

HOME,
THE SCHOOL,
AND
THE CHURCH;
OR THE
PRESBYTERIAN EDUCATION REPOSITORY.

EDITED BY
C. VAN RENSSELAER,
CORRESPONDING SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

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THE
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ARTICLE I.

CHILDREN BLESSED IN THEIR PARENTS.

BY THE REV. DAVID MAGIE, D.D., OF ELIZABETHTOWN, N. J.

“And the Lord said unto Noah: ‘Come, thou and all thy house, into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.’”—GEN. vii. 1.

IN all the dealings of God with men, we find that mercy rejoiceth against judgment. The very threatening to destroy the world by a deluge was accompanied by a kind and gracious invitation to Noah to come with all his family into the ark. Not himself merely, but his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives, were to be preserved.

Taking this invitation to the patriarch in its connexion, it seems like a bright and beautiful bow, formed on the background of a black and angry cloud. One family was to be saved from the wreck of a drowning world. Not a window of heaven could open, or a fountain of the great deep break up, until this entire domestic circle, as well those brought into it by marriage as those born in it, was securely enclosed in the ark. It was a household deliverance in which all the members were represented by their appropriate head. Brothers, sisters, and other relatives, of whatever degree, were left behind, and those only preserved, who made up the single, regularly constituted family. The reason given for this gracious procedure, is “for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” Noah's personal piety not only saved sons, wife, and sons' wives from destruction by the deluge, but it led to influences which, we have ground to hope, rescued them from the bitter pain of eternal death. Thus it is that light shineth in the midst of darkness, and the very denunciation of judgments is coupled with a precious intimation of mercy.

We find here the germ of a doctrine, which runs through the whole Bible, and is daily carrying encouragement and consolation to the bosoms of thousands of pious parents. In covenant with God themselves, it cannot but be delightful to see the pale of this covenant including their children also. God's promise is first to them personally, and to their seed after them in their generations; and it is a promise which we are assured shall never fail, so long as the sun and moon endure. What can be more interesting to fathers and

ARTICLE XXV.

THE GOSPEL SENT TO ALL CLASSES.

BY THE REV. JAMES HALL, D.D., OF N. C.*

"Thou shalt go to all that I sent thee, and whatsoever I command thee, thou shalt speak."—JEREMIAH i. 7.

GOD has, in every age, furnished his church with a series of ministers, or religious instructors, by whom he has communicated his will to the human race. Some of those have been extraordinary, others ordinary ministers of his word; the first he has employed to communicate new truths to their fellow creatures, the others to explain, illustrate, and enforce those truths already communicated. The former, when necessary, always carried their testimonials with them, which consisted in foretelling future events and working miracles; and without one or both of those, the world was under no obligations to believe that their mission was divine.

The class of extraordinary teachers, we have reason to believe, have been few in number when compared with those who may be termed ordinary; and those few God hath, in former ages, honoured as his primary messengers to publish the terms of salvation to a fallen world.

Of those the Lord Jesus was the supreme head; all the prophets, as well as apostles, being under his superintendency, hence the spirit of prophecy is called the spirit of Christ.† But as the spirit of prophecy has now ceased, none since the apostolic age having pretended to it except enthusiasts and impostors, it will follow, that the spirit of inspiration has also ceased.

This will certainly be granted by every impartial reasoner, who will distinguish between the meaning of the words, inspiration and illumination. The one is an exhibition of the will of God to man, either in the communication of some new doctrine never before revealed, or in the knowledge of some future event, not discoverable by human reason. The other is the enlightening influences of the Spirit of God shed upon the human mind, by which that mind has a clear and spiritual discovery of divine truths, and by which those truths have a practical influence both on the heart and life.

* Dr. JAMES HALL, one of the distinguished ministers of North Carolina, was born at Carlisle, Pa., in 1744. He commenced the study of the classics at the age of *twenty-six*, and was graduated at Princeton in 1774, under Dr. Witherspoon, with whom he also studied theology. He was licensed in 1776, and ordained in 1778 over the churches of Fourth Creek, Concord and Bethany, N. C., of the latter of which he remained pastor until his death in 1826. He established a classical academy in the bounds of Bethany Church. This sermon was delivered in 1792, at the ordination and installation of the Rev. *Samuel C. Caldwell*, son of Dr. David Caldwell, over the churches of Sugar Creek and Hopewell. We are indebted to the Rev. S. C. PHARR, for a copy of the sermon, printed at Halifax, in 1795.—ED.

† 1 Peter i. 11.

From these short definitions, it is presumed this conclusion is obvious—That the inspiration of the holy Spirit was peculiar to the prophets and apostles, and that the illumination of the same Spirit is common to every believer on Christ, as well as to every faithful minister of the gospel; so that what in modern times is by some called inspiration, would by them, if they would advert to the true meaning of words, be called illumination. And as the inspiration of the holy Spirit was indispensably necessary to those who were to communicate the will of God primarily to man—so the illuminating and sanctifying influence of the same Spirit appear also necessary to those who would explain, illustrate, and inculcate, revealed truth in a right manner, for this plain reason, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

It is granted, that the person to whom the words of our text were first addressed, was constituted an extraordinary minister of God’s word; but although in this he differed from those who are termed ordinary ministers—yet in this both ought to agree, that to whomsoever God, by his express command, or by the dispensation of his providence, may send one whom he has called to the ministry of his word, to them they must go, without hesitation; and whatsoever he commands, that shall they speak; or in other words, they are to preach the Gospel to every creature to whom they may, by the providence of God, be sent, and are to communicate to them, so far as ability and opportunity may admit, the whole counsel of God.

The text being thus introduced and explained, we will endeavour to illustrate it under the following heads of doctrine:

I. Show the various classes or characters to which the ministers of the Gospel are sent.

II. Give a sketch of the various messages which they are directed to deliver. And then apply the doctrine.

As there is such a close and necessary connexion between these heads of the doctrine, we will treat them together. But let it be previously observed, that many observations that will be made respecting any one class, will be found applicable to many others besides those of whom they are predicated.

1. Ministers of the Gospel are sent to those who are grossly ignorant of the doctrines of religion.

These may be subdivided into, 1st, Those who have been without the means of instruction.

Such are to be found not only among the savage tribes, but also among those nations that are called Christians; who from their state of society, or the negligence of their parents, are almost totally ignorant of the doctrines of the Gospel.

Those are often found more docile and tractable than many who have had the advantages of a religious education, and usually lie more

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

open to conviction than those in whose minds divine truths have been inculcated without any good effect.

Such ought to be treated in a gentle and tender manner, exhibiting to them the most plain and necessary instructions—the knowledge of God, their dependence on, and relation to him—that miserable state to which sin has reduced the human race—the method of recovery through a Redeemer—the necessity of faith, repentance, and a holy life, in order to be qualified for the enjoyment of God. In fine, such are to be fed with milk, not with strong meat, but such as they are able to receive.

2d, Those who have enjoyed, but have neglected religious instruction. To such we should state the crime of negligence as nothing less than the abuse of knowledge; showing, that God will deal with all according to the privileges he has bestowed upon them. Hence he represents those who will neither know nor consider his kindness exercised towards them, as more ungrateful than the senseless ox, or the more stupid ass.* Such should be taught, that the difference between those who sin against religious knowledge, and those who live in ignorance under the means of instruction, amounts only to this, that the one knows his duty but will not perform it; whereas the other determines not to know it, because he has no design to reduce it to practice. They should therefore be made sensible, that the ignorant and the wilful sinner shall be destroyed together—“When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”†

2. They are sent to them who know the will of God, but do not obey him. Those, it is to be feared, form a great part of our common audiences. The few evidences we have of practical godliness is a melancholy proof that this is the case, even where the means of grace are most faithfully dispensed.

With such it is difficult to deal. Divine truths, even those that are most pungent and practical, are such beaten subjects with them, that they usually fall like water on a rock, not making the least impression.

In order therefore to do anything that may promise success, we must preach to such plainly, pointedly and fervently. Recourse must be had to the reason, and especially to the conscience of the knowing and wilful sinner, showing how religious knowledge, if it do not influence the practice, must aggravate the sinner's condemnation; and how just that threatening is, “And the servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”‡ To such also the offers of pardon and reconciliation through the Redeemer, should be held forth, showing that if the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; if he turn unto the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, he will abundantly pardon.§

* Isa. i. 3.

† 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

‡ Luke xii. 47.

§ Isa. lv. 7.

3. The ministers of the Gospel are sent to backsliders. This is a fearful case, but not out of reach of the divine call. Some are backsliders in heart only, while the outward conduct may be fair and uniform; and indeed it is always in the heart that backsliding takes its rise. Others have thrown off the mask, formerly worn, and returned openly to the ways of iniquity. The case of both is dangerous; for the one leads towards, and the other often lands its unhappy subject in final apostasy.

Such must have had a partial work of the spirit of grace on their hearts. This, when not improved to the purposes of salvation, only qualifies them for a more dreadful fall; as they often turn to the practice of sin with greediness, and consequently rebel against greater light and more powerful testimony of conscience than formerly, having been made partakers of a partial sanctification, and experienced something of the pleasures of a religious life. Such a state must be more dangerous than even that of the unawakened sinner. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."*

It is difficult to find any avenue by which we may have access to the consciences of such hardened creatures. Their hearts are like hot iron thrown into cold water; the higher it has been heated it becomes the harder. So they, the deeper their convictions have been, are proportionately more hardened against the fear of the Lord. But as they are the objects of the divine call, ministers of the Gospel should leave no means unattempted that have an aptitude to reclaim them.

Their danger should therefore be stated to them in strong and pathetic terms; showing them how much more dangerous their relapse is, than their original disease.

They should be reminded of their former exercises, the views they have had of their obligations to obey the law of God, the innumerable breaches of it which they have seen themselves guilty, and the subsequent punishment to which they have seen themselves liable from the justice of God—the resolutions they formed to live more answerably to the end of their creation, and how far they have fallen short of the fulfilment of those resolutions—that these things will lay a foundation for deep and bitter remorse, in proportion to the distance they have fallen back, if ever they be brought to repentance in this world; but more unspeakably dreadful should that repentance be laid over for the world to come.—They should also be shown, that although their case is dangerous it is not hopeless—that God calls them particularly to return and they shall have mercy.—"Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine

* 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"*

When doubts arise in the mind, they look back to former experiences, and make the same use of them that the true believer makes of Jesus Christ, who is his only ground of comfort.

Such should be informed that former experiences are a dangerous foundation on which to rest a religious hope; for the heart is deceitful above all things; and on the above principles, if our hearts deceive us once, that deception may be final, and consequently fatal—that self-examination is a great part of the Christian's business through life—that faith is a vital principle, and will be a constant source of vital holiness—that it regulates the heart as well as the life; and that except the true believer can have new discoveries of the love of God to his soul, he can no more live comfortably on the recollection of past experiences, than a man famishing for want of food can satisfy himself by recollecting, that a month or a year ago he had eaten a plentiful meal. The language of every pious soul is that of the psalmist, when devoid of sensible manifestations: "My soul thirsteth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, wherein is no water to see thy power and thy glory as I have seen thee in thy sanctuary."†

Such should be reminded of the state of those who received the seed on stony ground; that their joy might be as great, perhaps greater than of those who received seed on good ground, yet soon became abortive; and that many have professed a high degree of religious comfort, and have set out with zeal, whose root has soon become as rottenness, and whose blossom has gone up as dust. In short, such ought to be urged to repent and do their first works, if ever they would expect to escape the wrath to come, or enjoy the favour of God.

6. Those convinced of the guilt, and consequently of the danger of sin, is another class to which the ministers of the Gospel are sent. For this purpose the Lord Jesus, the prime minister of the Gospel, was specially commissioned by the Father, and in him all his faithful ministers are authorized, declaratively, "To proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound."‡

Some of those are struck as with lightning, having the passions chiefly affected. A dreadful tumult is raised in the mind, and what must I do to be saved? is all their cry. They have keen flashes of conviction, which are often mingled with gusts of temporary joy. If such be ignorant of the doctrines of the Gospel, they lie exposed to the wild extravagances of an enthusiastic fancy, and ought to be well instructed in the leading doctrines of the Gospel, or method of salvation.

If they have a considerable degree of religious knowledge, they are often in danger of despondency, from a view of the abuse of that knowledge.

* Isa. xliv.

† Psal. lxiii. 1.

‡ Isa. lxi. 1.

Such should be shown, that God can be just and yet be the justifier of the most ungodly sinner, who believeth on Jesus; and that although they have destroyed themselves, yet in him is their help.

Others are wrought upon in a more slow and gradual manner. They are rarely so deeply affected as those above described, but more rationally and uniformly; and are more apt to persevere. Both characters, especially the former, grasp at comfort, and are in danger of being too easily healed. Under great awakenings, a comfortable text of scripture, suggested to the mind, has removed a sense of guilt and excited a flow of joy, which has continued for a considerable time, when a future conduct has testified that the unhappy subject of that joy was still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.

Both characters should be urged to press forward, and shown the danger of miscarrying in so great a work.

Hence they should be warned against the deceits of the human heart, and the legal bias that is by nature of every child of Adam.

The nature and necessity of regeneration, of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, should be explained to, and inculcated on them. The way of salvation should be made plain to them, and they urged to flee by faith to Jesus, by whom alone they can escape the wrath of God, and obtain a title to the heavenly inheritance.

The danger of loitering should be stated to them; knowing that to stand still in the ways of religion is really to go back; and they should be exhorted to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure, both on account of that storm of vengeance that will fall on those who draw back to perdition, and that eternal weight of glory which awaits all who persevere, as well as on account of those natural obligations they are under to God as his reasonable creatures.

7th. Young converts are another class to which the ministers of the Gospel are sent. The Lord Jesus commands them to feed his lambs.

Those who are young in religion have often more need of instruction than they imagine, especially if they have emerged suddenly from the depths of keen distress to lively and comfortable views of their interest in the favour of God. They feel themselves so transported with the novelty of the scene, all within them appearing new and strange, that they are apt to mistake those effusions of heart, which in a great degree, arise from mere natural gratitude, for deep and rooted affections.

Hence it is common with such when those overflowings of passion subside, to conclude that all they have experienced was a delusion.

Their religious joy they considered as one of the best evidences of grace; whereas it was only the result of the supposed goodness of their state; not considering, that those that received the seed on stony ground are said to receive it with joy; whereas there is not a word said of the joy of those who received it on good ground; but

before them, together with the lowest evidences of grace laid down in the scriptures.

They should be exhorted to look more to their desires than their supposed attainments, knowing that, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled:"*—that although they have toilings, trials and temptations, they should consider, that Christ himself hath suffered, being tempted; that he is able to succour them that are tempted; and that through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of heaven. They ought to be exhorted to press forward in the ways of holiness, to exercise consciences void of offence towards God and man, and keep themselves unspotted from the world.

If the darkness be only occasional, and in those who have enjoyed a comfortable sense of the love of God to their souls, they should be exhorted to search for the cause why God contends with them; and as soon as discovered, to turn to God by sincere repentance; a candid confession of their sins, and a new application to the atoning and purifying blood of Christ for pardon and sanctification. This was David's conduct, and it was attended with happy effects; for says he, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me." But when he comes to the following resolution he immediately obtains a sense of pardon. "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."†

9. The last class we will mention, to whom the ministers of the gospel are sent, is that of assured Christians—The Lord Jesus commands his disciples to feed his sheep as well as his lambs. There are means of sanctification provided as well as of conversion.

While believers are conversant with sensible objects, they will always be exposed to forgetfulness of their Father's house. They therefore have need to be kept in remembrance of their duty, as well as to have new instructions communicated to them—they are to be encouraged to go on with diligence and zeal in their Christian course—to be examples to others in all godly conversation—to manifest their attachment to the Lord Jesus by a holy life, letting their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father who is in Heaven.‡

They should also be exhorted to assist those who minister in holy things.

Although it is not the province of private Christians to preach the gospel, yet much is in their power, as a means in the hand of God, for the promotion of the cause of religion.

Every one has intimate acquaintances, many have families and other dependents, over whom they may have influence in word and deed. With such, Christians should be exhorted to be diligent; and surely none can be so fit to recommend religion to others as those

* Matt. v. 6.

† Psalm xxxii. 3, 4, 5.

‡ Matt. v. 16.

who have felt the power of godliness, and are walking under a sense of the favour of God.

We have designedly omitted every class of infidels, and of those who wrest the scriptures to the destruction of themselves and others, for these reasons. That this discourse, in which it will probably be thought, we have already been too tedious, might not be swelled to too large a size, and that it might be rendered as practical as our ability and the nature of the subject would admit.

We will now conclude by deducing a few practical inferences from the doctrine.

Inf. 1. Ministers of the gospel should study the human heart, in order to be able to communicate suitable instructions to others, and give to every one his portion.

This can be done only by being acquainted with themselves. He who has never felt the plague of his own heart, has never seen the twofold evil of sin, the fulness and sufficiency of Christ, and the beauty of holiness, must be a wretched guide for others in the way to glory.

Were any of us under a necessity of travelling through a country in which we had many enemies, and exposed to many dangers, any of which might prove fatal to us, and through which there was but one safe way, and that difficult to find, we would much rather choose a guide who had been accustomed to travel that way, than he who had only read an historical or geographical description of it. The latter might make a flourish of language, in describing the intricacies of the way and the dangers to which the traveller might be exposed, without knowing whether those things were true or false; whereas the other, having an experimental knowledge of them would certainly be the best qualified to lead the traveller through the difficulties of the way; point out to him where he may be most exposed to danger, and direct him to the best means of safety and defence.

The case is exactly similar, though much more serious in the matter before us. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. He, therefore, who is incapable of knowing those things that are essentially necessary to salvation, must be exceedingly disqualified, while in that situation, to teach others how to obtain everlasting life.

2. Ministers of the Gospel should adapt their discourses to various characters. We generally preach to promiscuous assemblies, in which there are all, or more than the characters lately described.

In order, therefore, to promise ourselves usefulness in our public performances, we must address ourselves to the feelings and particular cases of our auditors, so far as we are probably acquainted with their characters; if otherwise, some hungry or thirsty souls must go away disappointed. This will especially be the case, when an audience is entertained with some obscure speculative doctrine, which

even if true and founded on the word of God, yet alone will be but ordinary fare for those souls that are anxiously inquiring what they shall do to be saved; and still more so when they are subjects much controverted, and are treated in such a manner as is calculated to form parties and foment divisions among Christians of various denominations. Such subjects, especially the latter, should be touched with a cautious and sparing hand; and it is evident, that if they were less frequently brought into the pulpit, it would contribute more to the peace of the Church and the honour of religion. The great object in preaching the Gospel should be, to endeavour, as a means in the hand of God, to awaken those who are asleep in security, reclaim backsliders, point out to sinners their danger, encourage the timid, comfort the comfortless, strengthen the weak, and animate the godly in the ways of holiness.

3. The duties of ministers and people are mutual and reciprocal. If it be our duty to warn our fellow-creatures of their danger, it is also the duty of our auditors to take the alarm, and flee from the danger. If this were not the case, it never would be the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; which is evident from our Lord's own declaration.

It is to be feared, that many are insensible of this, who sit under the sound of the Gospel, who are so far from profiting by it, that it renders them more guilty. Of such the Lord Jesus says, if I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin. If such was the case, when the bulk of the Jewish nation, through the influence of their teachers, mistook him for an impostor and a deceiver, what must be the case of those who acknowledge his mission was divine, that he is the only Saviour of sinners, and yet will not bow to the sceptre of his grace.

Surely the condemnation of such, must be aggravated in proportion to the greater light that is now shed on the world, and the more general acknowledgment of the truth of the Gospel.

To conclude, let ministers and people be deeply impressed with this idea, that the word of God should be so spoken and heard as it becomes accountable creatures; knowing that we must render an account for the faithful or unfaithful discharge of the duties belonging to our office, and you for the improvement or misimprovement you make of our instructions. Let us so improve the inestimable privileges which we now enjoy, that they may produce the fruits of holiness in this world, and in the world to come, everlasting life; which may God grant to each of us, for Jesus' sake. *Amen.*