

Christian Obedience

John Kettlewell (1653-1695)

Phil. 4:13

I. The Text Opened

A. Phil. 4:13

1. "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."
2. The things Paul here glories in being able to perform,
 - a) are the duties of a Christian,
 - (1) *even those that are the greatest trial of a strong, and well-fixed mind,*
 - (2) *and have more than an ordinary temptation in them;*
 - (a) *such as the knowledge of ourselves,*
 - (b) *and serving God in prosperity,*
 - (c) *and trusting in him,*
 - (d) *and being content in any state.*
 - b) And that which gives him this ability he confesses, is not any power of nature derived from Adam, but the super-induced grace of Christ, which aids and strengthens him.
 - (1) *In that pitiful state, in which Adam's sin left all mankind, subject to strong lusts, surrounded with numerous and powerful temptations, and stripped of all divine aids, and supernatural assistances, they all lay open to be made a kind of prey, and were easy to be overcome.*
 - c) But since Christ has been the Restorer of the world, and recovered more grace and strength for us than ever Adam forfeited, they are again enabled to withstand temptations, and perform all duties to God, even those which seem to have the most hardship in them.
 - (1) *"I know both how to be abased, or how to live meanly, and how to abound in honor and plenty;" everywhere, and in all places, I am instructed both to be full without forgetting God, and to be hungry without being discontent at him; both to abound, and still be humble and temperate, and to suffer need, and at the same time praise and trust God, and rest contented; "I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me," (verses 12-13).*
3. By performing all duties, we are not to understand such a perfection of obedience to them without ever failing; for so Christ does not enable any of his servants in this world, no not even Paul himself, to live without some sin, and is not to be expected from any mortal man, but only from the strength of an divine angel, or a just soul made perfect in heaven.
 - a) Some sins of ignorance, or forgetfulness, have and surprise God's people, such as Paul's speech to Ananias, (Acts 23:3), will adhere to the best men while they have earthly bodies about them.
 - (1) *And Christ, who being in our nature has a fellow-feeling of all our infirmities, when he comes to sit as our judge, will make fair allowances for believers who have them, (Heb. 5:2).*
 - b) But it implies such a perfection of obedience, as admits of no damning sins, that is, of no sins which are willfully incurred, against knowledge, or it may be against checks and loud alarms of conscience; and which are also persisted in without true repentance, and amendment of the same.

(1) *These sins deprive us of the favor of God, and destroy a soul; and therefore, Christ must strengthen men against all these.*

(a) *And this strength, Paul says, he found, as all other Christians will, who will make an effort in it as he did, and not be needful to themselves, or fail to make use of it.*

(b) *Though they will not be strengthened against all involuntary surprises, yet, if they are as careful to employ this grace as Christ is ready to afford it, they will be strengthened against all willful violations of any commandments, or at least against all impenitent continuance in them, when at any time they have willfully broken any.*

(i) *“I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me,” is something all Christians must believe.*

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: that the grace of Christ is ready to enable all Christians to obey his laws, who are not lacking in their own care and good endeavors.

1. Christ earnestly desires the obedience of men, and affords them sufficient aid to help in it, so that no Christian can ever fail to do his duty, but through his own fault, when he either neglects, or rejects that help and grace, which our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, holds out to him.

a) Indeed, the great excuse which disobedient men are accustomed to make for themselves is, that they would do better if they knew how to do it, and are therefore only failing because they cannot help it.

(1) *They would plead impotence in themselves, and impracticable heights, and impossibilities in God's commandments.*

(2) *And if this were true as it is most false, it would be a serviceable plea indeed, and excuse them both for being sinful, and also for being idle.*

(3) *For, if they cannot avoid being disobedient, why should they be blamed for it?*

(a) *And if they are not able to obey, no matter what they do, why should they throw away their pains in vain attempts, and fruitlessly endeavor after it?*

(4) *There is neither duty, nor discretion in attempting impossibilities, and laboring after that which is not to be done, so that if obedience were impossible, every man might as innocently, and much more wisely, disobey at first, as at last, when he has striven in vain against it; and it ought not to be censured as the fault of his choice, but pitied as his invincible misfortune.*

2. Now as for this helplessness, and impossibility of performing all duties, it is often pleaded by those people who seem willing and have a desire to perform them.

a) It is often used of those who complain in hardship, and so from their own experience are best able to judge it.

b) Generally, such as endeavor wrongly, without using those suitable God-given means, which should make them obedient, have a great hindrance.

(1) *The means and instruments of duty, are the way that leads us to its performance; and in these it concerns us to be very careful, what choice we make, if we pursue any virtue without the use of any means at all.*

(a) *That is, as if we should set ourselves to do any business with our hands tied behind us.*

(2) *And if we use improper and unsuitable ones, like men who labor with unfavorable instruments in any craft, we shall make but rugged work, and find that also to prove very toilsome and difficult; and after much time and pains is spent, see but very little fruit of it all.*

(a) *The means of virtue are, as I say, the way to it.*

(b) *And therefore, there is much which depends on the means we use, when we would be virtuous, as on the way we take, when we would travel to any town or place.*

(c) *We may go on a straight road to it, and that brings us there in a short time, and without being very wearied; but if we take a contrary path, or go the long way about, we shall spend much more time, and be much more tired in going; yes, forced, perhaps, at last to sit down and stop short of our journey's end.*

c) And this now is an ordinary fault of those complainers who endeavor to obey God without any success, and cannot harness any virtue, though they do take pains to do so.

(1) *The reason why they fail, is because they are not well directed, and their labor is not wisely managed, and not wisely laid out in the use of those means, and in the practice of God's rules.*

(2) *God's rules are the most proper and likely means to gain the intended point, and introduce the virtue which they desired.*

d) To illustrate this by some instances; one man is of an irritable hasty temper; and he complains that he has tried very hard but is not able to bridle and conquer a particular passion.

(1) *He labors, and does what he can; but such is the distracting variety of his business, the crossness or carelessness of those he is concerned with, or the number of his irritants one way or other, that notwithstanding all he does in "taking care," his passion is still too strong for him.*

(a) *But I would ask that person, who says his labor is lost, whether he was well advised on what he did, and took the ready and right way to conquer it?*

(b) *Has he for instance, besides his earnest prayers to God for grace to master his passion, avoided moreover as much, as the concerns of life will suffer him, all unnecessary discourse, especially disputes with wrathful, loud, cross, or scornful people?*

(i) Has he avoided this?

(c) *Has he watched over himself daily at such times, and places, and in such business and company, in which he was likely to meet with hassles, and particularly resolved within himself, not only long before, but at those very times, that he will not be moved by them?*

(d) *And above all, lastly, has he made this a constant law to himself to forbear speaking, or acting anything suddenly, when he feels a passion stirred in him; but to turn aside, and pray the Lord's Prayer, or some devout spontaneous prayer to himself, which will both gain him time to consider himself, and likewise call God and goodness into his mind, which will be the most effectual means of all things to restrain him?*

(i) If these means, and others like it, have not been used, he has not taken the best way he can; and if he will set himself to bridle his nature in this way, I do not doubt, but God will bless him in it.

(a) And if God blesses him in it, then let him complain he cannot restrain himself, if he can find a reason.

e) Again, another who has accustomed himself to making oaths, complains that he is convinced he ought, and endeavors to do it, but that he is not able to refrain from promising rashly.

- (1) *But besides his fervent prayers to God, has such a complainer labored with this to possess his conscience with a great sense and dread of making false oaths?*
- (2) *Has he particularly called to mind, and resolved against it, not only when it was at a distance, but when he was expecting any disappointment, or coming into the way of any provocation, which would tempt him to it?*
- (3) *And because men expose themselves to this vice, swear often in a spirit of eagerness, and do not know it, has he desired some true friend, to be his disciplinarian, to warn him of it before, or tell him when it is past, that afterwards he may be more careful to prevent it, or to punish himself for it?*
- (a) *And in regard men who avoid it at other times, are generally pushed on to swear in haste, something surprises them, in the eagerness of some sport, or through the suddenness of some frustrating accident and disappointment.*
- (b) *Has he been careful, lastly, to speak nothing rashly, especially while he is in the heat and eagerness of spirit, but to bridle his tongue, and consider what he is about to say before he says it, that if it proves to be wrong he may not say it?*

(i) *These ways, and others, are the proper method for curing sin; and if a man has labored against it, without them, he has sought the end without the means, and pursued the cure without the right prescriptions.*

(ii) *And therefore, if he will correct that error, and begin again to labor in right ways, I do not question, but, that he will succeed well, and find the effect through God's blessing.*

3. In this way do men, who endeavor in vain for these, or for any other virtues, plainly go wrong, for lack of choosing the right ways to do it; the duties are not impossible to be attained, if the right course were used to attain them.

a) But it is their own neglect of means, or mistaken choice of bad ones, which makes them so disappointed.

b) And therefore, if they would labor to effect a good outcome, let them be careful to pursue good things, by wise and proper methods.

(1) *When they are resolved to endeavor after any virtue, let them learn from solid books, or from their ministers who are spiritual guides, or the advice of any wise or judicious people, what rules serve most to surround it.*

(2) *And if they carefully and diligently follow them, the duty which seemed before impossible, will prove to be a very possible thing.*

(a) *And this again would rid us of the greatest part of those complainers who fail at last, but yet endeavor to do something.*

(b) *For most of them, when they endeavor to obey, do not endeavor wisely, or in the use of such proper and prudent methods, which is a sure way to work obedience in them.*

4. But if anyone still complains, that they have taken advice about the best course and followed it, but yet all their labor has been without the desired effect: yet are they *always to be considered in the following*:

a) Such, as when they use right means, endeavor to do it by halves, half-heartedly, and do not go through with them.

b) They try, but with a partial and weak endeavor, which will never go through to the end with any work, which requires either a longer length of time, or a greater strength of labor.

(1) *If he puts only a little strength to the task, that will not conquer the difficulty of the temptation.*

(2) *And if he is soon wearied, he will give up before it comes to an end.*

(3) *So that a man must apply himself to the same, both earnestly and for a long time, if he would succeed when he has begun, and go on to finish and complete it.*

(a) *Now when we obey God, and amend our lives, this is a work of this kind.*

(b) *For our sins, being many in number, will require a considerable space of time, before they are all fixed.*

c) And our hindrances in leaving them, being great, and the temptations strong that daily assault and draw us to them, and our own lusts, and a treacherous enemy in our own hearts, being always ready to take their parts and strike with them, it requires a great watchfulness, and a constant care, and an earnest vigorous endeavor to overcome them.

(1) *And this the scripture tells us plainly we must use, if we ever expect to prevail against them.*

(2) *Peter tells us, we must give all diligence, (2 Peter 1:5, 10).*

(3) *Paul says that we must be circumspect, (Eph. 5:15).*

(4) *Our blessed Savior says that we must watch always, and be ever standing on our guard, (Mark 13:37).*

(a) *And strive to enter in at the strait gate, (Luke 13:24).*

(i) *This striving is called a warfare, (2 Cor. 10:4), and a fight, (1 Tim. 6:12).*

(ii) *All which show the greatness of that care, and both the earnestness and constancy of that endeavor, which we must lay out on it.*

d) And this, now, is the fault of all those strivers, who, pursuing obedience by right and proper methods, do yet miss it in the end.

(1) *They endeavor but by halves, and seek it, either by too short a time, or do not put in the strength it needs.*

(2) *They have not either made a resolution to set manfully about it, or the patience to go through with it; and so being either weak in their pursuit, or falling off before they get to the end, they are not reclaimed from their sins by all their works and pain, but continue to be subject, and bound still to many sins.*

(a) *But now when they fail on this account, it is not because they cannot, but because they will not really help it.*

(b) *They might become good, if they would do well in the thrall of it, and persevere with patience, until they have finished it.*

(c) *But if they will use only slight endeavors and short times to fight it, they will miss their success.*

(3) *Such a missing of the mark must not be charged on the impossibility of God's laws, but on their own laziness and negligence in performing the duty poorly.*

(a) *They can and do take great and incessant pains to be rich, or famous, or take in some worldly interest; they will indeed put forth great efforts there.*

(b) *Yet ... if they desire, they can labor as vigorously and as incessantly to be good, and do what God commands them.*

(c) *And if once they would do this, it would be the best demonstration of how possible it is to be obedient, since less pains than this will ordinarily help them to gain that end and purpose towards holiness.*

(i) *And this will stop the mouths of all those complainers, who have not been silenced by the two former considerations.*

e) If they have not complained before they tried, and if in trying to be good, they took a right method; yet they still lack one thing, they will see that they have endeavored but by halves, half-hearted, and were not vigorous and constant enough in their endeavors, and that is the reason why they failed.

(1) *Where, if they will try again, and endeavor not only wisely, but also vigorously and incessantly, they will most certainly be enabled to perform their duty.*

(a) *And their doing it actually will be the most effectual conviction that is possible to be done.*

B. No Cause for Complaining in This

1. Having said this, to remove the prejudice that lies against this possibility of performing the laws of God, from the complaints of those, who say they find it otherwise: I proceed *now*:

a) To show that among Christians, there is no cause for such complaints, and that they will be strengthened to perform all their duties, if they are not lacking to themselves in these things.

b) They must be careful as I have observed, to use their own endeavors, because God that made them, will not also save them without themselves.

(1) *And these endeavors must be in wise ways, since we must not expect God should give holy effects to unsuitable means, and be at the expense of miracles, to supply our foolishness.*

(2) *And when we endeavor in this way wisely, we must do it also vigorously and incessantly; obedience being a work of time and pain, that requires both the earnestness and the continuance of our efforts.*

(a) *These things are required on our part, and if we take care to perform that, the grace of Christ will make up the rest, and most certainly enable us, as he did Paul, to do all things which he indispensably requires of us.*

(b) *He will give us some strength at first, and as we employ that, according to that great rule of Gospel distribution, to him that hath shall be given, (Matt. 25:29).*

(c) *He will add more, until at last we perform as much, as is indispensably required, i.e. as I noted, either not sinning willfully, or sincerely repenting, and amending whenever we do.*

(3) *If they are in this way careful, I say, in their own endeavors, this strength all Christians shall surely receive from the grace of Christ to perform these things, as the apostle in the text declares of himself; "I can do," etc. unless they are unbelievers in this.*

2. Now, every wise, earnest, and incessant person who endeavors, shall be enabled in this way to perform all duties, which will appear from these three *things*:

a) *First*, because God indispensably requires, and passionately exhorts us to this performance.

b) *Secondly*, because he has promised this ability, and obedience to all who are so qualified and prepared for the same.

c) *Thirdly*, because all good men beforehand, and at this present time, do themselves find, and experience it.

d) 1. That they shall be in this way enabled to perform all duties, appears, because God indispensably requires, and passionately exhorts us to this performance.

(1) *He indispensably requires it.*

(a) *For now, as Paul says, God commandeth all men everywhere to repent, (Acts 17:30).*

(b) *And that of all sins, they being all liable to the same punishment; the wrath of God being revealed against all unrighteousness, (Rom. 1:18).*

(c) *And he that offends in one point being guilty of all, (James 2:10).*

(d) *And this he requires under the strictest condition, as ever they hope to avoid the wrath to come, or to obtain everlasting salvation.*

(i) *If the wicked turn from all his sins, and keep all my statutes, then says God by Ezekiel, but not before, he shall surely live, (Ezek. 18:21).*

(e) *And they only that do his commandments have the right to the tree of life, Christ says, (Rev. 22:14).*

(2) *Now since God in this way requires Christians to obey all his laws, it must necessarily be possible for us to obey them; for God never requires an impossible thing for his people; what he commands, he both desires and expects should be performed; and therefore, calls men to perform it; to be not only hearers, but doers of the law, (Rom. 2:13).*

(a) *And it is certain they may perform it, since he is too wise, either to desire, or expect what is not to be had.*

(b) *No, he does not only indispensably require this obedience, but friendly and passionately exhorts us to it; “repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”*

(c) *“Cast away from you all your transgressions,” and such like exhortations.*

e) In this way have we an assurance, that God will give us all so much grace and strength, as will be sufficient to make us good, if we diligently, and discreetly apply ourselves to become so.

(1) *This God engages, and he does not only permit, but expects that we should believe him, and take his word in this, as well as in all other promises.*

(2) *He would not only have us to have faith in his mercy, for the pardon of any sins when we repent of them, but likewise to have faith in his power and Spirit, enabling us to overcome our sins, when we seriously strive against them.*

(a) *When Paul bids us work out our own salvation, he gives God’s working in us, as the reason, plainly directing us to work in that expectation, (Phil. 2:11-12).*

(i) *And we are kept to salvation by the power of God through faith, i.e. through faith in the power, Peter says, (1 Peter 1:5).*

(3) *God has promised his Spirit to strengthen us against sin, as well as his mercy to pardon and forgive sin.*

(a) *And since he has promised both; our duty is to believe both, and not distrust him in either of them.*

(4) *We both may and ought to have this confidence in God’s grace, that will perfectly answer the main objection against the possibility of this performance, which is taken from ourselves, and the reigning power of our own lusts.*

(a) *For our lusts are not too strong for God, though they are too strong for us.*

(b) *Though there is a great might in corrupt nature, yet the grace of Christ is mightier.*

(i) *And therefore, having that on our side, we shall certainly be empowered to please God, let our own sinful lusts, and the temptations of the world, oppose themselves never so much against it.*

(c) *Greater is he that is in us, says John, than he that is in the world, (1 John 4:4).*

(d) *And though we are able to do nothing of ourselves, as of ourselves; yet having the same promise we shall all be enabled, as Paul was, "to do all things through Christ that strengthens us," unless we disbelieve God.*

f) And as this possibility of keeping the commandments, through our own care and pains, appears because God indispensably requires and exhorts to it; and has promised his Holy Spirit and grace, to enable all who duly labor after the same: so it does this yet even *further*:

(1) *Also, because good men beforehand, and at this present time, do find and experience that it is this way.*

(2) *Whenever they wisely, and earnestly endeavored, and did not grow weary or faint, they always succeeded, and were enabled to have such regard to their whole duty, as God required the true servants of God in all ages, have been endowed with so much strength as made them powerful with God, and able to perform all that he would require of them.*

(a) *Caleb and Joshua followed the Lord wholly, (Num. 32:12).*

(b) *David kept my commandments, God says, and followed me with all his heart, (1 Kings 14:8).*

(c) *Zachariah and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, walking in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless, Luke says, (Luke 1:6), and what is so expressly said of all these, is by plain indication employed of all others.*

(d) *They that are Christ's, Paul says, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts, (Gal. 5:24).*

(i) *If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, i.e. sin must have no more service from it, than one would expect from a dead man, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness, i.e. such a one lives in righteous ways, (Rom. 8:10).*

(e) *They who do no iniquity walk in his ways, (Psa. 119:3).*

(3) *In this way it is a constant thing in Scripture and relations, and so it was, and is still in all following ages, for God's faithful servants to see his faithfulness in this grand promise, and to be sufficiently assisted to do his will, when they diligently and duly applied themselves to doing it.*

(a) *When they wisely and resolutely set themselves to it, and stuck to it, and called to him for help; he put out his almighty hand, and strengthened them to accomplish what they attempted; and God's promise is still the same to us, as it was to them.*

g) He is fully able, and as inclinable, and as able to make it good, his ear is not grown heavy that it cannot hear, nor his arm short or feeble that it cannot help us.

(1) *So that if we follow their example, in wisely and faithfully endeavoring, we shall happily find their success, in acceptably, and entirely obeying too.*

(2) *Is this not the power of the Gospel of Christ?*

3. I add further, as Christians see this power in themselves, *viz.* of doing their duty through God's assistance, and evidence the same by their actual performance of it, so, in the same way do all those bad confess it, by repenting where they fail.

a) For there can be no repentance for a sin, where there was no possibility of avoiding it.

b) All repentance is a blaming of ourselves; and no man can accuse himself for lack of power, where he is not left to be his own support, but only for mis-use of it where he is.

(1) So that we can repent for nothing, but what, had we been wise and wary enough, our own hearts tell us we might have done otherwise.

(2) If any men then, in hopes to clear themselves, shall deny it in words, yet, whether they will to do it or not, they shall all confess this power in their practice.

(a) When they do wrong, they repent of it; and that shows, how by the grace of God, they might have done better, since otherwise they could only be pitied, not blamed and censured for what they did.

4. I come now to a last point.

a) And last place to show, that this performance is so far from being an impossible task, that it is not extremely difficult, when men set to do it earnestly.

b) By the grace of God, and care of pious parents, several good souls are trained up as soon as may be, to keep their baptismal vows, and perform their solemn engagements.

c) They are taught to know God, and to fear him, to know good and evil; and in reverence to God, to do the good, and refuse the evil, as soon as they are capable of knowing anything.

(1) Now here religion grows up with them, and corrupt passions and evil customs (which are other people's great complaints and difficulties) are stifled and prevented from the beginning, and never come to grow head-strong, or have any power to reign in them.

(a) So that what difficulties they have to find in religion, are chiefly the pains and services of religious actions; not those self-denials, and mortification of corrupt lusts and evil habits, which create so much trouble to other people.

(2) But the greatest part alas!

(a) ... have given way to their lusts, and subjected themselves to wicked customs, and their work is not retaining innocence, but recovering it, and rectifying and amending transgressions.

d) Now, in amending our lives, and obeying God after we have made ourselves in this way opposed to his obedience, there is difficulty and pains at first.

(1) Our former courses and customs generally must be altered, our friends sometimes disobliged, our temporal interest crossed and thwarted, and our natural lusts formerly indulged, now gain-said and conquered.

(2) All this is against our inclination, which is a force on any man, and that while it lasts, will make an uneasiness in religion.

(a) But to cure this, God's grace will be working in us, and new-molding of our natures; and by use we shall grow perfect and inclinable to the good things, which we set ourselves to practice.

(b) So that after God's grace, and our own virtuous use, have gone on for some due time, the case will be altered, and religion will appear not only a reasonable and beneficial, but also a very agreeable thing.

(3) Divine aids, and good customs, will give us a new sense of all our duties, and make them almost always fairly tolerable, and usually delightful things.

(a) And in this way our Lord encourages us to his service.

(i) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for my yoke is easy and my burden light, (Matt. 11:29-30).

(b) *And John speaking of keeping his commandments, for our comforts adds, that those “commandments are not grievous,” (1 John 5:3).*

(4) *This is plain, our Savior says, but how, may some reply, does it consist with various severities and strictnesses which his law requires?*

(a) *For he tells us to mortify our lusts, where he plainly says, by cutting off right hands, and plucking out right eyes; to take up the cross, and patiently suffer persecutions; to watch and strive, and wrestle against spiritual enemies.*

(i) *These are all hard things, and where there are such difficulties, and heavy loads, how can we expect to find, I will not say delight, but easiness, since it seems strange to expect ease under such difficult obligations.*

e) But in answer to this I observe, that these and all such places of Scripture, speak only either the difficulties of religion in some less common cases, as persecutions, in which the increase of difficulty is answered by a proportionable increase of strength, as makes it a tolerable task to encounter them.

(1) *Or, its hardships, at men’s new entrance into religion, after they had done much to unfit themselves for it; at which time as I have said, it calls for more work and pains.*

(2) *Or lastly, such diligent and just care, and watchfulness afterwards, as admits of comfort and delight enough to sweeten it to us.*

(3) *The hardest things spoken of religion concern it only in some less common cases, as persecutions.*

(a) *To this case all those hard sayings relate: it is hardly possible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven: i.e. to turn Christian, which was punished with confiscation of goods at Jerusalem; and left the disciples no other way of saving anything, than by selling all, and having all things common; which in those days, and all others like them, was an extreme difficulty, called here an impossibility, in the way of rich men.*

(b) *Matt. 19:23-24, If thou wilt be perfect sell all that thou hast and give to the poor; which refers I suppose to that particular time, and other succeeding times like it, when if he would adhere to Christ, a man could not keep his present state, verse 21.*

(c) *If any man will come after me; he must take up his cross, (Matt. 16:24).*

(d) *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecutions, (2 Tim. 3:12).*

(e) *He that will save his life, shall lose it, and he must be willing to lose it for my sake; that would expect to find it, (Matt. 10:39).*

f) All which strict sayings, do not respect the ordinary course and state of religion, but only its state in some certain occurrences, which more seldom happen, and under great persecutions, which were very hot in the first days; when as our Savior told them, *they could not be his disciples, without forsaking houses and lands, and parents and brethren; yea and their own lives also, (Luke 14:26, 33).*

g) But even in these cases and suffering times, when religion enjoins such hard things, yet they are not too hard for good men; the increase of difficulty is so answered by a proportionable increase of strength, as makes it not heavy, but a tolerable responsibility.

(1) *For things are hard, or easy in relation to our strength, according as we are more or less able to deal with them.*

(2) *What is hard to a young boy, is easy to a grown man; and what would be an intolerable burden to a sick person, is a very supportable load to a healthy and athletic person.*

(3) *And in these suffering days, when God adds to our task, he adds also to our strength, so that we are still well able to go through with it.*

(a) *When I am weak, Paul says, in distresses and persecutions of the flesh for Christ, then am I strong in spirit to go through with them, (2 Cor. 12:10).*

(b) *As the sufferings of Christ abound in us; so proportionably our consolation aboundeth by Christ, (2 Cor. 1:5).*

III. The Text Applied

A. How do you deal by way of strength with God?

1. In extraordinary trials *God is faithful*, Paul says, (1 Cor. 10:13).

a) And will afford extraordinary assistances; and then however hard their case may be looked on by others, who see only at a distance, it will appear fairly tolerable and supportable; no, full of comfort to themselves; as the numerous army of martyrs, and confessors have comfortably experienced; who were enabled not only to bear, but as the apostle says, *to take pleasure in necessities and distresses, for Christ*; yes, who could sing, and sometimes rejoice, and say, they felt no pain even in the hottest flames of martyrdom?

b) So that take even persecutions for God and a good conscience; for any first, or second table duties, which seems the hardest case; and the greatest hardship in that is furthest off, and men know it least?

(1) *But when good men are called out to suffer for righteousness' sake, and adhere to their duty without violation, and rely on God, and entirely commit themselves to him in faithful discharge of the same, they find such assistances of grace, as renders them strong enough for what he calls them to?*

(2) *They cannot only bear, but through the rich supplies of spiritual comforts, the applause of a good conscience, and the joyful prospect of a vast increase of future recompenses, for the overwhelming nature of present sufferings, they can take pleasure and rejoice in it; counting such losses for a good conscience, to be their greatest and truest gain; and that God instead of being hard on them, is in this most kind, and good to them.*

(a) *Other hardships attributed to religion concern only men's new entrance on it, after they have done much to unfit themselves for it, when indeed it requires more pains?*

(3) *And to this we may refer all those scriptures, which speak of cutting off right hands, and plucking out right eyes, i.e. casting away all evil habits and inclinations which are very near and dear to us, (Matt. 5:29-30).*

(a) *Of mortifying our members, which are upon the earth, (Col. 3:5), and the like.*

(4) *These are difficulties at our first entrance on the correction of evil courses, for then we throw off all sinful lusts and inclinations.*

(5) *It is very painful at first, but use makes it easier afterwards.*

(a) *Custom rectifies our inclinations, and begets a new nature, and reconciles us to those things, where we were very averse before, so that the hardship which these make in religion, is only when we begin the work of repentance and improvement.*

(b) *And though it is harder then, yet even at that time it is a tolerable thing.*

(i) *It employs our strength, but it does not exceed it.*

(c) *For when we do a little, God still enables us to do more, and so carries us on by degrees, until at last we have strength enough to conquer.*

(d) *And as we grow stronger, our duty grows easier, until it advances at last beyond an ease, into a pleasure.*

(e) *So that this difficulty is both tolerable while it continues, and besides it is soon over.*

2. Other places of scripture, denoting the hardships of religion, express only such diligent and just care and watchfulness through our whole course, as admits of comfort and delight enough to sweeten it to us.

a) And to this we may refer those texts which require us *to watch*, (Mark 13:37).

b) And to *give all diligence*, (2 Peter 1:5, 10).

c) *To strive*, and *labor* and the like.

d) Religion is not the effect of doing nothing, “being zapped by the Spirit” nor eternal life a prize that can be gained by lazy careless men who think the Holy Spirit of God transports them into holiness without any work on their part.

(1) *It requires pains in everything at first, yes much and great pains in those who have once corrupted themselves, by contrary lusts, and wicked customs.*

(2) *And it also requires a constant care and watchfulness forever afterwards.*

(a) *But this care and labor is moderate.*

(b) *It fairly behaves, not only with the necessary business, but also with the prudent, convenient and moderate diversions, and entertainments of this life, so that our minding it will not force us to neglect our outward comforts.*

(c) *It is reasonable in degrees, not holding us up at the utmost stretch of our faculties.*

(3) *But will do our work, if it does equal our care and pains, for the interests and enjoyments of this world, which pains men are very well content to take without ever complaining of those hardships.*

(a) *For if we are in any way so intent on doing our duty, as ordinarily we are on getting an estate, and will watch the opportunities of doing good, as we do of growing rich or great; it will abundantly serve for it.*

(4) *And besides as this labor of virtue, is in itself very moderate, so it has many accessory comforts, and considerations, which greatly sweeten and recommend it to us.*

(5) *It gives us at present the applause of a good conscience, and makes us pleased and satisfied with ourselves, and cherishes our heart, with the joyful hope of eternal life and happiness.*

(a) *And when all the pains we take is so pleasing to ourselves, and with this prospect, it will not only be found an ease, but a delight too.*

3. And in this way, I have endeavored from these words, to assert this great and necessary encouragement to all attempts in religion, *viz.*, that by the grace of Christ and his Gospel enabling them, men shall be sure to succeed in them, if they are not lacking to the work themselves.

a) And that when men continue wicked, and say, they cannot help it, they urge a shameful and very false pretense.

b) And the sum of what I have urged against this plea is this: *they generally complain most of the impossibility of obeying God, who least endeavor to obey him; or who endeavor wrong, without using those fit means, by which they should become obedient; or when they use right means, endeavor in a half-hearted spirit, but by halves, and do not go through with their endeavors.*

(1) *Where they would endeavor diligently, and discreetly, and incessantly for this obedience, as they do for other things, they might be sure to succeed, because God commands and exhorts them to it, and promises by his grace to help them in it.*

(2) *And good men, who have endeavored in this way, either now or later, have actually by such endeavors, performed them.*

(a) *No, if they will be persuaded to try this out in their practical walk, they will find it is not only possible, but after some time at least an agreeable service to God.*

(b) *And that in all its parts, it is tolerable, and in most cases easy; and in many, a most pleasurable and delightful thing.*

c) God grant, that as by his grace assisting us, we have all the power; so we may likewise have the will and heart to make a right use of this; and accomplish that obedience, which he so sincerely and earnestly desires we should; and will most gladly enable us on our honest endeavors to perform.