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Book

THE

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER:

OR,

SERMONS

ON

PLAIN & PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY SOME OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL,
RESIDING IN THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

VOL. I.

Edited by

George S. Woodhall
1813

Woodhall
Editor

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech
you by us; we pray *you* in Christ's stead be ye reconciled
to God....2 Cor. v. 20.

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ZIX



District of New-Jersey, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the thirty-first day of March, in the thirty-seventh year of the Independence of the United States of America, George S. Woodhull and Isaac V. Brown, of the said district, have deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

“The New-Jersey Preacher, or Sermons on plain and practical subjects. By some of the ministers of the gospel residing in the State of New-Jersey. Vol. I. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.— 2 Cor. v. 20.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to the act, entitled, “An act supplementary to an act, entitled an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical, and other prints.”

ROBERT BOGGS,

Clerk of the District of New-Jersey.

SERMON XIV.

THE TRUE AND FALSE GROUNDS OF RELIGION.

(IN TWO SERMONS.)

Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.

But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, &c. &c.

BY JOSEPH CLARK, D. D.

Pastor of the Presbyterian Congregation of New-Brunswick.

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XIV.

Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.—But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is, through the faith of Christ, the righteousness, which is of God by faith.

IF the christian religion be true, it follows, from the very nature of it, that it is the only religion given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved. In the whole strain of it, it excludes man from all hope of salvation, from any other source, and expressly declares that “No other foundation can any man lay than is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” This declaration should be well weighed : for, on the supposition of its truth, men who reject the gospel, reject their only remedy, and ensure their final and eternal ruin.

The passage that has been now read in your hearing, was penned by one who was, in the highest degree, qualified to be a witness of the truth of what he preached ; and of its infinite importance, as the *only way of salvation*. He was miraculously converted to the faith, and called to preach the gospel. God evidently working with him, during the whole of his ministry, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit of God. The miracles, that he and his fellow apostles wrought, were wrought in the name and by the power of Jesus Christ, and

in no other name, and by no other power. They were such as transeend every thing that mere human power or diabolical agency could possibly effect. This persuasion wrought so powerfully on multitudes who were eye and ear witnesses of these miraeles, that they were constrained to aeknowledge the finger of God in them, to give up their opposition to the gospel, and to embrace the faith which, before, had been the object of their seorn and malignity. Heaven, in this way, gave indisputable evidenee of the truth of the gospel, that it was no cunningly devised fable, conjured up by art and man's device ; but a revelation from God himself. Paul, in particular, declares that, " he received it not of man, neither was he taught it by man ; but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." And being taught in a supernatural way, confirmed in the faith by numerous attestations evidently and immediately from God himself: and seeing in the gospel, committed to him, the clear accomplishment of the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, he could no more doubt of the truth of the gospel, than he could doubt of his own existence.

Nor could Paul and the other apostles doubt of their own call and appointment of God to " go forth into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature ;" and to declare in the name, and by the authority of God— " He that believeth shall be saved ; and he that believeth not shall be damned !" The certainty of these things was put so completely past all doubt with them, that they could say, " necessity is laid upon us ; yea, woe unto us if we preach not the gospel."

To the evidenee above stated, they had also that of their own experience. They had felt the divine power and efficacy of the gospel on their own souls. They

knew in whom they had believed, and from their own experience, were thoroughly persuaded that, he was able to keep that which they had committed to him. Nothing makes us so acquainted with, and so fully confirms us in the belief of any thing, as *experience*. Experimental acquaintance with the nature, truth, and excellence of the gospel, will make us both esteem, and speak highly of it.

This was the case with Paul ; he had been once a persecutor of Christians, an enemy of the gospel, a proud Pharisee, trusting in his own righteousness, and highly valuing his distinctions and privileges as a Jew and a scholar of Gamaliel. “But, when it pleased God to reveal his Son in him,” and lead him to the knowledge of salvation by Christ, then, how do his views alter ! The gospel he had before despised, hated and laboured to destroy, now becomes more dear and precious to him than life itself. All his former attainments and legal righteousness appeared to him as *loss*, in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord. Nay, when set in competition with Christ, “he esteemed *all things but loss*, and did count them but *dung* that he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having on his own righteousness, which is of the law ; but that which is, through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

It cannot be denied that this is the language of one that well understood the gospel, and had indisputable evidence of its truth. It will, therefore, demand the more serious attention from us.

In the passage before us, two things are expressed by the apostle.

I. That every thing short of the religion of Christ, can be of no avail to us, for the attainment of our salvation, and should be entirely rejected as a ground of confidence.

II. The distinctive characters of gospel religion.

In discussing these two points, I shall pay a particular regard to the method and language, in which the apostle has seen proper to treat them. And

I. That every thing, short of the religion of Christ, can be of no avail to us, for the attainment of our salvation, and should be entirely rejected as a ground of confidence.

Words can scarcely express this sentiment more strongly than the apostle has done. He had been warning the Philippians against the ensnaring doctrines of the Judaizing teachers, who taught the young converts to christianity that, "unless they were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved." This the apostle calls, "Turning them aside to another gospel;" or, placing their hope of salvation on a different ground from that on which the gospel had placed it.

The aim of these teachers appears to have been either to draw the young converts off from their hope in Christ altogether, or to confound law and gospel, grace and works; to mingle the free salvation of the Saviour, with the merit of human obedience, and substitute the observance of ceremonial rites in the place of evangelical holiness.

These teachers, not understanding, or not embracing the gospel, were fain to glory in something beside Christ. Lured by the pomp of external ceremony, they were for making a fair shew in the flesh; and not persuaded that their typical system was now abolished; they, therefore, enjoined on their hearers the observance of external

rites, as necessary to salvation, that they might glory in their flesh, escape the offence of the cross and do away the soul-humbling doctrine of "trusting in Christ Jesus, putting no confidence in the flesh." Such corruptions and perversions of the gospel the apostle abhorred. He saw they aimed, immediately, to the overturning of the doctrines of the cross; and, with the honest zeal of a faithful ambassador, he nobly declares—"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The cross of Christ was, in the apostle's view, *the only tree of life* for perishing sinners. And, persuaded that nothing short of true faith in Christ could avail men to salvation, he conceived the doctrine of these teachers to be in the highest degree, mischievous and dangerous to the souls of men: and, therefore, in our context, he so warmly exhorts the Philippians on this subject. "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision,"—these sticklers for carnal ordinances and a boasted self-righteousness, who to establish their own systems, would subvert your souls, and overturn the gospel of Christ: for, adds he, we the apostles and ministers of Jesus Christ, that declare unto you the gospel, as we received it of the Lord, "we are the true circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

His reasoning evidently goes to this, and is as if he had said—"As to confidence in the flesh, or a dependence on any thing of our own, as the ground of our acceptance with God, I might say as much as any man. Shew me a man among them all, that can urge stronger pleas from his carnal privileges, Jewish prerogatives, or external performances; or that can raise a louder boast

of his self-righteousness than myself. *If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day—of the stock of Israel—of the tribe of Benjamin—an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless! Few, among all these teachers, can say as much as this for themselves; and none can say more. But what can all this avail a guilty sinner, for his justification before God? True, I once thought as highly of these things as they now do, and as confidently expected to gain heaven by my own righteousness. But, blessed be God, he hath stripped me of my false hopes, and shaken me from my false foundation; and taught me to rest my eternal all, on that only foundation which he hath laid in Zion. Here I see no room for boasting and glorying, and trusting in the flesh. The salvation of sinners is placed by God on quite another ground. So that *what things were gain to me; or what I once esteemed gain to me, these I now count loss for Christ: yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.*"*

What a proficient was Paul, in natural, ceremonial and moral righteousness! Behold the man! How fair his claims! How well founded, as some might suppose, his hopes of acceptance with God! He had been no hypocrite; however ignorantly he might have acted, he was sincere. But when his eyes were opened; when he was brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; see him casting away all his former grounds of

confidence; renouncing them all *as loss*, and counting them but *dung*, that he might win Christ. He saw, there was nothing short of true faith in Christ, and an interest in him, that could avail him to salvation. And, therefore the best his heart or hands could do, when viewed as the ground of his acceptance with God, he utterly disclaimed, and rejected with abhorrence, as mere garbage, to be relished by those only who had no just views or esteem of the gospel.

And, my brethren, if every thing, short of the religion of Christ, was of no avail to salvation, in the view of the apostle, who had the fairest advantages to judge in this matter; what warrant can we have to put our trust any where else? If he, from clear views of the truth, utterly renounced all confidence in the flesh, or in any thing that flesh can do, can these things be a proper ground of confidence to us? Surely reason and conscience must constrain us to say, *No, they cannot.*

But it is proper, on this subject, that I should be more particular; and detail and examine the false grounds of confidence, which the apostle enumerates, and to which misguided multitudes, in one way or another, are so attached. And,

1. The apostle refused to glory, or put any confidence in his being descended from a particular nation, tribe or family.

In this, it seems, the Jews were fain to boast. They were Abraham's seed; of the stock of Israel, that favoured nation, which the Lord chose out from all the nations of the earth, and distinguished by many peculiar privileges. On these accounts, the Jews were ready to conclude themselves the peculiar favourites of heaven;

that is, entitled above others, to the distinguishing favor of God.

But had not the apostle equal ground of boasting on this score, with any of them? He was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; a tribe honored with the first of Israel's kings, and that kept close to God, when other tribes fell away to Jereboam's idolatry. He was an *Hebrew of the Hebrews*, *i. e.* born a Jew, both by the father's and mother's side, which some Jews were not. So that, in this respect, he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the Jews. And though he was far from despising, or lightly esteeming national advantages; yet when these things were boasted of, as entitling to the divine favor, he rejected such confidence, as groundless, and would know nothing, in this view, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

As Gentiles, we indeed, cannot plead this boasted Jewish distinction, nor abuse it, as a ground of false confidence. Yet how many are there who, in the same mistaken way with the Jews, plead their having been born and educated in a christian land; their acquaintance with christian doctrines and duties; their belonging to a distinguished church, famed for its orthodoxy and purity; or their having sprung from, and been trained up by pious parents! How delusive must all such confidence be! Such should remember that, as among the Jews, "they were not all Israel that were of Israel; so neither, among christians, can external privileges give any title to the divine favour, if we be not ourselves found in Christ.

2. The apostle renounced all confidence in his obedience and conformity to the ceremonial law.

The rites of this law were all typical of Christ and the blessings of the gospel ; but could never make the comers thereunto perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. The Jews appear to have had very mistaken views of this law ; to have considered even an external conformity to its precepts, as atoning for moral defects, and rendering them acceptable in the sight of God.

It was this mistake that made the judaizing teachers so much insist on the observance of this law, as necessary to salvation. The apostle was fully convinced of their error, and considered it as leading men from the *substance* to the *shadow* ; from the true sacrifice for sin, to that which can never take away sin, and therefore building them on a false foundation.

This foundation he wholly renounced. He had himself, according to the strict prescription of the law, been circumcised the eighth day, and scrupulously exact in the observance of all its rites. But he now saw, these were all but *types* ; that the *substance was Christ* ; that the design of their observance, from the beginning, was *to lead to Christ* ; and not to be rested in as, of themselves, meritorious and efficacious to salvation. In this view, he considered and rejected all his ceremonial righteousness as loss and dung.

And, my brethren, does it not betray a like misplaced confidence, when we build our hopes of salvation on our external compliance with the ordinances and institutions of the gospel ? These things, indeed it is our bounden duty to observe. They are established by the authority of our divine master, and for wise and good ends. But when we plead, as the ground of our acceptance with God, that we have been baptised into Christ ; that we have put on the profession of the christian religion ; united

ourselves to the church in its most solemn ordinances, and are strict and punctual observers of all the duties of its worship; and think that, by a scrupulous observance of these external duties, we shall recommend ourselves to the favor of God, are we not guilty of the same error that the Jews were? This, surely, is to let go the Head, *even Christ*; and, instead of using these gospel institutions as means to increase our faith in, and conformity to Christ, it is substituting them in Christ's stead; and, contrary to their express design, making them the foundation of our hope. Alas, brethren, if we have no better foundation than this, our hope, at the last, must prove as the giving up of the ghost!

3. The apostle had been a Pharisee, one of the strictest and most devout sect among the Jews, and the most inviolably attached to the rites of the Mosaic law.

His zeal in the Jews' religion had outrun many of his equals in his own nation. He was, touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, transported even to persecuting the church. But now he rejected all hope from these things. Not all his strictness, as a Pharisee, nor all his zeal, as a disciple of Moses, could give him the least confidence towards God. However highly he might once have thought of himself, as a zealous Pharisee, he now saw that he was the *chief of sinners*, and acknowledged his only hope of deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Happy were it for multitudes, did they see and renounce their mistakes, in this way, as the apostle did. The blind attachment of some to sects and names, to peculiar opinions and forms—the spirit of intolerance which proclaims “Stand by thyself, come not near, for I am ho-

lier than thou," seems too plainly to betray a belief that, to be of *their* party, is to possess a sufficient title to the divine favour. There is a kind of zeal too, the result of ignorance and spiritual pride, and, in the forms it assumes, disreputable to religion, which will affect the name of exalted piety, and advance its boasted claims to acceptance with God.

My brethren, we may belong, as we suppose, to the purest and most orthodox denomination that ever existed; we may be ever so strictly attached to their doctrines and modes of worship, and have a zeal to promote these that would lead us to compass sea and land to make proselytes; and yet be only so much the farther from the kingdom of heaven, the more we rely on such party attachment and zeal, as constituting the ground of our hope of acceptance with God: for such reliance is, virtually, a renouneing of Christ, and setting up something of our own in his stead.

4. The apostle rejected all confidence in his moral attainments.

He had been a strict observer of the law, both moral and ceremonial. "I was," says he, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." That is, he was so in his own view, and in the view of others who knew him. He was esteemed an honest, upright, moral man; and one that paid a scrupulous regard to all the institutions of religion. None could impeach him with a want of integrity; he lived up to his knowledge, and his practice corresponded with his profession. And if this could have afforded him a safe ground of confidence, he might have rested there, and trusted and gloried in his own righteousness as well as others.

But alas ! he saw that all this would not do. His eyes had been opened ; God, in his inflexible justice and spotless holiness, had been manifested to the view of his soul ; the covering had been taken from the great deep of his inbred corruptions ; the divine law, in its extent and purity, had been set home, by the Spirit of God, on his soul ; this had awakened him to such a view of his moral depravity and guilt as he, before, had never experienced ; had slain all his vain hopes and refuges of lies, and taught him that, “By the deeds of the law, can no flesh living be justified in the sight of God.” As a condemned man he had been shut up to the faith ; as a sinner ready to perish, he had been led to see that salvation for sinners was to be found no where else but in Christ. He therefore gave up every other ground of hope ; rejected all trust in his own righteousness ; esteemed it but as filthy rags ; and aspired after the righteousness which is by the faith of Christ.

And, truly, my brethren, if there be any thing, short of Christ, that can afford a ground of hope to sinners, it must be *moral virtue*. This is inseparable from the nature of all religion ; this possesses intrinsic excellence in itself, and has, deservedly, commanded the veneration of all ages and nations.

But that the best obedience to the moral law, that guilty depraved man ever did, or does, or can perform, can never be plead as the ground of his justification and acceptance with God, will appear from the following considerations. 1. This law, from its very nature, and from the character of the lawgiver, requires perfect obedience. This, no man, in his fallen state, ever performs. The law reaches to the *thoughts* and *intents* of the heart, as well as to the *outward conduct*. Every

man, therefore, is *daily* a transgressor, in *thought, word and deed*. His best obedience is extremely imperfect ; so corrupt in the principle, from which it flows, and so defective in practice that, the man of the best morals may well cry, “ If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand ! 2. This law has its penalty. Every transgressor, therefore, and for every transgression, falls under the malediction, or penalty of the law. And what can he do to make amends for his transgression ? His best obedience, even should he do all those things that are required of him, is doing no more than is his duty to do. Instead, therefore, of making amends for past transgressions, the sinner is daily running deeper and deeper in debt. 3. The law, in whatever form and degree made known to man, must, in the day of final account, be the rule by which he shall be judged. If he then, when tried by the law, be found guilty of innumerable and awfully aggravated transgressions both in heart and life ; if it shall appear that, through all his life, his heart has been a sink of iniquity, and that all he has ever *thought, said, or done* ; that all his appetites, passions, affections, aims and views have been, more or less polluted from this corrupt sink of sin ; how will the sinner stand ? What *will* he, what *can* he plead in arrest of judgment ? Will he plead his imperfect obedience ? This will not answer the requisition of the law ; and this the righteous judge cannot, and will not accept. What can hinder, then, but that, as a totally depraved, guilty creature, and wholly unmeet for heaven, sentence should go against him ? All hope of acceptance with God, for our own righteousness, must, therefore, be forever in vain ! For, as the apostle reasons, Gal. iii. 21, 22, *If there had been a law-giver, which could have given*

life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe.

This doctrine the apostle well understood ; and fully persuaded that there was salvation for guilty man in no other way than through Christ ; and that, in this way, God could be just, and yet justify them that believe in Jesus, he esteemed all his own righteousness, all his gifts, all his learning, all his attainments ; yea, he esteemed *all things* but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, and did count them but dung that he might win Christ !

Thus have I endeavoured to prove, as was proposed, that, every thing, short of the religion of Christ, can be of no avail to us, and should be entirely rejected as a ground of confidence.

I pass, for the present, the consideration of the nature of this religion, that I may make some improvement of what hath been said.

1. This subject teaches us that, men are in great danger of running into fatal mistakes in matters of religion. It is manifest that this danger existed in the apostle's day. The superstitions, self-righteous spirit, and misguided zeal of the Jews, on the one hand ; the captivating charms of the infidel philosophy of the Gentiles, on the other ; the arts and assiduity of false teachers ; the general laxness in morals which then prevailed, and the ever working depravity of the human heart, were sources of danger, against which all the solicitude, the zeal, and the diligence of the apostle were employed to guard the young converts to christianity. But why all this zeal of the apostle ? Why did he use such unweari-

ed diligence to instruct and warn the churches, and guard them from error, if he had not the fullest reason to believe that, they were in great danger of erring from the true faith of the gospel; and that such errors were of a fatal tendency? And should not a like pious concern engage all who love the truth, to guard against the encroachments of error? Surely, the danger of erring from the truth is not less now than it was in the apostle's days. The heart of man remains, as ever, *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*

All unrenewed men labour under a deplorable spiritual blindness of mind. They are ignorant of the divine perfections; of the purity and extent of the divine law, and of the great evil of sin. They possess, naturally, a proud conceit of the sufficiency of their own power; the merit of their own righteousness, and, of course, see but little either of the beauty or the necessity of the way of salvation through Christ. And from their natural repugnance to the self-denying and soul-humbling truths of the gospel, they will ever be in danger of leaning to systems that flatter human pride and depravity, and of being *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.* "Evil men and seducers," we are told, "will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." We are therefore to expect that, they will be unwearied in their endeavours to *beguile unstable souls*, and turn them aside from the truth, as it is in Jesus. The danger, then, of erring from the true faith of God's holy word is great, and the consequence fatal.

This consideration should awaken parents to a more serious diligence in instructing their families in the first

principles of the oracles of God; and excite our young people to offer themselves more readily to catechetical instruction, lest, when entering a world full of seductions, and assailed by the enemies of truth, they, through ignorance, fall an easy prey to error. The danger of erring should also excite all, who wish to know and keep the truth, to study the word of God with a humble and prayerful attention, that they may be rooted and grounded in the truth, and not easily moved away from the hope of the gospel. And it would be well if all ministers of the gospel, like the apostle Paul, took due pains, in their public ministrations, clearly to instruct their people in the knowledge of gospel truth; to guard them against the seductions of error, and to establish and build them up in their most holy faith.

2. Let all examine carefully, on what foundation they are building their hope of salvation.

God alone is judge, on what foundation we may rest our hopes with safety. No schemes of human device can ever succeed in opposition to the plan of infinite wisdom and mercy. And the day that is coming will be, to all, a day of decision on this important point. *The fire will try every man's work, of what sort it is.* God will then thoroughly purge his floor, and gather none but the true wheat into his garner. What confusion will then overwhelm deceived souls, when the great judge shall pronounce; "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting!" When the rains shall descend, the winds blow and the floods beat, ah, what sweeping will there be among the sandy foundations of men's invention!

Sons of men, fly for refuge to the only shepherd and bishop of your souls.—Seek your remedy where alone

God has provided it.—Build for eternity on that foundation which God hath laid in Zion : for, be assured, “ No other foundation can any man lay, than that is laid ; which is Jesus Christ.”

3. This subject may admonish true believers to adore a sovereign, gracious God, who hath brought them out of darkness into his marvellous light, and made them wise unto salvation.

Ye children of God, let your devout reflections often dwell upon that distinguishing grace which hath made you to differ. How highly favoured is your lot ! Had not a sovereign God arrested you in your course of carnal security ; had he not, by his Spirit, discovered to you your lost state by nature, convinced you of sin, and brought you, from all your errings and wanderings, to the shepherd and bishop of your souls ; you would now be lying in a state of spiritual darkness and unbelief. Let God have all the glory that, *Whereas you were once blind, you now see.* Bless his holy name for what he hath done for your soul. Give thanks to him for whatever blessed experience you now have, or heretofore have had, of his mercy and love in Christ, and for that hope which is set before you in the gospel. See that ye stand fast in the faith, rooted and grounded in the truth, and not be easily moved away from the hope of the gospel. Let the lives you now live in the flesh, be lives of faith on the Son of God. *Ye are complete in him. Your life is hid with Christ in God.* Look to him, by faith, that of his fulness ye may receive, and grace for grace. Labour to adorn, in all things, the doctrine of God your Saviour. Thus living, ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And now, to him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.—AMEN.

SERMON XV.

**THE TRUE AND FALSE GROUNDS OF
RELIGION.**

(IN TWO SERMONS.)

Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.

But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, &c. &c.

BY JOSEPH CLARK, D. D.

Pastor of the Presbyterian Congregation of New-Brunswick.

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XV.

Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.—But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is, through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

IN a world where truth and falsehood both assume the name of religion; and where, from the depravity of the human heart, error will often present itself as the most pleasing and acceptable to men, we are in great danger of erring from the truth. And the more we suffer our enquiries, on this head, to be directed by the pride and corrupt passions of the heart, the greater will be the danger of building our hopes on a foundation that must finally be swept away, as a refuge of lies.

These are considerations that should excite every honest mind, to take heed what he receives for truth, in matters of religion, and on what he founds his hopes of acceptance with God. It is from these considerations also that ministers of the gospel have a double work to perform. They are to detect the fallacy and shew the insufficiency of *false* religion, while they explain and enforce the *true*. These are the two great objects of the apostle, in our text; from which, when this passage was before under consideration, it was proposed,

I. To shew that every thing short of the religion of Christ, can be of no avail to us, for the attainment of our salvation, and should be entirely rejected as a ground of confidence.

II. To consider the nature of that religion which the gospel reveals.

For the illustration of both these points, it was proposed to take up and consider the view which the apostle gives of *both*, in the passage under review. And, therefore, in shewing, under the first head, the insufficiency of every thing short of the religion of Christ, as the ground of our acceptance with God; the *false* grounds of confidence, which the apostle enumerates in the context, were considered, both as plead by the Jews; and as, with some circumstantial difference, they are plead by mere nominal christians. A recapitulation of the false grounds of confidence, enumerated in the former discourse, will not now be necessary. I, therefore, proceed,

II. To consider the nature of that religion which the gospel reveals, as the ground of our acceptance with God.

This the apostle has distinctly marked, and forcibly expressed in opposition to all these grounds of false confidence he had been combatting. Having entirely renounced all such confidences for himself, he declares that, the religion he aspired after—that in which *alone* his soul could rest—and in comparison with which he esteemed all things else but loss, was “*That he might win Christ, and be found in him. not having on his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*” This is the apostle’s description of gospel-

religion. The better to understand which, let us attend to its several parts.

1. The *winning of Christ*. “That I may win Christ.” It is manifest the apostle here uses figurative language ; and has reference either to the prizes, set up for the victors in the olympic games ; or, more probably, he alludes to the cities of refuge among the Jews, to which if the man-slayer reached, before the avenger of blood overtook him, he was said to *win the city*, and thereby saved his life. The aptness of this latter figure is abundantly manifest ; and the language used leaves little room to doubt that the apostle had reference to it, when he speaks of winning Christ. Taking this, therefore, as the figure the apostle had in view, and the following things are evidently implied in the soul’s winning Christ.

1. A deep conviction of his own sin and danger.

As the man-slayer, in fleeing to the city of refuge, was under an awful dread of the avenger of blood, until he reached the city ; so the soul seeking to win Christ, has an alarming conviction of his own sin and guilt.

Whatever slight views some may entertain of convictions of sin and guilt, as essential to gospel religion ; the word of God as well as sound christian experience, teaches us that, none ever truly flee to Christ for refuge, until they are convinced of the deep pollution of their nature by sin, their exposedness to the just displeasure of God on account of sin, their utter inability to save themselves, and their entire unworthiness of the divine mercy. These convictions may differ, in the degree felt, in different persons, and in the manner of their manifestation ; but whoever truly flies to Christ for refuge will, in a greater or less degree, feel that, until renewed by divine grace, he is “*as an unclean thing ; dead in tres-*

passes and sins, and by nature a child of wrath. The man-slayer dreaded the resentment of the avenger of blood, and fled, in haste, to his city of refuge ; the convinced sinner trembles under the denunciations of God's violated law, dreads the displeasure of the just and holy sovereign of heaven and earth, against whom he hath sinned, and, in this deplorable situation, flees to Christ. The man-slayer mourned for the deed he had done ; the convinced sinner flees to Christ, weeping and mourning for his transgressions, and loathing himself for all the abominations of his heart and life. The man-slayer used every exertion to reach his city of refuge ; the convinced sinner is in serious earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come. He asks, he seeks, he knocks, he strives to enter in at the straight gate, to lay hold on the hope set before him. In short, it is necessity, a felt, pressing necessity, that first excites the soul to flee to Christ. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." And while, as sin-sick souls, looking and fleeing to Christ, under this felt necessity, they cannot be indifferent about their success ; their cry is " *Lord, save me, or I perish !*

2. *Winning Christ* implies that, the whole trust of the soul, for salvation, is in Christ only.

The man-slayer, pursued by fear, and feeling his life in danger, used his utmost exertions to reach the appointed city of refuge. And to none other would he direct his course : for no where else had he any warrant for his security ; no where else could he be safe from the avenger of blood. So it is with the soul that seeks to win Christ. He is assured, from the authority of God himself, that, *There is salvation in none other ; that, there is none other name under heaven, given amongst*

men, whereby we must be saved; that, he is exalted of God to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sin; that, we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; that he is the propitiation whom God hath set forth, through whom he can be righteous and yet remit sin. Therefore, the soul seeks no other refuge; but finds his whole hope and trust, for salvation, in Christ Jesus, as the only foundation which God hath laid in Zion. To seek any other refuge, he is constrained to view as a most dangerous presumption. And therefore, all his former false hopes and refuges of lies he gives up and wholly renounces. What things were before gain to him, he now esteems loss for Christ, and counts them but dung that he may win Christ.

And to this sole trust in Christ Jesus he is led, not only because Christ is the only appointed way of salvation to sinners; but because he sees in Christ an infinite suitability and all-sufficiency for accomplishing this salvation. Instructed by the word and Spirit of God, he is led to view this Saviour as, *the eternal Son of God; the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; as having assumed our nature into union with his own divine nature; as having submitted to be made under the law; to be made a curse for us, that he might redeem us from the curse of the law; to bear our sins in his own body on the tree; to suffer and die, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. In this view of the Saviour, his infinite power, and the all-sufficient merit of his atonement and righteousness are abundantly manifest. So that, the soul in fleeing to Christ for refuge, puts his whole trust in him, as one able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. This*

view of the suitableness, the infinite power and merit of Christ, as a Saviour, must have a powerful influence in exciting the soul to flee to him, as the only refuge.

Add to this, the influence which a view of the loveliness and love of Christ has upon the soul. When Christ is revealed to the soul, in all the glory of his person, his character, and his offices, there will be a *shining in the heart of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. Christ will appear to the soul as, *the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely*. And the love of Christ manifested in the whole of the great work of redemption, will have an irresistible influence in constraining the soul to flee to Christ. How astonishing the mercy and love of God in Christ! How overwhelming the love of Christ to sinners! Ah! this is love that melts down the soul, that, while we were *dead in sin; dead in law; lying in all our pollution and wretchedness, and deserving nothing but the everlasting displeasure of God, Christ should so love us as to give himself an offering to God for us! Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he first loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins! While we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly!* Well might the apostle say "*The love of Christ constraineth us.*" And, constrained by this love, the sinner will seek to win no refuge but Christ.

3. To win Christ is, to attain to a satisfactory evidence of the soul's saving interest in Christ.

The man-slayer could not dismiss his fears, and feel himself in entire safety until he actually reached his city of refuge. So neither can the soul enjoy a settled peace in believing until it has some satisfactory evidence of its interest in Christ. There is a period, in christian ex-

perience, called the believer's *day of espousals*, when the soul, despairing of help elsewhere, and renouncing every other refuge, does freely give itself up to be Christ's, and cordially receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel. This is reaching to the true city of refuge; this is, in the language of the apostle, *to win Christ*. The soul, having been tossed as with a tempest, and not comforted, now reposes in Christ as, *a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, and as rivers of waters in a dry place*. A sweet peace ensues; the burden of his sins rolls off; his guilty fears are allayed; and, assured of the pardon of his sins, and feeling the love of Christ shed abroad in his heart, in a holy transport, he cries, *my beloved is mine and I am his!* Like believing Thomas, while his finger was in the print of the nails, he no longer hesitates to adopt the appropriating language, *My LORD, and my GOD!* Or with Paul he can say, *I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him*. The seeking soul has now found rest in Christ, and knows by happy experience, what it is to *win Christ*.

The persuasion, thus attained, of a saving interest in Christ is usually called the *faith of assurance*. Concerning this assurance, it is here proper to observe that, though it be the privilege of every child of God, yet, from some unhappy constitutional gloominess of mind, or from having their affections too much divided between Christ and the world, some are long left to mourn the want of this assurance. In fleeing to Christ for refuge, how often does it happen that, awakened, convinced souls are for a time, left to struggle with distressing doubts

and fears, and sometimes to conflict with the anguish of despair. When they seem to be just entering on the threshold of hope, they are driven back to their former doubts. When they are about to say, *I have found him whom my soul loveth*, they are left to complain, *my beloved hath withdrawn himself and is gone*; and the fear arises, *he will be favourable no more*. Such complaints are often heard from sincere, humble souls, at almost every stage of their christian progress.

However difficult it may be, in such a case, for the soul to decide on its real state, yet if, on a careful examination, it is found that, the soul does repose its entire trust in Christ; is striving to follow him in all his ways; and is willing to give up all for him; the hope of our having obtained a saving interest in Christ, although accompanied with many doubts and fears, should not be rejected but cherished. Nor should the soul, in such case, content itself to live in a state of uncertainty, nor be deterred from labouring after the *full assurance of faith*.

Thus much on the soul's *winning Christ*.

II. The next thing in the apostle's definition is, *to be found in Christ*. "That I may win Christ, and be found in him."

Those who are strangers to gospel religion, may have very low thoughts of this part of it. But Paul, who was a fit judge in this matter, viewed it as of essential importance. In describing to the Ephesians their state, before they embraced the gospel, he tells them, Eph. ii. 12, That at that time, ye were *without Christ*, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. To be *without Christ*, or

out of Christ, then, is to be in a most deplorable situation. It is to be, in no covenant relation to Christ; in no spiritual union with Christ; and therefore, no sharers in the blessings of his purchase.

The phrase, *to be found in Christ*, expresses more fully, the state of those who *win Christ*. *To win*, the soul goes out to, and under a deep sense of sin and guilt, cordially accepts of Christ. *To be found in him*, expresses the soul's being born in the image of Christ, its covenant relation to him, its spiritual union with him, and its safety from condemnation.

1. *To be found in Christ*, is to be renewed and born in his image.

While out of Christ, we bear no spiritual likeness to him. The old nature characterises us; we are in sin, and under its dominion. From this state we must be delivered, and *created anew in Christ Jesus*. This doctrine the Saviour has inculcated in the most explicit and forcible manner. “*Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” It is requisite, therefore that, *we put on the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. The same mind must be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Moreover, whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.* From the above scriptures, it appears that, regeneration is an essential doctrine of the gospel, and that none can *be found in Christ* until they are born in his image. No professed respect for religion; no compliance merely with its external duties; no fervors of mere animal feeling; no zeal however loud and active,

are of themselves sufficient to constitute us the spiritual members of Christ's family. No, there must be a change of heart ; an implanting in Christ ; a passing from the state of nature, to a state of grace. This is the state so highly accounted of by the apostle, and which he considered as essential to being *in Christ*. As he speaks, *2 Cor. v. 17*, If any man be *in Christ*, he is a *new creature* ; old things are are passed away ; behold all things are become new.

2. *To be found in Christ*, expresses the soul's covenant relation to him.

The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him, with all true believers in Christ. As Adam was the first, so Christ is the second covenant head ; and while he delivers from the miseries incurred under the first, he confirms to believers all the grants and privileges promised in the new covenant. *Gal. iii. 17*, The covenant that was confirmed before of God, in Christ. *2 Cor. i. 20*, For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, to the glory of God, by us. This covenant, of which Christ is the head, the apostle styles, *Heb. viii. 6*, a better covenant, established upon better promises. While out of Christ, therefore, we remain in the condition of the apostate children of Adam, and subject to all the ruin which the breach of that first covenant brought on us. But on believing in Christ, we pass from death to life ; from the condemnation and curse of the first covenant, to be heirs of the blessings promised in the new. That is, we are placed in a new covenant relation ; we are now *in Christ*, in a covenant relation to him. *Eph. ii. 19*, We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens of the saints, and of the household of God. *Gal. iii. 26*, For ye

are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. Eph. iii. 6, We become fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the gospel. Blessed state! glorious change! From being children of wrath and heirs of hell; to being the children of God, and heirs, yea, joint-heirs with Christ Jesus!

3. *To be found in Christ* implies the believer's union with Christ.

All those who have fled to, and accepted of Christ by faith, become spiritually united to him. *He abides in them by his Spirit which he has given them. He that is joined to the Lord, is one spirit. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* His spirit is diffused through them all, and is both the common bond which unites them to Christ, the *Head*, and into one body, the church; and is also the common source of life which supports the whole body, and each individual member. This union is beautifully described by the Saviour in the 15th chapter of John: I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. Paul thus speaks of it, 1 Cor xii. 13, For by one Spirit are we all baptised 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. Christ tells his disciples, John xiv. 20, Ye shall know that, I am in my Father and *you in me*, and I in you. The love of Christ to his people drew from him that most comforting petition. in the 17th chapter of John. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me—that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. It is from this union that, the spiritual life, or life of

grace, is maintained in believers. Gal. ii. 20, I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God. To what high dignity is our poor nature raised, through Christ! If David thought it an honor too great for a subject, to be united to his king, by a marriage alliance; what must be the honor of the real believer! He is united to the King of kings, and Lord of lords; to the head of all divine influence. His life is hid with Christ in God. It is from his being thus *in Christ*, that he derives all his spiritual life from Christ's fulness; and has, moreover, the assurance that this life shall be maintained in his soul and consummated in glory. John xiv. 19, Because I live, ye shall live also. I briefly add,

4. *To be found in Christ*, is to be in a state of safety.

As the city of refuge afforded safety to the man-slayer who had reached it; or as the ark afforded safety to Noah and his family, from the overwhelming flood, then all those who are *found in Christ*, possess a security that cannot fail: for it is a security of heaven's own providing. *In Christ*, they are set on high from the fear of evil. Neither the condemning sentence of the law, nor the avenging justice of God can reach and smite them there. Sprinkled by the blood of atonement, no curse can light upon them. Once they were the children of wrath; but *in Christ*, they have escaped from the wrath to come, and are warranted to adopt the following exulting language, "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.—There is therefore, now, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.—Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ*

that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Such is the import of being *found in Christ*. It is to be born in his image ; to be brought into a relation to him, as our new-covenant-head ; to be spiritually united to him, and to be in a state of safety from all condemnation. Each of these articles, it is evident from the scriptures adduced, are essential features of gospel-religion, and of such high import that, the apostle might well make so great account of being *found in Christ*, and be willing to suffer the loss of all things that he might attain to this.

III. The third and last part of the apostle's description is in these words. "Not having on mine own righteousness, which is of the law ; but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Here it is taken for granted that, man stands in absolute need of righteousness. That where there is not such a righteousness as the law requires and God can accept, man can have no hope. The reason is, man is a creature made under law to God, and in the day of final account, must be judged by the law under which he is placed. To be acquitted of the charge of guilt and pronounced righteous, or as the scriptures express it, *to be justified*, man must have either in himself, or in his surety, a righteousness equal to the demands of the law ; that is, a perfect righteousness : for the law knows nothing of mercy and forgiveness ; it is a pure law, not an act of grace. And God, the righteous law-giver and judge, cannot depart from his just claims of perfect obedience : for such a departure would be equal to the acknowledg-

ment either, that his law was, in itself, unreasonable, or that he had ceased to be just. A perfect righteousness, then, is necessary for the sinner's justification before God.

Let it be observed further that, to the salvation of man, it is also requisite, he possess a meetness for the enjoyment of God. Nothing unclean can enter heaven. This meetness is usually styled *holiness or sanctification*. It commences in regeneration, and is imperfect, even in the best of men in this life : for as the apostle observes, “ *We are here sanctified but in part.*” But it is a work of grace, in believers, which increases and grows until they are finally *presented unto God without spot or wrinkle or any such thing*. Every believer, therefore, so far as he is holy, that is, conformed to God, in the spirit and temper of his mind, and in the conduct of his life, is righteous ; he has the righteousness denominated sanctification. In our text, the apostle must have respect to righteousness, in both the senses above explained.* And so fully was he convinced of the insufficiency of his own doings, and of his entire dependence on free grace for every thing essential to his salvation that, *his own righteousness which is of the law* was rejected by him, as of no avail, and *the righteousness which is of God by faith*, was embraced as his sole ground of confidence. The former of these, therefore, he would not have on ; but with the latter, that which is of God by faith, he desired to be clad. I shall speak to both of these.

1. His own righteousness which is of the law.

* Imputed righteousness is doubtless the principal thing in the view of the apostle in the text ; but as sanctification is a benefit inseparable from justification, it may be considered as included in the apostle's description.

This will need little explanation. As obedience, or conformity to the law, is termed righteousness, he must mean, his own personal obedience to the law ; that is, to any law which God hath enjoined, whether moral, or ceremonial, or even to the institutions and precepts of the gospel. Such obedience or righteousness, was indeed his own, because performed by himself personally, and not by another for him. The explanation may be carried further, so that, by *his own righteousness*, he may intend, any obedience of his to the law, performed in *his own strength*, by the efforts of mere unrenewed nature, and without the aids of divine grace. Thus performed, the righteousness may be called *his own*. But it was such a righteousness as he would not have on. That is, he would not look for any shelter or security from it ; he would not place any reliance on it ; nay, he wished to have no esteem for it, as constituting any part of gospel religion. It was not the *wedding garment* in which he could ever hope or dare to appear before God. It was not that *breast-plate of righteousness*, provided in the panoply of God, which every christian is enjoined to put on.

There are two strong reasons why the apostle did, and why all should renounce any dependence on their own righteousness. First, because all such dependence is vain. It is a righteousness, certainly not perfect, but, ah, how miserably defective ! so mixed with sin, even in the very best of men, that it cannot possibly be accepted, by a holy God, for our justification. And if it be performed in no better strength than our own, without the aids of God's holy spirit ; if its spring and motives be no higher than the *carnal mind, which is enmity against God* ; if it be the production, merely of our un-

renewed, unsanctified natures, then there can be no holiness in it, it is not that righteousness which is denominated sanctification. Secondly : another reason for renouncing all dependence on our own righteousness is, that all such dependence is an opposition to the gospel plan of salvation. Salvation, on the gospel plan, is through free grace, without money or price on our part. The gospel finds us, *wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked*, in forlorn and helpless circumstances, and offers us salvation freely, and *wholly through Christ*. Whereas salvation by our own righteousness, is a plan founded on totally distinct principles ; a plan, in which Christ and his merits, and the necessity of divine influence, either make no part at all ; or, at best, they are taken in as sharers with the efficacy of our own works. To rely on such a plan is, to place our hope of eternal life on a covenant of works, and not on the covenant of grace through Christ. It is, as the apostle says of the unbelieving Jews, a being ignorant of God's righteousness, and a going about to establish our own righteousness, refusing to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God. And yet how many, even among professing christians, discover a strong attachment to the old covenant of works. If they profess some dependence on Christ ; their main reliance appears to be on their own power, and the efficacy of their own works of obedience. Such was not the faith and spirit of Paul. This eminent apostle had not so learned Christ. In this view of gospel religion, Christ is the *only name*, the *all and in all*. He would know none other, on none other foundation would he build. Therefore, he would not have on his own righteousness, which is of the law ; but,

2. That which the apostle did aspire to, and on which he could freely and confidently trust his eternal all, was *that righteousness which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

This is the righteousness, and this only, that can justify and save a sinner. Possessing this, he knew that, he should never be made ashamed. Two things are here to be noticed. 1. The righteousness itself. 2. How it is received by the sinner or becomes his.

1. The righteousness itself.

It is called God's righteousness, or the righteousness which is of God. We have the same language, Rom. i. 17 ; and in sundry other places in the gospel *is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.*

The scriptures, as was before observed, use the term righteousness, as it relates both to our justification and our sanctification. So I shall now consider it. The righteousness, by which we are justified, is the *imputed righteousness of Christ*. This righteousness is, Christ's perfect obedience to the precepts and penalty of the divine law. Such an obedience Christ has performed. Being made under the law, substituted in the guilty sinner's place, and without sin in himself, he fulfilled all righteousness ; his obedience was without spot ; and his propitiatory sufferings rendered it a righteous thing with God to forgive sin. For Christ came into the world, not to obey and suffer on his own account. Of this he had no need, nor was he under any obligation, seeing he was without sin, and is, moreover, the Lord and lawgiver of all creatures. But he submitted to this wholly on account of, and for the salvation of his believing people. He obeyed, *he suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.* Rom. iii. 24, We are justified

freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. To *redeem* is to recover from captivity, bondage and wretchedness, by paying down a price. Sinners, by nature, are in bondage to the law, sold under sin; but *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*. It is said, Rom. x. 4, Christ is the end of the law, *for righteousness*, to every one that believeth. Now the end of every law is, that it be obeyed; and if transgressed, that its penalty be suffered. This Christ hath accomplished. That is, he hath fulfilled the great end of the law by his obedience and suffering. And in doing this, he hath satisfied the law, paid down the ransom, and thereby brought in an *everlasting righteousness* for all them that believe in him. This is the righteousness which, according to Rom. iv. 6, God imputeth without works. Hence says the prophet, Jer. xxiii. 6, This is the name by which he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**. And it is said, 1 Cor. i. 30, Christ Jesus is made, of God, unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

By this righteousness of Christ, imputed unto us, we are justified. And this righteousness *is of God*; because it is of God's appointment; because it was wrought out for us by *the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ*; because God hath declared himself well pleased and satisfied with this righteousness, and because he imputes it to the believing sinner, and will accept it for his justification. On whomsoever, therefore, this righteousness is found, the condemning sentence of the law cannot light. In the Saviour's righteousness he stands complete. He has the robe, the wedding garment, that

will admit him to the guest-chamber, in the courts above!

The righteousness of God, by faith, is also *imparted* righteousness, or sanctification. It is the spirit of grace, implanted in believers, with the fruits of this spirit brought forth in their tempers and lives.

In this sense the word righteousness is so often used in the scriptures that it is needless to cite passages in proof. Of this righteousness every real christian partakes. The stamp they bear is, *Holiness to the Lord*. And it is not merely an external, but a real holiness; not a holiness, the mere result of our own natural strength; or of a good education, but the fruit of the implanted spirit of grace, which is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. To render his people *holy* is one great object of Christ in the plan of our salvation, Titus ii. 14, Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Our whole sanctification, or inherent righteousness, is the purchase of Christ's blood and the work of his Spirit. It is communicated, or *shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour*. This righteousness cannot, indeed, answer the demands of the law for our justification before God; but it is that righteousness or holiness, *without which no man shall see the Lord*.

The apostle, therefore, could not rest in any thing short of the *imputed and imparted righteousness of God*. He was neither a legalist, nor an antinomian. He looked to be *justified freely, by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; to be washed, to be sanctified, to be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and*

by the Spirit of our God. Humbled and stripped of all self-dependence, he trusted in Christ Jesus his Lord ; and looking for the aids of divine grace, through him, he applied himself with diligence and earnestness to the *putting off the old man, with his deeds, which are corrupt, and to the putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.* In this way, his life was one unceasing endeavour, to *increase in the fruits of righteousness which are, by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.*

Such, then, is the righteousness the apostle desired to have on, while he resolved to renounce wholly his own. Happy resolve ! Noble exchange ! To give up dross and dung, for the pearl of great price ! To renounce the vilest poverty for gold tried in the fire ! To cast away his filthy rags, for robes, pure and white ! To reject all dependence on poor unrenewed nature's strength ; and live in constant dependence on the merits of the Saviour, and on the aids of divine grace. I am,

2. To enquire, how this righteousness is received by the sinner, or becomes his.

And this is, in one word, by faith, *through the faith of Christ*, that is, by a gospel faith. He that is a stranger to the faith of Christ, possesses not the righteousness which is of God. This faith is the full and free assent and consent of the soul to God's revealed truth ; or, in other words, it is the receiving of the record which God hath given of his Son. In the religion of the gospel, this faith has a high rank. It is there revealed as of divine origin ; it is *the gift of God ; of the operation of God* ; it unites to Christ ; by it we become the children of God ; it puts in motion all the gracious affections : for *it worketh by love and purifieth the heart* ; it supports

under the severest trials ; renders the soul superior to discouragement, in seasons of the greatest difficulty, and is its grand stimulus to all holy obedience. So essential is it to our acceptance with God, that we are told, in Heb. 11. 6, Without faith it is impossible to please him. And in Mark xvi. 16, He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.

In the article of justification, *faith* stands opposed to *works* ; that is to our own works of obedience to the law. Rom. iii. 20, 28, By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight—therefore, we conclude, that a man is justified *by faith*, without the deeds of the law. Those who are looking for salvation, in some other way than through the faith of Christ, are opposed to this order of things. And by rejecting the doctrine of the totally depraved, guilty, undone state of man, as a fallen creature ; by persisting to plead for man's sufficiency in himself, for the purposes of his salvation ; and relying on the merit and efficacy of their own works of obedience, they see but little beauty in, or need of Christ, why they should desire him ; nay, they are opposed to the gospel plan of salvation, and reject the only remedy which God hath offered to sinners. How manifest is it that, in this way, the guilty creature sets himself up against the sovereign mercy of God ? He will be his own physician ; he is offended with the doctrine of entire dependence on the mere mercy of God in Christ. Notwithstanding his apostasy, with its effects on his state, he claims the credit of possessing in himself sufficient power and skill to procure his own deliverance, and work out for himself a sufficient meetness for heaven. Such a temper of mind can be no otherwise considered, than as in direct hostility to the re-

ligion of the gospel. Instead of desiring, seeking, and humbly receiving the righteousness which is of God by faith, it refuses to submit to this righteousness.

The above remarks are made, with a view, to shew more clearly, how the believing sinner does receive this righteousness. And I know not how, better, to shew this, than in the following manner. Brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, he bows to the testimony of God in his word, without conditions, or exceptions. He submits to become *reconciled to God by the death of his Son*. He gives up all trust in, or dependence on himself; acknowledging his perishing necessity, and intire unworthiness. With his whole soul, he reviews and rests upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel; and looking for acceptance with God, and help from God, wholly through Christ, the language of his heart is, "Lord, to whom shall I go, thou hast the words of eternal life!" This is faith. It is a submitting to, and cordially acquiescing in, God's own terms; it is humbly and thankfully receiving what God hath provided, and freely offers to perishing sinners. And he, that thus believeth, shall be saved; shall be justified from all things, from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses, nor by any other law. This is the divine plan. And on this plan, it appears that faith no more merits salvation than works do. But God hath so constituted the method of our salvation, that Christ and the benefits of his redemption, when received by faith, should become ours. Ours, *without money and without price*. John i. 12, As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Rom. iv. 4, 5, Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace,

but of debt ; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. And in Rom. x. 10, With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. That is, a believing in Christ, with all the heart, secures to the sinner a perfect, saving righteousness. It unites him to Christ, and thereupon, Christ's righteousness becomes his. And, in this view, is the doctrine so much insisted on in the scriptures that, we are *justified by faith, and not by the deeds of the law*. No, not of any law : for, as the apostle reasons, Gal. iii. 21, 22, If there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, *by faith of Jesus Christ* might be given to them that believe. This is saying that, the sinner can look to no law for life ; that the righteousness, by which alone he can be justified, is through the faith of Christ ; a righteousness which, according to the gracious plan, or promise of God, is given to them that believe.

It is through the faith of Christ, also, that the sinner is made partaker of inherent righteousness, or sanctification. In regeneration, *the faith of the operation of God* is implanted in the soul. This faith, from a clear view and deep conviction of the truth, operates in the soul as a principle of sanctification. Our Lord prays, John xvii. 17, Sanctify them, through thy truth, thy word is truth. This prayer teaches us that, the truths of God, received by faith, have a purifying effect on the soul ; that the soul, being thus brought to view the glory of the divine perfections, the excellence of the divine law, the great evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, and the rich displays of God's mercy in the gospel, is led to hate

and strive against sin; to love and labour after holiness; and thereby to grow in grace and increase in the fruits of righteousness. In this way, then, *faith worketh by love and purifieth the heart.*

Believing sinners, also, derive holiness or sanctification in the way of direct application, by faith, to Christ the living head. *They are complete in him. Their life is hid with Christ in God.* Though of themselves they can do nothing; yet, though Christ strengthening them they can do all things. The supplies of the Spirit of grace are derived from Christ, by faith, to the souls of believers. Christ is the object of their habitual trust for sanctification. As the apostle speaks, *The lives they now live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God.* In this way, *they receive of the Saviour's fulness and grace for grace.* And thus grow up into him in all things, and finally attain to a perfect meetness for God's heavenly kingdom. It is to this end that the throne of grace is made accessible; that, repairing thither, in the confidence of faith in the great high priest over the house of God, they may obtain mercy and find grace to help them in time of need. Thus, *by faith* is the sinner made partaker of God's righteousness. Having, thus far, considered the nature of gospel-religion, according to the view which the apostle hath given of it in our text, I shall now close the subject, by making some inferences from the whole.

1. From the view that has been taken of this subject, we are naturally led to infer that, gospel religion alters men's views of God, and reconciles them to his true character.

'This religion commences by God's *shining into the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the*

face of Jesus Christ. The shining of this light into the soul bows it to God, and it is led to adore and love God in that very character which he hath given of himself in his word. The wicked know not God. Unregenerate men are displeas'd with, nay, they cannot endure the view which the scriptures give of God's perfections and government. And this is the fruitful source of those numerous corrupt systems of religion which have appeared in the world. Men are oppos'd to revealed religion because it gives such a view of God as their proud corrupt hearts revolt at. They pretend not to deny the existence of a God; but, then, they are fain to form such a view of his character as, at least in some degree, resembles their own, and suits their wishes. He must not be so much displeas'd with sin, as the scriptures represent him. He must be all *mercy*; possess no vindictive justice. He must good-naturedly put up with their trampling on his laws, and their slighting and despising the offers of his grace. A little external morality, or, at most, a few formal professions of repentance, must be accepted with him, as a sufficient passport for them to eternal felicity. But gospel religion totally alters the views of the soul in this respect. They who possess this religion, are taught spiritually and savingly to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. God, as revealed in his word, appears altogether glorious; And they, ~~condemning themselves,~~ and confounded at their former enmity against God, now most heartily give up all their opposition, and become reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

2. From this subject, the inference fairly follows that, the religion of the gospel is a soul-humbling religion.

It prostrates the sinner in the dust, not only from the view of his past sins, with their dreadful demerit; but from the conviction that he feels of the awful moral depravity of his nature. Whatever may have been the ease before, he can now no longer entertain slight views of the evil of sin. His pride is brought down; his high looks and lofty imaginations are laid low. He is stripped of all dependence on his own power, or on the merit of his own works. He feels that, he is wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked. This religion, by teaching him the absolute necessity of dependence on Christ for justification and sanctification, takes from him all ground of boasting. He dares not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but, from every view of his situation, is constrained to cry, *God, be merciful to me a sinner!* Ah, how much of that which with many in our world, passes for religion, would be viewed with shame and rejected with abhorrence, did men truly see their own guilt, vileness, weakness and unworthiness, and the glory of the plan of salvation through Christ. On this plan, the sinner is laid low indeed, and the Lord alone is exalted. To every self-righteous professor, this religion speaks, as in 1 Cor. iv. 7, Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it? And in Rom. iii. 27, Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay; but by the law of faith.

3. From this subject we are led to infer that, to those who possess gospel religion, Christ is precious.

They have not those low thoughts of Christ which are entertained by many in the world, who notwithstanding, call themselves, christians. Ah no: to think

and to speak as some do of Christ, they cannot but view as treason against the King of kings! Christ is *the Lord, their righteousness and strength*. He is, to them, *the chief among ten thousands, and the one altogether lovely!* He is *their trust, their hope, their life, their all!* To you who believe, says the apostle, *he is precious*. God forbid that *I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, expresses the very feelings of their hearts. They adore and love him for what he is in himself, and for what he hath done and is doing for the salvation of a lost world. To Christ Jesus they trust their dearest interests; to him they commit their departing spirits; and through him and from him they look for their eternal all. To such, therefore, the name of Jesus is, *as ointment poured forth*. His honor, the interest of his kingdom, and the prevalence of his truths, are objects near to their hearts. They are grieved when Christ is dishonored, when his truths are opposed, or when the interests of his religion appear to be neglected. With this religion in lively exercise, they can join with the apostle in the text and say, *We esteem all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, our Lord*.

4. From this subject, it follows that, gospel religion, above all others, furnishes the best security for a holy life.

The character given of it is that, it is *a doctrine according to godliness*. An objection is often brought forward against the doctrine of justification by faith, that it tends to licentiousness. Now this objection must be made either from a misunderstanding of the doctrine, or from a wish to discredit it because of a preconceived fondness for an opposite system. Let any one serious

consider the sentiments it inspires ; the views that it gives of God, of his law, of the evil of sin, and of the beauty of holiness ; let him consider the feelings that, from its very nature, it excites in the soul, the necessity that it teaches of man's sanctification, and of his hearty co-operation therein ; let him consider the help so freely and abundantly offered, the powerful motives urged, and the constraining influence which the mercy and love of God, manifested in the gospel, has to lead men to holiness ; and then let him say, whether the doctrines now contended for, do not manifestly tend to constrain men, *to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world* ; to call and quicken their attention to all the duties they owe to God, to their fellow men and to themselves. Should the appeal be made to fact and experience, the truth of the inference advanced will be abundantly confirmed. The most distinguished for piety and godliness have ever been found among those, who have most strictly adhered to the doctrines that have now been advocated.

I shall now close this discourse by a very brief exhortation. 1. To those who have hitherto but too little considered, on what they are building their hopes of acceptance with God. Let me say to such that, no foundation will abide the day of trial but that which God hath laid in Zion. All others will be swept away as refuges of lies. But let every man take heed how he builds on this foundation. We are here in danger of fatal mistakes. Whatever professions of faith in Christ we may make ; if our faith be not of the operation of God ; if it be not a faith that receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel ; if it do not work by love and purify the heart, our pro-

fessions will stand us in no stead ; but, numbered with the enemies of the gospel, we must fall under the awful denunciation, “ Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels !” *Examine yourselves, therefore, whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves : know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.*

2. Let true believers bless the Lord for the glorious foundation he hath laid for your faith and hope in the gospel of his Son ; that he hath called you by his grace, and made you partakers of a living faith in the Lord Jesus. How changed is your state from what it once was ! Now are ye the sons of God ; adopted into his family ; made heirs of God, yea, joint heirs with Christ Jesus. All things are yours : for ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. While you adore him for his distinguishing love to you, and for all your consolations that abound by Christ ; see that ye walk worthy of the vocation, wherewith ye are called ; labour to adorn, in all things, the doctrine of God your Saviour. Testify, both to yourselves and others, the saving nature of your faith, by your works. Let not a vain world deceive and mislead you. Live not after the flesh ; but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever, **AMEN.**