

## **Spiritual Apprehension and Deficient Attainment**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, June 4, 1865

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:12

Possession and enjoyment—personal possession, and spiritual, experimental enjoyment of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the love of God, and of the communion of the Holy Ghost, and in possessing and enjoying these to possess and enjoy all that can be known of a Triune God here below, as it is the peculiar privilege and supreme blessedness of the living family of God, so it is the soul of all true religion, and the sum and substance of all vital godliness. Our blessed Lord therefore declared, "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21.) So also testifies the apostle: "The kingdom of God," that is, this internal, spiritual kingdom, "is not in word but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20); and again, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 14:17.) There is a solid reality, an enduring substance, in the divine teachings and gracious operations of the blessed Spirit in the heart. Wisdom, therefore, cries aloud, "at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors:" "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." (Prov. 8:20, 21.) It is this inheriting of substance, even in the present life, which distinguishes a living from a dead faith, for "faith," that is, living faith, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1.) To possess this faith, therefore, is to

possess substance, and to find a solid reality in the things not seen; for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him; but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." (1 Cor. 2:9, 10.) And it is this spiritual revelation of these prepared things to the soul which makes them substantial realities. Now just in proportion as we are led to see the reality and blessedness of the kingdom of God thus set up with a divine power in the heart, we shall desire more and more to possess and enjoy it; for desire for possession almost always goes before possession. Take one or two familiar figures to illustrate this point. A man ardently loves a woman, who warmly and tenderly reciprocates his affection. They are both young, and their situation and other circumstances in life are favourable for their union in marriage. Now what can satisfy either of these tender and affectionate lovers but mutual possession of each other, and that for life? Thus desire precedes possession; but desire without possession, or the prospect of possession, is but torment and disappointment. Take another illustration. A man is heir to a fine estate; but the mere bare fact of heirship, the knowledge, however clear or certain, that he is entitled at a certain person's death to come into a large property, will not satisfy him. What he wants is possession—the enjoyment of the property as his own. The same things hold good, and indeed with greater strength and force, in divine and eternal realities. If we are espoused to Christ, as the apostle speaks, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2), if we are espoused to Christ, and, as being his chosen bride, if we love him and he love us, nothing will content either Christ or us but to come into mutual possession and enjoyment of each other. This indeed will not be fully accomplished until that great and blessed day, when "there

will be heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." (Rev. 19:6, 7.) But before this blessed day it is in heavenly as in earthly espousals; there are love visits, love kisses, love smiles, tender loving conversation; and yet, as long and dismal seasons of absence often intervene, there will be no full satisfaction until this poor wretched body, the seat of sin and sorrow, is dropped. Similarly with the inheritance. We read of "the redemption of the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:14), which is yet future; for the Church is still to be, in one sense, redeemed, that is, by power; for she has been already fully redeemed by price. But there are earnestings of this; for there is a being "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance." (Eph. 1:13, 14.) Thus even in this life there are spiritual and heavenly blessings to be enjoyed, real, solid, and substantial. This is in the word largely set forth. Do we not read of "the love of God being shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 5:5); of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keeping the heart and mind through Jesus Christ" (Phil. 4:7); of "rejoicing in Christ with joy unspeakable and full of glory?" (1 Pet. 1:8.) Now all these blessings are to be tasted, felt, handled, realised, and made our own; and as they thus come into vital possession and are made matters of personal enjoyment, then we are enabled, as the apostle prays, "to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. 3:18, 19.)

But there is one special feature of vital godliness distinct from possession, and yet necessary to possession; which

precedes enjoyment, and yet is necessary to enjoyment, viz., *desire*. If you look all through the range of Christian experience, whether you take the least and lowest stage, or the highest and greatest, you will find desire more or less stamped upon every such state and every such stage. Let me show this. Take, for instance, a soul in its lowest state. Take Jonah in the whale's belly; Jeremiah in the low dungeon; Hezekiah on his bed of sickness; Job sunk into all the depth of his soul trouble. You will find in all these saints of God the expression of desire; or, if the word "desire" do not occur, there is that which is tantamount to desire—the language of crying, groaning, earnest prayer. Look first at the case of Jonah: "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice." (Jonah 2:1, 2.) There we certainly have the desire of Jonah's soul venting itself in crying out of the very belly of hell: as low as a saint could sink, as deep an extremity as that into which any vessel of mercy could fall. Now look at Jeremiah's case, and see whether we cannot trace the same thing in him. "Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry." (Lam. 3:54-56.) Is there not desire there? Look next at Hezekiah on his bed of sickness, when death stared him in the face, and the prophet came to him with that solemn message, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." What does he say in that deep extremity of soul but, "I am oppressed: undertake for me?" (Isaiah 38:14.) Is there not desire there? And what said Job when he was in that depth of sore perplexity? "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" (Job 23:3.) Is there not desire there? Do we not see in all these instances that however low the child of God may sink, there is still in

his soul a cry or sigh on which we may say that desire is stamped?

Now take what I may perhaps call a medium stage, that is, a state of experience not in the lowest depth, nor yet in the greatest height—not one of severe trouble and exercise, nor of much enjoyment, but much such an experience as you will find in Psalm 119. Do we not see that in this state and stage desire forms a very prominent feature? How the whole psalm is a praying psalm, a pouring forth of simple desire. Take as a sample such petitions as these: "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes." Is not the whole psalm the expression of desire to know and feel the power of God's word upon the heart? As similar instances take the experience of David in many other Psalms: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." "My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me." What desire, what earnest ardour we see stamped upon such expressions!

Now take a higher stage of experience still; for desire mounts up as the soul mounts. Take the case of the bride in the Song of Solomon; hear her say, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." There we see her in possession, in enjoyment; yet she still cries, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." How she begins with desire, and how she ends with desire: "Turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices." (Song 1:2; 8:14.)

But to apply this to our subject. Take Paul the man of God, who had been in the third heaven, and been blessed with most unspeakable revelations of the love of God to his soul. Read Phil. 3, and especially that part which stands in connection with the words before us, and see how it breathes the language of desire: "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. What desire, what ardent desire is stamped upon almost every syllable. Then follows our text: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." In opening up these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable,

I.—*First*, endeavour to show you what it is to be *apprehended of Christ Jesus*: for that is the foundation on which the text stands—the pivot round which it turns.

II.—*Secondly*, what it is to *apprehend that for which we also are apprehended*.

III.—*Thirdly*, what it is to *follow after*, that we may apprehend it.

IV.—*Lastly*, the confessed *falling short* and deficiency—"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect."

I.—I must ask your attention this morning. I don't preach to lazy, inattentive hearers. If I am worth being heard at all, I require my hearers to give me their best attention; for the things which I lay before them are full of weight and importance. Besides which, my sermons for the most part

are a train of continuous thought, as being a working out of my text from beginning to end, and therefore need attention; for if you lose some of the links, you have not the discourse as one connected chain. And I think you will find this morning, if I am able to unfold it, a beautiful connection of every part of our text from first to last. Give me, therefore, your attention, and endeavour to travel with me, step by step, as I go on. God enable me to guide you right. God give me grace to go before you, that you may walk as I step on, and put your feet in the footprints which I make, comparing the whole with your own experience and the work of God upon your soul, that you may have some testimony that I preach according to the oracles of the living God, and that you know the power of divine truth in your own heart.

i. I shall lay the foundation of my discourse by explaining to you the meaning of the word "*apprehend*;" for that is the basis of the whole. Nothing is more common than for people, even good people, to go on reading the Scriptures without understanding or even trying to understand their precise meaning. But how can we believe what we do not understand? How graciously the Lord "opened the understanding of his disciples that they might understand the Scriptures." Let me explain to you then the meaning of the word "apprehend." To apprehend signifies to seize, to take hold of, to get into one's possession. We find it familiarly used so. The policeman, for instance, apprehends a criminal. He puts his hand upon his shoulder; he grasps him by the collar; he takes possession of his person. That is apprehending. Or take another simple use of the word: "I don't apprehend your meaning;" that is, "I don't catch your meaning; I don't seize it with my mind: I don't lay hold of what you are saying so as to take it into my understanding, and make your idea mine." From these two illustrations, the one an act of the body, the other an act of the mind, you

may easily gather a simple idea of what the word apprehend means, viz., to seize, to lay hold of, and to make one's own. Excuse me, if this morning I have turned myself into a dictionary, but I have often found that the simplest words are least understood, or least attended to.

Now carry this idea of taking hold into the things of God as presented to our view in our text. The apostle speaks of himself as being "apprehended of," or, as the word rather means, "by Christ Jesus;" in other words he tells us that Christ Jesus had apprehended him, seized him, laid hold of him, and that for the purpose of taking eventually full possession of him. As this point is of such vital importance, it will want some careful opening up. We will look at it therefore in its length and depth and breadth too, if the Lord enable. But bear this carefully in mind, that what Paul said of himself is applicable to us also, if we are partakers of the same grace. Paul with all his grace and gifts was only one member of Christ's mystical body; and the same Christ who apprehended him, in apprehending him as a member, apprehended at the same time and in the same way the whole body. If therefore you and I are members of the mystical body of Christ, the same Christ who apprehended Paul apprehended you and me; the same Christ who laid hold of him, laid hold of you and me; and the same Christ who meant to bring Paul into full possession of himself, has taken, or will take that same possession and firm hold of you and me. Do you see and believe these things—that Christ has a Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all? (Eph. 1:22, 25.)

ii. Go with me a step further. Look back: take your stand upon the word of truth, and look back into heaven's settlements where the solemn transactions began, if we can use the word "beginning" to what was from all eternity, but



in which all our salvation here, and all our blessedness hereafter are wrapped up. Christ in eternity apprehended the Church; that is, he took hold of her. But how and why did the Son of God apprehend and take hold of the Church? As the Father's gift. The Church was God's property, so to speak: he chose her in Christ before the foundation of the world, and presented her as a beautiful bride to the Son of his love. I do not like to put words into the mouth of God which the Scripture has not; but it is almost as if the Father said to the Son, "Wilt thou have her? She shall be thine. Here is thine inheritance; here is thy bride: here is thy possession. Wilt thou have her?" "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" "And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." Then it was that Christ first apprehended the Church, that is, took hold of her. According to my view—I am not a man to split hairs in divinity, though I love Scriptural truth, our Lord received her unfallen, as a spotless virgin bride—not indeed without a foreview of the fall; but as presented to him in all her virgin innocence. I think we may gather this from two significant types. The first is the giving of Eve to Adam in Paradise, which all will admit was a typical representation of the gift of the Church to Christ and of his union with her, for the apostle most evidently alludes to it as such: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Eph. 5:30.) The marriage took place in Paradise, before the fall, not after. Eve was taken out of her husband's body, presented to him in an unfallen state, as such received, as such wedded. But observe secondly, that the high priest, who under the law was an eminent type of Christ, was not allowed to marry a harlot or divorced woman. He was to marry a bride in her virgin purity. (Lev. 21:13, 16.) Now I gather from these two striking types that our gracious Lord took the Church unfallen—not without a foreview of the fall, or of what he would suffer for her, and the necessity of her being one day washed in his blood and

clothed in his righteousness. But primarily he accepted her unfallen. According, then, to my view, and I may add it is the view of many of our greatest divines, the Lord Jesus thus first apprehended or took hold of the Church as his virgin bride.

iii. Now pass on. The fall takes place; we were all involved in it; and this unfallen bride fell in Adam into the lowest depths into which he himself sank. But shall the Son of God let her go? Had he not apprehended her? Had he not made her his own? Was she not his by covenant engagement and eternal ties? Was she to sink, and he to let her go without a desire or effort to save her? If your child were walking with you along the canal bank, and it suddenly fell in, would you stand quietly by and let it be drowned? If you and your wife were walking some summer eve along the river side and she tripped and fell in, and got entangled among the weeds, would you pass on when you could save her, and let her die there? "No," you would say; "I should not be a man to do that; I would risk my own life to save either my wife or child, for I dearly love them both." Was there less love in the heart of the Son of God when from the heights of his glory he saw his bride sink and fall, get overwhelmed in the waters of corruption, and the weeds of sin, as Jonah speaks, "were wrapped about her head?" No, he must go down into her very state and case, into her lowest condition, to pluck her out; take her nature—not her fallen, not her sinful nature, and yet the very flesh and blood of the children, sanctified by the Holy Ghost in the very moment and act of conception when he became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary; and thus he apprehended or took hold of at once the whole of his bride by taking her flesh into union with his own divine Person. Here was the second instance in which he apprehended the Church by becoming one with her, and making her a participator of his body, of his flesh, and of his

bones.

iv. Now we come to more personal matters, not more real, not more vital, not more important, but more experimental. There is the apprehending of each individual member by Christ through the *power of his grace*; for many have an interest in the electing love of God and in the blood of Christ, who have as yet no saving knowledge of either. We had before we were born. Does not Paul say? "Who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.) But who and what was Paul, when Christ gave himself to die for him? Still in his sins—a Pharisee and a persecutor. But there must be a time when this love and blood are brought into the heart so as to give a vital knowledge and possession of them. Now comes the apprehension of the soul by Christ Jesus. He sends forth his holy Spirit to quicken the dead sinner into life. The arrow flies from the unerring bow; it strikes the sinner's conscience. Now what is the effect? He is *apprehended*. The law which thus apprehends him, is almost like a policeman—like a detective. He goes into one of those places in London where thieves and burglars meet to recount their past exploits and plot their future crimes, and says to one man sitting among them, perhaps the merriest and loudest of the whole company: "You're wanted; come out; there is no use making any resistance; officers are at the door and every outlet guarded." Out the man comes at once all trembling, for he knows there is no use resisting the police, and off he goes to prison. How glad he would be to escape; but it is impossible. So when the law comes and puts its hands upon our shoulder, we are singled out from our companions—our associates in mirth or sin. We may dread going to prison; but as the detective will never lose his grasp of the prisoner till he lodges him safely in the cell, so the law will never lose its grasp upon our conscience until it brings us to the prison house. But let us trace out this more in detail. The first thing

which the Lord does is to apprehend our conscience. His word catches us by our conscience: that is the tender part. The arrow of conviction is shot into the conscience, the feeling part of a man. Just as when they shoot a buck in the park, they aim at a vital part—not at the horn, not at the hoof, nor even at the head, but just under the shoulder at the very heart, that it may drop at once; so God the Spirit, when he aims an arrow, aims it at a vital part—the conscience, the heart; and down the sinner drops. Even though the poor wounded buck may not fall at once, but seek to hide itself among the fern, or try to leap off with the rest of the herd, yet sooner or later it drops. So with the poor sinner. Sooner or later he sinks and falls under the power of the word. Has it apprehended you? Was there ever a time when you felt your conscience laid hold of, so that do what you would, go where you would, say what you would, there was that condemnation in your conscience which you never could get away from? Like the wounded buck, the further you ran the weaker you got; the more you tried to escape, the sooner you tripped and fell. Here was the first experimental apprehending of you by Christ Jesus.

v. One more instance and we pass on; and that is the apprehension of us by Christ Jesus through *the Gospel*. Don't think there is no apprehension but by the law; there is an apprehension also by the gospel. When the hand of grace comes out of the dark cloud; when the voice of the gospel sounds charmingly in the believing ear and heart, draws the poor sinner to the footstool, reveals Christ, manifests mercy, whispers peace, is not that a blessed apprehending of him by Christ Jesus? Now this apprehending of us by the gospel, is to apprehend us, not only by our conscience, as by the law, but by our understanding, our will, and by our affections; for these are the four things by which we are effectually taken hold of. The blood of Christ, applied to the *conscience*, takes

hold of the conscience to purge it from filth, guilt, and dead works to serve the living God; the light of the gospel entering the mind takes hold of the *understanding*; the power of Christ takes hold of, and thus bends the *will*; "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Psa. 110:3); and his love takes hold of the *affections*. Thus these four anchors, as in Paul's ship, hold the soul fast and keep it from falling on the rocks. (Acts 27:29.) Here, then, we see the soul experimentally apprehended by Christ Jesus; apprehended by his power, his Spirit, his grace, and thus made believingly, feelingly his.

II.—Now we pass on. The apostle prays in the text that he might *apprehend that for which also he was apprehended*. He wanted to lay hold of, to realize, to enjoy, and to enter into possession of that for which he had been thus apprehended by the Lord himself. Let us look at these things a little more closely.

When Christ apprehended the Church, that is, as I have explained, took hold of her in eternity by covenant engagement, and subsequently in time by his incarnation, he apprehended her that she might be eternally his; that he might enjoy her; that she might enjoy him; that they might be for ever happy in each other's company. If, then, we are to apprehend that for which also we are apprehended, we must know something in our souls of what there was in the mind of Christ when he apprehended the Church, and for what purpose he apprehended her. This is the grand object of this chapter. It is indeed all condensed in our text, yet the breathings and longings of the man of God in this chapter all point in the same direction. How ardently he longs that he might know Christ, win Christ, suffer with Christ, be conformed to Christ here and hereafter at the resurrection, and be found in Christ. If, then, we too are to follow after,

that we personally, experimentally, feelingly, and blessedly may apprehend that for which also we are apprehended, we must have some understanding, some conception, some knowledge of what it is that we are following after, or we shall run a fool's chase. Paul says of himself: "I, therefore, so run not as uncertainly." (1 Cor. 9:2G) To run uncertainly will be to miss the prize. Our only hope of winning it is by pressing toward the mark for the prize "of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:14.) But a little further explanation may throw light upon these points of blessed truth.

i. When Christ apprehended the Church, it was that she might be conformed to his image, behold his glory, and for ever reign with him. How blessedly did our Lord thus speak in his intercessory prayer: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24.) The expression of his will here chiefly regards two things: 1. First, that those whom the Father had given him should be with him where he was; 2, secondly, that they might there behold his glory, and share it too, according to those words: "And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them." (John 17:22.) The glory thus given already is a conformity to his image, which is, as manifested here below, begun in grace and consummated in glory. Thus, therefore, there is a being conformed to his likeness upon earth, and there is a being conformed to his likeness in heaven; a likeness to him here in grace, and a likeness to him hereafter in glory. The first is a spiritual conformity to the image which he wore here below; and this is mainly affected through the gospel, by the blessed Spirit, as the apostle so clearly testifies: "We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from

glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) The glass of his grace is the gospel, in which, with open or unveiled face we behold the glory of the Lord shining forth. This beholding of his glory produces a change into the same image. This view is by faith, as Christ is pleased to reveal himself to our souls; for it is by faith only that we can see the glory of the Son of God, as those did who received him when he was on earth. (John 1:14.) He being invisible, it is only by faith that we can see his glorious Deity, his divine and eternal Sonship, and his pure, spotless humanity in union with it, as Immanuel, God with us. This is the most ravishing sight that God can give to a soul upon earth, and has an assimilating effect in producing a conformity to the image of Christ. Now as Christ is revealed to the soul by the power of God in his complex Person as Immanuel, God with us, we get a view of what his real and personal glory is, and what will be seen and enjoyed when the body shall drop into the grave and eternity open to view. This, then, is one thing which the soul follows after to apprehend that for which it is apprehended by Christ Jesus. If you have an earnest desire to see the glory of Christ as revealed to your heart, to have the manifestations of his glorious Person to your soul, with the visitations of his love to your spirit, you are following after that you may apprehend that for which you have been apprehended by the grace of Christ. These desires show that the Lord Jesus has apprehended or laid hold of your heart by his Spirit and grace; and it is for this reason, that he may in his own time manifest his glorious love to your soul.

ii. But as without holiness no man can see the Lord; as heaven itself would be no heaven to a man who had no internal or external meetness for that eternal inheritance, the blessed Lord has to make us partakers of his holiness, that we may be conformed here below, in some measure at least, to his gracious image. The apostle therefore says, "Lie not

one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." (Col. 3:9, 10.) This image is the image of Christ, which the same apostle explains as being "in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24.) "For God has predestinated us that we should be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom. 8:29.) If you take this key with you, it will open well nigh every expression of the desires of Paul's heart, as we find them uttered by his own pen in this beautiful chapter. (Phil. 3.) Now as we get a view in our soul of what Christ is to the Church, and what he has done and suffered to redeem her by his most precious blood, we seek to realize, to enter into, to feel the blessedness, drink of the sweetness, and know experimentally the power of what Christ thus is, and what he has thus done. We are brought to see that a profession of religion, without a real experimental knowledge of Christ, is but a deceit or a delusion, and are made to feel the emptiness of mere words and notions unless there be vital realities. As then we see by faith who Christ is, what Christ has suffered, what Christ has done to redeem us from the depths of the fall, and get some faith in our bosom so as to embrace him as revealed in the gospel and made known to our soul by the power of God, there is on our side an apprehending, a taking hold, a bringing in of that for which we are apprehended. I before pointed out that the main object for which Christ apprehended his Church was to bring her into the enjoyment of himself.

Now as nothing can satisfy Christ but the enjoyment of the Church, so nothing can satisfy the Church but the enjoyment of Christ; for as the bridegroom delights in the bride and the bride in the bridegroom, and they are only happy in each other's company and in the possession of each other, so it is



with Christ and his people. Christ is only happy in the enjoyment of his Church, and the Church is only happy in the enjoyment of Christ. If, then, we personally are members of the mystical body of Christ, we shall have in our bosom the feelings which the Church has; for otherwise, the Spirit which teaches the Church has not taught or is not teaching us. The same desires therefore which we find so beautifully portrayed by the man of God in this chapter will be more or less felt in our soul. If the same Christ is made known to us who was made known to him, the same things which Christ did and suffered which were revealed to him are also or will be revealed to us; the same faith, though in smaller measure, is given to us which was granted to him, with the same hope to anchor within the veil, and the same love toward the same loving Lord. Just in proportion then as these divine realities are brought before the eye of faith and warmly impressed upon our spirit, is there an apprehending of them, a taking of them by the hand of faith, a bringing them by the power of the Spirit into experimental possession and felt enjoyment. Bear in mind, however, that it is the love of Christ which we have chiefly to apprehend. Thus the Apostle prayed for the church at Ephesus, that they "might comprehend" (or as it should have been translated, for it is precisely the same word in the original "apprehend") "with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. 3:18, 19.)

III.—Now I pass on to our third point, which is "*following after.*"

i. We know or should know what we are in pursuit of, or what can the end be but disappointment? Were any of you this morning ignorant of the place to which you were coming, or what you came for? Some of you have come many miles; but

how foolish it would have been to have set out without knowing where the place was or the road to it. I have known, indeed, instances of country people who have come up to hear me in London, and after walking about all the morning could not find the chapel. But this was because all their inquiries were useless. Had you not also a purpose in coming here? Was it not to hear me preach the word of life? Similarly, if I set out on the way to heaven I must walk in a certain path and follow a certain road; I must know to what point I am bound and what I want in going there. I must have some object in view, or I am but playing a child's sport, and putting my soul on the game. Now so far as I am a spiritual man and know Christ by any manifestation of him to my soul, I have a certain object proposed to my view, as set before me in the gospel of his grace. Paul plainly tells us from his own experience what this object is: "I follow after that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus." I have already explained what this apprehending of you by Christ is. But as a further elucidation of its meaning, compare with it some of Paul's desires, as expressed in this chapter.

1. The first thing he desired was an increasing *knowledge of Christ*: "That I may know him," that is, that I may be favoured with greater, more powerful, sweeter, and deeper revelations of his Person and work, beauty and blessedness, grace and glory. This knowledge of Christ is indeed inexhaustible. Paul therefore calls it the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

2. Connected with this knowledge of Jesus Christ, is a knowledge of "*the power of his resurrection.*" This includes more than I can now enter into, for it takes in everything which consists in raising the soul up from a state of carnality and death, either before or after calling, as well as investing

it with, and putting it in possession of all the blessings and benefits of Christ's resurrection; such as full and free justification, free access to the throne of grace, deliverance from the power of sin, victory over death and hell, and a glorious resurrection in the great day.

3. Another thing which Paul followed after that he might know in knowing Christ was "the *fellowship* of his sufferings." What depths of agony it cost Jesus to redeem his soul from the bottomless pit; what seas of blood and love he had to wade through; what conflicts with Satan; what hidings of his Father's face; what a weight of unutterable woe; what an indescribable pressure of imputed sin, and yet endured as none but he could endure when he bore our sins in his own body on the tree.

4. With this is also connected his desire of "being *made conformable unto his death*;" in other words, that he might be conformed to the suffering, dying image of the Son of God, as his daily experience and portion. As he elsewhere speaks: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." (2 Cor. 4:10.)

5. And as the end of all his race that he might "*win Christ and be found in him*"—win him as his own Lord and husband, and be found in him, clothed in that glorious righteousness which he calls "the righteousness which is of God by faith." I have indeed but touched on these things, though each expression contains a mine of the richest, deepest experience. Now if we are taught by the same Spirit that the apostle was taught by, we shall want to apprehend, to enter into, to embrace, to know, in some measure at least, these same blessings for ourselves in sweet possession and felt enjoyment.

ii. But we have to "*follow after.*" These things are to be sought for, not to be picked up lazily on the road, as an evening saunterer picks a violet from a bank or a dog-rose off the hedge which he smells at and then throws away. These are vital realities. Salvation is in them and damnation out of them. My soul is to be saved or lost; heaven or hell is before me; advancing years and an opening grave solemnly bid me, warn me to be in earnest. To meet death without fear, I must have a religion that can save my soul and hold me up in a dying hour. If Christ has apprehended me, laid hold of me in eternity, and taken hold of me by law and gospel to bring me into the eternal possession of himself, I must know whether he has done all this or not. I must be able to know and feel in my own bosom that he has done that for me which has saved my soul from the depths of hell. This is apprehending, embracing, seizing, laying hold of that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. But if I am not enjoying this I must follow after. I must not sit lazily upon a stile and think I shall get home by stopping there and looking about me. You will never get home tonight after hearing me by lying down on the road or sitting upon a gate. You may rest there awhile, but you will never get home if you have a long way to go, unless you put your best foot forward. To do this is to follow after. Sometimes we are *driven*; for sharp necessity urges: "O, my poor soul will be lost." Guilt presses hard upon our conscience; Satan thrusts with his fiery darts; a host of sins come to view; base backslidings rise up like ghosts from the dead. O what earnest desires, confessions of sin, longing entreaties, sighs and groans will now issue out of the heart and mouth, that we may apprehend that for which also we are apprehended—salvation by free grace, salvation by the blood and love of the Lamb. "O for one view of Christ; O for one look of his love; O for one sweet promise applied to my soul with divine power; O for a blessed manifestation of

his Person and work to my heart." Now this is following after. This is not sleeping under the hedge, nor sitting on the stile; but following after, like Paul, pressing on. But sometimes we are *drawn*. Sweet encouragements drop in, an inward whisper, a kind word, a gentle touch, melt and move. This draws. "Draw me, and we will run after thee." Then we follow on. We feel that there is something worth getting at the end; something worthy of all the labour and suffering bestowed upon it. Even in this life there is something to be enjoyed, which makes ample amends for all the trouble, temptation, perplexity, exercise, and sorrow, which we may have to wade through. This makes us follow after, that we may get possession of the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear him, have it in sweet enjoyment; and know its divine blessedness. But sometimes, alas! we have to follow on as Pharaoh's chariot wheels after Israel, dragging heavily through the sand, as cold, dark, and dead, as stupid, lifeless, and unfeeling, as if we never had known, as if we never should know anything for ourselves about real religion, vital godliness, the love of Christ, or the mercy of God. Yet every inward sigh, every groan, every feeling of complaint, every bitter thought, every cutting reflection, is a following on. This is not tarrying at Mount Sinai, looking for salvation there; nor weaving a spider's web to cover our nakedness; nor getting together a few filthy rags to hide our shame; nor entrenching ourselves in nature's strength and wisdom. Nay, every inward grief of the mind, trouble of soul, self-condemnation, crying out against ourselves, all are a going out of self-righteousness, self strength, and self-dependence; all are following after if that we may apprehend more and more of the Person of Christ, the work of Christ, the blood of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, what Christ is to the poor and needy. Sometimes in *reading* the word, there is a following on to get something out of it for ourselves; to find some sweet promise here, some opening up of truth there; a word

in season to suit our case. And sometimes we are not disappointed: the word of God is sweetly opened up and sealed upon our heart with living, loving power. So in attending diligently upon the *ministry*: coming up to the house of prayer, hearing the preached word, following on through many a stormy day, many a rough road, many a muddy path, and many a dark winter's night, as some of you have followed on year after year to come and hear me when I laboured amongst you. This was a following on to apprehend that for which you had been apprehended. You came hoping, longing, sighing, seeking, suing that something might be dropped which might be a blessing to your soul. You were following on to know the Lord, and to such the promise is made. (Hosea 6:3.) O to look back to a profession of thirty or forty years, and to see how the Lord has kept us on, never suffered us, with all our slips and falls, to turn away from God and truth. I have reason to bless God that ever since he opened my mouth to speak in his name, I have never taught false doctrine, never preached false experience, never inculcated false practice. God may have enlarged my mind, led me more into his blessed truth, and given me more of the experience of it. I hope he has. But I have reason to bless his holy name, that ever since he opened my mouth to speak I never preached error, never encouraged evil, never set up any experience as genuine but the work of the Holy Ghost upon the soul. I have many things deeply to lament between God and my own conscience; and yet it is my mercy that by his grace I can say, I never handled his word deceitfully; but ever sought by manifestation of the truth to commend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor. 4:2.) And I still desire to follow on in the same way: to know nothing in my own soul but what God is pleased to teach me out of the Scriptures by his blessed Spirit, that I may apprehend, firmly grasp, inwardly seize, blessedly realize, and experimentally enjoy what Christ is to

every soul that believes in his name.

IV.—And yet, to come to our last point, O how *defective* am I, are you, are all! O how hampered by unbelief, by sin, by Satan! O our short-comings in every particular. O the inability and helplessness of the soul that longs to be right, desires to walk in the strait and narrow path, and is following on, through brake and briar, mud and mire, darkness and light, sun and storm, fair and foul, winter and summer. O the short-comings, O the deficiencies of one that would be honest at heart, would be right at the last, and therefore follows on amidst every discouragement. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." This man of God, perhaps the greatest saint that ever lived upon earth, had to confess that even he had not attained. There was that in Christ more than he had ever seen, ever known, ever felt, ever tasted, ever handled, ever realised. There were heights in his glory, depths in his love, in his sufferings, in his bitter agonies in the garden and on the cross, which passed all apprehension and comprehension. Therefore he says, "Not as though I had already attained." I am a child still, a learner still, as weak as ever, as helpless as ever to obtain what I want. Though I follow on; though I forget the things which are behind and reach forward to the things before; though I know what I am aiming at, what I am seeking; though my eye is single, my heart earnest, yet it is not with me as if I had already attained. Now just put yourself in that scale; and to measure yourselves aright, just look at these two things.

1. First, are you following after? Do you see that there is something which is to be tasted, handled, felt, and realised of the precious things of God? Have you ever had any sips, tastes, drops, foretastes? Has your heart ever been melted, softened, warmed by the goodness and mercy of God, by the love of Christ? Did you ever feel that there was a sweetness, blessedness, and happiness in the things of God to which

nothing else could be compared? Has your heart ever been opened and enlarged by the love of God, so that you felt that spirituality of mind which is life and peace; and could you have continued in that spot it would have been to you all that you wanted to make you look death calmly in the face? Now it is these sips, tastes, and drops, these sweet discoveries of what the Lord is to believing souls, which draw forth the desires of the heart and enable it to follow after. But darkness supervenes; the Lord withdraws himself, sin works, Satan tempts, trials perplex your mind, unbelief rises up—begins to question everything. Then there is no following on. Everything looks so dark, so gloomy; divine things are so out of sight; doubts and fears so possess the mind; and it seems as if we came so short, so very short, that the question arises whether we may not come short at last; whether we may not have deceived ourselves; whether all we have felt may not have been an awful delusion. And yet see how this works. How it stirs the mind up; how it makes us seek again and again to possess realities; how it seems to open the eyes afresh to see what true religion is, and that it consists in the teachings and operations of the Holy Ghost upon the heart. Thus our very short-comings, deficiencies, and complaints are blessedly over-ruled and made to work graciously to stir us up to run again the race set before us. But depend upon it, the most highly favoured saint upon earth will have reason to say with Paul, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect;" that is, matured and ripe. Not perfect in understanding, nor perfect in heart, nor perfect in lip, nor perfect in life. Every saint of God will have to confess imperfection, imperfection stamped upon all that he has and is; imperfection, imperfection upon everything but the work of the Son of God upon the cross and the work of God the Holy Ghost in the soul.

Now what does the apostle add? and I must add it before I



close. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect (that is, grown out of childhood into some ripeness of Christian experience), be thus minded." It was the desire of his soul that every matured Christian might be like himself, seeking to win Christ, and know him. But he very graciously, kindly, condescendingly adds, "And if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." There might be those amongst them, and they sincere Christians, who might not see these things to the same extent nor feel them with the same power; whose eyes were not so far enlightened, nor whose heart so powerfully wrought upon. They were otherwise minded. They did not see and feel the deep necessity, nor realise the sovereign blessedness of these divine things as they should do. He says then to such, "If you are a child of God, God will reveal even this unto you; he will make it known to you in due time. He will not leave you in your present state of ignorance and indecision. He will reveal even this mystery unto you." And yet he adds, if we have attained any experimental knowledge of the things of God, "Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Let us all walk by the same rule of God's holy word, and all mind the same thing, which is to have the mind of Christ, to be taught of the Holy Ghost, and know the things which make for our everlasting peace. He does not allow two rules for men to walk by, and two minds for Christians to indulge. They all walk by the same rule—the rule of God's word, the rule of the gospel, the rule of divine teaching in their soul. And they all mind the same thing: they are all seeking for the same blessed realities. They are all of one mind in the things of God as to vital things, whatever difference there may be on minor points.

Then comes the solemn warning against those who walk otherwise. "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you." Paul had his mixed congregations; all to whom

he wrote were not children of God; the man of God therefore drops a word of warning, and I would drop it too—"Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Now what is the character of these men? That their god is their belly; that is, the lusts, whether of gluttony or drunkenness or any other vile abomination is their god whom they really serve. They glory in their shame; instead of confessing their sins and forsaking them, and being grieved for them, they rather glory in their shame, their hardness of heart, and searedness of conscience.

But now hear and attend to the last mark, which cuts off thousands of nominal Christians, and take heed lest any of you be among those that "mind earthly things." This means that they have no taste, no appetite or relish for divine things, no affections fixed on things above. They mind earthly things—mere muckworms, ever groping and grovelling after money and gain. But O the difference of the living family of God. "Our conversation is in heaven." There is the conversation, the walk of a living soul: it is in heaven, dealing with heavenly realities, and fixed upon what heaven is in its blessedness and glory. "From whence also we look to the Saviour." And what shall he do on his appearing? He shall change our vile bodies, the seat of every sin and every corruption, and fashion them like unto his glorious body, "according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."