

T H E
AMERICAN PREACHER;
O R, A
COLLECTION OF SERMONS
FROM SOME OF THE
MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,
NOW LIVING,
IN THE UNITED STATES,
O F
DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS
IN THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

VOLUME II.

ELIZABETH-TOWN, (NEW-JERSEY)
PRINTED BY SHEPARD KOLLOCK, FOR THE EDITORS,
WHO HOLD THE PRIVILEGE OF COPY-RIGHT.

M.DCC.XCI.

S E R M O N XXIX.*

A SYNODICAL DISCOURSE.

B Y

J E D E D I A H C H A P M A N, A. M.

Minister of a Presbyterian Church, Orange, New Jersey.

E P H E. iv. 3, 4.

*Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond
of peace—there is one body.*

MANIFOLD are the works of God, by which he has displayed his glorious perfections, and commands the admiration and love of all holy beings. The work of creation how wonderful! The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly to be seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead. On this occasion, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

But, my brethren, this is followed, yea, exceeded by the more glorious and astonishing work of

* Preached at Philadelphia, before the old Synod of New-York and Philadelphia, at their last session, May 1788.

redemption, and on this occasion, the heavenly host sang glory to God in the highest—in this the great Jehovah designs to give the brightest display of his glorious perfections, as the inspired apostle says—*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

The church of Christ, therefore, is an honorable body, the dearest interest, the most important cause on earth; this is Christ's kingdom, founded by his own blood on the ruins of satan's empire; the glorious cause which God has supported in all ages of the world, and which he will support against the united force of earth and hell.

The interest and welfare of the church of Christ have been ever dear to all the friends of God, and as uniformly opposed by all his enemies. Thus angels are said to be *ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation*; and all saints, and good men of old, cheerfully gave their interest, influence and affection to this cause—Thus breathes the pious psalmist—*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem!* The apostles and primitive Christians possessed the same affection in the highest degree, and counted not their lives dear, but freely gave up all for the promotion and defence of this glorious cause—Thus the apostle declares—*For this I suffer all these things, nevertheless I am not ashamed.* In the church of Christ, the promises, and all the distinguishing blessings and privileges of God's people are realized

and enjoyed—here, they enjoy the blessings of children in nonage, and are trained up for glory, honor, and immortality in a future state.

And since Christ Jesus came in the flesh, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, the door of entrance into this kingdom is open to all nations—*for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Now whosoever will, may come, and take the water of life freely.* It is true, as these privileges and blessings are spiritual, none can enjoy them, but those who are spiritually minded, *for the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. And none are welcome but those who come in by Christ the door.* As these are the disciples of Christ professedly separated from the rest of the world, so they are a distinct body agreeably to the declaration of Christ before Pilate, *My kingdom is not of this world;* and to the design of his death, which was *to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.* As good subjects of his kingdom, they are bound by a new and special command to love one another as brethren, and walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, *with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, striving with the utmost diligence and activity, as the word signifies in the original, to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*

What is further proposed by divine assistance, in the prosecution of the subject agreeably to our text, is,

I. To shew, that the church of Christ, on earth, is one body.

II. To shew, that there is a glorious foundation in the church of Christ for unity and peace.

III. To point out some of those ways by which we are to endeavor to keep in the church of Christ the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. And lastly, make some reflections on the subject.

I. That the church of Christ on earth is one body.

It may, perhaps, cast some light on this subject, to look back to the first institution of the church of Christ, and there we shall find the brethren *with one accord, together in one place*, when the church consisted only of about one hundred and twenty souls, and then it immediately increased to above three thousand, and soon after to five thousand, then it arose even to a multitude. Still it was but one church, one body in the strictest sense; and we are soon informed, that multitudes, both of men and women, were added to the Lord; and we are still instructed that they were together with one accord as one body, for the multitude of believers were of one heart and one soul, and had all things common. And when the number of believers was so increased, that for the sake of ac-

commodation, they were obliged to meet in different places, and under different ministers, they were as really one body as when they all met in an upper room.

And it is also evident, that when by reason of the persecution, believers were scattered abroad, and the church of Christ appeared in different places, it was one great body or spiritual community. Thus it appears, agreeably to the original constitution of the church, that however great the number of believers, and though they assemble in different places for worship, and inhabit distant climes, they are one church, and make one body.

And we are confirmed in this by many passages of the sacred scriptures—see our blessed Saviour's address to Peter, when he had confessed the true foundation of the church—*Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.* To the same purpose is our Saviour's prayer—*And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.* So 1 Cor. xii. 13. *For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body,*

whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one spirit.

It is readily granted that the church of Christ is spoken of in a more limited sense, when only a particular part of this body is designed—as the *church of God at Corinth*—the *church in thy house*. The plain fact is this; the church in this or that place is considered as a particular branch of this one body; for as every particular church of Christ consists of many individual Christians, as members, so this one body is made up of many particular churches, as branches of this great community of believers.

It must also be granted, as a fact too evident to be denied, that there are societies of men under this character, which do not belong to this body; their foundation and policy being essentially different, owning another head, they cannot, with propriety, be called churches of Christ, and must of course belong to another body.

But as it is a point of no small importance, whether all the particular churches of Christ on earth, however separated by land or sea, or distinguished by denominations, are in fact one body: I beg leave a little further to consider and illustrate this matter. And here if we attend to the analogical representation of the sacred scriptures on this head, we shall be invariably led to the same conclusion.

The church is called a kingdom. There is but one king and head Christ Jesus, who is the only Lord and law-giver, as God hath exalted him to be a Prince and Saviour, and made him head over all things to the church, to whom every branch owes, and every member professes supreme love, absolute submission and obedience.

Thus also we find the church compared to the natural body, *But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.* Eph. iv. 15, 16. *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ.* In this we see all the various parts, limbs and members harmonizing in one head, governed by one general law, quickened by one spirit, nourished and supported from one common source, making one natural body.

Again it is compared to a beautiful house—*Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*—and I Cor. iii. 9. *For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building, which is composed of various materials, as gold, silver and precious stones; which hath distinct courses, different apartments, many utensils and yet one building, as it has one general enclo-*

sure and common foundation. This also brings to our view the church as one body, built on Christ Jesus, its only foundation, agreeably to what the apostle says—*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus.* And though some unskilful builders should introduce wood, hay, stubble, which shall be burnt up, yet it remains, in all its various parts, one entire distinct body or spiritual building.

II. Thing proposed is, to shew that there is an ample and proper foundation in the church for unity and peace.

Whoever attends to the original constitution of the church of Christ, will readily see that it is a society of a peculiar nature, as its foundation and policy, laws and maxims, are very different from the kingdoms of this world. There is, therefore, doubtless something special in the unity spoken of in the text; especially as the apostle calls it *the unity of the spirit*, and qualifies this, by adding, *in the bond of peace*, i. e. holy love, which was enjoined by Christ himself on all his disciples, under the form of a new command, which elsewhere is called the *bond of perfection*. There is a kind of unity by natural ties and social connexions, which is but a shadow of this. There is a unity of a civil nature, which is very different—there is also a sort of agreement in wickedness, as the poet expresses, ‘Devil with devils damned, firm concord hold;’ but this also is not only different; but directly op-

posite in its very nature. The unity we are speaking of is wrought in the Christian church by the holy spirit; and as the fruit of the spirit, it is that sacred tie which makes holy beings one in the most cordial affection; by which also in faith, Christians are united to Christ the head, and as members of the church his body, become also members one of another; and being made *to drink into one spirit*, they have an affectionate fellow-feeling and communion one with another, which the apostle most beautifully expresses in his 1st epistle to the Cor. xii. 12. and onward—*As the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; for by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one spirit—that there should be no schism in the body, but the members should have the same care one for another, and whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it: Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

Now, my brethren, this is that unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, which is designed in our text; and you also see in the view, the inspired apostle here gives of the matter, that there is a proper foundation for it in the constitution of the church of Christ. And this will further appear if we attend to, certain facts the apostle gives us in our text and context.

1. There is one body and one spirit. If particular churches of Christ, or the churches of Christ under distinct Presbyteries or Synods, or even of different denominations, were really different separate bodies, as bigotry and party-zeal seem to suppose, their duty, as well as several interests, might necessarily clash and counter-act each other, as we often see in the kingdoms of this world. But now hath Christ Jesus so constituted his church one body, and made all its true members drink into one spirit, as to lay a proper basis for the most perfect unity and peace, amidst all possible variety.

2. There is one king and head. The church of Christ universally owns, according to its nature and constitution, one king and head Christ Jesus. As all the members of the natural body are united under one head, so all the particular churches of this body being united to Christ by faith, have in him their glorious king and head, a most ample foundation for union and peace; for he is the *chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.*

3. There is one faith and one baptism, the rule of both sufficiently clear and express in all essential matters, to every honest and unprejudiced mind. Under the influence of the same spirit—the peace and unity of the church is to be preserved, though it be to the exclusion of those who, in doctrine or practice, may oppose the truth, agreeably to Titus iii. 10, 11.—*A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.*

And so here also, there is a proper foundation for unity and peace in this body.

Again. *There is one God and Father of all*, says the apostle, *who is above all, and through all, and in all*—one common cause and hope of their calling, the same interest and portion for all; the glory of God, the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, the good of immortal souls, or in a word, the knowledge, service, and enjoyment of the blessed God for ever.

III. To point out some of those ways by which we are to endeavor to keep in the church of Christ, the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

That Christians and Christian churches ought to live in love and peace, no one pretends to doubt. And that offences will come is also certain; and that Christians sometimes have grossly erred with regard to the way and means by which they are to preserve the unity of the spirit, is most evident. Some have supposed uniformity absolutely necessary to unity; yea, some lay such stress upon this, that because of the great variety in the church in this respect, they reject Christianity by wholesale, as nothing but priestcraft and delusion; while others are so bigoted to certain rites, modes and forms of their own, that with them, all non-conformists are unchurched as schismatical heretics, with whom it is unlawful to hold any Christian communion.

But, my brethren, this is so far from being necessary to Christian unity and peace, that every at-

tempt to reduce the church to uniformity has produced the contrary effect, has been invariably attended with scandalous feuds, bitter animosities, which have most commonly issued in rents and divisions. And the enforcing of this measure, by various denominations of Christians in their turns, by iniquitous acts of uniformity, has been, perhaps, the most successful engine the devil ever played against the church.

It is likewise evident to every one who is acquainted with the history of the church in ages past, or has attended to facts in his own time, that when religion has been the most flourishing, and the unity of the spirit most perfect, the least stress has been laid on modes and forms, which are not expressly enjoined by Christ.

And on the other hand, when the life and power of religion have been the weakest, and the love of many waxen cold, then rites and ceremonies, modes and forms, have been made essential to communion, enforced by baneful acts of uniformity, followed by disorder and confusion, and the birth of new sects and denominations of Christians.

Nor can I join with those who think it necessary to reduce the church of Christ to one denomination, and make it subject to one form of government.

We dare not deny that there are churches of Christ of different denominations, and under different forms of government.

And, my dear brethren, where is the inconsistency in our keeping the unity of the spirit with every church of Christ of any denomination, since all make one body. And who can say there are not some errors or imperfections attending every Christian, and churches of every denomination of Christians. Therefore, in order to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the inspired apostle so warmly recommends humility and meekness, with long-suffering and forbearing one another in love. For as these are the certain fruits of that one spirit, which is in all the churches of Christ, so no way or measure whatever, without the exercise of these graces, can keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

It is easy to see, without this heavenly temper, and in the exercise of the opposite disposition of bigotry and party-zeal, nothing but envy, strife and contention will follow. Of the truth of this observation, we too often have the sad experience. Nor can it be otherwise expected in this imperfect state of things, when there is such a great disparity in knowledge, gifts and grace, as well as vast difference in the customs, habits, modes of education, and natural tempers of Christians.

But in the due possession and exercise of these graces of the spirit, while humility and meekness keep good order at home, long-suffering and forbearance toward others will follow of course, and the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, will

be preserved in the church of Christ, where there is a glorious foundation for strictest harmony, amidst a most surprising variety. But to be a little more particular, with all due submission to my dear brethren in the ministry, and respect to this numerous assembly, I would hazard a few thoughts further on this heard. *First*, In order to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, great care should be taken with regard to the admission of members into the church of Christ.

Many of the real friends of union and peace, behold with no small concern and distress, the growing laxity in some parts of the church in this respect. Deviations from the rule in admission of members into the church, must very materially effect the unity and peace of the body, but no one perhaps more essentially than this.

And though particular churches may not be fully agreed, as to the internal qualifications for Christian communion, yet I believe there is no difference among us respecting the moral characters of those who are to be admitted into the church.

If, therefore, ministers and churches act from carnal, worldly and selfish motives, and admit into the church men of heretical principles, or immoral lives, is not the unity of the spirit, and the peace of the church necessarily broken; for as the apostle says—*What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness, and what concord hath Christ with Belial, or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel.*

2. We are to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit, by the regular and proper exercise of the discipline Christ hath appointed in his church.

This, my brethren, is a matter of great importance, but very difficult, if not impossible, in churches where no proper care is taken, as to the admission of members.

For if persons are admitted into the church without religion or morals, with what propriety, I ask, or even consistency, can they be disciplined and cut off, for irreligious and immoral lives? And if such are allowed to live in the church, what is the unity, and what the bond of peace?

Is it not most evident, my brethren, that agreement in this, is not only subversive of that holy unity, the apostle recommends, but also very destructive to the prosperity and peace of the household of faith? Whereas, should the discipline of the church be kept up in the spirit the apostle here recommends, it would have a powerful tendency to heal divisions, to remove scandals, correct disorders, promote holiness and purity in the church, and preserve the *unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*.

Discipline will nip error and schism in the bud, and prevent the growth of those bitter roots, which springing up, have so often interrupted the peace and unity of the church.

And *lastly*, great care should be taken, that a general intercourse of brotherly love should be kept

up as much as possible, among the members and branches of Christ's church. And as the church is one body, and has one spirit, head and common interest, one God and Father of all, there most certainly is a proper foundation for this, not only among those who are under one form of church government, but also those of different denominations.

This will greatly promote unity and peace many ways, and most effectually destroy the contracted spirit of bigotry and party-zeal, the pest of society, and bane of the church.

From such an intercourse of brotherly love and mutual good offices, among the various members and branches of the church of Christ, great good may be expected to the common cause, not only as it directly promotes the unity and peace of the body; but also, as it gives the most striking practical evidence of the truth of the Christian religion in general, and of the reality of it in the church, to the no small terror and confusion of the common enemy.

And permit me just to observe here, that this remark has great weight in it, when applied to the clergy of all denominations. And in order to reduce it to practice, we need only comply with the pathetic address of the apostle in our text, which under the commanding force of inspiration, he introduces in the most affecting manner thus: *I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you,*

that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

I would beg leave just to suggest here, should some general plan of mutual intercourse, in brotherly love, with all the churches of Christ throughout the world, be formed and carried into execution, in the spirit of our text, whether it would not have a most happy tendency to heal the present divisions of the church, preserve the peace and unity of the body, and greatly promote the prosperity and welfare of the common cause?

A brief improvement shall now close the discourse. We may hence learn.

1. That all the particular members and branches of the church of Christ, have their use and importance in the common cause, from the highest to the lowest, from the greatest to the least, and from the first to the last. For if the church, which has many members, be one body, and God hath set all the members in this body, as it hath pleased him, then none can say to others, we have no need of you; for as in the natural body, the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you, so it is in this body, every member has his particular place, or office in the church.

2. That we should all have the same affectionate care and tenderness toward all the members

in to the whole church of Christ. And as there is such an ample foundation for union and peace, let us all here unite, and now honestly consult the good of the whole body, and in this view, take the most tender care of that part of the flock, which comes under our particular watch, either in our synodical or presbyterial capacity, or as individual ministers of Jesus Christ: remembering always, that we are to *do good to all men, as we have an opportunity; but especially to the household of faith.*

