

Holding Fast Our Profession

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"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Heb. 4:14, 15

There are two things which God in his holy word has joined together, and which therefore no man may lawfully put asunder. These are, faith and confession—both of them fruits of the Spirit, both of them effects of sovereign grace; but each occupying its own place, each succeeding in its own order. The seat of faith is the heart; the seat of confession the mouth. The end of the one is "righteousness," or justification; the end of the other is the fruit of righteousness—the "salvation" of the soul. Is not this according to the firm and sure Scripture testimony: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation?" (Romans 10:10.) We see then from this testimony that a confession of Christ is as needful as faith in Christ, and that the work of faith in the heart must ever be accompanied with the word of faith in the mouth. Does not our Lord himself say, "'Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven?" (Matthew 10:32, 33.) How encouraging upon this point to all who believe in Christ and confess his name is the apostle's declaration, and how solemn the warning words of his Lord and ours.

In our text we meet with the word "*profession*:" "Let us hold fast our profession." Now the word "confession" in the passage which I have quoted from Romans 10. is almost the same as the word "profession" in the text; the only difference being that in the original in the former place it is a verb and in the latter a substantive, the meaning in each being substantially the same. Or even if we do admit a little difference in the signification of the words as used in our own language, yet in intent and meaning they really and practically amount to much the same thing; confession being chiefly that which is made by the lips, profession that which is carried out in the life. Whether then we use the word "confession" or "profession" it comes to the same point as a matter of personal and indispensable performance, that there must be, agreeably to the word of God, an open and undisguised profession made of faith in the Son of God by all who through grace are enabled to believe in his name. We see this very clearly exemplified in the New Testament saints. When the Lord, for instance, by declaring to Nathanael that before Philip called him he saw him under the fig tree, convinced him that he was the Christ, faith immediately sprang up in Nathanael's heart, and confession at once burst from his lips: "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." (John 1:48, 49.) When the Lord asked his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" Simon Peter at once answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:15, 16.) But what was the root of Peter's noble confession? "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." What else but this special and personal revelation of the Son of God raised up faith in Peter's heart, and was not the confession of his lips the necessary fruit of this faith? When pardon and peace through the word of Ananias reached the soul of Paul after those three days of

intense conflict, when he neither ate nor drank, what was the effect? "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God." (Acts 9:17-20.) In his instance, as in that of Peter, we see how faith in his heart brought confession out of his mouth. He could not be silent. To him it was not life to live except to testify of Christ. And was not this the main object for which he was so specially and signally called? As the Lord said to Ananias, "Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." (Acts 9:15.) So a little before this we find that when Peter and his fellow apostles began to preach Jesus at Jerusalem, it caused a mighty stir. The Scribes and Pharisees were all up in arms to stop this dangerous religion, and if possible to put a gag into the mouth of those men who were spreading amongst the people that destructive doctrine—destructive, that is, to all their false pretensions, that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had ignominiously crucified, was the very Christ and the Son of God, as manifested by his resurrection from the dead. But what said Peter in the name of himself and his fellow apostles? "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." And so little daunted were they by the fear of suffering for Christ's sake, that when let go, and rejoining their own company, "they lifted up their voice to God with one accord," a part of their prayer was, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." (Acts 4:29.)

This, then, is what is meant in Scripture by "confession" or "profession"; and as with the apostles so it is now. It is impossible for any one to keep silence when once the Lord Jesus Christ has been made manifest to his soul. He must join confession to his faith; and sooner or later it must come

forth out of his mouth to declare what he has seen, felt, and heard of the Lord's Person, of the Lord's presence, of the Lord's voice, and of the Lord's power.

But this public and open confession of Christ, or, to use the word of our text, this "profession," especially in those times, was attended with great difficulty, and environed with many perils, and these most severe and daunting to the flesh. Believers in those days carried their lives in their hands. It was death, and often instantaneous death, to profess to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, as we see in the case of the martyred Stephen. The Hebrews, that is, the believing Jews in Palestine, as distinguished from the believing Gentiles, to whom the Epistle was addressed, were especially encompassed with these perils. They were surrounded on every side by the unbelieving Jews—deadly enemies not only to all who believed in Christ, but particularly to those of their own nation who professed faith in him. The apostle therefore says to them, "But call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, while ye were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions: and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used." (Heb. 10:32, 33.) They dwelt also surrounded by the power of the Roman Emperor, who had a large army always stationed in Judea, and whose will was law, from which there was no appeal. Added to these circumstances, it is very evident from various allusions in this epistle and its strong warning against apostacy, that the believing Hebrews to whom it was written were very weak in faith, and that there were those amongst them who were exceedingly wavering in their profession. Now all these circumstances from without and from within combined, as we find from the internal evidence of the epistle, to shake them to the very foundation, and were almost inducing some of

the waverers to give up the very profession of that faith in Christ which they had previously made. The apostle, therefore, in this epistle, to meet their peculiar circumstances, seeks on the one hand to strengthen the faith of all who truly believed amongst them, and to encourage them by all means to hold fast their profession, and on the other hand solemnly to warn all who wavered against drawing back, for if they did so it would be unto perdition. (Heb. 10:39.) And let no man think that these warnings and admonitions are not needed now. They may not, and we know they will not, keep back from apostacy those whose hearts are not right before God, for it is with them as with the sons of Eli: "Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them." (1 Sam. 2:25.) But they are made useful and profitable to those who truly fear God as hedges to keep them back from departing from the Lord.

Now we may not be exposed to the same perils in all points with which these believing Hebrews were surrounded. Persecution in our day has to a great extent, dropped its terrors; law has beaten the sword out of its hands, and we can meet this day and worship God according to our own conscience without let or hindrance. For this we cannot be sufficiently thankful. Great are our civil and religious privileges; and we know not how soon they may be suspended or taken away. But still a true profession—and no other is worth the name—will always be attended with difficulties. If these be not outward they will be inward, and perhaps to an extent even greater than when a profession of Christ led to the prison and the faggot; for the summer of prosperity has been always more dangerous to the Church of Christ than the winter of adversity, and there have been more shipwrecks in a calm than in a storm. The words of the apostle are therefore as applicable now as they were then;

and as in writing to the Hebrews he would inspirit them to hold fast their profession, by setting before their eyes the Lord Jesus Christ as their great and sympathising high priest, so, as the Scriptures were "written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come," we may sit and listen to the words of our text as believing that the Holy Ghost speaks to us by the apostle as much as he spake to them. With God's blessing, therefore, in opening up these words, I shall,

I.—*First, show the necessity and nature of a Christian profession.*

II.—*Secondly, the difficulties and discouragements which encompass the saints of God in making and maintaining a godly, consistent profession of their most holy faith.*

III.—*Thirdly, the helps and encouragements which the apostle sets before them to strengthen their faith, and to inspirit them still to hold their profession fast.*

I.—There may be those in this congregation who fear the Lord, and yet at times may almost wish they had never made a profession of his name. I am one. For when my mind has at various times been cast down by many trying circumstances without and within into which I cannot now enter, and I have been sunk by them very low, or at others when I have taken a solemn view of what I am in myself, as a poor, vile sinner, and felt how little either as a Christian man or as a Christian minister I have lived to the Lord's honour and praise, I could have wished that I had never made a public profession of the name of Jesus. You may think perhaps, from my being so widely known among the churches of truth, that I love and am ambitious of popularity; but that is not my real or natural disposition. To live in obscurity and quiet would suit me far

better than to be brought so much before the public eye. When, then, my position exposes me, as it has done, to much opposition without and within, I could wish myself anything and anywhere but to be what and where I am. But am I or you singular there? Can we not find in the Scriptures any one who has travelled in the same path? I think we can find one, and him not less than a prophet of the Lord—if there be no other, who has had similar feelings in his soul. "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name." But could Jeremiah carry out his feelings? Could he put in practice his resolution? Let us hear his own words: "But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." (Jer. 20:9.) The Lord had put his word into his heart, that it might come out of his mouth; and therefore he could not keep it in. So in our own case; though we may not be prophets of the Lord as was he, whatever resolutions we may make in the flesh, or whatever discouragements we may experience in the path we are called upon by Scripture and conscience to tread, there is that in our hearts which will not let us rest satisfied with hiding our light under a bushel, or burying our talent in the earth; for we feel we cannot be silent without sin, and that we must publicly profess what we have tasted, felt, and handled of the Word of Life, that it may be to the glory and honour of his great name.

1. The Lord has now, and ever had, a peculiar people upon earth—a people whom he has formed for himself, that they may show forth his praise. The whole world lieth in wickedness, or as it might be rendered, "in the wicked one" (1 John 5:19); and thus the whole human race are by nature and practice enemies to God and godliness. Will then the Lord be satisfied that his name should no longer be known upon earth? Shall men succeed in thrusting God out of his own creation? Shall his mighty wonders in providence and in

grace never be revealed, discovered, or made manifest? Shall the whole human race sink under his wrath, and no mention be ever made upon earth that though just, he is also merciful; that though he hates sin, yet that he can pardon a sinner, and that his name and nature are love? He has determined, therefore, that his name shall be glorified even upon this ruined scene, this abode of sin and woe; that there shall be a people even upon this earthly ball, who shall set forth his worthy praise, and make it manifest that there is a God who reigns and rules below as well as above, who can glorify himself in this mortal, perishing world as well as in the glorious realms of eternal, unclouded bliss. He therefore has chosen a peculiar people to make himself known upon earth; for so sunk and fallen is man, that but for this eternal choice, none would or could be called to a knowledge of it. I need not multiply passages to prove this. Election stands so prominent in the work of God, that none can doubt it who understand and believe the Scripture. If then we are to be delivered from the wrath to come, we must belong to this peculiar people, for they only will be saved; and if we are to enjoy the blessings and mercies which are stored up for them in the realms of bliss above, we must be satisfied to cast in our lot and portion with them here below. If we are ashamed of Christ here, he will be ashamed of us hereafter; if we deny him before men, he will deny us before God. But if we suffer with him, we shall be glorified with him. If in this time-state we bear his cross, in a future state we shall wear his crown. Such is the sure, the unvarying testimony of the word of truth, not one jot or tittle of which can fall to the ground. Thus, fear as we may what may be the consequence of such a step, if the blessed Spirit do but work upon our heart and give us faith in the Son of God, we are as if compelled—and it is good that we are compelled—to make a profession of his worthy name. When I was in the world I had no serious thoughts about religion; I say "serious thoughts," because

from various circumstances, and especially from what I had seen and heard in the life and example of gracious people, I had some thoughts about it, but there was no real weight and power attending them. No idea and inclination had I at that time of making any profession of religion; and indeed to have done so would have been but hypocrisy. Could I have had my own will, it would have been to have spent my life in ease and quiet, devoted to study and literature, without religion ever troubling my mind, interfering with my pursuits, or in any way injuring my worldly prospects, which I may say without boasting were fair and good. But God, in his infinite mercy to my soul, and I hope for the good of others also, willed it otherwise. He made me religious whether I would or not; for he wrought those feelings in my soul, he laid eternal things with that weight and power upon my mind, he brought his own word so to bear upon my conscience, and gave me, with a sense of my lost, ruined condition, such earnest longings, thirstings, and breathings after himself, that I could not but be sensible that the Lord himself had by his grace wrought a new and striking change upon my heart, which could not be hidden from myself or others. Therefore I was compelled to speak about those things of God and those divine realities which I so powerfully felt; because, with Jeremiah, there was that shut up in my bones which made me speak, whether I would or not. The consequences of all this in persecution and opposition were then hidden from my eyes; nor in truth did I care much about them. So it is with all the saints of God, in each according to his measure of faith. God's work upon their hearts separates them from the world, sometimes at once, sometimes more slowly and gradually, but in every case sooner or later effectually; for "they are not of the world," even as Christ was not of the world (John 17:14); and to all of them God speaks: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." (2 Cor. 6:17.) Now it is this separation which first stamps them as

belonging to the peculiar people; for until this is accomplished there is no decisive mark or evidence of God's choice or the Spirit's work. The first step, then, in profession is *separation*.

2. But now comes a further step. They are delivered from their various errors or their false profession by the same power of God's word upon their heart which makes them separate. This deliverance gives them an ear to *hear the truth*, faithfully and experimentally preached; and as it is commended to their conscience and finds a place in their affections, they feel and find themselves compelled by a sweet, invincible constraint, to cast in their lot with the people that know and love the truth; for they can truly say with Ruth, from the love that they feel to the Lord and his saints: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." (Ruth 1:16.) As the nature and evil of sin are also more and more opened up in their conscience, they are obliged to separate from that company, whether professing or profane, those ways and pursuits which feed the power of sin, and therefore from all who live in the practice of evil; and as the saints of God are made more and more dear unto them, and brought more into close relationship with them, they are obliged to associate with them more and more, both from the convictions of their conscience and the constraints of love. Thus by the work of God upon their souls, whether they will or not, they are brought into a profession of religion more and more, almost without knowing it and almost without seeing the consequences. It is therefore with them not a matter of choice and will, though they are made willing in the day of God's power, but of the Lord's leading and guiding; for they find and feel what the Lord is pleased to make manifest to their souls, of that they cannot but speak and testify. If they have felt Christ precious, they must, as opportunity offers, exalt his gracious name. And if the Lord

has blessed their souls with any manifestation of his goodness and mercy, they cannot keep silence, for it seems, if they did, as if the very stones would cry out. Thus, not against their will, and yet in a measure independent of their will, are they brought to make a profession of that name which is above every name—of that name which at times in their souls' feelings is as ointment poured forth. (Song 1:3.)

A profession then to be a right, a saving, an acceptable profession, must spring from faith. Faith is the root, profession is the stem; and as a root without a stem is an incomplete if not an unsightly object, so a stem without a root is a fading, withering plant. If then we have no right faith, we can make no right profession. But if we have right faith, by which I mean a faith of God's own giving and implanting in our soul, then that faith will of necessity give birth to a profession corresponding to it; for there will be a necessary agreement between root and stem. If my faith be strong and vigorous, my profession will be strong and vigorous too. If my faith be weak, so will be my profession. We see this daily exemplified in ourselves and others. How strong the faith, how active, how devoted, how godly the profession in some; in others the faith how weak, the profession how languid and unstable, and often inconsistent. It is true I may make a profession of faith, and a loud and bold one too, without possessing the faith of God's elect: it is true I may talk as many do about Christ, without having the root of the matter in me, or ever having spiritually seen his beauty and glory. But will not the fear of God in a conscience made tender by the touch of his hand repress and keep under this noisy, loud, talkative profession, and rather make us "swift to hear and slow to speak," than swift to speak and slow to hear? (James 1:19.) Is not honesty and sincerity before God and man an eminent fruit of divine teaching; and will not this honesty and sincerity of heart keep all who fear

God in good measure from that presumptuous confidence and boasting talkativeness which are so stamped upon the profession of the day, and so opposed to every gracious, godly feeling of the heart? We therefore see that to make an honest and good profession, we must have a faith wrought by the power of God in our soul. Bear also in mind that this profession is not to be confined to words only, the mere talk of the lips, but must be made manifest in our daily conduct and conversation; for "actions speak louder than words," and it matters little what profession a man makes with his lips unless it be carried out practically in his life.

II.—But I pass on to show the *difficulties and discouragements* that surround a godly profession; for if there were none, why should the apostle, here and elsewhere, exhort the Hebrews to "*hold fast* their profession?" Was there no danger of letting it go, of its slipping through their fingers? Was there no inward or outward peril accompanying their profession, so that it might be by a sudden stroke beaten out of their hand, or drawn from it by craft and subtlety? Would they have no moments of doubt and almost despair in which they might be tempted almost to abandon all for lost? Surely there were, or what need of the exhortation, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering?" (Heb. 10:23.)

i. But have these perils and dangers all passed away? Have not we, too, our temptations, our difficulties, and discouragements as well as they? Surely we have, or the text would not speak to us. Let us then look at some of these difficulties and discouragements which encompass a godly profession, some of which are inward and some outward; some arising from the church, others from the world. But most of them take rise from our own wicked, corrupt heart. Examine, then, with me a few of those difficulties which

prevent us from holding our profession as fast as we should.

1. As faith is the root of all gracious, godly profession, so *unbelief* is the grand hindrance both in making and maintaining such a profession as brings comfort to our own heart, glory to God, and profit to his people. This is therefore what the apostle calls "the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1), the idea being taken from a loose, cumbrous garment which entangles the feet and prevents activity in the race. When faith is in exercise, nothing is more easy than to confess the blessed name of Jesus. Then we hold fast our profession without wavering. But when faith is not in exercise, when unbelief comes in and exerts its power over our minds, it makes the hands droop, so that, if I may use the expression, our very profession but for the grace of God would drop out of our fingers. To fight at such times the good fight of faith is somewhat like a man fighting with an adversary in a dream: he cannot grasp his sword. Have you not dreamt sometimes that you were fighting with some deadly enemy, and it was as if your hand could not clasp your sword, or if you struck a blow, it was so weak and ineffective that it seemed as if all your muscle and sinew were gone? There are day-dreams as well as night-dreams; and how often in our day-dreams does unbelief so weaken our hands that we cannot grasp "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." We would fight against every foe and every fear, against every vile lust and base corruption; we would resist even to blood striving against sin. We would not be cast down and discouraged by the difficulties in the way. But, like one fighting in a dream, the enemy seems to get the better of us in every way, and all our attempts to beat him back are weak and inefficient.

2. Another temptation, and therefore another hindrance to holding fast our profession, is *infidelity*. You would hardly

think so, but it is an undoubted fact, that many of the saints of God are very much troubled with infidel suggestions; and that even the servants of God themselves are not exempt from these fiery darts of the devil. I personally knew a gracious man, a servant of God, who during the greater part of one week was so assailed with infidelity, and especially about the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he resolved on the coming Lord's day to go into the pulpit and tell the people that he had been deceived. "I have not deceived you," he resolved to say; "I fully believed what I preached to you, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost; but I now see that I was wrong, and that what I preached is not true." He was a remarkably honest man, both naturally and spiritually, and he therefore felt bound to tell the people the conclusion to which he had come in his own mind. Now I do not say that he acted wisely in coming to this resolution, for he might have seen, or at least feared, it was a temptation. But before the Sunday came, the Lord broke in upon his soul with such sweet, overwhelming power, and gave him such a bright and clear testimony to the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he went into the pulpit and preached it more boldly and strongly than ever. I mention this to show that even those whose hearts, lips, and lives are taken up with preaching the gospel are yet exposed to these assaults of Satan. I have read also of a man, an undoubted saint, and if I remember right, an acknowledged servant of God, who had lived many years in the sweet enjoyment of gospel truth, and yet when a friend came to see him upon his dying bed, was so full of infidelity—not only of unbelief, but actually of such infidelity that he said he could not believe that the Scriptures were the word of God. His friend was overwhelmed with trouble. "What?" he said, "you to be on your dying bed and say this, whom I and so many others have received as a saint of God for all these years?" "Well," he replied, "I only tell you what I

feel; here I am in it, and I cannot help myself out of it." But before he left this life, the Lord appeared in power and glory to his soul, and he went home in the sweet enjoyment of the truth which he had so long professed. I mention these things to encourage you and myself also, who am often assailed with these darts of hell, these infidel suspicions, those suggestions of our relentless foe, who would destroy, if he could, the very foundation of our faith. But O, "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" If he can take away our Lord from us as revealed in the Scriptures, and as we hope he has been revealed to our hearts, what have we before us but the blackness of darkness for ever? For to take away the Deity of Christ must necessarily do away with his atoning blood and justifying righteousness, and leave us to utter despair.

3. But again, we often get *slack and cold* in the things of God. We may at times, perhaps, have been indulged with light and life, liberty and love, and walked comfortably with the Lord in peace and truth. But the world, it may be, has got hold of us; we may have left our first love, and those blessed feelings of warmth and consolation that once animated our hearts may have sunk to a very low ebb. Now when this is so, it is very hard to keep up a godly, consistent, active profession. It is true we may still keep up our profession before the Church and the world, and I hope do keep it up; for it would be a sad thing to let it go, or be remiss outwardly. It would indeed be bad to abandon prayer, reading the Scriptures, the house of God, and the company of the saints. But with all this outward attention there may be much inward coldness, torpidity, and death; much that benumbs the spiritual faculties. Thus, though we may keep up the form without, yet the life and power, holy warmth and living energy of vital godliness may be much wanting within.

4. But again, our profession may expose us to many things that may much *annoy and mortify the flesh*. We may sometimes be almost even ashamed of our profession, as keenly feeling what contempt it brings upon us and often what persecution. Our friends and relations may all discountenance this new, this strange religion of ours, which none of our family, they tell us, ever professed before; and especially in early days, when we are subject to their authority, they may frown upon us and threaten us with severe pecuniary injury. Or if not so circumstanced, our own timorous, cowardly minds may present to us many difficulties, none of which may come to pass, and all of which God may dispel, as the sun dispels the morning mist; and yet they may appear of sufficient magnitude to deter us from making and maintaining a firm, consistent profession of Christ.

5. *Satan*, again, hates a godly profession. It thins the number of his subjects; it glorifies God; it makes the crucified One to be the object of our esteem and love; it casts contempt upon his power, and thus galls and wounds his jealousy and pride. As then an honest, consistent, godly profession, bringing glory to God, brings disgrace to Satan, this stirs up his infernal enmity, and prompts him to display it in every possible way, to hinder us, by force or fraud, from holding fast our profession, and thus glorify Christ by our faith and obedience.

Thus all those things—and many others might be mentioned—combine to make us drop our hands, as if worn and wearied by toil and exertion, and hold our profession at times with very lax and loose fingers. Mark then how the apostle comes as to the rescue in the words of our text, as if by them he would sound a shrill trumpet in our ears, and animate by them both himself and us: "Let us hold fast our

profession." And may I not re-echo his words, and say to you "Whatever come give not up your profession, for if you give up that, you give up Christ? By giving up your profession, you renounce your faith; you manifest yourself a reprobate; you are guilty of apostacy; the indignation of God will surely fall upon you; and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Therefore, come what will, hold fast your profession. Let friends, family, honours, pleasures, riches, all go; they are not worth an instant's thought in comparison with eternal life; they are not worthy to be put in the same scale for a moment with the weight of your immortal soul. Let all go, but keep Christ whatever you do. Whatever you suffer, never part with Christ; for remember that if you part with your profession, you part with Jesus, so far as your act is concerned, for his grace can recover as well as keep. But to draw back is virtually to draw back unto perdition; for it is by your profession that you are held up before the world, and testify you are one with him."

III.—But having viewed the difficulties and discouragements which stand in the way of a consistent, godly profession, let us now consider the *helps and encouragements* which are brought forward in our text, that we may ever hold it fast.

i. The apostle well knowing that all motives, whether to warn or to encourage, would be of no real efficacy unless there was One who could give them vital power, directs our eyes up to "the Great High Priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God," and thus would set before us the most encouraging motive he could possibly urge to hold fast our profession.

Now in thus setting Jesus before us, he would seek to impress upon our minds three things concerning him. 1. First, though not in exact order, yet still first, that he is a

sympathising and compassionate high priest. "We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." But how came Jesus to be a sympathising high priest? What makes his holy heart, even now, enthroned as he is in heaven's highest glory, to be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, struggling as we are with them day by day, in this vale of tears below? Does he know these our infirmities, if I may use such an expression, by theory only? Does he merely view them with his heart-searching eyes as possessed of perfect omniscience? O no! Though as the omniscient God he knows them so, still he knows them otherwise. He knows them feelingly and experimentally by having himself passed through them: "He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." 2. The next point he sets before us is, that *Jesus is passed into the heavens* as the Son of God, and therefore has gone up on high to be our Mediator and Advocate at the right hand of the Father. He was "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." This was God's decisive testimony that he had finished the work which he gave him to do. Thus he has won the battle; he has gained the victory; and leading captivity captive he passed into the heavens as our great Head and representative. 3. The third motive which the apostle, to encourage us to hold fast our profession, would lay before us is, that Jesus is "*a great high priest;*" and because a great high priest, greater than all our discouragements and hindrances.

Let us consider these three encouraging motives separately.

1. First, then, he is a *sympathising high priest*. Sympathy, you know, when we are afflicted, is very touching, very agreeable to our feelings; and when it is deep and real, penetrates with a peculiar power into our hearts. But a real sympathiser must have been a real fellow sufferer. Who, for

instance, can sympathise with a widow but a widow? Who can feel for a parent bereaved of offspring but the mother or father who has lost a child? Who can sympathise with the sick and afflicted but those who know by real experience the weight and burden of bodily pain and suffering? There is something in sympathy when truly felt and expressed that draws to it the tenderest feelings of our heart; something which, while it softens and melts, gives us strength to bear up under our afflictions, as not being alone in them. So in the things of God. We find great difficulties attending our profession—difficulties without, difficulties within; so that at times it seems as if we must almost give it up. Sometimes we may fear that we have been deceived altogether; that we never had a real work wrought upon our conscience, shall be proved at the last to have been vile hypocrites, and die under the wrath of God. As such fears and feelings work in the mind, it seems at times that it would be almost better at once to give up our profession, so as not to add hypocrisy to our other crimes. Now as we sink under these thoughts and apprehensions, the apostle would encourage us not to give way to them, but still in spite of them all to hold fast our profession. "Look not," he would say, "to yourself; what will you ever find in yourself but misery and wretchedness, sin and wickedness, hypocrisy, filth, and folly? Turn your eyes to another quarter. Look up: there is at the right hand of the Father One who can sympathise with you in all your temptations and difficulties, in all your wants and woes, in all your apprehensions and grievous discouragements." Yes: he can sympathise with you, in and under them all. And why? Because he "has been tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." Thus, have you been tempted with unbelief? His holy soul was so tempted. It was true that his holy soul never gave way to it, nor was under the power of it, because, though tempted, he was "without sin;" and had he given way to unbelief—had unbelief entwined its fibres around his holy

nature—it would have made him a sinner. But he had the temptation presented to him, and so can sympathise with those who are under it. Did not Satan come to him and say, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread?" Was not that tempting him to unbelief? But you say you are tempted even to *infidelity*; and to that surely the Lord could not be. But if he were tempted in *all* points like as we are, this must have been one, or the text would not be true. Have you then doubted at times whether the Scriptures are inspired of God? Is the Deity of Christ sometimes such a mystery to you that it seems as if you must give it up as a doctrine you cannot believe? Be assured that Jesus can sympathise with you in your temptation. Or are you tempted at times to believe God is not your Father or Friend—that he is rather your enemy, your angry and inflexible Judge, not your God and Father in Christ? Was not Jesus tempted so? When the Father hid his face from him and he had to endure the wrath of God due to our transgressions; when such dark clouds hung before the face of his Father in that awful eclipse, in which the very sun itself and earth sympathised, were no such temptations presented to his soul when his enemies cried aloud, "God hath forsaken him;" and he himself burst forth into that dolorous lament, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Or again, if we are sometimes almost ashamed of Christ, unwilling to bear the contempt and reproach which the profession of his name brings upon us, was not Jesus so tempted? Had he not to walk about this lower world despised and rejected of men, and at last to be buffeted and spit upon by the vilest of wretches, though at one word to his Father twelve legions of angels would have been given him to hurl them to hell? If we then through a feeling of shame would sometimes conceal, if not abandon, our profession, let us remember that Jesus was tempted like as we are in this as one of the "all points" insisted upon in our text. Are the difficulties and

discouragements which lie in our path—some from without and some from within, but the main from within—so peculiar and almost so overwhelming that it seems at times, as Hart says, "there is no way at all?" Had not Jesus, when travailing here below, everything to discourage his holy soul? Look at the greatness of the work he had to do, the sufferings he had to bear, the weight of God's wrath he had to sustain, the holy law he had to fulfil before he could say, "It is finished." It was this personal experience of suffering which has made our Lord so "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," as having felt everything which we feel, having suffered everything which we suffer, and actually drunk up every bitter which we do but taste in the cup of temptation and sorrow. Thus, though he is now in heaven encompassed with glory, surrounded with everything that is happy and blessed, yet he looks down from the throne of his mercy and his majesty upon his suffering saints in this vale of tears with the tenderest pity and compassion. Here is one poor child of his so inwardly distressed with sin, that he fears he shall die in despair: Jesus is touched with the feeling of *his* infirmities. Here is another so bowed together with unbelief, that, like the poor woman in the gospel, he can in no wise lift himself up: Jesus is touched with a feeling of *his* infirmities. Here is a third who is assailed with such infidel suggestions that he cannot pray, or draw near the throne, or even open his lips before God, on account of the dreadful thoughts that rush into his mind upon his knees: Jesus is touched with a feeling of *his* infirmities. Here is a fourth, who, when he would read the word or hear it preached, has blasphemous imaginations suggested, to drop poison, as it were, into the very wells of life. I have mentioned but a few as a specimen of the infirmities that we all have to groan under. Now we have a high priest at the right hand of God who "is touched with the feeling" of these infirmities. And remember who he is; that he is God-Man, with all the sympathy of man and all the

power of God; whose heart is human, and whose hand divine; who looks from his holy throne upon those who fear his name, scanning the thoughts of every heart and reading the infirmities of every tempted saint, with his ear open to every cry, and his eye watching every spiritual movement of their soul.

And yet, though he was "tempted in all points like as we are"—so that whatever our temptations be, he has personally experienced them all—yet "*without sin,*" for he was "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26.) This humanity, as being a "holy thing" in its very conception by the power of the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:35), was absolutely impeccable, that is, absolutely incapable of evil, and therefore all his temptations never produced one spot of sin in his pure, holy, human nature. They all fell from him, as the viper from the hand of Paul, without fastening on his pure humanity; or as when the waves of the sea dash upon a rock and the spray falls away, the rock is as and where it was before, neither sullied or moved. So the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ the Rock of ages, bore the pelting of the storm, and all the waves of hell that beat against it, unsullied and unmoved by them all.

It is by such motives that the apostle would direct our minds to look up to Jesus at the right hand of the Father. It is as if he would say, "There is everything in self to discourage and dismay; the more, therefore, that you look to yourself the lower you will sink, the more you will be tossed up and down by doubt and fear. But why do we look so much and so continually to self? Why should you ever be looking at your discouragements, as if there was nothing else to think of, nothing else to look at? Is your case wholly desperate? Must you sink in despair under a sight and sense of your sins, without hope or help? Look up." He would thus seek to raise

up our fainting spirits, and fix our eyes upon the only Object worth looking at—Jesus in glory, and yet Jesus full of grace. Thus would he direct our minds to the same gracious man of sorrows, who when upon earth was tempted in all points like as we are, but is now at the right hand of the Father, as the sympathising high priest of the Church of God.

ii. But he speaks of him also as having "*passed into the heavens.*" Now, if I may use the expression, Jesus would never have gone back to heaven if he had not finished his work upon earth. If you were to send a servant to do a certain work, and said to him at his departure, "Never see my face again until that work be done, and you can come without fear or shame into my presence and say, 'I have done that which thou hast commanded me,'" your servant, assuming he was a faithful servant, would never attempt to come back until he had done the work so solemnly and particularly entrusted to him. So in a spiritual sense. Jesus was the Father's servant ("Behold my servant whom I uphold," Isai. 42:1), and as such had a work to perform, which was to redeem the Church of God from the depths of the fall. Now Jesus would never have gone back to see his Father's face, any more than Judah could have ventured to go back to Jacob without Benjamin in his hand, unless he had finished the work which the Father gave him to do. This work was, as I said before, to redeem the Church of God from the lowest hell, and present all the redeemed to his Father without spot or blemish or any such thing, by washing away their sins in his own blood and covering them all around with his own robe of righteousness. The apostle therefore encourages us to look unto him who is "*passed into the heavens,*" as a proof that he had finished the work. Once he was upon earth doing his Father's will and working out our salvation. But he has left earth, is gone up on high, is passed into the heavens, and there sits at the right hand of God,

able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. He would by this blessed truth raise up our drooping hearts. He would say, "Look up, poor drooping soul, look up, and see Jesus who has passed into the heavens: there anchor within the veil; there let your faith and hope firmly rest. And you shall pass into the heavens too, because you are a member of his body, flesh, and bones. Where the Head is, there must be the members. He has gone to prepare a mansion for you, and where he is, there must his people be also. He cannot leave you on earth to grapple with your sins, for he has put them all away by his own blood-shedding. He will not then leave you in the hands of sin and Satan. Therefore, look to him and cast your weary soul into his hands, who is able to keep that which you commit unto him against that day." (2 Tim. 1:12.) This Jesus, who has passed into the heavens, is even now there with all his grace and all his glory; and he can send down supplies to all who feel their need of them. A word from him can give renewed strength. He has but to speak, and your foes and fears, sins and miseries, will all vanish like the mist before the sun. How was it in times of old? Look at the children of Israel with Pharaoh behind and the Red Sea before: death seemed certain which ever way they turned. But Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the waters were divided. So with us. We are surrounded with difficulties, perils, and woes. The great high priest has but to speak: the waves open, the way is made plain, and the soul passes through the waters as on dry land.

iii. But Jesus is said to be also "*a great high priest;*" he must indeed be a great high priest, because he is the Son of God; and if he be so by nature and essence, as we believe him to be, he has all the power of God, for he is God as well as man. With God all things are possible; that is our mercy. With man, many things are impossible. Salvation, for instance, is impossible to man as a poor, fallen sinner. Let man do what

he will, he never could save his own soul; but God can save it because Jesus died. This great high priest, then, as being God-Man, is greater than all our enemies. Put them all together, he is greater than all; yes, and greater than all our fears, greater than all our doubts, greater than all our dangers, greater than all our discouragements, greater than all our unbelief, greater than all our infidelity. Put together in one man everything that tempts, that tries, that casts down, and discourages all the saints of God taken together, why, they would be like chaff before the wind if the Lord did but appear. They would all fall flat upon their faces, like the walls of Jericho, or as so many dead men, like Sennacherib's army when the destroying angel went forth and their carcasses were stretched upon the plain. View, then, and review the number of your enemies, magnify them to the utmost of your fears or of your imagination: what are they all compared with the power of this great high priest? But you say, "I believe all this, and yet it does not remove them." But do you go the right way to have them removed? Are you putting your soul, with all its perils and cares and anxieties into the hands of this great high priest; or are you partly trusting to him and partly trusting to yourself—one eye upon Jesus and another upon your own strength? If it be so, be not surprised that he does not come forth. But be what the saints of God ever are in their right mind, and what they ever should be, poor and needy, weak and helpless, this deep necessity at once enlists him upon your side. This great high priest is drawn by a sense of our need of him to appear on our behalf; and when he appears, then all our doubts and misgivings will be like the chaff before the wind. Have you never proved it to be so? You know what afflictions, trials, and temptations are by personal experience; you must know what consolations are by the same medium and in the same way. You can go with me a certain length, for you can say, "I certainly am acquainted with the exercises of mind which you have

described." Can you not go a step further? See if you cannot. Stay not at the threshold; come into the inner court. Has there been no word of promise, no smile of mercy, no faith and hope and love raised up at some time or other in your soul? You cannot deny, if you know anything of divine teaching, that there have been times when help and support have been given you from the sanctuary. These are marks for good—certain proofs that the same Jesus who gave you these has others to give; that the same great high priest who has helped you on thus far will help you on to the end of the journey; that he will go on to appear more and more in your soul, and endear himself more and more unto you; and that if he enable you to trust in him, all will in the end be well. You may have more doubts and fears than ever you have had; the power of unbelief may rage stronger and stronger; but all these things will draw more sympathy, more compassion, more love and mercy out of the heart of our covenant Head. As you sink more and more into self-helplessness and despondency, and see more of the suitability of the Lord Jesus Christ, it will enable you to draw more out of his fulness; and then you will see that though your discouragements are very great, your temptations very strong, and your fears very powerful, yet there is that in him which can in a moment dispel all. By seeking his face, and casting your soul upon him, you are engaging him on your behalf, and putting yourself, as it were, in his way. Like blind Bartimeus, you are crying, "Son of God, have mercy upon me." You are lying at his feet, taking hold of his garment, seeking to come near to him. All these are movements of the divine Spirit in your heart. By these means he is drawn, so to speak, out of his sanctuary into the fuller and clearer opening up of his grace, beauty and glory. And every fresh view of him will endear him more to your heart, till faith is lost in sight and hope in enjoyment.