

1

The Great Duty of Imitating Christ

Preached at Mary Woolnoth, August 27, 1648

“He that saith he abideth in [Christ] ought himself also so to walk even as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

The apostle, having laid down the sum of the doctrine of the gospel in the former chapter, in this and the following chapter makes the application of it.

There are four principal duties to which he exhorts in this chapter.

1. To sanctity and holiness of walking (verses 1–6).
2. To brotherly love (verses 7–14).
3. To the contempt of the world (verses 15–17).
4. To shun seducers and to be constant in the faith (verse 18ff).

Each of these are urged by sundry arguments.

The arguments exciting us to holiness of life are:

1. From the end of the gospel, verse 1: “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not.”
2. From the mediation and intercession of Christ (verses 1–2).
3. It is an argument of the truth and sincerity of our faith. Verses 3–4: To know Christ is to believe in Him.
4. It is an argument of the sincerity of our love (verse 5).

2 Christ the Perfect Pattern of a Christian's Practice

5. It is an argument of our union with Christ (verse 5, latter part), which is amplified in verse 6.

So the text is the amplification of one argument pressing holiness of life, in which we may observe two things, a high dignity and a special duty.

To abide in Christ is the same with that in verse 5. To be in Christ is to have fellowship with Christ (chapter 1 verse 6).

Explication

That great mystery of our union with Jesus Christ is comprehended in this phrase. There is an external abiding in Christ by outward profession and an internal abiding by spiritual union.

“To walk even as He walked” is to tread in His steps, to follow His example, to imitate Him in His holy actions and virtues.

From the whole text arises this lesson.

DOCTRINE. It is the duty, and should be the care of everyone who pretends an interest in Jesus Christ, to imitate the holy life of conversation of Christ. It is laid down peremptorily and positively not as in arbitrary thing, but an act of debt: “he ought.” This is that which an apostle enjoins in other places also. Romans 13:14: “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the true putting on of Christ, which we do not only in our words, but in our conduct. We put on His example.

In Matthew 11:29 and Colossians 2:6 to walk in Christ signifies two things: To live the life of Christ and to persevere in Him (Philippians 2:5).

There are three things to be shown in the explication of this doctrine.

1. What it is to imitate.
2. Wherein we must imitate Christ.
3. Why we should do so.