

the
TRUE
BELIEVER

Asa MAHAN



WHITAKER
HOUSE

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

Boldface type in the Scripture quotations indicates the author's emphasis.

**The True Believer:
Character, Duty, and Privileges**

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CONTENTS

Preface.....	5
1. The Gospel Plan	7
2. The Believer's Confidence	25
3. Fullness of Joy	47
4. Life Eternal.....	71
5. Christ's Witnesses	98
6. The Glory Conferred upon the Believer	122
7. Taking Thought for the Morrow	145
8. Growing in Grace	167
9. A Word Fitly Spoken.....	181
10. Christian Admonition	198
11. Difficulties Connected with the Doctrine of Imperfection.....	215
12. Teachings of the Spirit	240
13. Inquirer Directed.....	264

PREFACE

The design of the following discourses is stated with sufficient explicitness on the contents page. An answer to the inquiry *What are the true character, duties, and privileges of the children of God in this life?* has now become one of the great and pressing wants of the church. Happy will it be for Zion if those whom the Holy Spirit has made overseers of the flock of God (see Acts 20:28) will instruct her rightly in respect to such inquiries. I indulge the fond hope that these discourses, prepared with no little prayer for divine illumination—and the preparation of which has so deeply refreshed my own spirit—may do something to forward so desirable a result. Zion is the chosen dwelling place of my heart. I have no interests or plans that are not fully identified with her purification, blessedness, and enlargement. Never may I be permitted to write a single line for the public eye or ear for any other end. The reason these discourses are given to the public is the full conviction that the church imperiously needs to be instructed in the knowledge of

the great and precious truths these discourses were designed to elucidate.

Some years ago, the substance of all of them but the last, which has never before been given to the public, was published in the *Oberlin Evangelist*. Since their appearance in that publication, I have been often and earnestly solicited to furnish them in a volume by themselves. As a response to such requests, they have been carefully revised and corrected and are now presented in a form in which I am willing they should meet the public eye.

But two classes of readers will *fully* appreciate what is here written—those who are earnest inquirers after the great salvation in all its fullness and those who have a present experience of that fullness in their own hearts. To such, especially, the work is commended with the fervent hope and prayer that their numbers in the churches may be multiplied a thousandfold till the “*redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head*” (Isaiah 51:11). Among that happy throng, perhaps, this work will be remembered by here and there an individual as one of the instruments by which his feet were guided and established in the highway of holiness. This is the only form of ambition I now know. If the reader will derive as great blessedness and profit in reading as I have in preparing this work, I will never have occasion to regret the loss of my labor. One of the most pleasing features of the doctrine therein set forth is the fact that he who proclaims it receives while he is thus watering others, if possible, greater fullness of joy than he who embraces it when proclaimed.

THE GOSPEL PLAN

*“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do,
do all to the glory of God.”*

—1 Corinthians 10:31

*“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy
paths.”*

—Proverbs 3:6

*“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and
supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made*

known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

—Philippians 4:6–7

*“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,
whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”*

—Isaiah 26:3

*“Thou shalt call his name JESUS:
for he shall save his people from their sins.”*

—Matthew 1:21

*“Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe,
all things are possible to him that believeth.”*

—Mark 9:23

The design of the present discourse is not to give a particular explanation of the passages above cited or to deduce any one specific principle from them as the basis of my remarks. Instead, it is to present some reflections of a general nature that are designed to throw light upon the gospel plan—reflections that have suggested themselves to my mind on reading these and kindred passages of Scripture. I need not here particularly remind the reader that all God requires of any being on earth or in heaven is comprehended in one word—*love*—and that every particular precept is only a specific exemplification and application of this one principle.

With this thought distinctly before the mind of the reader, I remark that love, in all its forms, implies devotion to the interest of its object. In the form of natural affection, it implies this. Parental affection, for example, implies devotion to the feelings and interests of children. In the form of benevolence, such as is required by the moral law, love implies supreme devotion to the great interests and objects of benevolence existing in the universe around us. As exercised toward God, it implies supreme respect for and delight in His character, implicit confidence in His veracity and faithfulness, unreserved obedience to His authority, and the consecration of our entire being to His kingdom and glory. As exercised toward the creatures of God, it implies the devotion of our powers to all their interests, temporal and spiritual, according to their relative importance, such as Christ Himself manifested when He was on earth. The person who exercises this love lives and moves and has his being for this object. (See Acts 17:28.) *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father”* (James 1:27) will manifest itself, not merely in devotion to the spiritual and eternal interests of men, but also in *“visit[ing] the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and... keep[ing] himself unspotted from the world”* (verse 27).

It is the fundamental design of Christ, in the plan of redemption, that the principles of the gospel—or the law of love—will be carried out and exemplified by the believer in every condition and relation in life. In other words, he will eat, drink, and clothe his body; demean himself in the family, in the church, and before the world; and regulate all his interests and transactions with his fellow men under the influence of the same Spirit of love by which Christ was induced to become poor for our sakes, that we, through His poverty, might be made rich. (See 2 Corinthians 8:9.) We understand distinctly the Spirit

by which Christ Himself was influenced in every condition and relation in life and by which a minister of the everlasting gospel ought to be influenced in the duties of his sacred calling. The design of Christ is that every believer will be influenced by the same motives in every condition and relation in life. “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31). “*In all thy ways acknowledge him*” (Proverbs 3:6). These are the fundamental requisitions by which Christ designs and expects that we will regulate our entire conduct before God and the world.

In some particular sphere in life, every individual is required and expected to glorify God by devoting all his powers and interests to the divine glory and conforming his entire deportment in that sphere to the principles of the gospel. On account of natural endowments and the arrangements and dispensations of divine providence, one person is adapted to and required to do more in one sphere in life, and another in another. But the farmer, the mechanic, the merchant, the husband, the wife, the parent, and the child are to glorify God by conforming their entire deportment and transactions with their fellow men to the same principles of pure and perfect love as the minister of the gospel is expected to regulate his conduct in his sacred calling. Every man, whatever his sphere in life may be, is expected to make it his supreme object to conduct himself in such a manner that the greatest possible amount of glory will result to God and the greatest good to men. In the particular sphere in which a person is for the time being called to move, *there* is the time and the place in which he is to glorify God. If he is at home, within the domestic circle, or abroad on a journey or engaged in any of the ordinary or special transactions of life, it is by ordering his whole deportment in these particular circumstances

in conformity with the principles of the gospel that God is to receive honor from him.

Such are the fixed arrangements of divine providence and grace. If we do not thus glorify God in each particular sphere in which we are called to move, we do not glorify Him at all. He can receive no honor from us in any sphere whatever. Suppose, for illustration, a professed Christian is, as in this respect he ought to be, very punctual in his attendance upon the services of the sanctuary on the Sabbath and upon all the meetings for social prayer, and in all these services, he appears exceedingly devout. If you should meet him nowhere else, you might, whatever his real character may be, receive a hallowed influence from his example because you would think his external appearance a reflection of the state of his heart. But should you see that man in some business transaction in a settled plan to overreach you, what influence would his appearance in the house of God and the circle for social prayer now exert upon you? As long as that sin remains upon that individual, unconfessed and unrepented of, it is impossible for him to glorify God in your estimation in any other sphere, whatever his appearance and conduct there may be. The same principle holds equally true in all cases whatsoever. The man who does not glorify God in every sphere in which he is called to move does not glorify Him in any.

A fundamental design of the redemption of Christ was and is to provide and reveal grace. By availing ourselves of grace, we may “*serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*” (Hebrews 12:28) in every particular sphere in which we are called to move. In this consists our completeness in Christ. In making provisions for our redemption, He remembered us in every particular sphere and condition in which we are called to move. As a Savior, He presents Himself as able and willing to meet all our

necessities and to render us, in every relation in life, all that God requires us to be.

Hence, I remark that if Christ does not save us by rendering us, in our different spheres and relations in life—as parents and children, as husbands and wives, as citizens and members of the household of faith—what He requires us to be, He does not save us at all. If He saves us, He does it by destroying in us the *spirit of disobedience* and inspiring us with the *spirit of obedience* to the commands of God. The man imbued with such a spirit will have respect to all God's commandments in every relation in life. If Christ saves us, He does it by destroying our selfishness and rendering us benevolent like Himself. The person possessed of such a spirit (and none others know Christ as a Savior at all), who loves his neighbor as himself, will not overreach or defraud his neighbor in any matter. All his business transactions with him will be an exemplification of the law of love.

Hence, I also remark that if our faith does not fasten upon Christ, to render us in our different spheres what God requires us to be, we do not, in any true sense, exercise faith in Him as a Savior from sin. It is in these circumstances and relations that our sins are found. Here we sin, if we sin at all. Here, then, our faith must fasten upon Christ to be thus saved from our sins, or we do not know Him by faith as such a Savior.

Another fundamental principle of the gospel plan is this: In every condition and relation in life, we are authorized and required to look to Christ for special wisdom and grace to render us, in those particular circumstances, all God requires us to be. This we are to do with the assured expectation that, in conformity with his promise, while we acknowledge Him in all our ways, He will direct our paths. (See Proverbs 3:6.) He will

instruct us, teach us the way we should go, and guide us by His eye. (See Psalm 32:8.)

While we thus consecrate our entire being to God, He kindly assumes the guardianship of all our interests, temporal and spiritual. While we are *“careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let [our] requests be made known unto God”* (Philippians 4:6), His word stands pledged that *“no good thing will he withhold”* (Psalm 84:11) from us and that the *“peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [our] hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:7). Our exclusive business, the only thing about which we are to be careful, is to hearken to God’s Word and do His will. His business is to see that all our real interests are secure, all our real wants supplied, and our souls kept in perfect peace. Such is a brief outline of the gospel plan. The way is now prepared for some important remarks that arise from our thoughts thus far, remarks designed to throw still further light upon this subject.

We see the relationship between the moral principles and precepts and the doctrines of the gospel. The former constitute the rules of action by which we regulate our heart and conduct in all the circumstances and relations of life. The latter embody those motives and influences, designed and adapted by infinite wisdom and love, to secure obedience to the moral precepts of Christianity. This is the design of every doctrine of the gospel, and this is the relationship between the doctrines and moral precepts of Christianity.

We see, in the light of this subject, the essence of the perfection of the gospel. It consists in the absolute perfection of its moral precepts and in the equally perfect adaptation of its doctrines and influences to secure obedience to its moral precepts.

Any other view of the gospel than this makes it an imperfect gospel.

We also perceive the essence of the perfection of Christ as a Savior. It consists in His perfect ability and willingness to meet entirely every demand of our being in every condition and relation in time and eternity. It consists in His ability and willingness to remedy all the consequences of past sins, to secure us in the future against the power of sin and all its incentives, and to cause His followers to “*stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*” (Colossians 4:12). Such a Savior we sinners imperiously need, and if Christ was in any respect deficient in these characteristics, He would be an imperfect Savior.

We may understand the nature of evangelical faith. The believer, in the exercise of such faith, recognizes himself as complete in Christ in every condition, relation, and sphere in life. To his mind, “*all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us*” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

His great inquiry is, *What has God promised?* When he understands the blessing really embraced and offered in any promise, his faith at once fastens upon Christ so he may have that promise in all its fullness accomplished in his own experience. Then he has no more doubt about whether he will realize its fulfillment than he has about the truthfulness of God. He never staggers at any promise of God through unbelief. (See Romans 4:20.) When called to move in any particular sphere or relation in life, he at once looks to Christ for grace and wisdom to meet fully every responsibility. This he does, expecting to receive of Christ’s fullness and “*grace for grace*” (John 1:16) as his circumstances require. Such is true evangelical faith. Reader, is this the confidence you have in Him?

We may see the nature of unbelief. Unbelief assumes three forms:

1. It denies the truth of revelation altogether. This is *infidelity*.
2. It admits the truth of revelation but denies the fact that provisions are made and revealed in the gospel to enable the believer to “*stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*” (Colossians 4:12) in this life. Or it admits the adequacy of the provisions of grace and then affirms that they sustain such a relation to us that no believer ever did or ever will so avail himself of them in this life in order to render the obedience required. This is *unbelief*—as manifested by those who oppose the doctrine of Christian perfection.
3. Unbelief in the third form admits the provisions of grace and the possibility that we might avail ourselves of them but withholds the faith required. This is *practical unbelief*.

We may also notice the symptoms of unbelief or those indications by which any man may determine whether he is under its influence:

1. The absence of a confirmed and settled peace of mind is a sure indication of unbelief. “*They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed*” (Psalm 125:1). “*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee*” (Isaiah 26:3). Faith recognizes in Christ a full and perfect and present supply for every necessity. Where is the place for anxiety in such a mind? Remember, reader, that if your peace is not “*as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea*” (Isaiah 48:18), it is because of your unbelief.

2. Present disquietude in regard to the future is a sure indication of unbelief. Faith recognizes in Christ a full supply of every necessity in every possible situation in our present and future. It therefore casts all its cares upon the Lord with the most peaceful assurance that every want will be met as it occurs. (See Psalm 55:22.) Anxiety finds no place in such a mind. Will you bear it in mind, reader, that all disquietude about the future, whether about our temporal or spiritual interests, finds its origin exclusively in unbelief?
3. Continued failure in good resolutions is another certain indication of the presence and prevailing influence of unbelief. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. (See 1 John 5:4.) It resolves upon obedience and, by the grace of God, renders that obedience. Unbelief is overcome by the world. It “resolves, and resolves, and dies the same.” Or, rather, despite its resolutions to the contrary, it slides back with a “*perpetual backsliding*” (Jeremiah 8:5). Reader, how is it with you? Do your often repeated and as often broken resolutions proclaim the fact that you are in unbelief?
4. Another very common indication of unbelief is the idea that in our circumstances and relations in life something peculiarly unfavorable opposes our sanctification, and thus, when our condition is changed, we will be more holy. How perfectly evident is it that the faith of such persons rests not upon Christ but upon external circumstances? In other words, here are the certain indications of unbelief. Faith recognizes for itself an infinite fullness in Christ for every condition, relation, and circumstance in life.

5. The complaint of a *hard heart* is another sure indication of unbelief. God has promised He will “*take the stony heart out of [our] flesh, and will give [us] an heart of flesh*” (Ezekiel 11:19). Faith lays hold of the promise and realizes its fulfillment in actual experience. Unbelief, on the other hand, retains the heart of stone as a fearful weight upon the soul. The conscious presence, therefore, of such a heart is a certain indication of unbelief.
6. A want of a felt, conscious assurance that God hears and answers us when we pray is another certain indication of unbelief. Faith introduces the soul into the very audience chamber of the Most High. It uses the name of Christ with the most fixed and peaceful assurance of being heard and of receiving the petitions desired of Him. Unbelief, on the other hand, shuts the soul from God and depresses it with the gloomy consciousness that God does not hear and will not answer.

Christian, when you pray with the feeling that God does not hear you, will you admit the fact that the cause is unbelief in your own heart? Say not that past sin is the cause. Past sin originated in unbelief, and God always hears the prayer of penitence and faith, whatever the past may have been.

The common impression is that our sinful propensities and the number and power of our temptations and besetments to sin are so strong we cannot hope to be sanctified in this life; this is a certain indication of the widespread influence of unbelief. The language of unbelief in this case is that Christ, as a Savior, is not *able* to deliver us from the world, the flesh, and the devil—or that he is not *willing*, which is the worst imputation that can possibly be cast upon His character. To say Christ is able or willing to save us from all sin when, and only when, He has us

beyond the reach of all temptation is saying very little, surely, to His credit as a Savior. It is the cruelest imputation that unbelief ever casts upon His character. Christian, how often have you thus wounded Him in the house of His friends?

I might mention other symptoms of unbelief, but these are sufficient to enable the reader to determine whether he is under its fearful influence.

We can now see why the religion of the majority of professing Christians waxes and wanes with external circumstances. This is the case with a very great proportion of the church. If religion is revived around them, they are excited and active. If it declines, the love of many waxes cold. (See Matthew 24:12.) They lie down and slumber with the rest. What is the cause of such a state of things? Here I will give three answers:

1. The religion of such persons is not a religion of love. If it was so, as soon as religion began to decline, instead of going with the multitude, they would begin to "*sigh and...cry for all the abominations*" (Ezekiel 9:4) being done around them.
2. Theirs is not a religion of faith. Faith does not look at the things we see, which are temporal, but at the things that are unseen and eternal. (See 2 Corinthians 4:18.) The religion of faith, therefore, is independent from external circumstances for its strength and continuance. It endures "*as seeing him who is invisible*" (Hebrews 11:27).
3. It is not Christ but external circumstances that sustain and influence such persons. "*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*" (Hebrews 13:8). Those who are really sustained and influenced by faith in Him will, indeed, be as "*mount Zion, which cannot be*

removed” (Psalm 125:1). When circumstances around them are unfavorable, “*he giveth more grace*” (James 4:6), because “*as thy days, so shall thy strength be*” (Deuteronomy 33:25).

What then must we think of the condition and prospects of a great proportion of professing Christians? Let the reader attentively examine the ninth chapter of Ezekiel and there learn who, and who only, have the mark of God on their foreheads.

*And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer’s inkhorn by his side; and the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men **that sigh and that cry** for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary.* (Ezekiel 9:3–6)

One solitary class, as we see, was spared—those who, amid abounding wickedness, “sighed and cried for the abominations” (see verse 4) being done around them. In all the churches of the living God, this one class only now stands approved in His sight as “*heirs together of the grace of life*” (1 Peter 3:7). Reader, when “*judgment must begin at the house of God*” (1 Peter 4:17), where will you appear?

The true spirit of the gospel, which distinguishes the sincere believer from all other men, next claims our attention. It is all comprehended in this—implicit faith or confidence in every truth of God; firm reliance upon all His “*exceeding great and precious*

promises" (2 Peter 1:4); and filial, unreserved obedience to all His commandments. Such an individual only really fears one thing, and that is sin. As from the pains of the second death, he flies from it himself and from all incentives and allurements to it, and in the deep sincerity of his heart, he sighs and cries when others perpetrate it. This, reader, is the true Christian. This was the spirit of Him whose name we bear, and we must remember, "*If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his*" (Romans 8:9).

I not infrequently meet with the question of how we should obey the great precept "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10:31). How should we demean ourselves in respect to food, drink, dress, and the business relations and transactions in life, for example, so that we will therein glorify God? We are now prepared with a specific answer to such inquiries, which are of vast importance to everyone who would have respect to all God's commandments.

Let us suppose that an individual, in all his business transactions and arrangements, maintains a strict adherence to the principles of integrity and to the demands of the great law of love—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 19:19)—and that he seeks the guidance of wisdom from above in all that Providence commits to his trust. Such an individual will glorify God in his business transactions as really and truly as the minister does in the most hallowed duties of his sacred calling. Thus every individual may glorify Christ in all the varied circumstances and relations in life. The application of the principle under consideration to the regulation of our conduct in respect to food, drink, and dress, is manifest.

Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified [its

appropriate use is a service, rendered virtue in us and acceptable to God] *by the word of God and prayer.*

(1 Timothy 4:4–5)

The great truth here presented is this: Every object God created, He brought into being for a certain end. When we use each object for the end for which it was created, with respect for what is right and according to the will of the great Giver of all, we honor God in its use. Our mental and physical constitution was created for a certain end, an end of which no one is ignorant. Food, drink, and apparel are requisite to this end. When from a sacred regard and in strict subordination to this end, we gratify and regulate these propensities—never in obedience to the demands of pride, custom, or appetite, or violating the laws of life and health—we then glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are His. (See 1 Corinthians 6:20.) Thus, while we acknowledge God in all our ways, everywhere, and in all things, He directs our paths to His own glory. (See Proverbs 3:6.) One of the most melancholy features of the prevailing religion of the present time is the almost total divorce of the fear of God and respect for His laws from the ordinary transactions of life. How few remember that *every* work is to be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good or evil. It is a fearful thing, reader, to defile the temple of God, and that temple, remember, is the mortal body you now inhabit. (See 1 Corinthians 3:17.) Reader, does God thus receive glory from you? *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much”* (Luke 16:10).

We see how individuals lose the presence of Christ when they leave their closets (the house of God) and engage in business when on a journey or when brought into new and untried

circumstances. The reason is because they do not admit Christ has provided special grace for them in those particular circumstances, or they do not avail themselves of that grace. If this were so, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, would keep their hearts and minds at all times and under all circumstances. (See Philippians 4:7.) Christ will be with you, Christian, as the joy, the rest, the life, and the peace of your soul, whenever and wherever you have faith to apprehend and receive Him. Whenever your faith abandons Him, then He leaves you in darkness and the shadow of death.

We see how it is that many professors of religion destroy their influence as Christians when they are not at all aware of the fact. It is through the *temper* and *spirit* they manifest in the particular spheres of active life they are called to move in. For example, a clerk in a store who was under deep conviction of sin and apparently on the point of submission to God was turned backward and rendered an infidel when he detected his employer, a professed Christian, in an attempt to defraud a stranger out of six cents in the sale of a trifling article. The exhortations to repentance from that merchant could have no influence over that young man after the disclosure of such a spirit. How many children are hardened into an incurable obstinacy against religion because of the ill temper of their parents in the domestic circle? Reader, is the blood of no deathless spirit sprinkled upon your garments because of your conduct in some unguarded hour? Does religion so influence you in every sphere and relation in life that your entire deportment is a standing reproof against sin and not an excuse for it?

We may understand the great defect in the gospel, as apprehended by the mass of Christians at the present time. One glaring and melancholy defect is that Christ is contemplated almost

exclusively as a Savior from *hell* and not as a Savior from *sin*—as a *justifying* but not a *sanctifying* Savior. Another is that the gospel, as now apprehended, has comparatively little to do with men in their particular and varied relations in life. They expect the gospel to influence them in the closet and on the Sabbath but to have very little to do with them in the ordinary transactions of life.

The gospel, when thus contemplated, can have but little influence upon Christians themselves or upon the world through them. On the other hand, when Christ is recognized and received—as the parents' and the child's, as the husband's and the wife's, as the farmer's, the mechanic's, and the merchant's Savior—when every believer in every sphere and relation in life looks to Christ as a special Savior to him in that particular sphere in which he is called to move—*then* will the power of the gospel be felt in the church and through the church upon the world. This, reader, is the gospel of Christ. Christ has come as a Savior to us in every condition and relation in life. The promises and provisions of His grace cover our entire necessities, here and hereafter. There is no condition or relation in life where His grace is not extended and where it will not be sufficient for us if we have faith to receive it. Remember, "*the just shall live by faith*" (Hebrews 10:38). Remember, also, the fearful declarations, "*If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established*" (Isaiah 7:9) and, "*If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*" (Hebrews 10:38).

Such, I repeat, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a Savior is Jesus Christ to all who will receive and trust in Him. Do you love this gospel? Have you faith to receive such a Savior? If you can thus receive Him, not one "jot or tittle" of all that He has spoken and promised will fail in its accomplishment in your

blessed experience. (See Matthew 5:18.) *“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth”* (Mark 9:23).

So let our lips and lives express
The holy Gospel we profess;
So let our works and virtues shine,
To prove the doctrine all divine.¹

1. Isaac Watts, “So Let Our Lips and Lives Express,” 1707.