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DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

ON THE 17TH MAY 1832.

By NATHAN S. S. BEMAN,

Moderator of the Assembly.

Montreal,

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DISCOURSE.

TEXT Acts xix 20—" *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.*"

On opening the New Testament, one of the first facts that rivets our attention, is the amazing success which followed the preaching of the gospel in primitive times. This remark is emphatically true of that portion of christain history recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles*. The new dispensation was now fully introduced. The twelve shosen disciples, after having been throughly instructed in the objects of their future mission, recieved the last qualification for their work, when they were "baptized with the Holy Ghost." Bearing the commision of the Son of God, and guided by the divine Spirit. they entered upon a systematic and vigorous course of efforts to enlighten and save the world:

Nor did they labour in vain. On the day of Penticost, three thousand souls were converted and added to the church. Upon almost he next page of christian effort, the eye lights upon this cheering fact—that "many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand." And again, "the Word of God increased ; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." We have in the context a record of the transforming powers of the same gospel at Ephesus. The occasion of the excitement was, an attempt to perform a miracle in "the name of the Lord Jesus." which led to an event more impressive, if possible, than a miracle itself. "And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, And many that believed came, and confessed and showed their deeds. And many of them also, which used curious arts, brought their books together. and burned them before all men : and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." Facts of this character might be multiplied to a great extent ; but it is unnecessary. The declaration, that the gospel was clothed with peculiar power, in primitive times, that it evinced a practical and saving efficacy, under apostolic administration, which it has exhibited in no other circumstances, will not be denied. From the day of Penticost to the death of the beloved John, embracing a period of between sixty and seventy years, the gospel was preached in the most distinguished cities and pro-

viaces of the Roman Empire. Large and flourishing churches were planted in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. Indeed, at this early period, the conquest of the gospel had become almost commensurate with the dominion of the Caesars. Here, then, is a striking fact, which ought to impress the heart of the church. Here we see the gospel in the hands of a few men, in a short time, producing effects altogether disproportionate to any thing which has been witnessed in modern times. Why this gospel should have been, in the hands of the apostles, so emphatically "the power of God into salvation," and become comparatively inefficient under the administration of their successors, is a legitimate subject of pulpit inquiry. The fact, I apprehend, will not be questioned, that the preaching of the gospel does not produce the same powerful and speedy results, at the present day, which were witnessed under the ministry of Peter and John, of Paul and Barnabas; and an inquiry into the reasons of this amazing disproportion in the practical effects of the same system, may have a happy influence upon ministerial affections and effort, and thus stand connected with the best interests of the church.

The single point of discussion on which I would fix your attention, is this—*The inefficiency of modern preaching, when compared with the apostolic administration of the gospel.*

I would not here intimate, that the gospel is a dead letter, at the present day. Such an intimation would contain an injurious reflection upon the christian ministry and constitute a vain attempt to pluck away, from the diadem of Jesus Christ those living brilliants which are planted there by the power and the grace of the gospel. Every solitary conversion to God, and every powerful revival of religion, as well as the general pervading influence of the gospel, which impresses and controls society, are so many evidences, that the sword of the spirit has not lost its heavenly temper, and that the Bible is not divested of its saving power. But a literal Pentecost lives only in the page of the sacred historian—the scenes of Ephesus, belong to another age—and the mortal energy of the gospel, which, in the dawn of its triumphs, seemed destined at once to arrest, convulse, and subdue the entire population of the world, is greatly modified in its operations. Whence this melancholy change? What has arrested the march of christian truth in our world? Why did one sermon from an apostle's lips often accomplish more than is effected by a hundred or a thousand sermons, at the present day?

Many reasons have been assigned in order to account for this difference; and some of them are, no doubt, correct, and

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some are incorrect. Let us fix our attention upon a few particulars.

I. *The difference in question ought not to be attributed to any thing particularly favourable to the reception of the gospel in the spirit and genius of primitive times.*

The human heart, till subdued by grace, is at enmity with God ; and this is the character of our whole world. We are not, then, in any circumstances, to expect a moral predisposition in the hearts of men to embrace the gospel. But still there may be many things in the state of the public mind, and in the institutions of society, which facilitate or obstruct the progress of the truth. These favorable or unfavorable circumstances may be found in the religion, the morals, the politics, and the philosophy of a people. Indeed, there are nameless modifications of human life and human opinions which may become the occasions of the reception or the rejection of the gospel. These things may form the very point on which the whole matter may turn—and turn, too, both for time and eternity. But what was the state of the apostolic age in this respect? What do we find, on a minute inquiry, in the existing condition of the world, which can be assigned as a reason why the gospel took such deep and fast hold of the mental and moral energies of man? It is true, God, in his providence, had prepared the world for the coming of Christ; and there were certain grand traits in the features of society which had a bearing upon the means and facilities of propagating the gospel. The universality of the Roman empire was a fact of this character. By this, channels of intercourse were opened between different nations, whose ignorance or enmities would otherwise have separated them from each other, as if impassable mountains or unnavigable seas had intervened. Another kindred in its operation—was the prevalence of the Greek language, in that age. It had become a kind of universal language in the Roman empire, and by this means the early christian teachers were enabled to address a vast population originally consisting many different nations, without the slow process of studying a variety of languages, and without the intervention of a miracle. The dispersion of the Jews, and their final settlement, in different parts of the Roman empire, and especially in the populous cities, is another circumstance which ought not to be omitted. Their synagogues opened the first pulpits for the heralds of the cross, and among the descendants of Abraham, the gospel, even remote from Jerusalem, gained its earliest victories. And sometimes its rejection by the Jews, became the occasion of its reception by the Gentiles. But these peculiarities of that age, though they constituted

facilities for the promulgation of the gospel, and were so important, that they may be pronounced essential to its incipient triumphs, cannot account for its peculiar power and efficacy at that period; they cannot solve the problem why the primitive administration of inspired truth, should be more efficacious than the present;—for, in all these respects, we stand on more elevated ground than that occupied by the apostles.

But there are other circumstances pertaining to that age which ought to be stated, in order to place this subject in its true light. There never was a period when the gospel had to force its way through stronger moral obstruction; where it had to encounter more deep-rooted enmity against holiness, than in that day of its most signal success. The prejudices of the Jews were never more fixed and violent. Their opinions respecting the Messiah and the objects of his coming, were unscriptural to the very foundation; and their rejection of the gospel was not accidental and capricious, but systematic and deliberate. It was a part of their religion. Nor did the structure of paganism ever present more formidable barriers to the progress of gospel truth, than when assailed by the first heralds of the cross. This system had multiplied almost to infinity; it appeals to the pride and sensuality—to the hopes and fears of men. The chain of moral servitude which weighed down the immortal mind, was fastened by a thousand rivets. The Greeks and Romans boasted of the multitude and the splendour of their gods; and it in some instances, in more elevated minds soared above these imposing superstitions, their systems of *philosophy* were not less hostile to the spirit of the gospel. The Stoic with his cool-blooded apathy, and obstinate submission to fate; and the Epicurean with his refined selfishness, cherished an enmity to the gospel not less unqualified, than that which inflamed the heart of the most stupid worshipper of idols. In the light of those facts, it may be safely affirmed, the peculiar success of the gospel in the apostolic age, is not to be attributed to anything in the spirit of that age favorable to its reception.

2. *The difference, in question, is not to be ascribed to the gift of inspiration.*

Inspiration seems to have been designed to accomplish two objects. The first was to qualify the apostles and their coadjutors for their personal works, as ministers of the gospel. This was a matter of intellectual tuition. This instruction of the Holy Ghost must be carefully distinguished from his gracious influence upon the heart. Inspiration and sanctification are very different things. The former is an intellectual, the latter a moral operation. Baalam was inspired, but his heart

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was not renewed, The apostles needed the spirit of inspiration to impart to them the necessary qualification for their work. Their circumstances were such that they could not acquire, by the ordinary means of intellectual training, the knowledge which was actually called for in order to carry their commission into effect. Hence the Holy Spirit gave them instruction, in mere matters of science; communicated new truths to their minds; taught them to understand and speak languages which they had never learned, and gave them a mental discrimination in wielding and applying the truth, which, in their situation, they could have acquired in no other way. The second great object of inspiration was to furnish a written revelation which should contain all the spiritual truth necessary for the instruction and salvation of men; and which should constitute, to the end of the world, the last appeal in all matters pertaining to religion.

If these are the legitimate objects of inspiration, then the different effects of apostolic and modern preaching are not to be accounted for on this principle. The apostles were inspired because they could, in no other way, become personally qualified for preaching the gospel; neither could they have contributed their portion in filling up the canon of Scripture. But the ministers of the gospel now, with the providential facilities which they enjoy of becoming qualified for their work, and with the Bible, a permanent revelation in their hands, stand at least, in these respects, on a summit level with the apostles. Should any think, that this is saying too much, I would ask, why then are not the present race of preachers inspired of God? If such a gift is essential to great success in announcing and enforcing the message of eternal life, then we might reasonably infer, that it would have been made a perpetual qualification for the ministry. But this is not all. What valuable purpose could now be answered by the gift of inspiration? If ministers were to be inspired to teach the languages, as were the apostles at the day of Pentecost, it would cherish mental indolence; if to communicate the same truths which are embodied in the scriptures, this would supercede a written revelation; if to reveal new truths, on the subject of religion, this would bring home the charge of imperfection against the Bible; if to render revealed facts and doctrines more vivid and powerful in their appeals to the heart, this, it should be remembered, is the office of the Holy Ghost, in the ordinary work of conviction and sanctification, and not in the gift of inspiration. It would seem, then, that the spirit of inspiration is not now required; and although this qualification was necessary for the apostles, yet their peculiar success is not to be

attributed to this cause, nor the inefficiency of modern preaching to the want of this gift.

3 *The efficacy of primitive preaching ought not to be ascribed to the power of miracles.*

A miracle, from its very nature, must be a striking and impressive event. Were we to see the helpless victim of disease arise from his couch, in perfect health ; or the dead man open his eyes and lift his head from the coffin ; or the tenant of the grave issue forth into the living world, and mingle in human society, as he had been accustomed to do in former days ; and were all these things to take place at the mere bidding of another, our minds would be forcibly arrested and deeply instantly recognize the finger of God in these events. Such miracles as these were wrought at the introduction of the gospel dispensation ; and, at the same time, the most decisive moral changes were effected ; that is, sinners were awakened and converted. The Jew renounced his bigotry, and the Gentile abjured his idols ; and those who were at enmity before, became one in Christ Jesus. As these two events—miracles and the rapid triumphs of the gospel—are associated in point of time, there is a tendency in many minds, to blend or confound them with respect to their moral influence. Tell such persons of the mighty and transforming movements of the gospel in the apostolic age—of the conversion of thousands under one sermon—and you are at once met with this declaration, *these were the days of miracles*. True, these *were* the days of miracles ; and the miracles which were wrought, were necessary to the success of the gospel. But this is *not* the point to be settled. Were the conversions which occurred in the days of the apostles, wrought by the power of miracles ? This question must be answered in the negative. Miracles seem to have been intended for a specific purpose. They constituted the seal of heaven to the commission under which the apostles and others acted, in introducing and establishing the new dispensation among the Jews and a new religion among the Gentiles. They furnish the necessary attestation, that these men were sent of God. They served to arrest the public mind ; to elicit inquiry ; and to rivet attention long enough to permit the truth, in the hands of the Holy Ghost, to find its way to the conscience and the heart. Miracles, I say arrested attention ; and conviction and conversation were wrought just as they are now, by the instrumentality of the truth and the agency of the Holy Spirit. The appeal made to the human mind, by miracles, was nearly intellectual, while the whole moral power was embodied in the truth. These interpositions of God are not essential to the most triumphant

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success of the gospel ; but were rendered necessary only by the specific circumstances in which the primitive ministers of the cross were called to act. The moment we desire this position we are surrounded by an ocean of difficulties and objections. If miracles are to be clothed with converting powers, then why did not the saving effects of the gospel bear a direct proportion to the frequency and impressive character of these events ? This, every one knows, was far from being the fact. If miracles are to occupy this position in the work of saving sinners, then the gospel is an imperfect scheme without them ; it is not itself "the power of God," but only made so by the collateral efficacy of an extraneous circumstance. According to this theory, the most powerful and effectual appeals of God to our lost world are drawn from the kingdom of nature, and not from the kingdom of grace. But this is not the end of the difficulty. On the supposition that apostolic success is to be attributed to miracles, then miracles must be restored to the church, or the predicted triumph of the gospel will never take place. The true decision of the question now at issue appears to be this—miracles were necessary only in the introduction of the gospel ; and with the record of these special acts of God, in our hands, and without their actual occurrence before our eyes, the ministers of the present day, are, to say the least, in a situation as eligible for making a saving impression upon the world, as were the apostles with a peculiar providence of God in their favour.

4. *We ought not to ascribe the difference under consideration to the mere sovereign God.*

That God is a sovereign, and that as such he governs the world of nature and the world of grace, there can be no doubt. And in this fact, too, every heart ought to rejoice. But the sovereignty of God, as well as any other doctrine of the Bible, may be misunderstood or abused. It would, no doubt, be incorrect to refer the existence and the loss of the soul to a mere naked, sovereign act of God. The same may be said of the poverty of the sluggard—the ruin of the prodigal—the abasement of the intemperate—and the remorse and shameful death of the murderer ! All these things take place under the government of a sovereign God ; but they take place according to established connections between cause and effect—between means and ends, and in such a manner, too, that man is always free, and never permitted to go and hang his sin on the sovereignty of God's throne. On the same principles, it would be an abuse of divine sovereignty, to ascribe to this cause the coldness and death which pervade some sections of the church, and the want of power and efficiency which generally charac-

terizes an uninstructed and an unfaithful ministry. Who would ever think of asserting, that the reason why saving conversions are not multiplied in the Roman and the Unitarian churches, is, that God, by a pure act of sovereignty; is not pleased to grant them a blessing? It is, indeed, the sovereign purpose of God to bless the truth, and not error, to the salvation of souls. But this is not the point at issue. Why does he, as far as we know, in certain circumstances grant his blessing; and in others, withhold it. When obvious reasons can be assigned, and those, too, belonging to the very nature of the case, or growing out of the moral relations between God and his creatures, we never refer the case, for solution, to his sovereignty. If two cases precisely parallel can be presented, and in the one a blessing is granted, and in the other withheld—if the same means are employed; and urged with the same spirit and fidelity—if the condition, physical, intellectual and moral, of those to whom the truth is addressed, is in all respects the same then any difference in the results must be ascribed to the sovereign good pleasure of God. But to infer the existence of all these parallels between the apostolic and the present age, without establishing these positions by proof, and to attribute the different practical efforts of the gospel upon the souls of men, at these two periods, to divine sovereignty, is a mere begging of the question. Till it can be proved, that as much is done now to save men, as was done in the days of the apostles, and that these efforts are as pure and elevated, in their moral character, as were the efforts of that age, it is perfectly safe to affirm, that we are not at liberty to ascribe the difference in question to a mere sovereign act of God.

5. *The apostles and first preachers of the gospel were supremely devoted to their work; and in this fact, we find one of the elements of their success.*

The one great object on which they had fixed their hearts, was the salvation of men. This was their deep and absorbing purpose. A portion of the same spirit, and a large one too, which animated their master's bosom, and which drew him down from heaven, filled and fired their hearts in the enterprize in which they had embarked. With him they could say, "our meat is to do the will of him that sent us, and to finish his work." They consecrated themselves to the ministry, keeping back no "part of the price." They had counted the cost, and determined to *build their tower*. They had surveyed the whole field of labor, and entered their Master's service with the deliberate purpose of bearing the burden and heat of the day," till the last earthly sun should go down, and the morning of a brighter world dawn upon them. Nothing could warp

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them from their purpose. They had received a commission signed by the hand, and sealed with the blood of their Master; and this commission they intended to execute—and this commission they did execute, till they died. Their only business was to preach the gospel; and the perpetual breathings of their hearts to heaven—their highest aspirations were, that this gospel might be blessed to the salvation of men. If their bosoms sometimes heaved with sighs, and their cheeks were bathed in tears, it was not on account of their personal afflictions; but these sighs and tears were poured out over a world at war with God, and obnoxious to his burning curse! If they were forbidden by the decrees of counsels to preach the gospel, their reply was, "We ought to obey God rather than men."—When arraigned before kings and magistrates, they seized the opportunity to deliver their message, pressing obligation upon the conscience, till their judges sometimes acknowledged their convictions, and trembled in anticipation of their impending doom. No hardships could subdue—no persecutions intimidate—no threatenings overawe—no temporary defeats tear away from their hearts the fond hope of future and triumphant success—and even martyrdom, armed as she was with fire and faggot, could make no impression on their fearless spirits. They had begun a work, and they intended to finish it. In the prosecution of their object, they were indifferent to many things which have been too eagerly sought by ministers in other ages of the church. They stood aloof from the clashings of politics; they had no ambition for literary fame; worldly titles and worldly honours they left to worldly men; they looked down upon the mere pomp and show of human eloquence; and they seem never to think of themselves but in connection with their Master, and the salvation of souls. In one word, they pursued their object with more *piety* and less *policy*, than any other race of ministers who ever blessed the world. They "determined," as one of their own number has recorded of himself, "not to know any thing" among the people, "save JESUS CHRIST, and him crucified." And in this fact of exclusive devotedness to their work, we find at least one reason for their unparalleled success.

6. *The primitive preachers were more abundant in labors, than at the present day.*

It is not intended here to bring an indiscriminate charge of indolence against the ministers of the present day. That there are many in the sacred office against whom the charge might be sustained, in its full force, there can be no doubt. But extreme cases fall not within the limits of this discussion.

The inquiry now before us is, to ascertain, if possible, how much of the marked and peculiar success of the first preachers of the gospel, over those of other ages, may be fairly attributed to their superior activity in the work which God had assigned them. A more laborious set of men never unfolded their physical and moral energies, in our world, than the first preachers of the gospel. Whatever may be true, of here and there an individual, of this or any other age, no generation of their successors, have attained, in this respect, an equal elevation. They appear to me to be the only men who have undertaken and accomplished in religion, what other men have done in some of the more elevated affairs of the world—in science, legislation, war, and commerce. They put their whole hearts into their work. The entire energies of their immortal minds, rekindled by a living flame from heaven, were concentrated, and made to glow and burn on a single point. They were “instant in season—out of season” Their great business was, to “preach the word.” Wherever they were, this object was never forgotten. Withersoever they were led by Providence, or driven, or transported by their enemies, their hearts clung to the single purpose of living and dying in the service of souls. It was not on the Jewish, or the Christian Sabbath alone, or in the synagogue exclusively, that they prosecuted this work.—Time and place were mere circumstances which they often compelled to yield to the master passion of their hearts, and the governing purpose of their lives. Take Paul as a specimen of activity in preaching the gospel. At Ephesus, “by the space of three years” he “ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” During two years of this time he disputed daily in the school of Tyrannus. At Athens, his spirit was so stirred within him, “when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry,” that he not only preached the gospel “in the synagogue,” but “in the market,” and to the celebrated court, “Areopagus.” Disregarding the fastidiousness of worldly opinions, on one occasion he “continued his speech until midnight;” and after a little interruption, protracted his exercises “even till break of day.” When arraigned before Felix, he “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” with such amazing moral appeals, that the judge “trembled” before the accused. When immured in a dungeon at Philippi, he and his fellow laborer and fellow sufferer, Silas, prayed and sung praises unto God; and these were but the introductory exercises to the successful announcement of the gospel to the tenants of that prison. In one word, the first heralds of the cross, exerted every energy of soul and body to convert and save the world.—Even Alexander in his

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ambition to conquer the earth—and Cæsar to become the master of the Roman commonwealth—and Bonaparte to overrun and consolidate the kingdoms of Europe, were never more active and laborious, than were Paul and his associates to subjugate the world to the sceptre of Jesus Christ.

7. *The apostles were more simple in their manner of exhibiting the truth, than most preachers of the present day.*

Their first object in preaching was to give a clear exhibition of their message. Mere speculations found no place in their sermons. And they not only presented the truth, but they selected such truth as was adapted to the state and circumstances of those whom they addressed. The next object was to exhibit this truth in the most simple and intelligible manner. In their hands; the gospel was always left to recommend itself by its own intrinsic value and never borrowed an influence from the mere drapery in which it was clothed. Their figures and illustrations were drawn from sources with which their hearers were familiar; and were so simple in their structure, that ordinary as well as elevated minds—the illiterate as well as the learned, could comprehend their full force. In all their public discourses, and in all their written productions, as far as the record has come down to us, we detect no laboured refinements of style—no hankerings after literary fame—no aspirings to be ranked among great men—no attempts to excite admiration, or dazzle the world by their eloquence. It would have been honourable to the gospel, and happy for our lost world, if the simplicity had become hereditary among the ministers of the cross: if the unadorned mantles of these New Testament Elijahs had fallen upon all succeeding Elishas. The refinements of literature, and the mere pomp and parade of language, have sometimes been an immense drawback upon the moral power of the gospel. The arguments in favour of the simplicity of style and manner, in preaching the gospel, are decisive. The truth of God is too majestic to be covered up by the little trappings of mere human ornaments—and no man can devote much attention to such things, without losing sight of the grand object of preaching—the salvation of souls.

There are two practical thoughts on this subject, upon which every minister of the gospel would do well to reflect. A labored style and manner, in the pulpit, require so much effort in order to be understood by the hearers, that the truth by these circumstances, is divested of a portion of its influence. Great mental exertion, for the mere purpose of comprehension, must, on the first principles of intellectual philosophy, always exclude deep conviction, and repress strong feeling. The

mind is too much employed to reflect upon its own personal guilt, or to be alarmed by the apprehensions of personal danger. The other thought is this—when style and manner are made leading objects in preaching the gospel, the attention of the hearer is always fixed on something short of the grand purpose which ought to be accomplished by the exhibition of the truth. The eye of the hearer, will follow the heart of the preacher. Admiration may be excited, but the conscience is untouched, and the power of sin is unbroken. The delighted audience praise the speaker, but never condemn themselves. The shaft is indeed a polished one, but it does no execution. Many applaud the archer, while no groans of the wounded fall upon the ear. If a minister of God would turn away the heart from all that is human—if he would open the eye of his dying congregation on hell and heaven—if he would bind the truth upon the conscience, by a chain stronger than death, and lead the trembling soul to inquire, "What must I do to be saved?"—he must preach the gospel in great simplicity.

8. *The early preachers were remarkable for their appeals to the heart and conscience; and to this mode of addressing men, they were indebted in no small degree for their success.*

Whenever they stated facts, it was with a view to their practical application; whenever they reasoned, it was for the purpose of fixing through the understanding, a stronger grasp upon the moral powers and sensibilities of the heart. In preaching the gospel they had nothing to do with mere abstraction. Their very doctrines were divested of the forms of speculation, and were experimentally and practically stated and enforced. Even truth itself was deemed valuable only as it stood connected with the character of God and his creatures, and as its exhibition and defence might promote the glory of the former, and the happiness of the latter. Hence they preached *to* men, and not *about* them; and whatever truth they wielded, their object was to make a deep and saving impression upon their hearers. In addressing the impenitent, their purpose was to make them dissatisfied with their existing character and situation; to alarm them by holding up before their eyes a picture of their own hearts; by exhibiting the claims of the divine law; by throwing around them the scenes of the judgment bar; by pointing to heaven, whose inheritance may be lost; and to hell, whose worm shall never die and whose fires shall never be quenched. They appealed to, the hopes and fears of man; they derived arguments from life and death; they climbed to the summit of Sinai, and plucked its thunders from the clouds; they ascended Calvary, and lin

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gerd arround the cross, and drew their pleas from its blood and shame and agony ; they stood before the sepulchre where the mighty victim slept, and whence the mighty conquerer arose and inferred from its silence and desertion, both the resurrection and the Godhead of the Savior ; they explored the earth, and emptied heaven, and drained hell, in order to find motives by which they might load down the conscience of the sinner, and persuade him to become "reconciled to God." Their object, in all these expostulations, they never concealed. Nothing was covered up—nothing modified. They held up the human heart in sunbeams of truth, and called upon the dying sinner to look and be instructed.

Much of their power and success as preachers depended on this mode of address ; and much of ministerial success of the present day, is to be attributed to the same cause. And when the essential truths of the gospel are exhibited with little or no effect, the cause, no doubt, in many instances, may be found in the fact, that these truths are presented in the form of abstract and dry speculations. Or, in other words, God grants his signal blessing on that preaching which brings home the truth to the conscience and the heart.

9. *The apostles and their associates in labour, depended entirely on God for the success of their mission.*

This sentiment they distinctly acknowledged and taught. "I have planted, Apollos watered ; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither is he that watereth ; but God that giveth the increase." It is true, these men had been personally instructed by Jesus Christ ; they had received the gift of inspiration and the power of working miracles, but their confidence was in the arm of God and not of these qualifications. They hung their last hope on the cross. They well knew, that all ministerial gifts and exertions would never convert without "the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." While they thus felt their dependence, they made a practical use of this doctrine. They tore themselves away from every earthly hope and promise, and laid themselves and the interests of their Master's kingdom at the feet of a sovereign God. They had confidence that he would bless. They seized the promise, and carried it up to the throne, and there succeeded. They were men of great prayer. They put their hearts on heaven, and God heard them. They believed the recorded declarations of eternal truth, on this point, and while they urged them at the mercy seat, the broad windows of heaven were opened, and a blessing came down till there was hardly room to receive it. These men lived on their knees, and in this fact we find the secret of their power.

No wonder they prevailed with men, for they had already prevailed with God. No wonder they moved the earth, for they conducted a co-agency with the Eternal, and they had already moved heaven.—The minister that does not pray, cannot preach; and if he would have a large blessing, he must pray much. This the Apostles did, and the world bowed before the truth. Read the brief record of their doings, and you will find, that they carried every thing to God in prayer. And their hearts were in it. They had “the spirit of grace and supplications.” The same may be said of the church. The whole household of faith were on their faces before the mercy seat. It was emphatically a day of intercessions with God. Read the history of the church for a few days previous to the memorable Pentecost. Review the scenes of that blessed morning. Look into the prayer meeting which was held at the house of Mary, when Peter was in prison, and the prevailing power of which caused the chains to fall from his hands, and “the iron gate” to open before him. Listen to the supplications that went up from the dungeon in Philippi. Prison doors, and the stocks confined the body, but the passage to heaven was wide open, and prayer could not be fettered. But examples would be endless. Let any one read with attention the history of the apostolic age, and he will rise up from the perusal, deeply impressed with this consideration, that the spirit of prayer in the ministry and in the church, was one of the powerful elements of the early triumphs of christian truth. And when this spirit returns in full power to the earth, these scenes will be repeated.

10. *There was more union of feeling and effort, in the first ages of christianity, than at present; and hence another reason for the peculiar blessing which attended the ministry.*

One of the greatest hindrances to the full effect of the gospel in our day, is the spirit of *sectarianism*. Indeed, this remark may apply to every age except that of the apostles. It is true, that the spirit, in its most fearful exhibitions, was then in the world; but it was not permitted to enter the enclosures of the christian church. The case at the present day, is far different. The church is cut up into a multitude of separate communions; and such is the spirit which is too often cherished and expressed toward each other, that the most unhappy consequences follow. The professed disciples of Jesus Christ, instead of uniting against the common enemy, expend their energies in contending with one another; and thus infidels are emboldened, and the impenitent of every description are hardened in sin. The same may be said of alienations and party contests, which not unfrequently exist in churches of

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the same denomination. Whatever heated feeling, or even honest hearted zeal may suggest, these things are doing immense mischief in the world; and ought to be ranked among the fundamental reasons why the gospel at this moment, is so tardy in its progress. The church of Jesus Christ is marred by her own hands—she bleeds under self-inflicted wounds; and now, instead of presenting to the eyes of the admiring world, that beautiful and vigorous body, which was seen in the days of the apostles, it resembles a subject under the dissector's knife; the members which were once in union, dissevered, and limb disjointed from its kindred limb.

It is true, that occasional alienations entered the primitive church. Paul and Barnabas had a "contention," which "was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other;" but they entered different fields of labor, and went on with their work. Other ministers seem not to have embarked in the contest; and separate denominations in the church was not the result. On another occasion, Paul "withstood" Peter "to the face, because he was to be blamed;" but here the matter was dropped;—and they both continued members and ministers, in good standing, in the same church, and followed up their untiring efforts to convert the world. They felt the practical force of the injunction of Jesus Christ, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." They experienced in their ministrations, the truth of the motive by which this command is enforced—"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another." And those who act on the same principle, will witness the same results. No earthly power could stand before the energies of a united church. And those who cannot consent to obey the command and exemplify the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in this respect, are not the men whom God will greatly honour in giving enlargement and strength to his kingdom. Let ministers slay their animosities, and bury them at once, and then combine all their living powers to save the world, and there is not the shadow of a doubt on my mind, that more might be achieved in ten years, in this work, than has been accomplished during the last century. If any doubt it, let them try it.

11. *The apostles in their preaching, aimed at immediate success.*

They knew, as I have before stated, that the blessing must come from God. They acted under the full conviction too, that God had selected rational means, for the accomplishment of appointed ends. With these impressions they began, and prosecuted their work. They set themselves about it, as other.

men, to accomplish their object; that is, they applied appropriate means—the means of God's appointment, to awaken, convert, and save men. And in this undertaking they expected to succeed—not because they believed there was an inherent power in the means, nor even in revealed truth itself, to save the soul, but because God had promised his blessing. This assurance, that their labor would not be in vain, was intimately connected with the accomplishment of their end. This leaning upon heaven, honored God, and at the same time urged them forward in their work. They were precisely in that state of mind, most favorable for spiritual action. They were so deeply impressed with the consideration, that they could effect nothing without the Spirit of God, that their eye and heart were always fixed on heaven; and they were so confident that God *would* grant this influence, that they hardly commenced an enterprize, but they saw it already accomplished. In every undertaking, whether secular or spiritual, an *expectation* of success, is one of the necessary elements of successful action.

The apostles too, in preaching the gospel, aimed at making an impression at once; their object was to bring men to an immediate decision. In this respect they acted as men of good sense act in other things. They wished for a decision when the subject was fully before the mind, and its impression fresh upon the heart. They never sent men home to think of a sermon; they urged repentance for sin, and submission to the terms of salvation, as for the last time; they closed up the concern, under every discourse, as for the judgment seat! And in this course, they were directed by the clearest principles of common sense, as well as the Bible. The Advocate insists on a decision when the case is fairly before the court or the jury; the parliamentary speaker, when the discussion has fully closed.—And the reason is obvious; the subject is then before the mind. If it is a matter which respect duty or feeling, the heart and conscience are then most susceptible. If it should be urged that the cases are not parallel, because the efficacy of the gospel depends upon the divine blessing—I reply, that while the fact of dependence on God is not denied no such use of this fact is justified by the Bible. And the reason is probably this: the blessing of God goes along with the truth, and its rational applications, and not in some other way, mysterious in its nature, and unassociated with the instrument. Although the truth, by its own inherent powers, or by the appeals of moral suasion, will never convert one sinner, yet as far as it can reach, it has this tendency; and it is to be urged in the same manner, so far as man is concerned, as if the truth itself could effect the object proposed. In other words

the Spirit of God goes along with the truth, and follows up its natural and legitimate tendency, in the conversion of sinners; that is, the spirit acts in conjunction with the word, and not in opposition to its nature, in saving souls.

If this be true there can be nothing hazardous in pressing men to an immediate decision respecting their eternal interests nothing that implies giving up the doctrine of the Spirit's influence in conversion, or the doctrines of divine sovereignty and election. So thought Peter on the day of Pentecost. So thought Paul in the prison at Philippi. And so thought and preached, all the apostles. In their preaching, we never discover any thing of that hovering round the point—nothing of that cautious, qualified statement of the uncompromising claims of God upon the conscience—nothing of those speculating doctrinal drawbacks upon the sinner's obligations to drop his weapons and submit to God at once—nothing of that virtual announcement, from the pulpit, that it is not expected men will obey God and to do their duty, which, if I mistake not, are so abundant in modern sermons; and which must greatly weaken the power of gospel appeals.

Two or three PRACTICAL REMARKS, will close this discourse.

I. This subject teaches us the doctrine of MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

If the peculiar usefulness of the first advocate of christianity, over those of other ages, is not to be referred to any thing more favorable in their field of labor, nor to the gift of inspiration, nor to the power of working miracles, nor to the mere acts of divine sovereignty, disconnected with moral causes—then, my brethren, we may well sigh and weep over the limited amount of good which is secured by our ministrations. If it is true, that the success even of the apostles, depended wholly, or even *principally*, on spiritual causes,—on the singleness of purpose with which they pursued their object—their persevering and self-denying labors—the simple and naked manner in which they presented the truth of heaven—their honest and fearless appeals to the conscience—their broken-hearted dependence upon God—the union of affection and effort which pervaded the ministry and the church—and the enforcement of the claims of God upon the sinner, requiring submission without compromise and without delay—then, it becomes us, my brethren to inquire how far the want of the fruits under our ministry may be owing to the want of those spiritual qualifications. If the difficulty lies here, then, we have no excuse. Enjoying as we do, peculiar facilities for accomplishing much for the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and living, as I trust we do, upon the borders of a far brighter era, no doubt a most fearful re-

sponsibility rests upon us! It ought to be the first object with every minister who intends to lean his dying head upon the Savior's bosom, and the judgment seat without paleness and trembling, to ascertain what are the obstacles that lie in the way of his doing a great work for Jesus Christ and the good of souls. Surely, my brethern, if we survey for one moment, the elevated post of responsibility which we now occupy, we shall lift our eyes to heaven and cry, "*who is sufficient for these things?*"

2, *This subject enforces upon us MINISTERIAL DUTY.*

If the views presented in this discourse are correct, then the ministers of Jesus Christ ought to adopt and pursue that course which will best promote the powerful applications, and the final triumph of the gospel. It is their duty to aim at great usefulness in preaching. Two things ought fully to impress the heart. One is, that we are solemnly bound to avoid that course which must, on every principle of rational calculation, impede the progress of gospel truth; and the other, to adopt that which will make the deepest and the best impression on a lost world. If these two points were constantly before the eyes of ministers, a new impulse would be given to the gospel, and the millenium would fly upon rapid wings to meet us. If the pressure of duty and of souls were to rest upon us *now*, as they will rest upon us at the judgment bar, how cheerfully would we sacrifice a multiplicity of minor objects for the one sole purpose of presenting the bleeding Savior to dying men; how soon should we dismiss our indolence, and brace up every nerve and stimulate every muscle to labor for God: how little should we amuse ourselves or others with mere pulpit speculations; how anxious should we be to find, for the simple truth of the Bible, an avenue to the conscience and heart; How should we lean upon God for a blessing; what a death blow would be given to ministerial animosities; with what tenderness inspired of heaven should we strengthen each others hands and encourage each others hearts; and with what powers of truth and entreaty, could we then come down upon our immortal hearers whom we shall soon meet amidst the dread scenes of another world While I tenderly present these thoughts to my brethern, I would impose upon my own soul, a double injunction to be faithful.

3. *This subject furnishes motives to MINISTERIAL ACTION.*

We have seen that a certain course, in the ministry, is necessary to success. It was so in the days of the apostles; it is so at the present day. God has blessed—and he will continue to bless—a certain course of moral and spiritual action. Here then is a motive which ought to enlist our last power in

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the service of Christ and of souls. This subject comes home to us both by a *negative* and a *positive* appeal. Would we stand before God, in the great burning day, and lift up our hands in eternity's blazing light, unstained with the blood of murdered souls, we must resolve to do our duty! If we would mark our foot-steps with usefulness, through the world, as did the preachers of the gospel, and give a grateful church occasion to write an affectionate epitaph upon our tombstones—we must begin anew the great business of being co-workers with God in the kingdom of his Son. If we intend to obey God, and come up to the expectations of the church, and disappoint the wishes of wicked men and baser spirits, we shall commence the work anew of becoming emphatically the ministers of the New Testament. If we would hereafter be planted as stars in the firmament of the third heaven, and shine in holiness, amidst the living sapphire that forms the canopy above the brightness of the throne—we must be baptized afresh with the spirit of our Master, and begin to work as men who believe in the threatenings; in God, and heaven, and hell! It is a part of divine record, that "*they that be wise,*" &c. Dan. xii 5,

And is another motive necessary? I feel that motive as it comes up in the voice which issues from the grave yards where many of our brethren sleep who were in the field of labor, at the meeting of the last General Assembly! Death has gone on in the work of desolation in our ranks, during the last year. He has numbered with his sleeping victims some of the most venerable and beloved ministers of our church. These providences admonish us of our duty, and ought to quicken us in its performance. While the voice from heaven proclaims, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them"—the voice from the coffin and the tomb crying in our ears, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest." May these united appeals of death and heaven, reach every minister's heart, and every christian's heart, and every impenitent sinner's heart in this congregation—that when these heads of ours shall press upon their last pillows, we may look up and say, "*Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.*" Amen.

THE END.

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Page 9 line 3 for *desire* read *desert*.