.	(15-22)
The believers unite in prayer and praise.	(23-31)
The holy charity of the Christians.	(32-37)

Verses 1-4

The apostles preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. It includes all the happiness of the future state; this they preached through Jesus Christ, to be had through him only. Miserable is their case, to whom the glory of Christ's kingdom is a grief; for since the glory of that kingdom is everlasting, their grief will be everlasting also. The harmless and useful servants of Christ, like the apostles, have often been troubled for their work of faith and labour of love, when wicked men have escaped. And to this day instances are not wanting, in which reading the Scriptures, social prayer, and religious conversation meet with frowns and checks. But if we obey the precepts of Christ, he will support us.

Verses 5-14

Peter being filled with the Holy Ghost, would have all to understand, that the miracle had been wrought by the name, or power, of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, whom they had crucified; and this confirmed their testimony to his resurrection from the dead, which proved him to be the Messiah. These rulers must either be saved by that Jesus whom they had crucified, or they must perish for ever. The name of Jesus is given to men of every age and nation, as that whereby alone believers are saved from the wrath to come. But when covetousness, pride, or any corrupt passion, rules within, men shut their eyes, and close their hearts, in enmity against the light; considering all as ignorant and unlearned, who desire to know nothing in comparison with Christ crucified. And the followers of Christ should act so that all who converse with them, may take knowledge that they have been with Jesus. That makes them holy, heavenly, spiritual, and cheerful, and raises them above this world.

Verses 15-22

All the care of the rulers is, that the doctrine of Christ spread not among the people, yet they cannot say it is false or dangerous, or of any ill tendency; and they are ashamed to own the true reason; that it testifies against their hypocrisy, wickedness, and tyranny. Those who know how to put a just value upon Christ's promises, know how to put just contempt upon the world's threatenings. The apostles look with concern on perishing souls, and know they

cannot escape eternal ruin but by Jesus Christ, therefore they are faithful in warning, and showing the right way. None will enjoy peace of mind, nor act uprightly, till they have learned to guide their conduct by the fixed standard of truth, and not by the shifting opinions and fancies of men. Especially beware of a vain attempt to serve two masters, God and the world; the end will be, you can serve neither fully.

Verses 23–31

Christ's followers do best in company, provided it is their own company. It encourages God's servants, both in doing work, and suffering work, that they serve the God who made all things, and therefore has the disposal of all events; and the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Jesus was anointed to be a Saviour, therefore it was determined he should be a sacrifice, to make atonement for sin. But sin is not the less evil for God's bringing good out of it. In threatening times, our care should not be so much that troubles may be prevented, as that we may go on with cheerfulness and courage in our work and duty. They do not pray, Lord let us go away from our work, now that it is become dangerous, but, Lord, give us thy grace to go on stedfastly in our work, and not to fear the face of man. Those who desire Divine aid and encouragement, may depend upon having them, and they ought to go forth, and go on, in the strength of the Lord God. God gave a sign of acceptance of their prayers. The place was shaken, that their faith might be established and unshaken. God gave them greater degrees of his Spirit; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, more than ever; by which they were not only encouraged, but enabled to speak the word of God with boldness. When they find the Lord God help them by his Spirit, they know they shall not be confounded, [Isa 17](#).

Verses 32–37

The disciples loved one another. This was the blessed fruit of Christ's dying precept to his disciples, and his dying prayer for them. Thus it was then, and it will be so again, when the Spirit shall be poured upon us from on high. The doctrine preached was the resurrection of Christ; a matter of fact, which being duly explained, was a summary of all the duties, privileges, and comforts of Christians. There were evident fruits of Christ's grace in all they said and did. They were dead to this world. This was a great evidence of the grace of God in them. They did not take away others' property, but they were indifferent to it. They did not call it their own; because they had, in affection, forsaken all for Christ, and were expecting to be stripped of all for cleaving to him. No marvel that they were of one heart and soul, when they sat so loose to the wealth of this world. In effect, they had all things common; for there was not any among them who lacked, care was taken for their supply. The money was laid at the apostles' feet. Great care ought to be taken in the distribution of public charity, that it be given to such as have need, such as are not able to procure a maintenance for themselves; those who are reduced to want for well-doing, and for the testimony of a

good conscience, ought to be provided for. Here is one in particular mentioned, remarkable for this generous charity; it was Barnabas. As one designed to be a preacher of the gospel, he disentangled himself from the affairs of this life. When such dispositions prevail, and are exercised according to the circumstances of the times, the testimony will have very great power upon others.

Chapter 5

Chapter Outline

The death of Ananias and Sapphira.	(1–11)
The power which accompanied the preaching of the gospel.	(12–16)
The apostles imprisoned, but set free by an angel.	(17–25)
The apostles testify to Christ before the council.	(26–33)
The advice of Gamaliel, The council let the apostles go.	(34–42)

Verses 1–11

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was, that they were ambitious of being thought eminent disciples, when they were not true disciples. Hypocrites may deny themselves, may forego their worldly advantage in one instance, with a prospect of finding their account in something else. They were covetous of the wealth of the world, and distrustful of God and his providence. They thought they might serve both God and mammon. They thought to deceive the apostles. The Spirit of God in Peter discerned the principle of unbelief reigning in the heart of Ananias. But whatever Satan might suggest, he could not have filled the heart of Ananias with this wickedness had he not been consenting. The falsehood was an attempt to deceive the Spirit of truth, who so manifestly spoke and acted by the apostles. The crime of Ananias was not his retaining part of the price of the land; he might have kept it all, had he pleased; but his endeavouring to impose upon the apostles with an awful lie, from a desire to make a vain show, joined with covetousness. But if we think to put a cheat upon God, we shall put a fatal cheat upon our own souls. How sad to see those relations who should quicken one another to that which is good, hardening one another in that which is evil! And this punishment was in reality mercy to vast numbers. It would cause strict self-examination, prayer, and dread of hypocrisy, covetousness, and vain-glory, and it should still do so. It would prevent the increase of false professors. Let us learn hence how hateful falsehood is to the God of truth, and not only shun a direct lie, but all advantages from the use of doubtful expressions, and double meaning in our speech.

Verses 12–16

The separation of hypocrites by distinguishing judgments, should make the sincere cleave closer to each other and to the gospel ministry. Whatever tends to the purity and

reputation of the church, promotes its enlargement; but that power alone which wrought such miracles by the apostles, can rescue sinners from the power of sin and Satan, and add believers to His worshippers. Christ will work by all his faithful servants; and every one who applies to him shall be healed.

Verses 17–25

There is no prison so dark, so strong, but God can visit his people in it, and, if he pleases, fetch them out. Recoveries from sickness, releases out of trouble, are granted, not that we may enjoy the comforts of life, but that God may be honoured with the services of our life. It is not for the preachers of Christ's gospel to retire into corners, as long as they can have any opportunity of preaching in the great congregation. They must preach to the lowest, whose souls are as precious to Christ as the souls of the greatest. Speak to all, for all are concerned. Speak as those who resolve to stand to it, to live and die by it. Speak all the words of this heavenly, divine life, in comparison with which the present earthly life does not deserve the name. These words of life, which the Holy Ghost puts into your mouth. The words of the gospel are the words of life; words whereby we may be saved. How wretched are those who are vexed at the success of the gospel! They cannot but see that the word and power of the Lord are against them; and they tremble for the consequences, yet they will go on.

Verses 26–33

Many will do an evil thing with daring, yet cannot bear to hear of it afterward, or to have it charged upon them. We cannot expect to be redeemed and healed by Christ, unless we give up ourselves to be ruled by him. Faith takes the Saviour in all his offices, who came, not to save us in our sins, but to save us from our sins. Had Christ been exalted to give dominion to Israel, the chief priests would have welcomed him. But repentance and remission of sins are blessings they neither valued nor saw their need of; therefore they, by no means, admitted his doctrine. Wherever repentance is wrought, remission is granted without fail. None are freed from the guilt and punishment of sin, but those who are freed from the power and dominion of sin; who are turned from it, and turned against it. Christ gives repentance, by his Spirit working with the word, to awaken the conscience, to work sorrow for sin, and an effectual change in the heart and life. The giving of the Holy Ghost, is plain evidence that it is the will of God that Christ should be obeyed. And He will surely destroy those who will not have Him to reign over them.

Verses 34–42

The Lord still has all hearts in his hands, and sometimes directs the prudence of the worldly wise, so as to restrain the persecutors. Common sense tells us to be cautious, while experience and observation show that the success of frauds in matters of religion has been very short. Reproach for Christ is true preferment, as it makes us conformable to his pattern,

and serviceable to his interest. They rejoiced in it. If we suffer ill for doing well, provided we suffer it well, and as we should, we ought to rejoice in that grace which enabled us so to do. The apostles did not preach themselves, but Christ. This was the preaching that most offended the priests. But it ought to be the constant business of gospel ministers to preach Christ: Christ, and him crucified; Christ, and him glorified; nothing beside this, but what has reference to it. And whatever is our station or rank in life, we should seek to make Him known, and to glorify his name.

Chapter 6

Chapter Outline

- The appointment of deacons. (1-7)
Stephen falsely accused of blasphemy. (8-15)

Verses 1-7

Hitherto the disciples had been of one accord; this often had been noticed to their honour; but now they were multiplied, they began to murmur. The word of God was enough to take up all the thoughts, cares, and time of the apostles. The persons chosen to serve tables must be duly qualified. They must be filled with gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, necessary to rightly managing this trust; men of truth, and hating covetousness. All who are employed in the service of the church, ought to be commended to the Divine grace by the prayers of the church. They blessed them in the name of the Lord. The word and grace of God are greatly magnified, when those are wrought upon by it, who were least likely.

Verses 8-15

When they could not answer Stephen's arguments as a disputant, they prosecuted him as a criminal, and brought false witnesses against him. And it is next to a miracle of providence, that no greater number of religious persons have been murdered in the world, by the way of perjury and pretence of law, when so many thousands hate them, who make no conscience of false oaths. Wisdom and holiness make a man's face to shine, yet will not secure men from being treated badly. What shall we say of man, a rational being, yet attempting to uphold a religious system by false witness and murder! And this has been done in numberless instances. But the blame rests not so much upon the understanding, as upon the heart of a fallen creature, which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Yet the servant of the Lord, possessing a clear conscience, cheerful hope, and Divine consolations, may smile in the midst of danger and death.

Chapter 7

Chapter Outline

Stephen's defence.	(1–50)
Stephen reproves the Jews for the death of Christ.	(51–53)
The martyrdom of Stephen.	(54–60)

Verses 1–16

Stephen was charged as a blasphemer of God, and an apostate from the church; therefore he shows that he is a son of Abraham, and values himself on it. The slow steps by which the promise made to Abraham advanced toward performance, plainly show that it had a spiritual meaning, and that the land intended was the heavenly. God owned Joseph in his troubles, and was with him by the power of his Spirit, both on his own mind by giving him comfort, and on those he was concerned with, by giving him favour in their eyes. Stephen reminds the Jews of their mean beginning as a check to priding themselves in the glories of that nation. Likewise of the wickedness of the patriarchs of their tribes, in envying their brother Joseph; and the same spirit was still working in them toward Christ and his ministers. The faith of the patriarchs, in desiring to be buried in the land of Canaan, plainly showed they had regard to the heavenly country. It is well to recur to the first rise of usages, or sentiments, which have been perverted. Would we know the nature and effects of justifying faith, we should study the character of the father of the faithful. His calling shows the power and freeness of Divine grace, and the nature of conversion. Here also we see that outward forms and distinctions are as nothing, compared with separation from the world, and devotedness to God.

Verses 17–29

Let us not be discouraged at the slowness of the fulfilling of God's promises. Suffering times often are growing times with the church. God is preparing for his people's deliverance, when their day is darkest, and their distress deepest. Moses was exceeding fair, "fair toward God;" it is the beauty of holiness which is in God's sight of great price. He was wonderfully preserved in his infancy; for God will take special care of those of whom he designs to make special use. And did he thus protect the child Moses? Much more will he secure the interests of his holy child Jesus, from the enemies who are gathered together against him. They persecuted Stephen for disputing in defence of Christ and his gospel: in opposition to these they set up Moses and his law. They may understand, if they do not wilfully shut their eyes against the light, that God will, by this Jesus, deliver them out of a worse slavery than that

of Egypt. Although men prolong their own miseries, yet the Lord will take care of his servants, and effect his own designs of mercy.

Verses 30–41

Men deceive themselves, if they think God cannot do what he sees to be good any where; he can bring his people into a wilderness, and there speak comfortably to them. He appeared to Moses in a flame of fire, yet the bush was not consumed; which represented the state of Israel in Egypt, where, though they were in the fire of affliction, yet they were not consumed. It may also be looked upon as a type of Christ's taking upon him the nature of man, and the union between the Divine and human nature. The death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, cannot break the covenant relation between God and them. Our Saviour by this proves the future state, [Mt 22:31](#). Abraham is dead, yet God is still his God, therefore Abraham is still alive. Now, this is that life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel. Stephen here shows that Moses was an eminent type of Christ, as he was Israel's deliverer. God has compassion for the troubles of his church, and the groans of his persecuted people; and their deliverance takes rise from his pity. And that deliverance was typical of what Christ did, when, for us men, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. This Jesus, whom they now refused, as their fathers did Moses, even this same has God advanced to be a Prince and Saviour. It does not at all take from the just honour of Moses to say, that he was but an instrument, and that he is infinitely outshone by Jesus. In asserting that Jesus should change the customs of the ceremonial law. Stephen was so far from blaspheming Moses, that really he honoured him, by showing how the prophecy of Moses was come to pass, which was so clear. God who gave them those customs by his servant Moses, might, no doubt, change the custom by his Son Jesus. But Israel thrust Moses from them, and would have returned to their bondage; so men in general will not obey Jesus, because they love this present evil world, and rejoice in their own works and devices.

Verses 42–50

Stephen upbraids the Jews with the idolatry of their fathers, to which God gave them up as a punishment for their early forsaking him. It was no dishonour, but an honour to God, that the tabernacle gave way to the temple; so it is now, that the earthly temple gives way to the spiritual one; and so it will be when, at last, the spiritual shall give way to the eternal one. The whole world is God's temple, in which he is every where present, and fills it with his glory; what occasion has he then for a temple to manifest himself in? And these things show his eternal power and Godhead. But as heaven is his throne, and the earth his footstool, so none of our services can profit Him who made all things. Next to the human nature of Christ, the broken and spiritual heart is his most valued temple.

Verses 51–53

Stephen was going on, it seems, to show that the temple and the temple service must come to an end, and it would be the glory of both to give way to the worship of the Father in spirit and in truth; but he perceived they would not bear it. Therefore he broke off, and by the Spirit of wisdom, courage, and power, sharply rebuked his persecutors. When plain arguments and truths provoke the opposers of the gospel, they should be shown their guilt and danger. They, like their fathers, were stubborn and wilful. There is that in our sinful hearts, which always resists the Holy Ghost, a flesh that lusts against the Spirit, and wars against his motions; but in the hearts of God's elect, when the fulness of time comes, this resistance is overcome. The gospel was offered now, not by angels, but from the Holy Ghost; yet they did not embrace it, for they were resolved not to comply with God, either in his law or in his gospel. Their guilt stung them to the heart, and they sought relief in murdering their reprover, instead of sorrow and supplication for mercy.

Verses 54–60

Nothing is so comfortable to dying saints, or so encouraging to suffering saints, as to see Jesus at the right hand of God: blessed be God, by faith we may see him there. Stephen offered up two short prayers in his dying moments. Our Lord Jesus is God, to whom we are to seek, and in whom we are to trust and comfort ourselves, living and dying. And if this has been our care while we live, it will be our comfort when we die. Here is a prayer for his persecutors. Though the sin was very great, yet if they would lay it to their hearts, God would not lay it to their charge. Stephen died as much in a hurry as ever any man did, yet, when he died, the words used are, he fell asleep; he applied himself to his dying work with as much composure as if he had been going to sleep. He shall awake again in the morning of the resurrection, to be received into the presence of the Lord, where is fulness of joy, and to share the pleasures that are at his right hand, for evermore.

Chapter 8

Chapter Outline

Saul persecutes the church.	(1-4)
Philip's success at Samaria. Simon the sorcerer baptized.	(5-13)
The hypocrisy of Simon detected.	(14-25)
Philip and the Ethiopian.	(26-40)

Verses 1-4

Though persecution must not drive us from our work, yet it may send us to work elsewhere. Wherever the established believer is driven, he carries the knowledge of the gospel, and makes known the preciousness of Christ in every place. Where a simple desire of doing good influences the heart, it will be found impossible to shut a man out from all opportunities of usefulness.

Verses 5-13

As far as the gospel prevails, evil spirits are dislodged, particularly unclean spirits. All inclinations to the lusts of the flesh which war against the soul are such. Distempers are here named, the most difficult to be cured by the course of nature, and most expressive of the disease of sin. Pride, ambition, and desire after grandeur have always caused abundance of mischief, both to the world and to the church. The people said of Simon, This man is the great power of God. See how ignorant and thoughtless people mistake. But how strong is the power of Divine grace, by which they were brought to Christ, who is Truth itself! The people not only gave heed to what Philip said, but were fully convinced that it was of God, and not of men, and gave up themselves to be directed thereby. Even bad men, and those whose hearts still go after covetousness, may come before God as his people come, and for a time continue with them. And many wonder at the proofs of Divine truths, who never experience their power. The gospel preached may have a common operation upon a soul, where it never produced inward holiness. All are not savingly converted who profess to believe the gospel.

Verses 14-25

The Holy Ghost was as yet fallen upon none of these coverters, in the extraordinary powers conveyed by the descent of the Spirit upon the day of Pentecost. We may take encouragement from this example, in praying to God to give the renewing graces of the Holy Ghost to all for whose spiritual welfare we are concerned; for that includes all blessings. No man can give the Holy Spirit by the laying on of his hands; but we should use our best endeavours

to instruct those for whom we pray. Simon Magus was ambitious to have the honour of an apostle, but cared not at all to have the spirit and disposition of a Christian. He was more desirous to gain honour to himself, than to do good to others. Peter shows him his crime. He esteemed the wealth of this world, as if it would answer for things relating to the other life, and would purchase the pardon of sin, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and eternal life. This was such a condemning error as could by no means consist with a state of grace. Our hearts are what they are in the sight of God, who cannot be deceived. And if they are not right in his sight, our religion is vain, and will stand us in no stead. A proud and covetous heart cannot be right with God. It is possible for a man to continue under the power of sin, yet to put on a form of godliness. When tempted with money to do evil, see what a perishing thing money is, and scorn it. Think not that Christianity is a trade to live by in this world. There is much wickedness in the thought of the heart, its false notions, and corrupt affections, and wicked projects, which must be repented of, or we are undone. But it shall be forgiven, upon our repentance. The doubt here is of the sincerity of Simon's repentance, not of his pardon, if his repentance was sincere. Grant us, Lord, another sort of faith than that which made Simon wonder only, and did not sanctify his heart. May we abhor all thoughts of making religion serve the purposes of pride or ambition. And keep us from that subtle poison of spiritual pride, which seeks glory to itself even from humility. May we seek only the honour which cometh from God.

Verses 26–40

Philip was directed to go to a desert. Sometimes God opens a door of opportunity to his ministers in very unlikely places. We should study to do good to those we come into company with by travelling. We should not be so shy of all strangers as some affect to be. As to those of whom we know nothing else, we know this, that they have souls. It is wisdom for men of business to redeem time for holy duties; to fill up every minute with something which will turn to a good account. In reading the word of God, we should often pause, to inquire of whom and of what the sacred writers spake; but especially our thoughts should be employed about the Redeemer. The Ethiopian was convinced by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, of the exact fulfilment of the Scripture, was made to understand the nature of the Messiah's kingdom and salvation, and desired to be numbered among the disciples of Christ. Those who seek the truth, and employ their time in searching the Scriptures, will be sure to reap advantages. The avowal of the Ethiopian must be understood as expressing simple reliance on Christ for salvation, and unreserved devotion to Him. Let us not be satisfied till we get faith, as the Ethiopian did, by diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, and the teaching of the Spirit of God; let us not be satisfied till we get it fixed as a principle in our hearts. As soon as he was baptized, the Spirit of God took Philip from him, so that he saw him no more; but this tended to confirm his faith. When the inquirer after salvation becomes acquainted with Jesus and his gospel, he will go on his way rejoicing, and will fill up his station

in society, and discharge his duties, from other motives, and in another manner than heretofore. Though baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, with water, it is not enough without the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Lord, grant this to every one of us; then shall we go on our way rejoicing.

Chapter 9

Chapter Outline

The conversion of Saul.	(1–9)
Saul converted preaches Christ.	(10–22)
Saul is persecuted at Damascus, and goes to Jerusalem.	(23–31)
Cure of Eneas.	(32–35)
Dorcas raised to life.	(36–43)

Verses 1–9

So ill informed was Saul, that he thought he ought to do all he could against the name of Christ, and that he did God service thereby; he seemed to breathe in this as in his element. Let us not despair of renewing grace for the conversion of the greatest sinners, nor let such despair of the pardoning mercy of God for the greatest sin. It is a signal token of Divine favour, if God, by the inward working of his grace, or the outward events of his providence, stops us from prosecuting or executing sinful purposes. Saul saw that Just One, ch. [22:14](#); [26:13](#). How near to us is the unseen world! It is but for God to draw aside the veil, and objects are presented to the view, compared with which, whatever is most admired on earth is mean and contemptible. Saul submitted without reserve, desirous to know what the Lord Jesus would have him to do. Christ's discoveries of himself to poor souls are humbling; they lay them very low, in mean thoughts of themselves. For three days Saul took no food, and it pleased God to leave him for that time without relief. His sins were now set in order before him; he was in the dark concerning his own spiritual state, and wounded in spirit for sin. When a sinner is brought to a proper sense of his own state and conduct, he will cast himself wholly on the mercy of the Saviour, asking what he would have him to do. God will direct the humbled sinner, and though he does not often bring transgressors to joy and peace in believing, without sorrows and distress of conscience, under which the soul is deeply engaged as to eternal things, yet happy are those who sow in tears, for they shall reap in joy.

Verses 10–22

A good work was begun in Saul, when he was brought to Christ's feet with those words, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And never did Christ leave any who were brought to that. Behold, the proud Pharisee, the unmerciful oppressor, the daring blasphemer, prayeth! And thus it is even now, and with the proud infidel, or the abandoned sinner. What happy tidings are these to all who understand the nature and power of prayer, of such prayer as the humbled sinner presents for the blessings of free salvation! Now he began to pray after

another manner than he had done; before, he said his prayers, now, he prayed them. Regenerating grace sets people on praying; you may as well find a living man without breath, as a living Christian without prayer. Yet even eminent disciples, like Ananias, sometimes stagger at the commands of the Lord. But it is the Lord's glory to surpass our scanty expectations, and show that those are vessels of his mercy whom we are apt to consider as objects of his vengeance. The teaching of the Holy Spirit takes away the scales of ignorance and pride from the understanding; then the sinner becomes a new creature, and endeavours to recommend the anointed Saviour, the Son of God, to his former companions.

Verses 23–31

When we enter into the way of God, we must look for trials; but the Lord knows how to deliver the godly, and will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape. Though Saul's conversion was and is a proof of the truth of Christianity, yet it could not, of itself, convert one soul at enmity with the truth; for nothing can produce true faith, but that power which new-creates the heart. Believers are apt to be too suspicious of those against whom they have prejudices. The world is full of deceit, and it is necessary to be cautious, but we must exercise charity, [1Co 13:5](#). The Lord will clear up the characters of true believers; and he will bring them to his people, and often gives them opportunities of bearing testimony to his truth, before those who once witnessed their hatred to it. Christ now appeared to Saul, and ordered him to go quickly out of Jerusalem, for he must be sent to the Gentiles: see [ch. 22:21](#). Christ's witnesses cannot be slain till they have finished their testimony. The persecutions were stayed. The professors of the gospel walked uprightly, and enjoyed much comfort from the Holy Ghost, in the hope and peace of the gospel, and others were won over to them. They lived upon the comfort of the Holy Ghost, not only in the days of trouble and affliction, but in days of rest and prosperity. Those are most likely to walk cheerfully, who walk circumspectly.

Verses 32–35

Christians are saints, or holy people; not only the eminent ones, as Saint Peter and Saint Paul, but every sincere professor of the faith of Christ. Christ chose patients whose diseases were incurable in the course of nature, to show how desperate was the case of fallen mankind. When we were wholly without strength, as this poor man, he sent his word to heal us. Peter does not pretend to heal by any power of his own, but directs Eneas to look up to Christ for help. Let none say, that because it is Christ, who, by the power of his grace, works all our works in us, therefore we have no work, no duty to do; for though Jesus Christ makes thee whole, yet thou must arise, and use the power he gives thee.

Verses 36–43

Many are full of good words, who are empty and barren in good works; but Tabitha was a great doer, no great talker. Christians who have not property to give in charity, may yet be able to do acts of charity, working with their hands, or walking with their feet, for the good of others. Those are certainly best praised whose own works praise them, whether the words of others do so or not. But such are ungrateful indeed, who have kindness shown them, and will not acknowledge it, by showing the kindness that is done them. While we live upon the fulness of Christ for our whole salvation, we should desire to be full of good works, for the honour of his name, and for the benefit of his saints. Such characters as Dorcas are useful where they dwell, as showing the excellency of the word of truth by their lives. How mean then the cares of the numerous females who seek no distinction but outward decoration, and who waste their lives in the trifling pursuits of dress and vanity! Power went along with the word, and Dorcas came to life. Thus in the raising of dead souls to spiritual life, the first sign of life is the opening of the eyes of the mind. Here we see that the Lord can make up every loss; that he overrules every event for the good of those who trust in him, and for the glory of his name.

Chapter 10

Chapter Outline

Cornelius directed to send for Peter.	(1–8)
Peter's vision.	(9–18)
He goes to Cornelius.	(19–33)
His discourse to Cornelius.	(34–43)
The gifts of the Holy Spirit poured out.	(44–48)

Verses 1–8

Hitherto none had been baptized into the Christian church but Jews, Samaritans, and those converts who had been circumcised and observed the ceremonial law; but now the Gentiles were to be called to partake all the privileges of God's people, without first becoming Jews. Pure and undefiled religion is sometimes found where we least expect it. Wherever the fear of God rules in the heart, it will appear both in works of charity and of piety, neither will excuse from the other. Doubtless Cornelius had true faith in God's word, as far as he understood it, though not as yet clear faith in Christ. This was the work of the Spirit of God, through the mediation of Jesus, even before Cornelius knew him, as is the case with us all when we, who before were dead in sin, are made alive. Through Christ also his prayers and alms were accepted, which otherwise would have been rejected. Without dispute or delay Cornelius was obedient to the heavenly vision. In the affairs of our souls, let us not lose time.

Verses 9–18

The prejudices of Peter against the Gentiles, would have prevented his going to Cornelius, unless the Lord had prepared him for this service. To tell a Jew that God had directed those animals to be reckoned clean which were hitherto deemed unclean, was in effect saying, that the law of Moses was done away. Peter was soon made to know the meaning of it. God knows what services are before us, and how to prepare us; and we know the meaning of what he has taught us, when we find what occasion we have to make use of it.

Verses 19–33

When we see our call clear to any service, we should not be perplexed with doubts and scruples arising from prejudices or former ideas. Cornelius had called together his friends, to partake with him of the heavenly wisdom he expected from Peter. We should not covet to eat our spiritual morsels alone. It ought to be both given and taken as kindness and respect to our kindred and friends, to invite them to join us in religious exercises. Cornelius declared the direction God gave him to send for Peter. We are right in our aims in attending a gospel

ministry, when we do it with regard to the Divine appointment requiring us to make use of that ordinance. How seldom ministers are called to speak to such companies, however small, in which it may be said that they are all present in the sight of God, to hear all things that are commanded of God! But these were ready to hear what Peter was commanded of God to say.

Verses 34–43

Acceptance cannot be obtained on any other ground than that of the covenant of mercy, through the atonement of Christ; but wherever true religion is found, God will accept it without regarding names or sects. The fear of God and works of righteousness are the substance of true religion, the effects of special grace. Though these are not the cause of a man's acceptance, yet they show it; and whatever may be wanting in knowledge or faith, will in due time be given by Him who has begun it. They knew in general the word, that is, the gospel, which God sent to the children of Israel. The purport of this word was, that God by it published the good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ. They knew the several matters of fact relating to the gospel. They knew the baptism of repentance which John preached. Let them know that this Jesus Christ, by whom peace is made between God and man, is Lord of all; not only as over all, God blessed for evermore, but as Mediator. All power, both in heaven and in earth, is put into his hand, and all judgment committed to him. God will go with those whom he anoints; he will be with those to whom he has given his Spirit. Peter then declares Christ's resurrection from the dead, and the proofs of it. Faith has reference to a testimony, and the Christian faith is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, on the testimony given by them. See what must be believed concerning him. That we are all accountable to Christ as our Judge; so every one must seek his favour, and to have him as our Friend. And if we believe in him, we shall all be justified by him as our Righteousness. The remission of sins lays a foundation for all other favours and blessings, by taking that out of the way which hinders the bestowing of them. If sin be pardoned, all is well, and shall end well for ever.

Verses 44–48

The Holy Ghost fell upon others after they were baptized, to confirm them in the faith; but upon these Gentiles before they were baptized, to show that God does not confine himself to outward signs. The Holy Ghost fell upon those who were neither circumcised nor baptized; it is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. They magnified God, and spake of Christ and the benefits of redemption. Whatever gift we are endued with, we ought to honour God with it. The believing Jews who were present, were astonished that the gift of the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the Gentiles also. By mistaken notions of things, we make difficult for ourselves as to the methods of Divine providence and grace. As they were undeniably baptized with the Holy Ghost, Peter concluded they were not to

be refused the baptism of water, and the ordinance was administered. The argument is conclusive; can we deny the sign to those who have received the things signified? Those who have some acquaintance with Christ, cannot but desire more. Even those who have received the Holy Ghost, must see their need of daily learning more of the truth.

Chapter 11

Chapter Outline

Peter's defence.	(1-18)
The success of the gospel at Antioch.	(19-24)
The disciples named Christians, Relief sent to Judea.	(25-30)

Verses 1-18

The imperfect state of human nature strongly appears, when godly persons are displeased even to hear that the word of God has been received, because their own system has not been attended to. And we are too apt to despair of doing good to those who yet, when tried, prove very teachable. It is the bane and damage of the church, to shut out those from it, and from the benefit of the means of grace, who are not in every thing as we are. Peter stated the whole affair. We should at all times bear with the infirmities of our brethren; and instead of taking offence, or answering with warmth, we should explain our motives, and show the nature of our proceedings. That preaching is certainly right, with which the Holy Ghost is given. While men are very zealous for their own regulations, they should take care that they do not withstand God; and those who love the Lord will glorify him, when made sure that he has given repentance to life to any fellow-sinners. Repentance is God's gift; not only his free grace accepts it, but his mighty grace works it in us, grace takes away the heart of stone, and gives us a heart of flesh. The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit.

Verses 19-24

The first preachers of the gospel at Antioch, were dispersed from Jerusalem by persecution; thus what was meant to hurt the church, was made to work for its good. The wrath of man is made to praise God. What should the ministers of Christ preach, but Christ? Christ, and him crucified? Christ, and him glorified? And their preaching was accompanied with the Divine power. The hand of the Lord was with them, to bring that home to the hearts and consciences of men, which they could but speak to the outward ear. They believed; they were convinced of the truth of the gospel. They turned from a careless, carnal way of living, to live a holy, heavenly, spiritual life. They turned from worshipping God in show and ceremony, to worship him in the Spirit and in truth. They turned to the Lord Jesus, and he became all in all with them. This was the work of conversion wrought upon them, and it must be wrought upon every one of us. It was the fruit of their faith; all who sincerely believe, will turn to the Lord, When the Lord Jesus is preached in simplicity, and according to the Scriptures, he will give success; and when sinners are thus brought to the Lord, really good men, who are full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, will admire and rejoice in the grace of God

bestowed on them. Barnabas was full of faith; full of the grace of faith, and full of the fruits of the faith that works by love.

Verses 25–30

Hitherto the followers of Christ were called disciples, that is, learners, scholars; but from that time they were called Christians. The proper meaning of this name is, a follower of Christ; it denotes one who, from serious thought, embraces the religion of Christ, believes his promises, and makes it his chief care to shape his life by Christ's precepts and example. Hence it is plain that multitudes take the name of Christian to whom it does not rightly belong. But the name without the reality will only add to our guilt. While the bare profession will bestow neither profit nor delight, the possession of it will give both the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Grant, Lord, that Christians may forget other names and distinctions, and love one another as the followers of Christ ought to do. True Christians will feel for their brethren under afflictions. Thus will fruit be brought forth to the praise and glory of God. If all mankind were true Christians, how cheerfully would they help one another! The whole earth would be like one large family, every member of which would strive to be dutiful and kind.

Chapter 12

Chapter Outline

The martyrdom of James, and the imprisonment of Peter.	(1-5)
He is delivered from prison by an angel.	(6-11)
Peter departs, Herod's rage.	(12-19)
The death of Herod.	(20-25)

Verses 1-5

James was one of the sons of Zebedee, whom Christ told that they should drink of the cup that he was to drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that he was to be baptized with, [Mt 20:23](#). Now the words of Christ were made good in him; and if we suffer with Christ, we shall reign with him. Herod imprisoned Peter: the way of persecution, as of other sins, is downhill; when men are in it, they cannot easily stop. Those make themselves an easy prey to Satan, who make it their business to please men. Thus James finished his course. But Peter, being designed for further services, was safe; though he seemed now marked out for a speedy sacrifice. We that live in a cold, prayerless generation, can hardly form an idea of the earnestness of these holy men of old. But if the Lord should bring on the church an awful persecution like this of Herod, the faithful in Christ would learn what soul-felt prayer is.

Verses 6-11

A peaceful conscience, a lively hope, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit, can keep men calm in the full prospect of death; even those very persons who have been most distracted with terrors on that account. God's time to help, is when things are brought to the last extremity. Peter was assured that the Lord would cause this trial to end in the way that should be most for his glory. Those who are delivered out of spiritual imprisonment must follow their Deliverer, like the Israelites when they went out of the house of bondage. They knew not whither they went, but knew whom they followed. When God will work salvation for his people, all difficulties in their way will be overcome, even gates of iron are made to open of their own accord. This deliverance of Peter represents our redemption by Christ, which not only proclaims liberty to the captives, but brings them out of the prison-house. Peter, when he recollected himself, perceived what great things God had done for him. Thus souls delivered out of spiritual bondage, are not at first aware what God has wrought in them; many have the truth of grace, that want evidence of it. But when the Comforter comes, whom the Father will send, sooner or later, he will let them know what a blessed change is wrought.

Verses 12–19

God's providence leaves room for the use of our prudence, though he has undertaken to perform and perfect what he has begun. These Christians continued in prayer for Peter, for they were truly in earnest. Thus men ought always to pray, and not to faint. As long as we are kept waiting for a mercy, we must continue praying for it. But sometimes that which we most earnestly wish for, we are most backward to believe. The Christian law of self-denial and of suffering for Christ, has not done away the natural law of caring for our own safety by lawful means. In times of public danger, all believers have God for their hiding-place; which is so secret, that the world cannot find them. Also, the instruments of persecution are themselves exposed to danger; the wrath of God hangs over all that engage in this hateful work. And the range of persecutors often vents itself on all in its way.

Verses 20–25

Many heathen princes claimed and received Divine honours, but it was far more horrible impiety in Herod, who knew the word and worship of the living God, to accept such idolatrous honours without rebuking the blasphemy. And such men as Herod, when puffed with pride and vanity, are ripening fast for signal vengeance. God is very jealous for his own honour, and will be glorified upon those whom he is not glorified by. See what vile bodies we carry about with us; they have in them the seeds of their own dissolution, by which they will soon be destroyed, whenever God does but speak the word. We may learn wisdom from the people of Tyre and Sidon, for we have offended the Lord with our sins. We depend on him for life, and breath, and all things; it surely then behoves us to humble ourselves before him, that through the appointed Mediator, who is ever ready to befriend us, we may be reconciled to him, lest wrath come upon us to the utmost.

Chapter 13

Chapter Outline

The mission of Paul and Barnabas.	(1-3)
Elymas the sorcerer.	(4-13)
Paul's discourse at Antioch.	(14-41)
He preaches to the Gentiles, and is persecuted by the Jews.	(42-52)

Verses 1-3

What an assemblage was here! In these names we see that the Lord raises up instruments for his work, from various places and stations in life; and zeal for his glory induces men to give up flattering connexions and prospects to promote his cause. It is by the Spirit of Christ that his ministers are made both able and willing for his service, and taken from other cares that would hinder in it. Christ's ministers are to be employed in Christ's work, and, under the Spirit's guidance, to act for the glory of God the Father. They are separated to take pains, and not to take state. A blessing upon Barnabas and Saul in their present undertaking was sought for, and that they might be filled with the Holy Ghost in their work. Whatever means are used, or rules observed, the Holy Ghost alone can fit ministers for their important work, and call them to it.

Verses 4-13

Satan is in a special manner busy with great men and men in power, to keep them from being religious, for their example will influence many. Saul is here for the first time called Paul, and never after Saul. Saul was his name as he was a Hebrew; Paul was his name as he was a citizen of Rome. Under the direct influence of the Holy Ghost, he gave Elymas his true character, but not in passion. A fulness of deceit and mischief together, make a man indeed a child of the devil. And those who are enemies to the doctrine of Jesus, are enemies to all righteousness; for in it all righteousness is fulfilled. The ways of the Lord Jesus are the only right ways to heaven and happiness. There are many who not only wander from these ways themselves, but set others against these ways. They commonly are so hardened, that they will not cease to do evil. The proconsul was astonished at the force of the doctrine upon his own heart and conscience, and at the power of God by which it was confirmed. The doctrine of Christ astonishes; and the more we know of it, the more reason we shall see to wonder at it. Those who put their hand to the plough and look back, are not fit for the kingdom of God. Those who are not prepared to face opposition, and to endure hardship, are not fitted for the work of the ministry.

Verses 14–31

When we come together to worship God, we must do it, not only by prayer and praise, but by the reading and hearing of the word of God. The bare reading of the Scriptures in public assemblies is not enough; they should be expounded, and the people exhorted out of them. This is helping people in doing that which is necessary to make the word profitable, to apply it to themselves. Every thing is touched upon in this sermon, which might best prevail with Jews to receive and embrace Christ as the promised Messiah. And every view, however short or faint, of the Lord's dealings with his church, reminds us of his mercy and long-suffering, and of man's ingratitude and perverseness. Paul passes from David to the Son of David, and shows that this Jesus is his promised Seed; a Saviour to do that for them, which the judges of old could not do, to save them from their sins, their worst enemies. When the apostles preached Christ as the Saviour, they were so far from concealing his death, that they always preached Christ crucified. Our complete separation from sin, is represented by our being buried with Christ. But he rose again from the dead, and saw no corruption: this was the great truth to be preached.

Verses 32–37

The resurrection of Christ was the great proof of his being the Son of God. It was not possible he should be held by death, because he was the Son of God, and therefore had life in himself, which he could not lay down but with a design to take it again. The sure mercies of David are that everlasting life, of which the resurrection was a sure pledge; and the blessings of redemption in Christ are a certain earnest, even in this world. David was a great blessing to the age wherein he lived. We were not born for ourselves, but there are those living around us, to whom we must study to be serviceable. Yet here is the difference; Christ was to serve all generations. May we look to Him who is declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead, that by faith in him we may walk with God, and serve our generation according to his will; and when death comes, may we fall asleep in him, with a joyful hope of a blessed resurrection.

Verses 38–41

Let all that hear the gospel of Christ, know these two things: 1. That through this Man, who died and rose again, is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. Your sins, though many and great, may be forgiven, and they may be so without any injury to God's honour. 2. It is by Christ only that those who believe in him, and none else, are justified from all things; from all the guilt and stain of sin, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. The great concern of convinced sinners is, to be justified, to be acquitted from all their guilt, and accepted as righteous in God's sight, for if any is left charged upon the sinner, he is undone. By Jesus Christ we obtain a complete justification; for by him a complete atonement was made for sin. We are justified, not only by him as our Judge but by him as

the Lord our Righteousness. What the law could not do for us, in that it was weak, the gospel of Christ does. This is the most needful blessing, bringing in every other. The threatenings are warnings; what we are told will come upon impenitent sinners, is designed to awaken us to beware lest it come upon us. It ruins many, that they despise religion. Those that will not wonder and be saved, shall wonder and perish.

Verses 42–52

The Jews opposed the doctrine the apostles preached; and when they could find no objection, they blasphemed Christ and his gospel. Commonly those who begin with contradicting, end with blaspheming. But when adversaries of Christ's cause are daring, its advocates should be the bolder. And while many judge themselves unworthy of eternal life, others, who appear less likely, desire to hear more of the glad tidings of salvation. This is according to what was foretold in the Old Testament. What light, what power, what a treasure does this gospel bring with it! How excellent are its truths, its precepts, its promises! Those came to Christ whom the Father drew, and to whom the Spirit made the gospel call effectual, [Ro 8:30](#). As many as were disposed to eternal life, as many as had concern about their eternal state, and aimed to make sure of eternal life, believed in Christ, in whom God has treasured up that life, and who is the only Way to it; and it was the grace of God that wrought it in them. It is good to see honourable women devout; the less they have to do in the world, the more they should do for their own souls, and the souls of others: but it is sad, when, under colour of devotion to God, they try to show hatred to Christ. And the more we relish the comforts and encouragements we meet with in the power of godliness, and the fuller our hearts are of them, the better prepared we are to face difficulties in the profession of godliness.

Chapter 14

Chapter Outline

- Paul and Barnabas at Iconium. (1-7)
- A cripple healed at Lystra, The people would have sacrificed to Paul and Barnabas. (8-18)
- Paul stoned at Lystra, The churches visited again. (19-28)

Verses 1-7

The apostles spake so plainly, with such evidence and proof of the Spirit, and with such power; so warmly, and with such concern for the souls of men; that those who heard them could not but say, God was with them of a truth. Yet the success was not to be reckoned to the manner of their preaching, but to the Spirit of God who used that means. Perseverance in doing good, amidst dangers and hardships, is a blessed evidence of grace. Wherever God's servants are driven, they should seek to declare the truth. When they went on in Christ's name and strength, he failed not to give testimony to the word of his grace. He has assured us it is the word of God, and that we may venture our souls upon it. The Gentiles and Jews were at enmity with one another, yet united against Christians. If the church's enemies join to destroy it, shall not its friends unite for its preservation? God has a shelter for his people in a storm; he is, and will be their Hiding-place. In times of persecution, believers may see cause to quit a spot, though they do not quit their Master's work.

Verses 8-18

All things are possible to those that believe. When we have faith, that most precious gift of God, we shall be delivered from the spiritual helplessness in which we were born, and from the dominion of sinful habits since formed; we shall be made able to stand upright and walk cheerfully in the ways of the Lord. When Christ, the Son of God, appeared in the likeness of men, and did many miracles, men were so far from doing sacrifice to him, that they made him a sacrifice to their pride and malice; but Paul and Barnabas, upon their working one miracle, were treated as gods. The same power of the god of this world, which closes the carnal mind against truth, makes errors and mistakes find easy admission. We do not learn that they rent their clothes when the people spake of stoning them; but when they spake of worshipping them; they could not bear it, being more concerned for God's honour than their own. God's truth needs not the services of man's falsehood. The servants of God might easily obtain undue honours if they would wink at men's errors and vices; but they must dread and detest such respect more than any reproach. When the apostles preached

to the Jews, who hated idolatry, they had only to preach the grace of God in Christ; but when they had to do with the Gentiles, they must set right their mistakes in natural religion. Compare their conduct and declaration with the false opinions of those who think the worship of a God, under any name, or in any manner, is equally acceptable to the Lord Almighty. The most powerful arguments, the most earnest and affectionate addresses, even with miracles, are scarcely enough to keep men from absurdities and abominations; much less can they, without special grace, turn the hearts of sinners to God and to holiness.

Verses 19–28

See how restless the rage of the Jews was against the gospel of Christ. The people stoned Paul, in a popular tumult. So strong is the bent of the corrupt and carnal heart, that as it is with great difficulty that men are kept back from evil on one side, so it is with great ease they are persuaded to evil on the other side. If Paul would have been Mercury, he might have been worshipped; but if he will be a faithful minister of Christ, he shall be stoned, and thrown out of the city. Thus men who easily submit to strong delusions, hate to receive the truth in the love of it. All who are converted need to be confirmed in the faith; all who are planted need to be rooted. Ministers' work is to establish saints as well as to awaken sinners. The grace of God, and nothing less, effectually establishes the souls of the disciples. It is true, we must count upon much tribulation, but it is encouragement that we shall not be lost and perish in it. The Person to whose power and grace the converts and the newly-established churches are commended, clearly was the Lord Jesus, "on whom they had believed." It was an act of worship. The praise of all the little good we do at any time, must be ascribed to God; for it is He who not only worketh in us both to will and to do, but also worketh with us to make what we do successful. All who love the Lord Jesus, will rejoice to hear that he has opened the door of faith wide, to those who were strangers to him and to his salvation. And let us, like the apostles, abide with those who know and love the Lord.

Chapter 15

Chapter Outline

The dispute raised by Judaizing teachers.	(1-6)
The council at Jerusalem.	(7-21)
The letter from the council.	(22-35)
Paul and Barnabas separate.	(36-41)

Verses 1-6

Some from Judea taught the Gentile converts at Antioch, that they could not be saved, unless they observed the whole ceremonial law as given by Moses; and thus they sought to destroy Christian liberty. There is a strange proneness in us to think that all do wrong who do not just as we do. Their doctrine was very discouraging. Wise and good men desire to avoid contests and disputes as far as they can; yet when false teachers oppose the main truths of the gospel, or bring in hurtful doctrines, we must not decline to oppose them.

Verses 7-21

We see from the words “purifying their hearts by faith,” and the address of St. Peter, that justification by faith, and sanctification by the Holy Ghost, cannot be separated; and that both are the gift of God. We have great cause to bless God that we have heard the gospel. May we have that faith which the great Searcher of hearts approves, and attests by the seal of the Holy Spirit. Then our hearts and consciences will be purified from the guilt of sin, and we shall be freed from the burdens some try to lay upon the disciples of Christ. Paul and Barnabas showed by plain matters of fact, that God owned the preaching of the pure gospel to the Gentiles without the law of Moses; therefore to press that law upon them, was to undo what God had done. The opinion of James was, that the Gentile converts ought not to be troubled about Jewish rites, but that they should abstain from meats offered to idols, so that they might show their hatred of idolatry. Also, that they should be cautioned against fornication, which was not abhorred by the Gentiles as it should be, and even formed a part of some of their rites. They were counselled to abstain from things strangled, and from eating blood; this was forbidden by the law of Moses, and also here, from reverence to the blood of the sacrifices, which being then still offered, it would needlessly grieve the Jewish converts, and further prejudice the unconverted Jews. But as the reason has long ceased, we are left free in this, as in the like matters. Let converts be warned to avoid all appearances of the evils which they formerly practised, or are likely to be tempted to; and caution them to use Christian liberty with moderation and prudence.

Verses 22–35

Being warranted to declare themselves directed by the immediate influence of the Holy Ghost, the apostles and disciples were assured that it seemed good unto God the Holy Spirit, as well as to them, to lay upon the converts no other burden than the things before mentioned, which were necessary, either on their own account, or from present circumstances. It was a comfort to hear that carnal ordinances were no longer imposed on them, which perplexed the conscience, but could not purify or pacify it; and that those who troubled their minds were silenced, so that the peace of the church was restored, and that which threatened division was removed. All this was consolation for which they blessed God. Many others were at Antioch. Where many labour in the word and doctrine, yet there may be opportunity for us: the zeal and usefulness of others should stir us up, not lay us asleep.

Verses 36–41

Here we have a private quarrel between two ministers, no less than Paul and Barnabas, yet made to end well. Barnabas wished his nephew John Mark to go with them. We should suspect ourselves of being partial, and guard against this in putting our relations forward. Paul did not think him worthy of the honour, nor fit for the service, who had departed from them without their knowledge, or without their consent: see ch. 13:13. Neither would yield, therefore there was no remedy but they must part. We see that the best of men are but men, subject to like passions as we are. Perhaps there were faults on both sides, as usual in such contentions. Christ's example alone, is a copy without a blot. Yet we are not to think it strange, if there are differences among wise and good men. It will be so while we are in this imperfect state; we shall never be all of one mind till we come to heaven. But what mischief the remainders of pride and passion which are found even in good men, do in the world, and do in the church! Many who dwelt at Antioch, who had heard but little of the devotedness and piety of Paul and Barnabas, heard of their dispute and separation; and thus it will be with ourselves, if we give way to contention. Believers must be constant in prayer, that they may never be led by the allowance of unholy tempers, to hurt the cause they really desire to serve. Paul speaks with esteem and affection both of Barnabas and Mark, in his epistles, written after this event. May all who profess thy name, O loving Saviour, be thoroughly reconciled by that love derived from thee which is not easily provoked, and which soon forgets and buries injuries.

Chapter 16

Chapter Outline

Paul takes Timothy to be his assistant.	(1-5)
Paul proceeds to Macedonia, The conversion of Lydia.	(6-15)
An evil spirit cast out, Paul and Silas scourged and imprisoned.	(16-24)
The conversion of the jailer at Philippi.	(25-34)
Paul and Silas released.	(35-40)

Verses 1-5

Well may the church look for much service from youthful ministers who set out in the same spirit as Timothy. But when men will submit in nothing, and oblige in nothing, the first elements of the Christian temper seem to be wanting; and there is great reason to believe that the doctrines and precepts of the gospel will not be successfully taught. The design of the decree being to set aside the ceremonial law, and its carnal ordinances, believers were confirmed in the Christian faith, because it set up a spiritual way of serving God, as suited to the nature both of God and man. Thus the church increased in numbers daily.

Verses 6-15

The removals of ministers, and the dispensing the means of grace by them, are in particular under Divine conduct and direction. We must follow Providence: and whatever we seek to do, if that suffer us not, we ought to submit and believe to be for the best. People greatly need help for their souls, it is their duty to look out for it, and to invite those among them who can help them. And God's calls must be complied with readily. A solemn assembly the worshippers of God must have, if possible, upon the sabbath day. If we have not synagogues, we must be thankful for more private places, and resort to them; not forsaking the assembling together, as our opportunities are. Among the hearers of Paul was a woman, named Lydia. She had an honest calling, which the historian notices to her praise. Yet though she had a calling to mind, she found time to improve advantages for her soul. It will not excuse us from religious duties, to say, We have a trade to mind; for have not we also a God to serve, and souls to look after? Religion does not call us from our business in the world, but directs us in it. Pride, prejudice, and sin shut out the truths of God, till his grace makes way for them into the understanding and affections; and the Lord alone can open the heart to receive and believe his word. We must believe in Jesus Christ; there is no coming to God as a Father, but by the Son as Mediator.

Verses 16–24

Satan, though the father of lies, will declare the most important truths, when he can thereby serve his purposes. But much mischief is done to the real servants of Christ, by unholy and false preachers of the gospel, who are confounded with them by careless observers. Those who do good by drawing men from sin, may expect to be reviled as troublers of the city. While they teach men to fear God, to believe in Christ, to forsake sin, and to live godly lives, they will be accused of teaching bad customs.

Verses 25–34

The consolations of God to his suffering servants are neither few nor small. How much more happy are true Christians than their prosperous enemies! As in the dark, so out of the depths, we may cry unto God. No place, no time is amiss for prayer, if the heart be lifted up to God. No trouble, however grievous, should hinder us from praise. Christianity proves itself to be of God, in that it obliges us to be just to our own lives. Paul cried aloud to make the jailer hear, and to make him heed, saying, Do thyself no harm. All the cautions of the word of God against sin, and all appearances of it, and approaches to it, have this tendency. Man, woman, do not ruin thyself; hurt not thyself, and then none else can hurt thee; do not sin, for nothing but that can hurt thee. Even as to the body, we are cautioned against the sins which do harm to that. Converting grace changes people's language of and to good people and good ministers. How serious the jailer's inquiry! His salvation becomes his great concern; that lies nearest his heart, which before was furthest from his thoughts. It is his own precious soul that he is concerned about. Those who are thoroughly convinced of sin, and truly concerned about their salvation, will give themselves up to Christ. Here is the sum of the whole gospel, the covenant of grace in a few words; Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. The Lord so blessed the word, that the jailer was at once softened and humbled. He treated them with kindness and compassion, and, professing faith in Christ, was baptized in that name, with his family. The Spirit of grace worked such a strong faith in them, as did away further doubt; and Paul and Silas knew by the Spirit, that a work of God was wrought in them. When sinners are thus converted, they will love and honour those whom they before despised and hated, and will seek to lessen the suffering they before desired to increase. When the fruits of faith begin to appear, terrors will be followed by confidence and joy in God.

Verses 35–40

Paul, though willing to suffer for the cause of Christ, and without any desire to avenge himself, did not choose to depart under the charge of having deserved wrongful punishment, and therefore required to be dismissed in an honourable manner. It was not a mere point of honour that the apostle stood upon, but justice, and not to himself so much as to his cause. And when proper apology is made, Christians should never express personal anger,

nor insist too strictly upon personal amends. The Lord will make them more than conquerors in every conflict; instead of being cast down by their sufferings, they will become comforters of their brethren.

Chapter 17

Chapter Outline

Paul at Thessalonica.	(1-9)
The noble conduct of the Bereans.	(10-15)
Paul at Athens.	(16-21)
He preaches there.	(22-31)
The scornful conduct of the Athenians.	(32-34)

Verses 1-9

The drift and scope of Paul's preaching and arguing, was to prove that Jesus is the Christ. He must needs suffer for us, because he could not otherwise purchase our redemption for us; and he must needs have risen again, because he could not otherwise apply the redemption to us. We are to preach concerning Jesus that he is Christ; therefore we may hope to be saved by him, and are bound to be ruled by him. The unbelieving Jews were angry, because the apostles preached to the Gentiles, that they might be saved. How strange it is, that men should grudge others the privileges they will not themselves accept! Neither rulers nor people need be troubled at the increase of real Christians, even though turbulent spirits should make religion the pretext for evil designs. Of such let us beware, from such let us withdraw, that we may show a desire to act aright in society, while we claim our right to worship God according to our consciences.

Verses 10-15

The Jews in Berea applied seriously to the study of the word preached unto them. They not only heard Paul preach on the sabbath, but daily searched the Scriptures, and compared what they read with the facts related to them. The doctrine of Christ does not fear inquiry; advocates for his cause desire no more than that people will fully and fairly examine whether things are so or not. Those are truly noble, and likely to be more and more so, who make the Scriptures their rule, and consult them accordingly. May all the hearers of the gospel become like those of Berea, receiving the word with readiness of mind, and searching the Scriptures daily, whether the things preached to them are so.

Verses 16-21

Athens was then famed for polite learning, philosophy, and the fine arts; but none are more childish and superstitious, more impious, or more credulous, than some persons, deemed eminent for learning and ability. It was wholly given to idolatry. The zealous advocate for the cause of Christ will be ready to plead for it in all companies, as occasion offers. Most of these learned men took no notice of Paul; but some, whose principles were the most dir-

ectly contrary to Christianity, made remarks upon him. The apostle ever dwelt upon two points, which are indeed the principal doctrines of Christianity, Christ and a future state; Christ our way, and heaven our end. They looked on this as very different from the knowledge for many ages taught and professed at Athens; they desire to know more of it, but only because it was new and strange. They led him to the place where judges sat who inquired into such matters. They asked about Paul's doctrine, not because it was good, but because it was new. Great talkers are always busy-bodies. They spend their time in nothing else, and a very uncomfortable account they have to give of their time who thus spend it. Time is precious, and we are concerned to employ it well, because eternity depends upon it, but much is wasted in unprofitable conversation.

Verses 22–31

Here we have a sermon to heathens, who worshipped false gods, and were without the true God in the world; and to them the scope of the discourse was different from what the apostle preached to the Jews. In the latter case, his business was to lead his hearers by prophecies and miracles to the knowledge of the Redeemer, and faith in him; in the former, it was to lead them, by the common works of providence, to know the Creator, and worship Him. The apostle spoke of an altar he had seen, with the inscription, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." This fact is stated by many writers. After multiplying their idols to the utmost, some at Athens thought there was another god of whom they had no knowledge. And are there not many now called Christians, who are zealous in their devotions, yet the great object of their worship is to them an unknown God? Observe what glorious things Paul here says of that God whom he served, and would have them to serve. The Lord had long borne with idolatry, but the times of this ignorance were now ending, and by his servants he now commanded all men every where to repent of their idolatry. Each sect of the learned men would feel themselves powerfully affected by the apostle's discourse, which tended to show the emptiness or falsity of their doctrines.

Verses 32–34

The apostle was treated with more outward civility at Athens than in some other places; but none more despised his doctrine, or treated it with more indifference. Of all subjects, that which deserves the most attention gains the least. But those who scorn, will have to bear the consequences, and the word will never be useless. Some will be found, who cleave to the Lord, and listen to his faithful servants. Considering the judgement to come, and Christ as our Judge, should urge all to repent of sin, and turn to Him. Whatever matter is used, all discourses must lead to Him, and show his authority; our salvation, and resurrection, come from and by Him.

Chapter 18

Chapter Outline

Paul at Corinth, with Aquila and Priscilla.	(1-6)
He continues to preach at Corinth.	(7-11)
Paul before Gallio.	(12-17)
He visits Jerusalem.	(18-23)
Apollos teaches at Ephesus and in Achaia.	(24-28)

Verses 1-6

Though Paul was entitled to support from the churches he planted, and from the people to whom he preached, yet he worked at his calling. An honest trade, by which a man may get his bread, is not to be looked upon with contempt by any. It was the custom of the Jews to bring up their children to some trade, though they gave them learning or estates. Paul was careful to prevent prejudices, even the most unreasonable. The love of Christ is the best bond of the saints; and the communings of the saints with each other, sweeten labour, contempt, and even persecution. Most of the Jews persisted in contradicting the gospel of Christ, and blasphemed. They would not believe themselves, and did all they could to keep others from believing. Paul hereupon left them. He did not give over his work; for though Israel be not gathered, Christ and his gospel shall be glorious. The Jews could not complain, for they had the first offer. When some oppose the gospel, we must turn to others. Grief that many persist in unbelief should not prevent gratitude for the conversion of some to Christ.

Verses 7-11

The Lord knows those that are his, yea, and those that shall be his; for it is by his work upon them that they become his. Let us not despair concerning any place, when even in wicked Corinth Christ had much people. He will gather in his chosen flock from the places where they are scattered. Thus encouraged, the apostle continued at Corinth, and a numerous and flourishing church grew up.

Verses 12-17

Paul was about to show that he did not teach men to worship God contrary to law; but the judge would not allow the Jews to complain to him of what was not within his office. It was right in Gallio that he left the Jews to themselves in matters relating to their religion, but yet would not let them, under pretence of that, persecute another. But it was wrong to

speak slightly of a law and religion which he might have known to be of God, and which he ought to have acquainted himself with. In what way God is to be worshipped, whether Jesus be the Messiah, and whether the gospel be a Divine revelation, are not questions of words and names, they are questions of vast importance. Gallio spoke as if he boasted of his ignorance of the Scriptures, as if the law of God was beneath his notice. Gallio cared for none of these things. If he cared not for the affronts of bad men, it was commendable; but if he concerned not himself for the abuses done to good men, his indifference was carried too far. And those who see and hear of the sufferings of God's people, and have no feeling with them, or care for them, who do not pity and pray for them, are of the same spirit as Gallio, who cared for none of these things.

Verses 18–23

While Paul found he laboured not in vain, he continued labouring. Our times are in God's hand; we purpose, but he disposes; therefore we must make all promises with submission to the will of God; not only if providence permits, but if God does not otherwise direct our motions. A very good refreshment it is to a faithful minister, to have for awhile the society of his brethren. Disciples are compassed about with infirmity; ministers must do what they can to strengthen them, by directing them to Christ, who is their Strength. Let us earnestly seek, in our several places, to promote the cause of Christ, forming plans that appear to us most proper, but relying on the Lord to bring them to pass if he sees good.

Verses 24–28

Apollos taught in the gospel of Christ, as far as John's ministry would carry him, and no further. We cannot but think he had heard of Christ's death and resurrection, but he was not informed as to the mystery of them. Though he had not the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, as the apostles, he made use of the gifts he had. The dispensation of the Spirit, whatever the measure of it may be, is given to every man to profit withal. He was a lively, affectionate preacher; fervent in spirit. He was full of zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of precious souls. Here was a complete man of God, thoroughly furnished for his work. Aquila and Priscilla encouraged his ministry, by attendance upon it. They did not despise Apollos themselves, or undervalue him to others; but considered the disadvantages he had laboured under. And having themselves got knowledge in the truths of the gospel by their long intercourse with Paul, they told what they knew to him. Young scholars may gain a great deal by converse with old Christians. Those who do believe through grace, yet still need help. As long as they are in this world, there are remainders of unbelief, and something lacking in their faith to be perfected, and the work of faith to be fulfilled. If the Jews were convinced that Jesus is Christ, even their own law would teach them to hear him. The business of ministers is to preach Christ. Not only to preach the truth, but to prove and defend it, with meekness, yet with power.

Chapter 19

Chapter Outline

Paul instructs the disciples of John at Ephesus.	(1-7)
He teaches there.	(8-12)
The Jewish exorcists disgraced. Some Ephesians burn their evil books.	(13-20)
The tumult at Ephesus.	(21-31)
The tumult appeased.	(32-41)

Verses 1-7

Paul, at Ephesus, found some religious persons, who looked to Jesus as the Messiah. They had not been led to expect the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost, nor were they informed that the gospel was especially the ministration of the Spirit. But they spake as ready to welcome the notice of it. Paul shows them that John never design that those he baptized should rest there, but told them that they should believe on Him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. They thankfully accepted the discovery, and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Ghost came upon them in a surprising, overpowering manner; they spake with tongues, and prophesied, as the apostles and the first Gentile converts did. Though we do not now expect miraculous powers, yet all who profess to be disciples of Christ, should be called on to examine whether they have received the seal of the Holy Ghost, in his sanctifying influences, to the sincerity of their faith. Many seem not to have heard that there is a Holy Ghost, and many deem all that is spoken concerning his graces and comforts, to be delusion. Of such it may properly be inquired, "Unto what, then, were ye baptized?" for they evidently know not the meaning of that outward sign on which they place great dependence.

Verses 8-12

When arguments and persuasions only harden men in unbelief and blasphemy, we must separate ourselves and others from such unholy company. God was pleased to confirm the teaching of these holy men of old, that if their hearers believed them not, they might believe the works.

Verses 13-20

It was common, especially among the Jews, for persons to profess or to try to cast out evil spirits. If we resist the devil by faith in Christ, he will flee from us; but if we think to resist him by the using of Christ's name, or his works, as a spell or charm, Satan will prevail

against us. Where there is true sorrow for sin, there will be free confession of sin to God in every prayer and to man whom we have offended, when the case requires it. Surely if the word of God prevailed among us, many lewd, infidel, and wicked books would be burned by their possessors. Will not these Ephesian converts rise up in judgement against professors, who traffic in such works for the sake of gain, or allow themselves to possess them? If we desire to be in earnest in the great work of salvation, every pursuit and enjoyment must be given up which hinders the effect of the gospel upon the mind, or loosens its hold upon the heart.

Verses 21–31

Persons who came from afar to pay their devotions at the temple of Ephesus, bought little silver shrines, or models of the temple, to carry home with them. See how craftsmen make advantage to themselves of people's superstition, and serve their worldly ends by it. Men are jealous for that by which they get their wealth; and many set themselves against the gospel of Christ, because it calls men from all unlawful crafts, however much wealth is to be gotten by them. There are persons who will stickle for what is most grossly absurd, unreasonable, and false; as this, that those are gods which are made with hands, if it has but worldly interest on its side. The whole city was full of confusion, the common and natural effect of zeal for false religion. Zeal for the honour of Christ, and love to the brethren, encourage zealous believers to venture into danger. Friends will often be raised up among those who are strangers to true religion, but have observed the honest and consistent behaviour of Christians.

Verses 32–41

The Jews came forward in this tumult. Those who are thus careful to distinguish themselves from the servants of Christ now, and are afraid of being taken for them, shall have their doom accordingly in the great day. One, having authority, at length stilled the noise. It is a very good rule at all times, both in private and public affairs, not to be hasty and rash in our motions, but to take time to consider; and always to keep our passions under check. We ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly; to do nothing in haste, of which we may repent at leisure. The regular methods of the law ought always to stop popular tumults, and in well-governed nations will do so. Most people stand in awe of men's judgments more than of the judgement of God. How well it were if we would thus quiet our disorderly appetites and passions, by considering the account we must shortly give to the Judge of heaven and earth! And see how the overruling providence of God keeps the public peace, by an unaccountable power over the spirits of men. Thus the world is kept in some order, and men are held back from devouring each other. We can scarcely look around but we see men act like Demetrius and the workmen. It is as safe to contend with wild beasts as with men enraged by party zeal and disappointed covetousness, who think that all arguments are

answered, when they have shown that they grow rich by the practices which are opposed. Whatever side in religious disputes, or whatever name this spirit assumes, it is worldly, and should be discountenanced by all who regard truth and piety. And let us not be dismayed; the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; he can still the rage of the people.

Chapter 20

Chapter Outline

Paul's journeys.	(1-6)
Eutychus restored to life.	(7-12)
Paul travels towards Jerusalem.	(13-16)
Paul's discourse to the elders of Ephesus.	(17-27)
Their farewell.	(28-38)

Verses 1-6

Tumults or opposition may constrain a Christian to remove from his station or alter his purpose, but his work and his pleasure will be the same, wherever he goes. Paul thought it worth while to bestow five days in going to Troas, though it was but for seven days' stay there; but he knew, and so should we, how to redeem even journeying time, and to make it turn to some good account.

Verses 7-12

Though the disciples read, and meditated, and prayed, and sung apart, and thereby kept up communion with God, yet they came together to worship God, and so kept up their communion with one another. They came together on the first day of the week, the Lord's day. It is to be religiously observed by all disciples of Christ. In the breaking of the bread, not only the breaking of Christ's body for us, to be a sacrifice for our sins, is remembered, but the breaking of Christ's body to us, to be food and a feast for our souls, is signified. In the early times it was the custom to receive the Lord's supper every Lord's day, thus celebrating the memorial of Christ's death. In this assembly Paul preached. The preaching of the gospel ought to go with the sacraments. They were willing to hear, he saw they were so, and continued his speech till midnight. Sleeping when hearing the word, is an evil thing, a sign of low esteem of the word of God. We must do what we can to prevent being sleepy; not put ourselves to sleep, but get our hearts affected with the word we hear, so as to drive sleep far away. Infirmary requires tenderness; but contempt requires severity. It interrupted the apostle's preaching; but was made to confirm his preaching. Eutychus was brought to life again. And as they knew not when they should have Paul's company again, they made the best use of it they could, and reckoned a night's sleep well lost for that purpose. How seldom are hours of repose broken for the purposes of devotion! but how often for mere amusement or sinful revelry! So hard is it for spiritual life to thrive in the heart of man! so naturally do carnal practices flourish there!

Verses 13–16

Paul hastened to Jerusalem, but tried to do good by the way, when going from place to place, as every good man should do. In doing God's work, our own wills and those of our friends must often be crossed; we must not spend time with them when duty calls us another way.

Verses 17–27

The elders knew that Paul was no designing, self-seeking man. Those who would in any office serve the Lord acceptably, and profitably to others, must do it with humility. He was a plain preacher, one that spoke his message so as to be understood. He was a powerful preacher; he preached the gospel as a testimony to them if they received it; but as a testimony against them if they rejected it. He was a profitable preacher; one that aimed to inform their judgments, and reform their hearts and lives. He was a painful preacher, very industrious in his work. He was a faithful preacher; he did not keep back reproofs when necessary, nor keep back the preaching of the cross. He was a truly Christian, evangelical preacher; he did not preach notions or doubtful matters; nor affairs of state or the civil government; but he preached faith and repentance. A better summary of these things, without which there is no salvation, cannot be given: even repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, with their fruits and effects. Without these no sinner can escape, and with these none will come short of eternal life. Let them not think that Paul left Asia for fear of persecution; he was in full expectation of trouble, yet resolved to go on, well assured that it was by Divine direction. Thanks be to God that we know not the things which shall befall us during the year, the week, the day which has begun. It is enough for the child of God to know that his strength shall be equal to his day. He knows not, he would not know, what the day before him shall bring forth. The powerful influences of the Holy Spirit bind the true Christian to his duty. Even when he expects persecution and affliction, the love of Christ constrains him to proceed. None of these things moved Paul from his work; they did not deprive him of his comfort. It is the business of our life to provide for a joyful death. Believing that this was the last time they should see him, he appeals concerning his integrity. He had preached to them the whole counsel of God. As he had preached to them the gospel purely, so he had preached it to them entire; he faithfully did his work, whether men would bear or forbear.

Verses 28–38

If the Holy Ghost has made ministers overseers of the flock, that is, shepherds, they must be true to their trust. Let them consider their Master's concern for the flock committed to their charge. It is the church He has purchased with his own blood. The blood was his as Man; yet so close is the union between the Divine and human nature, that it is there called the blood of God, for it was the blood of Him who is God. This put such dignity and worth

into it, as to ransom believers from all evil, and purchase all good. Paul spake about their souls with affection and concern. They were full of care what would become of them. Paul directs them to look up to God with faith, and commends them to the word of God's grace, not only as the foundation of their hope and the fountain of their joy, but as the rule of their walking. The most advanced Christians are capable of growing, and will find the word of grace help their growth. As those cannot be welcome guests to the holy God who are unsanctified; so heaven would be no heaven to them; but to all who are born again, and on whom the image of God is renewed, it is sure, as almighty power and eternal truth make it so. He recommends himself to them as an example of not caring as to things of the present world; this they would find help forward their comfortable passage through it. It might seem a hard saying, therefore Paul adds to it a saying of their Master's, which he would have them always remember; "It is more blessed to give than to receive:" it seems they were words often used to his disciples. The opinion of the children of this world, is contrary to this; they are afraid of giving, unless in hope of getting. Clear gain, is with them the most blessed thing that can be; but Christ tell us what is more blessed, more excellent. It makes us more like to God, who gives to all, and receives from none; and to the Lord Jesus, who went about doing good. This mind was in Christ Jesus, may it be in us also. It is good for friends, when they part, to part with prayer. Those who exhort and pray for one another, may have many weeping seasons and painful separations, but they will meet before the throne of God, to part no more. It was a comfort to all, that the presence of Christ both went with him and stayed with them.

Chapter 21

Chapter Outline

- Paul's voyage towards Jerusalem. (1-7)
- Paul at Cesarea. The prophecy of Agabus, Paul at Jerusalem. (8-18)
- He is persuaded to join in ceremonial observances. (19-26)
- Being in danger from the Jews, he is rescued by the Romans. (27-40)

Verses 1-7

Providence must be acknowledged when our affairs go on well. Wherever Paul came, he inquired what disciples were there, and found them out. Foreseeing his troubles, from love to him, and concern for the church, they wrongly thought it would be most for the glory of God that he should continue at liberty; but their earnestness to dissuade him from it, renders his pious resolution the more illustrious. He has taught us by example, as well as by rule, to pray always, to pray without ceasing. Their last farewell was sweetened with prayer.

Verses 8-18

Paul had express warning of his troubles, that when they came, they might be no surprise or terror to him. The general notice given us, that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God, should be of the same use to us. Their weeping began to weaken and slacken his resolution. Has not our Master told us to take up our cross? It was a trouble to him, that they should so earnestly press him to do that in which he could not gratify them without wronging his conscience. When we see trouble coming, it becomes us to say, not only, The will of the Lord must be done, and there is no remedy; but, Let the will of the Lord be done; for his will is his wisdom, and he doeth all according to the counsel of it. When a trouble is come, this must allay our griefs, that the will of the Lord is done; when we see it coming, this must silence our fears, that the will of the Lord shall be done; and we ought to say, Amen, let it be done. It is honourable to be an old disciple of Jesus Christ, to have been enabled by the grace of God to continue long in a course of duty, stedfast in the faith, growing more and more experienced, to a good old age. And with these old disciples one would choose to lodge; for the multitude of their years shall teach wisdom. Many brethren at Jerusalem received Paul gladly. We think, perhaps, that if we had him among us, we should gladly receive him; but we should not, if, having his doctrine, we do not gladly receive that.

Verses 19–26

Paul ascribed all his success to God, and to God they gave the praise. God had honoured him more than any of the apostles, yet they did not envy him; but on the contrary, glorified the Lord. They could not do more to encourage Paul to go on cheerfully in his work. James and the elders of the church at Jerusalem, asked Paul to gratify the believing Jews, by some compliance with the ceremonial law. They thought it was prudent in him to conform thus far. It was great weakness to be so fond of the shadows, when the substance was come. The religion Paul preached, tended not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. He preached Christ, the end of the law for righteousness, and repentance and faith, in which we are to make great use of the law. The weakness and evil of the human heart strongly appear, when we consider how many, even of the disciples of Christ, had not due regard to the most eminent minister that even lived. Not the excellence of his character, nor the success with which God blessed his labours, could gain their esteem and affection, seeing that he did not render the same respect as themselves to mere ceremonial observances. How watchful should we be against prejudices! The apostles were not free from blame in all they did; and it would be hard to defend Paul from the charge of giving way too much in this matter. It is vain to attempt to court the favour of zealots, or bigots to a party. This compliance of Paul did not answer, for the very thing by which he hoped to pacify the Jews, provoked them, and brought him into trouble. But the all-wise God overruled both their advice and Paul's compliance with it, to serve a better purpose than was intended. It was in vain to think of pleasing men who would be pleased with nothing but the rooting out of Christianity. Integrity and uprightness will be more likely to preserve us than insincere compliances. And it should warn us not to press men to doing what is contrary to their own judgment to oblige us.

Verses 27–40

In the temple, where Paul should have been protected as in a place of safety, he was violently set upon. They falsely charged him with ill doctrine and ill practice against the Mosaic ceremonies. It is no new thing for those who mean honestly and act regularly, to have things laid to their charge which they know not and never thought of. It is common for the wise and good to have that charged against them by malicious people, with which they thought to have obliged them. God often makes those a protection to his people, who have no affection to them, but only have compassion for sufferers, and regard to the public peace. And here see what false, mistaken notions of good people and good ministers, many run away with. But God seasonably interposes for the safety of his servants, from wicked and unreasonable men; and gives them opportunities to speak for themselves, to plead for the Redeemer, and to spread abroad his glorious gospel.

Chapter 22

Chapter Outline

- Paul's account of his conversion. (1-11)
- Paul directed to preach to the Gentiles. (12-21)
- The rage of the Jews Paul pleads that he is a Roman citizen. (22-30)

Verses 1-11

The apostle addressed the enraged multitude, in the customary style of respect and good-will. Paul relates the history of his early life very particularly; he notices that his conversion was wholly the act of God. Condemned sinners are struck blind by the power of darkness, and it is a lasting blindness, like that of the unbelieving Jews. Convinced sinners are struck blind as Paul was, not by darkness, but by light. They are for a time brought to be at a loss within themselves, but it is in order to their being enlightened. A simple relation of the Lord's dealings with us, in bringing us, from opposing, to profess and promote his gospel, when delivered in a right spirit and manner, will sometimes make more impression than laboured speeches, even though it amounts not to the full proof of the truth, such as was shown in the change wrought in the apostle.

Verses 12-21

The apostle goes on to relate how he was confirmed in the change he had made. The Lord having chosen the sinner, that he should know his will, he is humbled, enlightened, and brought to the knowledge of Christ and his blessed gospel. Christ is here called that Just One; for he is Jesus Christ the righteous. Those whom God has chosen to know his will, must look to Jesus, for by him God has made known his good-will to us. The great gospel privilege, sealed to us by baptism, is the pardon of sins. Be baptized, and wash away thy sins; that is, receive the comfort of the pardon of thy sins in and through Jesus Christ, and lay hold on his righteousness for that purpose; and receive power against sin, for the mortifying of thy corruptions. Be baptized, and rest not in the sign, but make sure of the thing signified, the putting away of the filth of sin. The great gospel duty, to which by our baptism we are bound, is, to seek for the pardon of our sins in Christ's name, and in dependence on him and his righteousness. God appoints his labourers their day and their place, and it is fit they should follow his appointment, though it may cross their own will. Providence contrives better for us than we do for ourselves; we must refer ourselves to God's guidance. If Christ send any one, his Spirit shall go along with him, and give him to see the fruit of his labours. But nothing can reconcile man's heart to the gospel, except the special grace of God.

Verses 22–30

The Jews listened to Paul's account of his conversion, but the mention of his being sent to the Gentiles, was so contrary to all their national prejudices, that they would hear no more. Their frantic conduct astonished the Roman officer, who supposed that Paul must have committed some great crime. Paul pleaded his privilege as a Roman citizen, by which he was exempted from all trials and punishments which might force him to confess himself guilty. The manner of his speaking plainly shows what holy security and serenity of mind he enjoyed. As Paul was a Jew, in low circumstances, the Roman officer questioned how he obtained so valuable a distinction; but the apostle told him he was free born. Let us value that freedom to which all the children of God are born; which no sum of money, however large, can purchase for those who remain unregenerate. This at once put a stop to his trouble. Thus many are kept from evil practices by the fear of man, who would not be held back from them by the fear of God. The apostle asks, simply, Is it lawful? He knew that the God whom he served would support him under all sufferings for his name's sake. But if it were not lawful, the apostle's religion directed him, if possible, to avoid it. He never shrunk from a cross which his Divine Master laid upon his onward road; and he never stepped aside out of that road to take one up.

Chapter 23

Chapter Outline

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| Paul's defence before the council of the Jews. | (1-5) |
| Paul's defence. He receives a Divine assurance that he shall go to Rome. | (6-11) |
| The Jews conspire to kill Paul, Lysias sends him to Cesarea. | (12-24) |
| Lysias's letter to Felix. | (25-35) |

Verses 1-5

See here the character of an honest man. He sets God before him, and lives as in his sight. He makes conscience of what he says and does, and, according to the best of his knowledge, he keeps from whatever is evil, and cleaves to what is good. He is conscientious in all his words and conduct. Those who thus live before God, may, like Paul, have confidence both toward God and man. Though the answer of Paul contained a just rebuke and prediction, he seems to have been too angry at the treatment he received in uttering them. Great men may be told of their faults, and public complaints may be made in a proper manner; but the law of God requires respect for those in authority.

Verses 6-11

The Pharisees were correct in the faith of the Jewish church. The Sadducees were no friends to the Scripture or Divine revelation; they denied a future state; they had neither hope of eternal happiness, nor dread of eternal misery. When called in question for his being a Christian, Paul might truly say he was called in question for the hope of the resurrection of the dead. It was justifiable in him, by this profession of his opinion on that disputed point, to draw off the Pharisees from persecuting him, and to lead them to protect him from this unlawful violence. How easily can God defend his own cause! Though the Jews seemed to be perfectly agreed in their conspiracy against religion, yet they were influenced by very different motives. There is no true friendship among the wicked, and in a moment, and with the utmost ease, God can turn their union into open enmity. Divine consolations stood Paul in the most stead; the chief captain rescued him out of the hands of cruel men, but the event he could not tell. Whoever is against us, we need not fear, if the Lord stand by us. It is the will of Christ, that his servants who are faithful, should be always cheerful. He might think he should never see Rome; but God tells him, even in that he should be gratified, since he desired to go there only for the honour of Christ, and to do good.

Verses 12–24

False religious principles, adopted by carnal men, urge on to such wickedness, as human nature would hardly be supposed capable of. Yet the Lord readily disappoints the best concerted schemes of iniquity. Paul knew that the Divine providence acts by reasonable and prudent means; and that, if he neglected to use the means in his power, he could not expect God's providence to work on his behalf. He who will not help himself according to his means and power, has neither reason nor revelation to assure him that he shall receive help from God. Believing in the Lord, we and ours shall be kept from every evil work, and kept to his kingdom. Heavenly Father, give us by thy Holy Spirit, for Christ's sake, this precious faith.

Verses 25–35

God has instruments for every work. The natural abilities and moral virtues of the heathens often have been employed to protect his persecuted servants. Even the men of the world can discern between the conscientious conduct of upright believers, and the zeal of false professors, though they disregard or understand not their doctrinal principles. All hearts are in God's hand, and those are blessed who put their trust in him, and commit their ways unto him.

Chapter 24

Chapter Outline

- The speech of Tertullus against Paul. (1–9)
- Paul's defence before Felix. (10–21)
- Felix trembles at the reasoning of Paul. (22–27)

Verses 1–9

See here the unhappiness of great men, and a great unhappiness it is, to have their services praised beyond measure, and never to be faithfully told of their faults; hereby they are hardened and encouraged in evil, like Felix. God's prophets were charged with being troublers of the land, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that he perverted the nation; the very same charges were brought against Paul. The selfish and evil passions of men urge them forward, and the graces and power of speech, too often have been used to mislead and prejudice men against the truth. How different will the characters of Paul and Felix appear at the day of judgement, from what they are represented in the speech of Tertullus! Let not Christians value the applause, or be troubled at the revilings of ungodly men, who represent the vilest of the human race almost as gods, and the excellent of the earth as pestilences and movers of sedition.

Verses 10–21

Paul gives a just account of himself, which clears him from crime, and likewise shows the true reason of the violence against him. Let us never be driven from any good way by its having an ill name. It is very comfortable, in worshipping God, to look to him as the God of our fathers, and to set up no other rule of faith or practice but the Scriptures. This shows there will be a resurrection to a final judgment. Prophets and their doctrines were to be tried by their fruits. Paul's aim was to have a conscience void of offence. His care and endeavour was to abstain from many things, and to abound in the exercises of religion at all times; both towards God. and towards man. If blamed for being more earnest in the things of God than our neighbours, what is our reply? Do we shrink from the accusation? How many in the world would rather be accused of any weakness, nay, even of wickedness, than of an earnest, fervent feeling of love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and of devotedness to his service! Can such think that He will confess them when he comes in his glory, and before the angels of God? If there is any sight pleasing to the God of our salvation, and a sight at which the angels rejoice, it is, to behold a devoted follower of the Lord, here upon earth, acknowledging that he is guilty, if it be a crime, of loving the Lord who died for him, with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. And that he will not in silence see God's word despised, or hear his name profaned; he will rather risk the ridicule and the hatred of the world, than one frown from that gracious Being whose love is better than life.

Verses 22–27

The apostle reasoned concerning the nature and obligations of righteousness, temperance, and of a judgment to come; thus showing the oppressive judge and his profligate mistress, their need of repentance, forgiveness, and of the grace of the gospel. Justice respects our conduct in life, particularly in reference to others; temperance, the state and government of our souls, in reference to God. He who does not exercise himself in these, has neither the form nor the power of godliness, and must be overwhelmed with the Divine wrath in the day of God's appearing. A prospect of the judgment to come, is enough to make the stoutest heart to tremble. Felix trembled, but that was all. Many are startled by the word of God, who are not changed by it. Many fear the consequences of sin, yet continue in the love and practice of sin. In the affairs of our souls, delays are dangerous. Felix put off this matter to a more convenient season, but we do not find that the more convenient season ever came. Behold now is the accepted time; hear the voice of the Lord to-day. He was in haste to turn from hearing the truth. Was any business more urgent than for him to reform his conduct, or more important than the salvation of his soul! Sinners often start up like a man roused from his sleep by a loud noise, but soon sink again into their usual drowsiness. Be not deceived by occasional appearances of religion in ourselves or in others. Above all, let us not trifle with the word of God. Do we expect that as we advance in life our hearts will grow softer, or that the influence of the world will decline? Are we not at this moment in danger of being lost for ever? Now is the day of salvation; tomorrow may be too late.

Chapter 25

Chapter Outline

Paul before Festus, he appeals to Caesar. (1–12)

Festus confers with Agrippa respecting Paul. (13–27)

Verses 1–12

See how restless malice is. Persecutors deem it a peculiar favour to have their malice gratified. Preaching Christ, the end of the law, was no offence against the law. In suffering times the prudence of the Lord's people is tried, as well as their patience; they need wisdom. It becomes those who are innocent, to insist upon their innocence. Paul was willing to abide by the rules of the law, and to let that take its course. If he deserved death, he would accept the punishment. But if none of the things whereof they accused him were true, no man could deliver him unto them, with justice. Paul is neither released nor condemned. It is an instance of the slow steps which Providence takes; by which we are often made ashamed, both of our hopes and of our fears, and are kept waiting on God.

Verses 13–27

Agrippa had the government of Galilee. How many unjust and hasty judgments the Roman maxim, ver. #**(16)**, condemn! This heathen, guided only by the light of nature, followed law and custom exactly, yet how many Christians will not follow the rules of truth, justice, and charity, in judging their brethren! The questions about God's worship, the way of salvation, and the truths of the gospel, may appear doubtful and without interest, to worldly men and mere politicians. See how slightly this Roman speaks of Christ, and of the great controversy between the Jews and the Christians. But the day is at hand when Festus and the whole world will see, that all the concerns of the Roman empire were but trifles and of no consequence, compared with this question of Christ's resurrection. Those who have had means of instruction, and have despised them, will be awfully convinced of their sin and folly. Here was a noble assembly brought together to hear the truths of the gospel, though they only meant to gratify their curiosity by attending to the defence of a prisoner. Many, even now, attend at the places of hearing the word of God with "great pomp," and too often with no better motive than curiosity. And though ministers do not now stand as prisoners to make a defence for their lives, yet numbers affect to sit in judgment upon them, desirous to make them offenders for a word, rather than to learn from them the truth and will of God, for the salvation of their souls. But the pomp of this appearance was outshone by the real glory of the poor prisoner at the bar. What was the honour of their fine appearance, compared with that of Paul's wisdom, and grace, and holiness; his courage and con-

stancy in suffering for Christ! It is no small mercy to have God clear up our righteousness as the light, and our just dealing as the noon-day; to have nothing certain laid to our charge. And God makes even the enemies of his people to do them right.

Chapter 26

Chapter Outline

- Paul's defence before Agrippa. (1–11)
- His conversion and preaching to the Gentiles. (12–23)
- Festus and Agrippa convinced of Paul's innocence. (24–32)

Verses 1–11

Christianity teaches us to give a reason of the hope that is in us, and also to give honour to whom honour is due, without flattery or fear of man. Agrippa was well versed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, therefore could the better judge as to the controversy about Jesus being the Messiah. Surely ministers may expect, when they preach the faith of Christ, to be heard patiently. Paul professes that he still kept to all the good in which he was first educated and trained up. See here what his religion was. He was a moralist, a man of virtue, and had not learned the arts of the crafty, covetous Pharisees; he was not chargeable with any open vice and profaneness. He was sound in the faith. He always had a holy regard for the ancient promise made of God unto the fathers, and built his hope upon it. The apostle knew very well that all this would not justify him before God, yet he knew it was for his reputation among the Jews, and an argument that he was not such a man as they represented him to be. Though he counted this but loss, that he might win Christ, yet he mentioned it when it might serve to honour Christ. See here what Paul's religion is; he has not such zeal for the ceremonial law as he had in his youth; the sacrifices and offerings appointed by that, are done away by the great Sacrifice which they typified. Of the ceremonial cleansings he makes no conscience, and thinks the Levitical priesthood is done away in the priesthood of Christ; but, as to the main principles of his religion, he is as zealous as ever. Christ and heaven, are the two great doctrines of the gospel; that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. These are the matter of the promise made unto the fathers. The temple service, or continual course of religious duties, day and night, was kept up as the profession of faith in the promise of eternal life, and in expectation of it. The prospect of eternal life should engage us to be diligent and stedfast in all religious exercises. Yet the Sadducees hated Paul for preaching the resurrection; and the other Jews joined them, because he testified that Jesus was risen, and was the promised Redeemer of Israel. Many things are thought to be beyond belief, only because the infinite nature and perfections of Him that has revealed, performed, or promised them, are overlooked. Paul acknowledged, that while he continued a Pharisee, he was a bitter enemy to Christianity. This was his character and manner of life

in the beginning of his time; and there was every thing to hinder his being a Christian. Those who have been most strict in their conduct before conversion, will afterwards see abundant reason for humbling themselves, even on account of things which they then thought ought to have been done.

Verses 12–23

Paul was made a Christian by Divine power; by a revelation of Christ both to him and in him; when in the full career of his sin. He was made a minister by Divine authority: the same Jesus who appeared to him in that glorious light, ordered him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. A world that sits in darkness must be enlightened; those must be brought to know the things that belong to their everlasting peace, who are yet ignorant of them. A world that lies in wickedness must be sanctified and reformed; it is not enough for them to have their eyes opened, they must have their hearts renewed; not enough to be turned from darkness to light, but they must be turned from the power of Satan unto God. All who are turned from sin to God, are not only pardoned, but have a grant of a rich inheritance. The forgiveness of sins makes way for this. None can be happy who are not holy; and to be saints in heaven we must be first saints on earth. We are made holy, and saved by faith in Christ; by which we rely upon Christ as the Lord our Righteousness, and give up ourselves to him as the Lord our Ruler; by this we receive the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and eternal life. The cross of Christ was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and they were in a rage at Paul's preaching the fulfilling of the Old Testament predictions. Christ should be the first that should rise from the dead; the Head or principal One. Also, it was foretold by the prophets, that the Gentiles should be brought to the knowledge of God by the Messiah; and what in this could the Jews justly be displeased at? Thus the true convert can give a reason of his hope, and a good account of the change manifest in him. Yet for going about and calling on men thus to repent and to be converted, vast numbers have been blamed and persecuted.

Verses 24–32

It becomes us, on all occasions, to speak the words of truth and soberness, and then we need not be troubled at the unjust censures of men. Active and laborious followers of the gospel often have been despised as dreamers or madmen, for believing such doctrines and such wonderful facts; and for attesting that the same faith and diligence, and an experience like their own, are necessary to all men, whatever their rank, in order to their salvation. But apostles and prophets, and the Son of God himself, were exposed to this charge; and none need be moved thereby, when Divine grace has made them wise unto salvation. Agrippa saw a great deal of reason for Christianity. His understanding and judgment were for the time convinced, but his heart was not changed. And his conduct and temper were widely different from the humility and spirituality of the gospel. Many are almost persuaded to be

religious, who are not quite persuaded; they are under strong convictions of their duty, and of the excellence of the ways of God, yet do not pursue their convictions. Paul urged that it was the concern of every one to become a true Christian; that there is grace enough in Christ for all. He expressed his full conviction of the truth of the gospel, the absolute necessity of faith in Christ in order to salvation. Such salvation from such bondage, the gospel of Christ offers to the Gentiles; to a lost world. Yet it is with much difficulty that any person can be persuaded he needs a work of grace on his heart, like that which was needful for the conversion of the Gentiles. Let us beware of fatal hesitation in our own conduct; and recollect how far the being almost persuaded to be a Christian, is from being altogether such a one as every true believer is.

Chapter 27

Chapter Outline

Paul's voyage towards Rome.	(1–11)
Paul and his companions endangered by a tempest.	(12–20)
He receives a Divine assurance of safety.	(21–29)
Paul encourages those with him.	(30–38)
They are shipwrecked.	(39–44)

Verses 1–11

It was determined by the counsel of God, before it was determined by the counsel of Festus, that Paul should go to Rome; for God had work for him to do there. The course they steered, and the places they touched at, are here set down. And God here encourages those who suffer for him, to trust in him; for he can put it into the hearts of those to befriend them, from whom they least expect it. Sailors must make the best of the wind: and so must we all in our passage over the ocean of this world. When the winds are contrary, yet we must be getting forward as well as we can. Many who are not driven backward by cross providences, do not get forward by favourable providences. And many real Christians complain as to the concerns of their souls, that they have much ado to keep their ground. Every fair haven is not a safe haven. Many show respect to good ministers, who will not take their advice. But the event will convince sinners of the vanity of their hopes, and the folly of their conduct.

Verses 12–20

Those who launch forth on the ocean of this world, with a fair gale, know not what storms they may meet with; and therefore must not easily take it for granted that they have obtained their purpose. Let us never expect to be quite safe till we enter heaven. They saw neither sun nor stars for many days. Thus melancholy sometimes is the condition of the people of God as to their spiritual matters; they walk in darkness, and have no light. See what the wealth of this world is: though coveted as a blessing, the time may come when it will be a burden; not only too heavy to be carried safely, but heavy enough to sink him that has it. The children of this world can be prodigal of their goods for the saving their lives, yet are sparing of them in works of piety and charity, and in suffering for Christ. Any man will rather make shipwreck of his goods than of his life; but many rather make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, than of their goods. The means the sailors used did not succeed; but when sinners give up all hope of saving themselves, they are prepared to understand God's word, and to trust in his mercy through Jesus Christ.

Verses 21–29

They did not hearken to the apostle when he warned them of their danger; yet if they acknowledge their folly, and repent of it, he will speak comfort and relief to them when in danger. Most people bring themselves into trouble, because they do not know when they are well off; they come to harm and loss by aiming to mend their condition, often against advice. Observe the solemn profession Paul made of relation to God. No storms or tempests can hinder God's favour to his people, for he is a Help always at hand. It is a comfort to the faithful servants of God when in difficulties, that as long as the Lord has any work for them to do, their lives shall be prolonged. If Paul had thrust himself needlessly into bad company, he might justly have been cast away with them; but God calling him into it, they are preserved with him. They are given thee; there is no greater satisfaction to a good man than to know he is a public blessing. He comforts them with the same comforts wherewith he himself was comforted. God is ever faithful, therefore let all who have an interest in his promises be ever cheerful. As, with God, saying and doing are not two things, believing and enjoying should not be so with us. Hope is an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, entering into that within the veil. Let those who are in spiritual darkness hold fast by that, and think not of putting to sea again, but abide by Christ, and wait till the day break, and the shadows flee away.

Verses 30–38

God, who appointed the end, that they should be saved, appointed the means, that they should be saved by the help of these shipmen. Duty is ours, events are God's; we do not trust God, but tempt him, when we say we put ourselves under his protection, if we do not use proper means, such as are within our power, for our safety. But how selfish are men in general, often even ready to seek their own safety by the destruction of others! Happy those who have such a one as Paul in their company, who not only had intercourse with Heaven, but was of an enlivening spirit to those about him. The sorrow of the world works death, while joy in God is life and peace in the greatest distresses and dangers. The comfort of God's promises can only be ours by believing dependence on him, to fulfil his word to us; and the salvation he reveals must be waited for in use of the means he appoints. If God has chosen us to salvation, he has also appointed that we shall obtain it by repentance, faith, prayer, and persevering obedience; it is fatal presumption to expect it in any other way. It is an encouragement to people to commit themselves to Christ as their Saviour, when those who invite them, clearly show that they do so themselves.

Verses 39–44

The ship that had weathered the storm in the open sea, where it had room, is dashed to pieces when it sticks fast. Thus, if the heart fixes in the world in affection, and cleaving to it, it is lost. Satan's temptations beat against it, and it is gone; but as long as it keeps above the world, though tossed with cares and tumults, there is hope for it. They had the shore in

view, yet suffered shipwreck in the harbour; thus we are taught never to be secure. Though there is great difficulty in the way of the promised salvation, it shall, without fail, be brought to pass. It will come to pass that whatever the trials and dangers may be, in due time all believers will get safely to heaven. Lord Jesus, thou hast assured us that none of thine shall perish. Thou wilt bring them all safe to the heavenly shore. And what a pleasing landing will that be! Thou wilt present them to thy Father, and give thy Holy Spirit full possession of them for ever.

Chapter 28

Chapter Outline

Paul kindly received at Melita.	(1–10)
He arrives at Rome.	(11–16)
His conference with the Jews.	(17–22)
Paul preaches to the Jews, and abides at Rome a prisoner.	(23–31)

Verses 1–10

God can make strangers to be friends; friends in distress. Those who are despised for homely manners, are often more friendly than the more polished; and the conduct of heathens, or persons called barbarians, condemns many in civilized nations, professing to be Christians. The people thought that Paul was a murderer, and that the viper was sent by Divine justice, to be the avenger of blood. They knew that there is a God who governs the world, so that things do not come to pass by chance, no, not the smallest event, but all by Divine direction; and that evil pursues sinners; that there are good works which God will reward, and wicked works which he will punish. Also, that murder is a dreadful crime, one which shall not long go unpunished. But they thought all wicked people were punished in this life. Though some are made examples in this world, to prove that there is a God and a Providence, yet many are left unpunished, to prove that there is a judgment to come. They also thought all who were remarkably afflicted in this life were wicked people. Divine revelation sets this matter in a true light. Good men often are greatly afflicted in this life, for the trial and increase of their faith and patience. Observe Paul's deliverance from the danger. And thus in the strength of the grace of Christ, believers shake off the temptations of Satan, with holy resolution. When we despise the censures and reproaches of men, and look upon them with holy contempt, having the testimony of our consciences for us, then, like Paul, we shake off the viper into the fire. It does us no harm, except we are kept by it from our duty. God hereby made Paul remarkable among these people, and so made way for the receiving of the gospel. The Lord raises up friends for his people in every place whither he leads them, and makes them blessings to those in affliction.

Verses 11–16

The common events of travelling are seldom worthy of being told; but the comfort of communion with the saints, and kindness shown by friends, deserve particular mention. The Christians at Rome were so far from being ashamed of Paul, or afraid of owning him, because he was a prisoner, that they were the more careful to show him respect. He had great comfort in this. And if our friends are kind to us, God puts it into their hearts, and we

must give him the glory. When we see those even in strange places, who bear Christ's name, fear God, and serve him, we should lift up our hearts to heaven in thanksgiving. How many great men have made their entry into Rome, crowned and in triumph, who really were plagues to the world! But here a good man makes his entry into Rome, chained as a poor captive, who was a greater blessing to the world than any other merely a man. Is not this enough to put us for ever out of conceit with worldly favour? This may encourage God's prisoners, that he can give them favour in the eyes of those that carry them captives. When God does not soon deliver his people out of bondage, yet makes it easy to them, or them easy under it, they have reason to be thankful.

Verses 17–22

It was for the honour of Paul that those who examined his case, acquitted him. In his appeal he sought not to accuse his nation, but only to clear himself. True Christianity settles what is of common concern to all mankind, and is not built upon narrow opinions and private interests. It aims at no worldly benefit or advantage, but all its gains are spiritual and eternal. It is, and always has been, the lot of Christ's holy religion, to be every where spoken against. Look through every town and village where Christ is exalted as the only Saviour of mankind, and where the people are called to follow him in newness of life, and we see those who give themselves up to Christ, still called a sect, a party, and reproached. And this is the treatment they are sure to receive, so long as there shall continue an ungodly man upon earth.

Verses 23–31

Paul persuaded the Jews concerning Jesus. Some were wrought upon by the word, and others hardened; some received the light, and others shut their eyes against it. And the same has always been the effect of the gospel. Paul parted with them, observing that the Holy Ghost had well described their state. Let all that hear the gospel, and do not heed it, tremble at their doom; for who shall heal them, if God does not? The Jews had afterwards much reasoning among themselves. Many have great reasoning, who do not reason aright. They find fault with one another's opinions, yet will not yield to truth. Nor will men's reasoning among themselves convince them, without the grace of God to open their understandings. While we mourn on account of such despisers, we should rejoice that the salvation of God is sent to others, who will receive it; and if we are of that number, we should be thankful to Him who hath made us to differ. The apostle kept to his principle, to know and preach nothing but Christ and him crucified. Christians, when tempted from their main business, should bring themselves back with this question, What does this concern the Lord Jesus? What tendency has it to bring us to him, and to keep us walking in him? The apostle preached not himself, but Christ, and he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Though Paul was placed in a very narrow opportunity for being useful, he was not disturbed in it. Though it

was not a wide door that was opened to him, yet no man was suffered to shut it; and to many it was an effectual door, so that there were saints even in Nero's household, [Php 4:22](#). We learn also from [Php 1:13](#), how God overruled Paul's imprisonment for the furtherance of the gospel. And not the residents at Rome only, but all the church of Christ, to the present day, and in the most remote corner of the globe, have abundant reason to bless God, that during the most mature period of his Christian life and experience, he was detained a prisoner. It was from his prison, probably chained hand to hand to the soldier who kept him, that the apostle wrote the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews; epistles showing, perhaps more than any others, the Christian love with which his heart overflowed, and the Christian experience with which his soul was filled. The believer of the present time may have less of triumph, and less of heavenly joy, than the apostle, but every follower of the same Saviour, is equally sure of safety and peace at the last. Let us seek to live more and more in the love of the Saviour; to labour to glorify Him by every action of our lives; and we shall assuredly, by his strength, be among the number of those who now overcome our enemies; and by his free grace and mercy, be hereafter among the blessed company who shall sit with Him upon his throne, even as He also has overcome, and is sitting on his Father's throne, at God's right hand for evermore.