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SERMON,
PREACHED MAY, 1821,
IN THE
BRICK CHURCH, NEW-YORK,
BEFORE THE
PRESBYTERIAN
EDUCATION SOCIETY.

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SERMON.



GALATIANS vi. 10.]

“AS WE HAVE THEREFORE OPPORTUNITY, LET US DO GOOD TO ALL MEN.”

THIS injunction of the Apostle breathes a spirit of the most pure and expansive benevolence. It was the spirit of his divine Master, whose disinterested love was strikingly manifested in that amazing weight of suffering, which he voluntarily endured for our fallen world. “For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”* His holy soul glowed with the most exalted benevolence, when he condescended to lay aside the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, and to be clothed in human flesh, that he might become the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. “Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”† The same spirit of benevolence, which the Lord Jesus Christ thus manifested, warmed the breast of the Apostle Paul. From

* Rom. 15. 3. † Philip. 2. 6—8.

his own experience, he could bear testimony to the blessed effects of the love of Christ. Though a blasphemer and a persecutor, and justly meriting the full vials of divine wrath; yet the love of Jesus arrested him, even while breathing out threatening and slaughter against the Church, and made him a trophy of victorious grace. The flame of holy love was instantly enkindled in his own soul, and prompted him to engage with ardor in the work of benevolence. Though he viewed with complacency those, who bore the image of his divine Master, and felt himself under peculiar obligation to do them good, yet his expanded benevolence embraced the world. He felt the most tender compassion for the wretched condition of the whole human family. Of this he gave practical demonstration, in his unwearied exertions to diffuse as extensively as possible the blessings of that Gospel, through which "life and immortality are brought to light." He considered himself under the most solemn obligation to make use of every effort in his power, that others also might become interested in the riches of that grace, of which he himself had been so large a partaker. When, therefore, his eyes beheld the perishing millions around him, he did not sit down in listless inactivity, and attempt to excuse his negligence by saying that it was the Lord's work, and that he would accomplish it in his own way. No, my Brethren, though he knew that the work was the Lord's, yet he also knew that the Lord had determined to accomplish it through the instrumentality of

human agents. Hence, his spirit was stirred within and prompted him to action. His benevolent bosom, likewise swelled with a sincere and anxious desire, that all his Christian brethren should use their utmost endeavours to save from death a dying world. This was no doubt the spirit that dictated the text, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men." Inasmuch as the same spirit, in some degree, influences the mind of every real child of God, Christians need only have their duty clearly presented to their view, to excite them to the performance of it. In pursuing this subject, therefore, I propose

I. To direct your attention to the objects of benevolence, of which the Apostle here speaks.

II. To the opportunities afforded for benevolent effort ; and

III. To the motives which urge to it.

I. The objects of benevolence.—"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to *all men*." All men, without distinction, are the objects to which the Apostle calls our attention. All, of whatever country or nation they may be, are children of the same parent with ourselves. Bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh ; for God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."* All alike are partakers of the sad effects of the first apostacy. All by nature are sinners, and, as such, are children of wrath, and heirs of misery and death. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death

* Acts 17, 26.

by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* The introduction of sin into the world opened the floodgates of misery, and poured a torrent of woes upon our guilty race. Poverty, disease, and pain are the sad inheritance of fallen man.

1. Men, as it respects their temporal wants, are proper objects for the exercise of Christian charity.

Though the first and great command is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart ;” yet the second is like unto it, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The soul, therefore, that is warmed by the pure flame of holy love, will not only be drawn forth in supreme regard to God, the source of all excellency and perfection ; but will likewise embrace, in the arms of affection, the whole human family. In the parable of the good Samaritan, our Saviour has given a delightful exposition of this second commandment of the law ; and, in his conduct through life, he most strikingly exemplified the benign and heavenly effects of those principles of benevolence which he inculcated. He spent an active and laborious life in works of beneficence and charity. He entered with a generous sympathy into all the afflictions and distresses of mankind. He healed their sicknesses, he supplied their wants, and administered the balm of consolation to their wounded spirits. This example of love he has made it the duty of all his followers to imitate. We are surrounded by ten thousand objects of

* Rom. 5, 12.

want and wretchedness, who have a claim upon our benevolence. The law of love has laid us under an imperious obligation to administer to their necessities. But while the children of poverty and misfortune are extending an imploring hand and soliciting our aid, it is consoling to reflect that they do not seek in vain. It is extremely gratifying to the Christian philanthropist, to look around this favored land and behold the vast variety of charitable institutions, which have been established amongst us. These institutions are calculated to alleviate almost every species of human woe. The haunts of poverty and wretchedness have been explored, the bed of sickness and pain has been visited, and the wants of the needy and destitute have been supplied, by the consoling hand of this heaven-born charity. But however extensive man's temporal wants,—however great the burden of his bodily calamities, and however interesting and important the duty of extending an alleviating hand; still, my Brethren, there is a charity far more interesting and sublime. To this more particularly, on the present occasion, I would call your attention.

2. The souls of men, as objects of charity, claim our superior regard. The body is soon destined to return to the unconscious dust, from which it was originally taken. Its wants will soon have an end, and its pains and calamities will soon cease to claim our sympathy. But the soul will survive the wreck of its earthly tenement, and live in happiness or woe, through interminable ages. Its expansive powers will con-

tinue to unfold themselves, in an eternal increase of knowledge and felicity, or sink deeper and deeper in the awful abyss of endless misery. To this misery, this "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power," all men are exposed, while they remain in a state of impenitence ; for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* The law, in accents of thunder, denounces the dreadful curse, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."† The perilous situation therefore, into which sin has brought the souls of men, calls for the exercise of the most pure and exalted benevolence. In seeking the welfare of the soul, charity may exert her kindly influence to the best advantage. Here she may display her heavenly origin ; for that benevolence which regards the salvation of the soul is God-like. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Through the atonement of Christ, a door has been opened for man to escape the curse of God's violated law, and to become reconciled to his offended Sovereign. But in effecting this reconciliation, God makes use of a variety of means and instruments. Though the salvation of sinners is all of grace, from the foundation to the top stone ; and though every saint in heaven will freely acknowledge, that his escape from hell was wholly owing to the sovereign mercy and invincible grace of God ; yet still it may be asserted,

* Romans 3, 23.

† Ezekiel 18, 4.

that means are not more necessary in administering to the comfort, and in alleviating the distress of the body, than they are in securing the everlasting welfare of the soul.

In the natural world, the husbandman, though sensible that he is entirely dependent for his success upon the sovereign pleasure of the God of nature, nevertheless breaks up the clods of the field, and having prepared the soil, casts the precious seed into the earth. In like manner, the soil of the human heart must be prepared, and the seed of the word must be sown, before a spiritual harvest can reasonably be expected. The command of God upon this subject is, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand : for thou knowest not whether shall prosper either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."* Such is the blindness, ignorance and dulness of the natural heart, that much labor and toil are necessary to prepare it for the reception of the spiritual seed. The understanding must be enlightened by the communication of divine truth, and correct principles inculcated from the dawn of life. Early religious instruction is often blessed to the salvation of the soul. But the grand instrument which God has appointed for the salvation of men, is undoubtedly a preached gospel : for "how shall men believe in him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher ? † Love for the souls of men, and a desire to pro-

* Ecclesiastes 11, 6. † Romans 10, 14.

mote their eternal welfare, dictated that commission which our Lord gave to his disciples before he ascended to glory: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* However simple the institution of a preached gospel may appear in the eyes of unbelievers, and however inadequate to the accomplishment of the great end which it proposes; though it may be treated with contempt, and be termed foolishness, yet of this we are certain, that it has pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.—Those, therefore, who are instrumental in furnishing a supply of gospel ministers, may truly be considered the benefactors of mankind.—I come now

II. To speak of the opportunities afforded for benevolent effort. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men."

Such is the high tone of benevolent feeling in this age of wonders, and so numerous the charitable institutions to which that feeling has given rise, that when we seek for opportunity to manifest the benevolence of our hearts, the difficulty consists not so much in finding objects, as in selecting those which are of primary importance. It is not my design, on this occasion, to point out the particular ways in which your charity may be exercised in relieving the temporal wants of mankind; but to call your attention to some of the opportunities which are afforded of administering to the wants, and of securing the welfare of the immortal soul.—The time has been, when

* Mark 15, 16.

the christian community appeared to feel that the duty of fighting the battles of the Lord, and rescuing souls from the thralldom of Satan, devolved, almost exclusively, upon the ministers of the gospel. But a different sentiment begins very extensively to prevail. Opportunities are now afforded, in the Providence of God, for christians of every age and sex, and from every walk of life to aid in the important work, and to come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Praying societies, the monthly concert, sabbath schools, bible, missionary and religious tract societies, are all powerful engines which the holy spirit has put into operation, for the purpose of pulling down the strong holds of Satan, and of building upon their ruins the spiritual temple of the living God. These institutions afford opportunity to the humblest and most obscure individual to exert an important influence, in promoting the glory of God, in the salvation of the souls of men. The avails of the charity box, consecrated to the service of the Lord by lipping infancy, uniting with the widow's mite, like small but kindred streams, will tend to increase that mighty river, which is destined to flow through the world to refresh the nations. Even where no pecuniary assistance can be afforded, the hand of industry may help on the interesting work by preparing garments for the heathen. But it becomes more particularly my duty, on this occasion, to point you to the opportunity afforded for benevolent exertion, by the institution of Education Societies.

The Society on whose account we are conven-

ed this evening, has been instituted for the express purpose of affording assistance to poor and pious youth, in obtaining an education for the gospel ministry. Though it is less than three years since this society was organised, and not two since it came into active operation, yet it has already under its patronage about sixty young men of hopeful piety and promising talents, who are training up for the work of the ministry. And we are far from exaggerating when we assert, that more than three times that number might be obtained from the fruits of those precious revivals, which have taken place in different parts of our country, if this society had the means of extending to them a fostering hand. It is to enable us to enlarge the sphere of our usefulness, that we now appear before a generous public and solicit their aid. While we duly appreciate the value of the other benevolent institutions which have a claim upon your bounty, we have the fullest conviction that the object of this society yields to no other in point of importance. It is most intimately connected with the vital interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. But while we solicit your co-operation and assistance in the accomplishment of this important object, we wish it to be distinctly understood, that it is not the intention of this society to bestow the charity of a christian public, upon these young men, so profusely, as to nurse them in the lap of indolence and ease, and thus unfit them for laborious exercise in the vineyard of the Lord; but barely to grant them such assistance as shall aid their

own persevering exertions in obtaining the important object of their pursuit. If with the means thus afforded, we shall find them indisposed to help themselves, we shall deem them unsuitable candidates for the labors and toils of the ministerial life.

That learning is a necessary handmaid to piety, in qualifying a person to become a useful minister, it is presumed that no man of reflection, in this age of light, will pretend to deny. But such is the expense of acquiring those literary attainments so important to a minister of the gospel, that few, except the sons of the wealthy, are able to meet it. Sound minds and vigorous intellects, are as often found in the cottages of the poor, as in the palaces of the rich. Hence, it has ever been the policy of wise legislators, to afford the means of education to every class of citizens, that the state might have the benefit of all the talent of the community. And shall not the Christian Church profit by so laudable an example? Shall she be deprived of the labors of some of the best of her sons, for want of means to elicit their talents? How much has she lost by her neglect already? How many heralds of the cross, of vigorous minds and shining parts, might she have added to the number of those now in her service, had the proper means been used to bring them into notice? Like precious gems in the bowels of the earth, their real value has been unknown. But the good Providence of God, by the institution of education societies, is now affording opportunity for these gems to be drawn from the

depths of their obscurity, and to be cleared of their rubbish, that they may appear in all their native brilliancy. Accustomed to labour, and inured to hardship from their earliest years, persons of this description will, generally, be better able to endure the fatigues and privations of a missionary life, than those who from their infancy have been nurtured in the bosom of ease and plenty.

That ministers, in great numbers are needed to supply the wants of the church, has, on similar occasions, been most fully demonstrated by others. Their calculations are before you, and it is needless to spend time in repeating them. I will only add, that the statements which they have made, receive additional confirmation from the numerous calls for laborers, which resound from almost every part of the vineyard of the Lord.

The fervent prayers and supplications of that heroic band of missionaries, who have planted the standard of the cross upon the distant shores of Asia and the adjacent Isles, have been wafted to your ears. They point you to the moral darkness and spiritual death that surrounds them, and entreat you to increase their numbers. Even the Islands of the Pacific, just emerging from the darkness of Paganism, direct their imploring eyes to the American churches and ask for assistance. Convinced of the folly of bowing down to idol gods which their own hands have formed, some of them have already abandoned their ancient superstition, and committed their gods to the flames. They now seem desirous of paying

homage to a God who will hear their prayers, and who is able to afford them protection in the time of their calamity. But of that God they still remain ignorant ; and as to the worship which he requires, they are ready to say as the Eunuch did to Philip ; How can we understand it, except some man should guide us. Will you not then, my brethren, do all in your power to raise them up teachers ? You now have an opportunity to manifest the sincerity of your prayers, when you plead that the Lord of the harvest would thrust forth more laborers into his harvest. You have an opportunity of becoming fellow laborers with God, in evangelizing the world. And do you want motives to urge you to engage in the important work ? These are what I proposed in the

III. Place to consider.

1. We are urged to this work of charity, by the pleasure and advantage that attend it. In this respect, " it is more blessed to give than to receive." There is a luxury in doing good, which no sensual gratification can possibly afford. It enlarges the mind, expands the breast, and fills it with the most pure and exalted emotions. It draws forth the affections to the fountain of love, and fixes them upon an object worthy of their supreme regard. Those sweet consolations which a spirit of benevolence imparts to the soul, are of unspeakable value. They spread over it a divine serenity, and inspire it with a heavenly satisfaction, which no earthborn, miserly spirit can ever experience. The highest pleasures and

enjoyments which can be derived from earthly objects, are at best but short lived and transitory, and utterly unable to satisfy the desires of an immortal mind. In general, they serve rather to contract and debase the soul. But the man, who is employed in works of Christian benevolence, anticipates on earth the joys of heaven. He derives more solid satisfaction from this blessed employment, than is felt by the most splendid conqueror in the car of triumph.

Again—We are urged to engage in the work of benevolence, not only from the pleasure, but also from the advantage which attends it. The reflex actings of benevolence, are of unspeakable advantage to those who are engaged in works of charity. It awakens and excites a spirit of christian communion and brotherly love, which spreads a charm over the whole face of the community. It gives spring to Christian exertion, so that the more Christians are engaged to promote the general interests of Christ's kingdom, the more attention will every particular department of that kingdom receive. The more deeply interested we feel in the advancement of Christ's cause in distant lands, the more lively will be our interest in the prosperity of that cause amongst ourselves. It is impossible for a man to take a lively interest in the welfare of souls, and the spread of the gospel, without, in some measure, being impressed with a sense of his personal need of an interest in those blessings. He will very naturally be led to attend more carefully to the state of his own soul, and thus he himself will reap that harvest of bles-

sings, which he has been procuring for others. It is an interesting fact, which cannot be controverted, that a spirit of genuine benevolence has done more, far more, both for the bodies and souls of men, in this highly favored land, since christians have been engaged in sending the gospel to the heathen, than had been done, in the same space of time, in any former period of our history. Witness those various and multiplied schemes of benevolence, which have been enterprised, for different classes of the community during the last twenty years. No species of temporal calamity has been overlooked, or disregarded, while the spiritual wants of men have been more carefully attended to. Many churches in our own vicinity, which for years had lain desolate without the stated administration of the word, have been roused from their slumbers, and, by the assistance of the charitable, have been furnished with spiritual guides. Witness also that uninterrupted succession of revivals of religion, which the churches, in this land, have at the same time experienced. Truly it may be said, that those who have watered, have themselves been watered in return. And who has been rendered more poor, or more wretched by all these efforts? What family was ever brought to poverty by acts of benevolence? Consult your own observation upon this subject. You have seen the grasping miser robbing God of his due, and shutting up the bowels of his compassion from his fellow beings in distress, that he might hoard up his ill-gotten treasures. He accumulates a

large estate and then dies. What now becomes of that wealth, which cost him so much labour and toil to amass? Soon, very soon, it is dissipated and gone. And what is the condition of his descendants? In general, you will find them amongst the most wretched of the community. Often are they seen wallowing in the sinks of pollution, or plunged into the depths of poverty and disgrace. But who, amongst those who like David, have marked the progress of human events even to old age, has seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging bread? It is undoubtedly a general truth, and one which has been most fully confirmed by the experience of the past, that the children of the truly benevolent, are most prosperous and happy, even in this world.

2. The worth of the soul, which may be saved from death by the efforts of Christians, is a powerful motive to the exercise of benevolence.

Destined to immortality, and capable of an infinite progression in knowledge and happiness, it is of more value than ten thousand worlds. How appropriate to this subject are the words of our Saviour: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*" Time has its limits, and will soon come to a close; but who can count the years of eternity? who can speak the joys of endless bliss, or estimate the weight of eternal punishment? Look forward, my friends, through the long years of a never-ending duration, and contemplate that a-

* Math. 16. 26.

mazing weight of glory, to which he is an heir, who is interested in the blood of the Redeemer ! Then reflect, that all this happiness may be lost for want of christian exertion. Yea more, the soul itself may sink into an abyss of woe, the awful horrors of which, eternity alone can unfold. The redemption of the soul is indeed precious. To render its redemption possible, the Saviour has paid an invaluable price. But the opportunity to redeem it will soon cease forever. Already millions have sunk beyond the reach of mercy, while the Christian church has been slumbering in criminal inactivity. While I am yet speaking, the frightful monster Death is bearing away thousands to the regions of despair. A world of wretched sinners are sinking to rise no more. Is it the time then, for us to sleep in carnal ease and security ? Are our tender mercies turned into cruelty ? No, my brethren, I feel conscious that your souls are awake to the wretched condition of fallen man. On us the blessed gospel has shed her cheering beams. Our hearts have been comforted by the hopes and consolations which it imparts ; and have we no desire that these hopes and consolations should be possessed by those, who are still sitting in the region and shadow of death ? Impressed with a sense of the value of the soul, and having tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, I trust we are prepared, with increased energy, to engage in the holy work of raising up those who shall become Heralds of the Gospel, and of sending that Gospel to every destitute corner of the earth.

3. The example of Christ is, to all his followers, a powerful excitement to benevolent effort.

From the heights of celestial glory, the bosom of everlasting love, he surveyed our wretched state. Love, pure and disinterested, swelled his generous breast. He descended to earth, took up his abode in humble clay, spent an active and laborious life in doing good to the bodies and souls of men, and then suffered a most shameful and painful death, that he might make an atonement for the sins of the world. Behold the privations which he endured, in prosecuting his benevolent work ! Though Lord of heaven and earth,—the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person,—yet, in his humiliation, so destitute was he, that he could say, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests ; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head."* Behold him in the garden ! Such was his agony, that his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Behold him suspended on the cross, forsaken both by God and man, while enduring the tremendous curse of that holy law which man had violated ! But why this depth of humiliation ? Why this amazing weight of suffering ? That you and I, my dear hearers, and all who believe in him might not perish but have everlasting life. Do we then hope that by faith we have been transformed into his blessed image ; and shall we not imitate his benevolent example ? If we have the spirit of Christ, we shall certainly feel a deep interest in

* Matthew 8, 20.

the welfare of perishing sinners. We shall manifest our gratitude to him, who has done so much for us, by redoubled exertions for the advancement of his kingdom in the world.

4. The last and crowning motive which I shall mention, is the glory of God. To glorify God, is the great end of our existence ; and to this all our actions ought to tend. For this the world was made. God has fitted up the vast theatre of creation, that he might manifest to intelligent creatures the perfections of his nature. This interesting object, will, in an especial manner, be accomplished by the instrumentality of the Church of Christ.—The scriptures inform us that, through the medium of the Church, will be made known to principalities and powers, in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God. God is glorified by his creatures when all their powers and all their efforts are consecrated to his service. “Herein is my father glorified,” saith the Saviour, “that ye bear much fruit.” Christians may be said to bear much fruit, and thus glorify God, when, by a Godly example, they exhibit to the world the bright impress of their heavenly Father, instamped upon their souls ; and when they are actively engaged in diffusing the blessings of his grace, amongst their perishing fellow creatures. The glory of God is the delightful theme on which angels dwell. As the conversion of every sinner is an additional exhibition of the mercy and grace of God, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. It was the prospect of that glory,

which would redound to the Godhead, by the work of the Redeemer, and the consequent extension of the reign of benevolence, that animated the celestial choir at the Saviour's birth. It was this that tuned their harps to sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Do your hearts, my brethren, beat responsive to these heavenly strains? You now have an opportunity of giving practical evidence of it, by aiding in the work of Redeeming love. By raising up faithful missionaries, who shall be instrumental in turning many to righteousness, you may add new notes even to Gabriel's lyre. When translated to the mansions of glory, whither you hope ere long to arrive, what joy will thrill your heart, when you hail the arrival of many happy spirits, rescued from death, by those very Missionaries whom you have been instrumental in raising up for the work of the Lord. No person will then regret the sacrifices which he has made, for the advancement of God's glory, in the salvation of sinners. I trust I am speaking to many, in whose breasts the pure flame of benevolence has been enkindled by the Holy Spirit. Some portion of that love, which Jesus manifested for a dying world, has doubtless ere this warmed your hearts. The objects of benevolence, and the motives to exertion, have been presented to your view. You need no more. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men." AMEN.



