

THE

# **PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER,**

OR ORIGINAL SERMONS BY LIVING MINISTERS IN THE PRES-  
BYTERIAN CHURCH,

ON

**THE IMPORTANT DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY,**

PRESENTED IN A CLEAR AND COMPREHENSIVE MANNER, FOR THE  
INSTRUCTION OF THE PRESENT AGE, AND IN DEFENCE  
OF THE TRUTH.

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The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.—PSALMS.

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EDITED BY REV. S. C. JENNINGS.

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VOLUME II.



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THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

VOL. II.

PITTSBURGH, JUNE, 1833.

No. 1.

**SERMON XIV.**

BY ANDREW WYLIE, D. D.

PRESIDENT OF INDIANA COLLEGE.

**THE NATURE OF FAITH.**

JOHN 14:1. *Ye believe in God: believe also in me.*

Nothing can be plainer from the word of God than the importance of faith.

We are said to be justified by faith—to have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand—to live by faith—to be saved by faith.

On the other hand, it is written, that without faith it is impossible to please God, and that he that believeth not shall be damned.

There is, however, a faith which is not genuine, which, the apostle James tells us, the devils possess, which is without works, which is dead being alone, which will not save the soul.

It is important, therefore, that the nature of true faith be well understood. And though more, perhaps, has been published from the pulpit and the press on this subject than on any other within the whole compass of theology; yet, I believe it still needs to be discussed; not only because certain opinions continue to be propagated concerning it which are exceedingly false and dangerous, but because it has, by the orthodox, generally been treated so much at large that the simple, elemental nature of faith has been lost sight of, amidst the multitude of remarks which it has been thought necessary to make in order to illuminate its diversified operations.

Faith, in the New Testament, is generally represented as having a special reference to Christ. It is so in the text: and else-

where we read, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son of God shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

The object of faith is always a person. The credit which we give to the truth of any statement is in consequence of our confidence in the person who makes it. Where this confidence is wanting there can be no faith in the statement of a person, though it should be confirmed with an oath: for, according to the ancient saying, it is the man that gives credibility to the oath, and not the oath to the man. We may, indeed, consider a statement as true, though made by one in whom we place no confidence, because we have sufficient evidence, independently of his authority, for the truth of the facts contained in the statement. But we do not, in this case, believe either the man, or his statement. His authority goes for nothing. We know the truth without him: his testimony does not make us the more certain, nor would the want of it render our certainty less.

The confidence which we place in a man, whom we believe, when he states things as matters of fact, regards only his veracity and the accuracy of his judgment; his veracity principally, though not exclusively. For he may be deceived, as was the case with Jacob, when he exclaimed that his beloved son Joseph had been torn to pieces by wild beasts. The declaration was no lie, though the thing was not true.

Faith in relation to matters of fact has been called historical; and it is plainly resolvable, as we have just seen, into confidence in the veracity and accuracy of the narrator. This may be considered the simplest form of faith, because the attributes which it contemplates in its object are the fewest possible.

When statements are made which respect not the past but the future, other attributes, besides veracity and accuracy, are necessary to entitle the person making them to our confidence. Take, for instance, a promise. When we consider a promise as entitled to our regard, we do so, because we repose confidence in the promiser, that he is sincere in making the promise, that he is faithful and will stand to his engagements, that he will live till the time for their fulfilment, and otherwise will be able to make good his engagements. Could there be a concurrence of all these conditions, in the case of any promise made to us by mortal man, we might have full faith in such promise. And here, also, it is manifest, that the object of our faith would be not the promise in itself considered, but the person making it: that is

to say, we expect with certainty that the promise will be fulfilled, because there are in the character of the person promising all those attributes which are necessary to warrant such expectation.

But the promise may be so modified as to depend on something to be done on our part. The promise itself may be a part of a plan in which our concurrence may be necessary. This concurrence may be of different kinds and degrees. The author of the promise may require of us nothing more than merely to commit ourselves to his guidance and protection; or he may require us to be actively employed in certain things necessary to be done, and to be done by us, for the execution of his plan. The plan he may think it improper, in the mean time, to disclose to us; as is the case of the commander of a fleet sailing under sealed orders. In such a case, in addition to all the other attributes of character necessary to justify our faith in the author of the promise as before supposed, wisdom and goodness would be requisite. We must believe that he is kindly affected toward us, and that the concurrence which is required on our part is, in all its extent, necessary and proper. Here it is manifest, that our confidence must be, in part, implicit. We do not understand the plan, in which our concurrence is required: but it is enough for us that its author does, and that he has been moved, in proposing it to our acceptance, by a sincere regard for our welfare. But still, there is yet a further condition behind, which is necessary to our actual concurrence. The part required of us may be contrary to our prevailing inclinations: it may make it necessary that we should forego pleasures which we relish; interests which we value highly; honors which we hold dear—or that we should encounter opposition which we have not the heart to encounter. On this supposition, we will dislike the plan proposed, and be secretly dissatisfied with the author of it. We will not give him our confidence. His promises are now a nullity. We may think them true: but they are not good; they are clogged by hateful conditions. Here we are unbelievers, not for want of evidence but want of will. The sole reason why we have not faith in the author of the plan proposed, and in the promises which it involves, is that our heart is not right with him—there is not a coincidence in our views and feelings.

To illustrate this matter, let us suppose the case of a slave in some one of our Southern seaports. The captain of a vessel about to sail for Africa offers to purchase his freedom, and to

give him a gratuitous conveyance to the land of his fathers, and a happy settlement there:—but he is unwilling to accept the offer. And the reason is, his mind has become debased with his condition. He is in the employment of a master who uses him as the instrument of dishonest gain and of sinful pleasures, in which the slave, to secure his fidelity, is allowed to participate. He, therefore, does not desire greatly to be free. He hears the proposals of the benevolent captain: but, having no experience of such goodness in his own heart, he is slow to trust to the appearance of it in others: and besides, he cannot rise to the dignity of the privileges set before him. Therefore he has no faith in the captain, and does not close with his proposals. Suppose him now, by some means, to undergo a renovation of character,—to put off the slave, and, in heart and desire at least, to become free. He will consider the matter in a different light. The generous spirit which begins to breathe and move within him will seek its like in the breast of the captain, whose benevolence he will think to be real, and the deliverance which it proposes desirable. Still, perplexing doubts might arise in his mind. “The land of my fathers,” he might say, “is far distant: a dangerous navigation is to be tried: is the vessel sufficient? are the crew competent?” These, and a thousand more, perplexing thoughts might arise in the mind of the poor slave, which, by any knowledge he possessed, he could never remove, and which, indeed, no knowledge, in his case, could remove, but that which could be gained in no other way than by making the experiment. But there is one thing which he might possess, and which would serve him instead of all the knowledge he could desire; and that is, confidence, unshaken confidence, or trust, in the sincerity, the veracity, the skill, the goodness, the ability of the captain; or, in other words, faith in him.

The examples of faith recorded in the sacred Scriptures strongly support the position assumed and illustrated in the foregoing remarks. Let the examples of Noah and of Abraham serve as a specimen. When God revealed to Noah his intention to destroy the race of man from off the face of the earth, by a deluge, the prediction was accompanied by a command to build an ark, and an implied promise of safety, by that means. This information was given, not to increase his knowledge, but to influence his conduct: and unless he had put confidence in the truth, power, and goodness of God, his conduct would not have been influenced by it—he never would have built the ark.

For, if the truth were not told him, the ark was unnecessary: and, without the power and goodness of God, it would have been unavailing. This confidence in God, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews calls faith. Heb. 11:7. "By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." When God called Abraham to leave the land of his nativity, promising to make of him a great nation, and that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed, the principle to which the whole communication, the command and the promise together, was addressed, was plainly confidence, or trust in God. The circumstances strongly indicate this. Accordingly, it is said, by the same inspired writer, that, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out unto a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed and went out, *not knowing whither he went.*"

That the elemental nature of faith is confidence or trust in a person, is manifest from the way in which, by all Greek writers, secular as well as sacred, the word ΠΙΣΤΙΣ (the term to express faith) is employed. Joined in construction with a word signifying a person, it always means to put confidence in that person. Instances are too numerous and too obvious to need quotation.

In the writings of the Old Testament it is remarkable, that we seldom find the word, faith; whereas, the word, trust, is every where occurring; and in connection with the same commands and promises, with which we find faith, in the New: "It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes"—"Trust ye in the Lord, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength"—"Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is"—"They that trust in the Lord shall be like mount Zion, that can never be moved." In many places in the New Testament, also, the word rendered believe, might, with evident advantage to the sense, be translated, trust. Take, for instance, 1 Pet. 2:6. "Wherefore, also, it is contained in the scriptures, Behold I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." How strangely does this sound! "a corner stone," and "he that believeth on *him*!" Instead of "*him*," read "*it*," which will suit the original equally well; and instead of "believeth" put "trusteth," and you will preserve both the image and the meaning which, undoubtedly, the apostle intended to convey.

The gospel is a persuasive argument, made up of facts, commands, invitations, promises, threatenings: and to believe the gospel can mean nothing short of yielding to the force of this argument. The drift and point of the argument, however, is to persuade us to trust in God, through Christ, for eternal salvation, and for every thing else that we need. Any thing less than this is not faith. And if so, we may believe every one of the facts, doctrines, and precepts of the gospel to be true, and yet have no faith in the Author of the gospel.

Whoever will carefully inspect his own moral nature, and how it is that his mind is influenced by motives and principles of action, will perceive that nothing but trust in God can produce those effects which are ascribed in the sacred scriptures to faith. Trust in God "is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen:" for the character of God—his whole character—is the reason why all holy beings trust in him, and this is what gives validity to all his promises, and thus lays a firm foundation for hope, substantiating and making present future blessings. It is trust in God that "overcomes the world:" for his favor can compensate the loss of the world, and leave a redundancy of eternal advantages. It is trust in God that "purifies the heart:" for it is God alone who knows the heart, and he will patronize no evil thought. It is trust in God which lifts the soul above the fear of evil: for, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" And, there is no other principle which can produce these effects. Faith cannot, if by faith we understand, what some do, a mere assent of the understanding to divine truth. Many, alas! who pride themselves on their orthodox faith, are loose and unprincipled in their lives. Such were the Jews of old who persecuted the prophets. Such, the murderers of "the Prince of life." Such, they who made antichristian Rome "drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus." All these believed much truth, and, according to their respective standards of orthodoxy, they were all orthodox.

There can be no genuine trust in God without some previous knowledge and belief of the truth. For a cordial acquiescence in the will and ways of God, which trust in him supposes and implies, there cannot be, without a knowledge of what *is* the will, and what *are* the ways of God. It is possible—there is reason to fear it is common—for people to impute their own weak prejudices and partialities to the object of their worship; to think that God is "altogether such an one" as they themselves are, and that he will exercise the same sort of indulgence

towards them which they exercise towards themselves. Influenced by such notions, they will trust in God, to patronize them in an evil course. But it is not the true God—it is a phantom of the imagination—that is the object of their trust. Persons of this description are apt to be punctilious and abundant in the performance of the ceremonies of religion, while they are, at the same time, regardless of heart-purity and moral rectitude. They neglect “the weightier matters of the law;” and think to make up for the defect, by tithing “mint, annise and cummin.” They may love to talk of their experiences, be seemingly much engaged in what they think the spiritualities of religion, and deeply concerned for the salvation of the souls of others, while their own souls are far, very far, from being right with God in this essential matter of trusting in him. The truth is, they feel towards God as a partisan towards his leader, a client towards his patron; and imagine, that, whatever position they take, they are always “on the Lord’s side.” They conceive that he, of course, is bound to favor them. His cause cannot well be managed without them. Their prayers and efforts avail much. They affect an indecent familiarity with the “King Immortal, Eternal and Invisible,” and act as if he needed their advice and the aid of their ingenious contrivances, to carry on the affairs of his kingdom: as if he had not, already, prescribed, in a Book, to which no supplement is needed, the whole of what they and all men ought to know and to do in obedience to his will. Where there is much of this arrogance there must be great weakness and little genuine piety; probably none at all. Yet, such persons are usually confident of their state. They profess to trust God; but their character resembles, too much, that of those whom the Master describes, Matt. 7:21,22. “Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

The gospel, as has been already noticed, is a persuasive argument: and faith in the Author of the gospel is an active principle. It supposes a purpose. He that trusts another trusts him for something which he expects him to perform, or *with* something which he believes will be safe in his hands. The believer does both these things: he trusts God *with* all that he is, and *for* all that he desires.

Now, there is nothing in the character of God to encourage, much less justify, the expectation that he will favor, or even connive at, iniquity. The wicked—those who allow themselves in an evil course—those who are careless even, as to purity and integrity of their principles—cannot, therefore, really trust God. They may, indeed, so far mistake his character, or their own, or both, as to *imagine* that he will be their friend. But they will be disappointed. It is giving a representation of the matter infinitely below the truth, to say that their confidence is unauthorized:—it is, in the highest degree, insulting to the Almighty. It implies the opinion that he is accessible to corruption, and may be gained over to the side of injustice and iniquity!—What a blasphemous imputation to be cast upon the character of the thrice holy God! Holiness confederate with sin! Iniquity on the throne of the universe! Omnipotence and infinite Wisdom pledged to the cause of universal and eternal disorder and misrule! Such a supposition involves in it the sum and substance of all moral absurdities: and yet it must be verified in fact, or else the confidence of the wicked will be disappointed. The government of the Eternal is fixed. “Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. Righteousness and truth go before his face.” He is not subject to partialities. He has no favorites. He cannot be bribed or flattered. The prayers of the wicked are an abomination to him. He delights in goodness, and the entire system of things throughout the universe he will so move and direct, as to secure its interests.

So deeply fixed in the human heart is the truth of these sentiments, that fear is always the companion of guilt. The enlightened sinner finds it the most difficult of all things to trust or believe in God. The majesty and purity of the divine character repel him: a sense of unworthiness dashes his rising hopes. Hence the necessity for some strong manifestation of mercy, made in such a way as to preserve the character of God from the imputation that he might connive at sin—an imputation which the unqualified and indiscriminate exercise of mercy would seem to justify. Such a manifestation only can encourage the confidence, and “revive the spirit, of the contrite ones.” Here, precisely, lies the glory of the gospel, that it gives such a manifestation—soothing to the penitent, by the hopes of pardon which it inspires; repulsive to the light and inconsiderate expectations of the careless, and the hypocritical, by exhibiting the claims of justice not abated, not neutralized, but sustained and preserved in their utmost vigor on the principle of vicarious atonement. How full of authority, blended with the most at-

tractive, overwhelming kindness, is the language of the text, considered as proceeding from the lips of the Author of this atonement, or as I should rather say, from his heart—from the heart of Love—the seat of infinite benevolence and compassion—and addressed to the guilty and the helpless! And, when the heart has been brought to feel its guilt and helplessness, and is made to *hear* this language—that is the “joyful sound”—that is the “hearing” by which “faith cometh.” Then trust in God, and in his Christ, springs up in the soul—working by love—purifying the heart, giving strength for work and for warfare and for suffering, till this state of trial and discipline is ended, and faith gives place to vision, and hope to enjoyment.

The principle, then, or essential element, of faith is trust in God. This one principle may be acted out in various ways. One, and a principal one, of these is “a belief of the truth.” The credit we give to the statements of any person in whom we have confidence, is one of the ways in which that confidence exerts itself. Yet, some truth must be believed respecting God, before we can trust him: “He that cometh unto God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him.” If it be asked, Is there no more than this necessary to be believed in order to faith, and therefore, to salvation? the safest answer would be, That we should, on such points, confine ourselves to “what is written.” Infants are saved without the actual belief of any truth. Cornelius had faith before Peter was sent to preach to him. For, before that, his prayers and alms came up with acceptance before God: and without faith, we know, it is impossible to please God. The saints of the Old Testament had faith: but they did not believe *all* the truths of the gospel, for these truths were not all then revealed. That the heathen world, generally speaking, are out of the way of salvation, is a lamentable *fact*, made manifest by their atrocious vices. But, that many orthodox *assenters* to the truths of christianity are in the same deplorable condition—is not this a fact, made manifest with equal certainty, and by the same means? That it is impossible for any individual living, on who ever did live, beyond the sound of the gospel, to have such a knowledge of the character and will of God as to lead to faith in him, I would not take upon me to affirm. Neither the Bible nor our standards would warrant such an affirmation. But the question, How much truth is necessary for a man to believe in order to faith or trust in God? is widely different from this other question with which it has sometimes, strangely, been confounded, How much truth must a man believe, in order to his becom-

ing a member of the Presbyterian church under the care of the General Assembly? The former of these questions no man can answer. No answer that could be given would apply in all cases. The same quantity of truth, which might suffice in certain circumstances, might not, in others. But the latter of these questions let our standards answer. Break down these standards—and our sanctuary would become a Babel. Good people cannot all meet together for worship in the same church, at any rate. Let those meet together who can agree. Paul and Barnabas had a contention; and they separated, to end it. Some think they have found “a more excellent way.” For one, I must approve of the conduct of Paul and Barnabas, not for their dissention, but for their agreeing to separate, rather than prolong the dispute. But their separation was not a separation of Christian fellowship, nor of church fellowship. That is a very different matter. Alas! for the divisions into communions—separate, hostile communions, which have taken place in the church of Christ! And yet, it seems, they are too few! What is the cause? What is the cause! Does not every body see, that it is the unhallowed, the absurd fondness of too many theologians for carrying the spirit of light, flippant, superficial speculation into every thing sacred. In theology there can be no discoveries. Practical theology has been settled long ago: mystical theology never can be settled by disquisition. It is not a matter for disquisition, but for implicit credence. The Homousians and the Homoiousians, had they lived and disputed incessantly till this day, (as, by the help of Aristotle, they might,) would have been no nearer an agreement than when their discussion began. They discussed—the essence of God!

In like manner, the circumstantials of Christianity never can be settled by disputation. Were the Christian world prepared to receive the truth, many particulars here might be specified. But the Christian world has not yet learned that the “kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Plain, practical things are neglected, because we would be profound! Paul, discoursing on a certain subject, stopped short, as if on the brink of an unfathomable abyss, and exclaimed, “O, the depth!” But, now, there are those—thanks to “the march of mind”—who can fathom these depths!

In the mean time, the plain facts, precepts and doctrines of the Gospel—rich mines of glory and beauty—themes which “the angels desire to look into,” and which it were worthy the eloquence

of an angel's tongue to preach—are contemptuously passed by! And some miserable Shibboleth is taken up instead. And this it is, which has divided the church—yea, and threatens still further to divide the church!

Opposites illustrate each other. The opposite of faith is unbelief. Unbelief were a venial sin, compared with what it is, did it consist in withholding the assent of the understanding from any one truth, or from all the truths, contained in the Bible. But in this—in any thing like this—it does not consist. It lies deep in man's moral nature. No amount of evidence can conquer it. The wicked do not believe in the good. There are those among us, who think themselves wiser than common people, and possessed of stronger thinking faculties than the most—because their understandings are balanced in sceptical equilibrium on the question, whether there is a God! Why? Has nature no voice to them? Is there no earth for them to see, teeming with fruits, and clothed in beauty? No succession of day and night!—no revolving seasons!—no varying winds and flying clouds!—no stars, glittering in the azure sky!—no moon, walking in brightness, to cheer the night!—no sun, with floods of golden radiance, creating the day? Are they incapable of discerning, throughout all nature, a perfect harmony and adjustment of one thing to another—the signatures of power, wisdom and goodness in every thing around them, especially in every thing that lives and moves? No. They are not idiots. Why, then, not recognize a Presiding Mind? Because one of the attributes of that mind is Goodness, and they do not believe in goodness, on earth, or in heaven. It has been justly said, that if reason be against a man, he will be against reason. So here: if goodness be against a man, he will be against goodness. Unbelief, like faith, belongs not chiefly or primarily to the head: it consists in the estrangement of the heart from God and moral excellence, and its consequent supreme devotion to the world and self. The reason why unbelief rejects the truth of God, is because it belongs to its nature to withhold its confidence from goodness when it speaks, as well as when it exerts itself in any other way.

To this is owing its damning malignity. Men “choose darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” To say, that a man's belief must necessarily be according to the evidence, is as shallow in philosophy, as it is false in theology. Except in abstract science, the intellect never acts independently. In all other cases it is in the power of taste and passion to dethrone reason, and usurp her place. In common life this is

seen and acknowledged every where. When bad men accuse the good with hypocrisy, they are sincere in their allegations; otherwise, they must be supposed to believe in moral excellence, and stand self-condemned for the want of it; like Satan when rebuked by the good angel Zephon:

———“ Abashed the Devil stood  
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw  
Virtue in her shape how lovely; saw and pined  
His loss.”

The exercise of faith—trust in God—is peculiarly appropriate to our condition in this world. Every thing here is fluctuating; nothing stable; nothing exempt from change. Prosperity is deceitful: riches take wing: friends die: enemies lurk in ambush: our strength decays: the light of life declines apace—soon heart and flesh shall fail. How happy, in such circumstances, to say, “Thou, O Jehovah! art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.”

God is entitled to our highest confidence. We, indeed deserve his displeasure. But, in Christ, he is reconciled. His justice is appeased in the atonement, and now his love and mercy salute and embrace the returning sinner. Trusting in him we shall not be disappointed. The event will verify his promises. “The Lord is a sun and shield: he will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from such as walk uprightly.” How cheering to the honest heart are these gracious, comprehensive promises! From the exercise of faith in the Author of them may we not derive consolation in the severest afflictions, knowing that “the trial of our faith being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth, shall be found unto praise and glory and honor at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

In the uncertainties of life and the decline of earthly comforts, we best glorify God, by trusting in him. When appearances are all in our favor, we thank none for their confidence: but when they may be so construed as to give plausibility to the malicious accusations of our enemies, who insolently begin to sing over us an anticipated triumph, then it is that we feel peculiarly gratified and honored, by the confidence of our friends. The character of God is traduced, and his name blasphemed, in this present evil world. The ways of his providence are often mysterious, and seem to countenance the suggestions of the enemy, who, tauntingly, asks the tempted believer, “Where is now your God?” This is the time when the believer should show himself

“strong in faith, giving glory to God”—when he should say with Job, “Though he slay me yet will I trust in him”—when he should sing, with David “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”—or with Habakkuk, “Although the figtree should not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

Faith is the true principle of moral courage. It gives the spirit of the soldier and the martyr. The believer is enlisted under the banner of Him who leads “the sacramental host of God’s elect” and set upon “the straight and narrow way”—a way leading up the steep of difficulty, and in the face of armed legions. Faith only can inspire him with resolution to advance. The supposition that any thing can be gained, by a violation of duty, or lost, by adhering to it, is bottomed in a virtual denial of a just moral government over the universe; yet, appearances are often such as to countenance such denial. The wicked are not only seen to “prosper in the world and to increase in riches,” but their wealth and prosperity often seem to be, and in fact are, the fruit of their wickedness. Affliction and poverty are often, not only the *lot*, but the consequence, of virtue. Yet, it is certain, that the Author of our nature could not have so constituted the plan of things, as to place interest and duty in opposition. He surely designed that we should move in the path of duty under the *united* influences of the love of virtue, and interest. But this can take place only on the principle of “walking by faith and not by sight;” since it is faith alone which can assure us, that whatever pain or loss we may endure here, in the cause of virtue, shall be compensated hereafter. Faith gives to the cause of virtue the character of service done for God, and encourages the mind of the devoted to that service, with the reflection, that their Heavenly Master regards their honest efforts with complacency, and has prepared for them, when they shall have finished the course of patient obedience, “a crown of glory which fadeth not away.”

Whoever supposes that there is, now that the times of bloody persecution have passed away, no more scope for the exercise of christian courage, knows but little of the matter. There are duties, still, to be performed, which require patience, zeal, self-denial, and indifference to the obloquy, not only of the evil and censorious, but of the unthinking part of the good.

And in reference to these duties, the question will have to be answered "What have ye done more than others?" Let us prepare, by a good life, a life devoted to the service of God, an answer to this question. Thus shall we show our faith by our works. Trusting in the Lord and doing good, we shall "dwell in the land"—whatever hell may threaten—"and verily" we "shall be fed." In the path of duty, for the honor of God and religion, let us be undaunted. To the timid Christian, in God's great name, let me say, "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth." Let the unbeliever quail: "But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour."

[Contrary to expectation, it was ascertained after the manuscript of the foregoing sermon had in part passed through the hands of the printer, that there would be a deficiency of matter to complete 16 octavo pages. As the author lived so remote from the place of publication, it was deemed advisable to present several extracts somewhat on the same subject; which it is hoped, will give some idea of the views of a dangerous errorist on one point, and at the same time correct them.]—Ed.

EXTRACTS FROM DR. JENNINGS'S "DEBATE ON CAMPBELLISM," RECENTLY PUBLISHED.

"In confirmation of his doctrine Mr. Campbell proceeded to state, that in his youth he had read 'three histories,' one of Asia, one of Africa, and one of these United States. That he believed them all; of this he was assured. But his belief of the other two, had not the same effect upon his mind, and did not lead to the formation and execution of purposes, in any degree, like his belief of the history of this country. That his belief in this history, was fully equal to the faith of the gospel which is connected with salvation, and was productive of similar results. For he was thereby induced to leave the country of his nativity, (Ireland,) to forego all the bright prospects and advantages which were there presented to his view; in a word, to forsake all, and risk the dangers of the mighty deep, to seek a settlement in this country, with a view to the enjoyment of the privileges and advantages which he believed it was calculated to secure. And what better or higher faith could the gospel require than this, which had exerted such a powerful influence on his mind?"

"With regard to the illustration of the nature of faith, drawn by Mr. C. from his own conduct and experience, it was replied, that neither the appositeness nor force of it was perceived. Besides, it was confidently believed, that, in the estimation of the public at large, Mr. C. would not be considered as having acted a very adventurous, meritorious, or even disinterested part, in exchanging Ireland—a land groaning under the pressure of taxation, and the heavy hand of oppression, where the poorer classes of society frequently suffer for the actual necessities of life—for this fair land of plenty and freedom, which presents so many flattering prospects to the virtuous and the enterprising from every country and every clime; and where Mr. C. himself had, it was believed, more than realized all his expectations. I would, nevertheless, add, that the illustration of Mr. C. seems very aptly to elucidate the principles upon which, it is apprehended, too many (whether Mr. C. is embraced among the number I will leave every one to judge for himself,) make a profession of the religion of Christ, whilst they are historical believers, but have not "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine," which God has given in his word and gospel. Whether they be conscious of it or not, it is often too evident, that the real motive whereby they were induced to confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus, was the hope of temporal advantages, such as wealth, reputation, or influence over their fellow men; whereas, had no such prospects presented themselves to their view, their historical faith, however sincere and perfect in its character it may have been, would no more have influenced them publicly to profess Christ, than did Mr. Campbell's belief of the history of Africa induce him to take up his residence among the Hottentots. This leads me to observe that it was farther, in reply to Mr. C., urged as a decisive objection to his view of faith, that, in thousands of instances, it was evident it had no abiding practical influence upon the hearts or lives of such as *historically* believed the word of God and the gospel of his Son. And therefore, it might be fairly argued or inferred, that in no case, was a mere historical faith productive of a permanent and universal *change* of the human character, similar to that produced by the 'faith which worketh by love.'"

"It was urged in reply to Mr. C., on this part of the subject in debate, that if it was thus characteristic of historical faith to be unproductive of good and lasting fruit, much more palpably would this be the case, if it consisted, as Mr. Campbell asserted, in the historical belief of the facts related in the New Testament, separated from the doctrines with which such facts stand connected. Thus, if it were possible to strip the facts contained in the gospel history of the doctrines with which they are not only intimately, but inseparably, connected, so as simply to believe the facts, that Jesus Christ, of Nazareth, was born under the reign of Augustus Cæsar, and was crucified as a malefactor under Pontius Pilate, upon Mount

Calvary, near Jerusalem,—how would this belief influence the heart of any man to the exercise of right affections towards God and his neighbor; or his life, so that it should be habitually conformed to the law of God, any more than would the belief that Julius Cæsar was assassinated at Rome?"

"Thus he makes the genuineness of faith to depend, not upon its *properties*, but upon its supposed *quality* or strength. What would be the estimation of the skill of the professed metallurgist, who should pretend to assay gold upon a similar principle? As every particle of gold, however small it may be, is intrinsically valuable, and can be distinguished, not only from dross, but any other metal, however it may happen to be mixed with one or the other; so, it is not only evident from the word of God, but in accordance with the enlightened judgment of every impartial man, that every *degree* of true or genuine faith is, intrinsically, and, as it regards the cardinal point of our justification in the sight of God, and our acceptance with him, equally valuable. Thus we are not only said by Paul, to be justified by faith, (be it weak or strong,) whereby we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, but the same apostle directs such as are weak in the faith to be received, but not to doubtful disputations. As this seems *confessedly* not to be the case with historical faith, it follows that it cannot be the faith whereby Abraham was justified, and the elders obtained a good report: or the faith whereby Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, who, it would seem, in the offering which he made, was actuated by something very similar to the historical faith of Mr. Campbell.

"The unscriptural character, as well as absurdity of Mr. C.'s view of faith will further and still more palpably appear, from the position which he attempts to maintain, that a sinner is not justified by faith, or *that* exercise of the heart whereby a sinner flees for refuge to lay hold of Christ as the hope set before him, but by or through immersion, which as has been seen, he calls an *act* of faith. It would seem, from this view of justification taken by Mr. C., as though he himself was doubtful of the sufficiency of his historical faith, and therefore immersion is brought in to aid its efficacy. But be that as it may, we not only are clearly taught in the scriptures, that "being justified by faith (not by any supposed act of mere external obedience) we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" but that it is "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Can it then be doubted, that the instant a man thus believes "with the heart unto righteousness;" or that in the same moment that he truly, by faith, *receives* or lays hold of the Lord Jesus, as the LORD, or Jehovah his righteousness, he is justified freely, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, according to the riches of his grace?

"Now let us apply these remarks, or rather the clear passages from the word therein cited, to the case of the eunuch, whereby we shall be enabled to determine not only the nature of his faith, and whether he was justified before, or in consequence of his baptism, but also, and that upon safe grounds, to pronounce a judgment upon the whole subject of this *historical* faith of Mr. C.

"It is then most clearly manifest that Philip did not baptize the eunuch upon his profession of a mere *historical* faith, or such a profession as Mr. C. and his followers would deem sufficient; for if he and they be not grossly misunderstood, they exclude all supposed exercises, at least religious exercises of the heart, alleging that we might as well speak of the religion, not only of the head, but of the hand or the foot, as of the heart. But it evidently appears that the eunuch received baptism, in consequence of the reason which Philip had to conclude, that he had believed; or, at least, that he did then, before his baptism, receive the Lord Jesus and did believe on him, not merely *historically*, but with his heart, nay, with *all* his heart. "See, here is water," said the eunuch, "what doth hinder me to be baptized? If thou believest with *all* thine heart thou mayest," was the evangelist's reply. But if the eunuch believed with the heart, as Philip had, and as we have, just ground to conclude he did, then it is not only evident that his faith was of a higher and nobler character than that which is simply *historical*, but that he thereby was forthwith justified, or believed "unto righteousness," even "the righteousness of faith;" and that too before he received baptism, which he afterwards received, as the "seal of the righteousness of faith which he had," while as yet he was unbaptized."

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**SERMON XV.**

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**ELECTION NOT CONTRARY TO A FREE GOSPEL.\***

JOHN 6:37—40. *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.*

In this passage, we have it plainly asserted that the blessings of the gospel are free to all who are willing to accept them. The very object of our Lord, in uttering it to the Jews, seems to have been, to bring before their minds the true character of his salvation, as a benefit designed not for their nation alone, but for the men of all nations under heaven; a benefit, therefore, which would have wide and glorious effect in the world, even though the posterity of Abraham should be found rejecting it in mass. "Ye have seen me, and believe not;" yet shall not my mission be in vain. Others will accept the salvation which ye despise; and come they from what region of the world they may, they shall experience the truth of the declaration that I am the "Bread of Life." "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast

\*The substance of the following Discourse was originally preached in the First Presbyterian Church, in compliance with a desire, which had been expressed on the part of some persons in the Congregation, to have the subject discussed from the pulpit. The time seemed to call for it; and having been engaged by the Pastor to supply his place on an occasion when he was called to be absent from the city, I did not hesitate, on his recommendation, to make this the theme of one of my sermons at that time. A wish has been intimated, to have the sermon published; and it is now given to the world, accordingly, in the hope that it may be useful to some minds, in relieving them from difficulties on the trying question to which it relates. This explanation is given here, to account for some forms of expression that occur in the discourse.

out." "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life."

The doctrine now stated, is not peculiar to any one part of the sacred volume. It stands out in strong relief from almost every page; and it enters vitally into the whole system of grace which it reveals. The language of the Old Testament is throughout of this tenor: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" The invitations of the New, are, if possible, still more free. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Declarations like these teach as plainly as language can, that men are never straitened in God, but always in themselves, when they live unblest with the salvation which is brought nigh to them by the gospel. The blessings of that salvation wherever the gospel comes, are like the light of heaven poured forth for the free use of all: and if they are not apprehended, it is only because the eyes of sinners are shut against their presence. They are a broad, deep river, sent out from the throne of God by all the habitations of men; and if any stand unrefreshed in their places, it is only because they will not betake themselves to the stream and drink.

Who can attentively consider the history of the gospel redemption, and entertain any doubt on this subject? Is not the whole mediatorial work an exhibition, and an overwhelming argument, of the love of God to lost men, and of his willingness to save them? It originated in love—it was carried forward in love—it came to its consummation in love; and it is set forth, accordingly, in the sacred volume as an irrefragable proof, that God is kindly and tenderly disposed toward the human race, and for the very purpose of overcoming the feelings of distrust that possess the hearts of sinners in regard to this point; and subduing them into penitence, gratitude, confidence, and child-like affection. "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Is it true, that this immense sacrifice has been made on the part of Heaven for the benefit of earth? Is the story of the Redeemer's humiliation from the height of glory to the low estate of miserable man in this dark and dying world, a sober narration of facts that have actually taken place? Is it no fancy picture, but a sketch from real life, that the gospel holds up to view, when it tells, how he emptied himself, and became poor, and labored, and suffered shame, in the body, for the salvation of men? Is the record of the transactions that occurred on Calvary, worthy of credit? Did he bear our sins in his own body on the tree,

dying the death of a malefactor under the rage of men, and pouring out his soul in unutterable anguish under the wrath of a holy God? And can any doubt, after all, whether the grace of the gospel be, what it claims to be, the flowing of unobstructed kindness in the divine mind toward all who are willing to receive it? He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all—oh, how shall *He* be supposed to harbor still a feeling opposed to the welfare of a single soul, or to hold forth the slightest hindrance to its salvation? "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

The doctrine of the bible, as now stated, on this subject, falls in with every man's common sense and habitual consciousness. The blessings of the gospel are offered to all men alike, on the condition of their being willing to receive them on its own terms; and all men feel, that in accepting or rejecting them they act with just the same kind of freedom that belongs to them in any other exercise of mind whatever. Who doubts, in ordinary life, whether he have the power of choosing freely in his own mind or not? All men know that their wills are not controlled by any force contrary to their own nature in other cases; and the conscience of every man tells him that he is just as free in this respect, and as independent of control, in the state of his mind in relation to the gospel. The invitations of the gospel address him as they do other men; and if he will not comply with them, his own spirit is witness against him that the fault is with himself.

The passage, however, which I have taken for my text, asserts another doctrine, as plainly as the one which I have been thus far holding up to view. It teaches, that it is only by the intervention of an extraordinary impulse from God himself, that the minds of men are ever brought to embrace the salvation of Christ; and that wherever this impulse is put forth, the result of it is to make men willing to come to him for life. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me—I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me: and this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." And immediately after he added; "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." The doctrine evidently exhibited in these declarations is, that when men are led to embrace Christ, they are led to do so by some kind of influence exerted upon them from God, which of itself secures the result, and without which they would never have taken the step at all. It is of no account to inquire, at present, *how* this influence is exerted; whether by trials in God's providence which draw out the soul after higher blessings than any that are to be found in this perishing world; or by the mere exhibition of truth, held up by any of the ordinary ways of

teaching; or by an impression made immediately upon the mind itself, without any means of this kind. The *fact* is all that is necessary to be contemplated now, and *that* is unequivocally affirmed by our Lord, in the passages just quoted.

And need I ask, if this doctrine, also, be not in accordance with the general representation of the bible? Is it not a doctrine incorporated with the very system of righteousness and life which the scriptures reveal? Is it not a part of every evangelical creed, that an influence from the Spirit of God is wanted, in all cases, to incline the soul of a sinner to a compliance with the gospel invitation, and that it is never embraced *without* that influence? It is surely unnecessary to spend any time, in argument on this point, at present.

But this doctrine of the necessity of a divine influence to bring men to Christ, so generally received, draws along with it another doctrine, less acceptable to multitudes who read the bible—I mean the doctrine of ELECTION. If no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him, it follows, that the ultimate reason of this coming in any case, must be looked for in God. One man comes, because he is drawn, and another persists in refusing to come, because he is not thus drawn; every man, says the Saviour, “that hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me,” and consequently if any do not come, it is because they have not been taught of God in a like way; in the divine mind, therefore, we must look for the ultimate reason of the difference that is found to have place between them. But if the ultimate reason of the difference lie in the divine mind, when that difference appears in fact, it is plain that it must have existed there from all eternity. If it be only an influence going out from God that ever brings a soul to repentance, God must have known from the beginning every case of repentance, that would ever take place; for who will say, that his own actions have not been always present to his mind, or that he ever does any thing, which he had not all along expected to do? And if God *knew* from the beginning every case of repentance that should ever take place, it is manifest his knowledge must have been the result only of his own *determination*, in regard to such cases; since we have seen that the reason of the thing in any case must be looked for ultimately in himself, and his own will, therefore, and nothing else, must be regarded as the ground of all he could know on the subject. This is the doctrine of Election, against which so many hard things have been uttered in different ages of the world, but which it will always be found much easier to cover with reproach, than it is to force it from the strong entrenchments of reason with which it is surrounded.

But I am called upon to-day to consider the difficulty which

grows out of the apparent opposition to each other of the two doctrines, which I have now presented to your attention—the doctrine of divine election, on the one hand, and the doctrine of the perfect freeness of the gospel offer, on the other. Can they be made to stand together, it has been asked, in the same system, without collision? Are they susceptible of reconciliation? In answer to this inquiry, I remark:—

1. THE DIFFICULTY IS NOT ONE THAT BELONGS PARTICULARLY TO THE BIBLE OR TO THE SUBJECT OF RELIGION. It presses with all its force upon every department of mind, and upon the whole range of human action. It grows out of the very idea of a moral universe—an idea, which is not peculiar to revelation at all, but set forth in every manifestation of the living world, and which constitutes the groundwork of religion, only as it lies at the bottom of all the common interests and activities of life. There is no reason why the interest of religion, should be regarded as being vitally concerned with the question, how this difficulty can be solved, more than any other interest. Christians are not held to the solution of it by their faith, more than all other men are; and if they should find it utterly impossible to give any satisfactory explanation of it, there would be no reason at all for them to be unsettled in their opinions, on that account, or disturbed in their feelings: if christianity could suffer under any trial of this kind, all the concerns of society would suffer just to the same extent, and the disadvantage, if any there should be, must in the nature of the case rest upon all men alike. Men have no right to urge upon religion this particular difficulty, as if it stood out to view only on the pages of the bible, or as if it were a distinguishing characteristic of the system of philosophy that the bible teaches; and the friends of the bible have no reason at all to show themselves sensitive, when attacked in this way, or to throw themselves upon their defense, as if the burden of removing the objection lay with any sort of exclusiveness on *them*. Christianity is but a part of the universal scheme of life, and is certainly not bound to sustain the weight of a difficulty that belongs to the whole, and springs from the very idea of its constitution as a whole. A few remarks will set this in its true light.

Election, in religion, is only one particular manifestation of that divine sovereignty which reigns through all the world of God's providence. The idea of this sovereignty, absolute and universal, is one that forces itself upon the mind in the very act of contemplating the being of God; and the whole course of nature is one steady development of its truth. If there be a God at all, his providence must extend to all affairs and all events, however minute; and in the very nature of the case, it must proceed according to the purpose of his own mind, had from all eternity. In actual life, accordingly, we meet with the decrees

of God every day. Election, and reprobation too, stand forth upon our view in whatever direction our eyes are turned. Is it not the election of God, that makes one man rich, leads another to honor and renown, and clothes a third with the high accomplishments of learning? Is there no election in the circumstances of men's birth and education, so widely different, and yet so deeply influential on their character and happiness? Where in fact are we *not* thrown upon this doctrine, in the ordinary providence of God? Where is the case, in which when the question is put, Who hath made thee to differ? the respondent will not be driven for his ultimate answer to the sovereign will of the Infinite Mind?

But the doctrine of election is not more implicated with the common experience of life, than is the doctrine of the perfect freedom of the human will. Every man carries in his own bosom the evidence, to him all-sufficient, that he is morally free under all circumstances; and he is never led to doubt for a moment that his fellow men around him are in this respect as free as himself. All men continually act under the influence of this persuasion. They proceed in all cases under the conviction, that the human mind is governed by motives only, and is at perfect liberty therefore to choose and refuse according to its own pleasure; and on this ground alone the virtuous are every where held deserving of praise, and the wicked of blame. Now this moral freedom, is nothing more than that liberty, in virtue of which the blessings of religion are brought within the reach of all to whom the gospel is preached. God addresses men in the bible, just as he addresses them in the constitution of nature; what he offers, he offers just as freely and fully in the one case, as he does in the other; and when the offer has been made, the mind acts just as freely, in embracing or refusing it, in the one case, as it does in the other. In the world of this life's interests, then, as well as in the world of religion, we find a doctrine of perfect liberty, in respect of man, on the one hand, as well as a doctrine of the most absolute sovereignty, in respect of God, on the other.

These doctrines, therefore, are not peculiar to the bible; and consequently the difficulty of reconciling them, is not one that should be considered as having any particular force in regard to religion more than to any other subject. If they seem contrary to each other here, they must do so throughout the broad range of human life. The difficulty lies in the fundamental idea of such a constitution as the world presents, and is universal in its applications.

2. **THE DIFFICULTY IS NOT A PRACTICAL ONE.** It does not bear upon any of the interests of life, in such a way as to interfere at all with human action. It throws no obscurity on a single question of duty; it unsettles no principle of prudence; it

brings no embarrassment into the operations of conscience; it disturbs no law on which the regular activity of the world is made to depend.

In ordinary life, this is abundantly manifest. Who stands still in his worldly pursuits—who feels himself paralyzed in his undertakings—who neglects the means of safety—who defies the approach of evil—who holds himself absolved from the charge of imprudence or guilt—on the plea, that all things are determined of God, and must take place according to his will? The doctrine of God's sovereignty over all affairs is one from which philosophy can make no escape; and yet men feel no difficulty in forming their plans, and going forward with their enterprises, just as if every result was dependent on themselves. They may puzzle themselves, occasionally, in their speculations, with the question, how this doctrine can be reconciled with their own free agency; but whether they find themselves able to solve the difficulty or not, they never dream of letting it disturb their thoughts, or perplex their movements, in any of the practical affairs of life. They are guided in these affairs by the principles of action that God has implanted in their nature, without suffering themselves to go back, and inquire, whether these principles are in themselves worthy of their confidence; and they feel, that if they even had it in their power to convince themselves that they are not, it would not avail to free them, in the least, from their force; they would still feel and act as they do now.

Now the difficulty is just as little practical in religion, as it is in common life. There is just as little reason, why a man should allow his mind to be disturbed with it, or hindered in the pursuit of its object, in regard to spiritual interests, as there is in regard to those which are temporal. It does not touch a single principle of action to which religion makes its appeal. These are all grounded in our moral nature itself, and whether we can explain the philosophy of that nature or not, will always make their power to be felt and acknowledged; the difficulty in question cannot strip them of their force, and the clearest solution of it could add nothing to their original strength. The sense of guilt—the apprehension of wrath—the desire of salvation—are all independent of this whole subject. The consciousness of acting freely, in accepting or refusing to accept the grace of Christ, is never disturbed by any speculation to which it may give rise. All the motives to holiness, are just what they would be if there was no difficulty in the case. The difficulty is not practical; and it should never be allowed to interfere with the soul's action in any case.

3. IF IT SHOULD BE FOUND IMPOSSIBLE ALTOGETHER TO SOLVE THE DIFFICULTY IN QUESTION, THE CIRCUMSTANCE WOULD NOT NECESSARILY AFFECT THE CREDIBILITY OF EITHER OF THE DOCTRINES TO

WHICH IT RELATES. Though baffled in all our endeavors to explain it, we might still maintain our faith in both, without being chargeable with any offense against sound reason. Things may be unsusceptible of reconciliation to a created mind, and yet not stand in contradiction to each other after all. A difficulty may be *above* reason, and yet not *against* it; it may lie beyond the grasp of human intellect, and yet involve no absurdity in its own nature. Those who oppose either the doctrine of election, or the doctrine of free grace, have not by any means gained the victory, when they have shut the holders of these doctrines up to the task of reconciling them with one another, and found them incapable of surmounting the difficulty. These last may be unable to show how the two things are upheld in perfect harmony, and yet be fully justified at the bar of reason for refusing to reject either the one or the other.

There are cases in which the contrariety that holds between two tenets is of such a nature, that one or the other must be false; but there are cases also in which such a contrariety may have place without affecting the truth of either. Things may stand so related to each other that our minds can by no means reconcile them with each other, and yet may have severally such evidence of being true, that we shall have no power to question their reality. How should it be expected to be otherwise? To be able to reconcile all facts that have place in the world, would imply on our part a perfect knowledge of the first principles and remote relations of things, such as can be supposed to belong to God only. There are, therefore, in every science truths clearly ascertained on their own proper evidence, which yet the most comprehensive minds are unable to reconcile with each other; the point where they come into contact, and appear in their full harmony, is hidden far back in the reason of things beyond the utmost range of human observation. And if the case be so even in the science of mathematics, why should it be thought strange to find it so also in the philosophy of morals?

We might admit, then, the doctrines which we are now considering to be of such a nature that we could not understand their agreement with each other, and still hold them both as true, without being chargeable with any offense against reason. It is not necessary, in order to believe them both with full confidence, and to have a practical sense of them on our spirits, that we should be able to show how they can be reconciled together.

4. THE DOCTRINES IN QUESTION, WHATEVER DIFFICULTY MAY ATTACH ITSELF TO THE THEORY OF THEM, ARE FOUND TO HARMONIZE PERFECTLY IN THEIR PRACTICAL FORM, AS THE OBJECTS OF SENTIMENT IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT. I have already said, that the difficulty of reconciling them is not one that bears upon the range of men's practical duties. It might be supposed, however,

that this consequence does not take place, only because one or the other of these doctrines is not really believed, or because one or the other of them is not adapted at all in its nature to become incorporated with the inward life of the spirit as a principle of living action. But I affirm, now, that this is not the case. The doctrines may dwell together as practical sentiments in the same mind, without any sort of conflict. In this view, they give rise to no difficulty whatever.

We sometimes hear it said, that the doctrine of election is not practical. The speculative difficulty that grows out of it is admitted to have no bearing upon practice, and so it is inferred that it is no matter whether people hold it or not. It is looked upon as a mere notion or metaphysical abstraction. But this is a wrong view of the case entirely. The difficulty that occurs from a comparison of this doctrine with the doctrine of human liberty, is indeed only in speculation, and has nothing to do with practice; but both of the doctrines themselves are practical in an eminent degree, and the one not more so than the other. It is as an object of *sentiment* mainly that the doctrine of election is important: It is only when it becomes incorporated with the interior feeling of the soul, that it can be said to be properly realized at all.

Both the doctrines now under consideration are practical, we say, in the highest degree; and they are found, at the same time, to harmonize under this character, in the most perfect manner. They can be *felt* by the same mind, and at the same time, without any attending sense of opposition or discord whatever. The one feeling has no tendency at all to *destroy* the other. They can live together, and stand out with equal distinctness upon the consciousness of the spirit, without bringing into it any sort of distraction or disunion. No schism is experienced in the inner man, under the presence of two forces, which speculatively regarded seem so hard to be reconciled. The soul feels it perfectly possible to admit in its living experience both the one and the other, without the least sense of violence done to its moral nature, or the smallest confusion of its moral views and feelings. The two articles of its faith subsist together in perfect agreement, and are not found to have the slightest disposition to clash with each other in their authority. And in fact, they impart vigor mutually one to the other. The sentiment of personal free agency is never so full, as when men have the deepest impression upon their spirits of the sovereignty of God; and the more truly they realize their moral accountability, and the necessity of their being active themselves in the business of their salvation, the more entirely will they feel their need of help from on high, and enter into the meaning of the declaration, that no man cometh unto the Saviour except the Father draw him.

The two sentiments sustain each other in the soul in which they dwell; and their influence, accordingly, upon the activities

of life, is the combined action of harmonious principles tending to the very best results. The idea of absolute sovereignty on the part of God, has been represented to be inimical to righteousness on the part of men: as tending to destroy the sense of personal responsibility, and to inspire the mind with presumptuous hope, on the one hand, or presumptuous despair, on the other. But however it may seem in theory, the operation of the doctrine, where it is practically felt, is in fact widely different. The two ideas create no schism within, and are attended with no conflicting operation in the forms of action to which they give rise.

In support of all that I have now been saying upon this point, I appeal to facts which are open to the observation of all. History is full of confirmation on the subject. Have the holders of the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, in different ages of the world, been doubters on the question of their own free agency? or have they showed themselves less diligent than others, in the cultivation of all that pertains to virtuous character? Quite the reverse. The doctrine has ever stood in close union with high ideas of responsibility, and severe views of duty. Even when it has degenerated into an extreme, bordering upon fatalism itself, as it has often done, it has still been found more friendly far to the interests of morality, than the idea which makes man independent of God in order to make him free. It always entered as an element into the best of the heathen systems of philosophy, and was that which, more than any thing else, seems to have given them whatever power they had. The sect of *Zeno*, among the Greeks, was vastly better in this respect than that of *Epicurus*. The Pharisees, among the Jews, with all their hypocrisy and formality, had a greater zeal for righteousness than the Sadducees. The Catholic Jansenists were immeasurably better Christians, than the Jesuits. And disguise the matter as men may, it cannot be denied that the faith of election has been connected with some of the brightest exhibitions of piety the world ever saw, among the ancient "witnesses for the truth," and the protestant churches of modern times.

And then, there are living this day, thousands of honest and intelligent persons, who assure us, that they have in their minds the most distinct consciousness of both the sentiments of which I have been speaking, without any sense of collision between them; while their own excellent lives bear witness that no relaxation whatever of the claims of religion is suffered in consequence. Shall we not give credit to what they say on this subject?

But I may go still farther. I appeal to every man's own consciousness for proof of my general statement. Whose mind is set at war with itself, by admitting the sentiment of God's absolute sovereignty, at one and the same time with the sentiment of its own moral liberty? I venture to say, such a mind cannot be

found. The speculative contemplation of these things, may create embarrassment; but the felt presence of them in the human spirit, never did. The vivid idea of dependence upon God, thus realized, never paralyzes the proper energies of the soul, though the absence of that idea is found lulling them into a deadly torpor every day. Every child of God, in remembering the history of his own conversion, will bear me witness to the truth of this assertion. And you, that have never yet yielded yourselves to God! ye can bear me witness too. Is it a deep and awful feeling of the sovereignty of God, that holds your spirits inactive in this mighty interest? Or rather, is it not just because you have no sentiment of this sort upon your souls at all, and because you flatter yourselves that you have it in your power to turn to God when you please, even though it should be upon a dying bed, that you are able to dream away life as you do? Let conscience answer.

Now we can have no more conclusive evidence of the harmony of the doctrines we have been considering, than this that I have now stated. We saw, a little while ago, that the doctrines *might be* in fact consistent, though the speculative difficulty attending them should be wholly insurmountable; and now we have the most satisfactory proof, that they *are* consistent. Whether we can solve the problem in its abstract form or not, we have it verified as an indisputable fact in the constitution of our own nature; and that is a better ground of trust immeasurably than any speculative argument can possibly be. And here we ought to plant our reason, rather than upon any other ground, when assailed with objection on this subject. Let the cavalier speculate as he may, he cannot overthrow an ultimate sentiment in our nature. *That* is of more account in the eye of true philosophy, than all his abstractions; and when he has reasoned to the uttermost, we are stronger than he, if we can turn to our own moral constitution, and there show him FALSE TO FACT.

5. IT CAN BE SHOWN, THAT EVEN WHEN CONTEMPLATED IN THE ABSTRACT, THE DOCTRINES UNDER CONSIDERATION DO NOT COME INTO ANY REAL CONFLICT WITH EACH OTHER. We do not mean to say, that the mode of their ultimate reconciliation, as it takes place far back in the original ground of all being, can be made plainly apparent to the human mind; but we may see even in speculation, that the difficulty is only in appearance, and not real. We may see, that the two great ideas to which it relates, do *not* come into contradiction; that they are distinct and independent forms of truth, either of which stands entirely and eternally clear of the proper range of the other.

The doctrine of God's decrees in relation human actions, involves no other consequence, in regard to the actions themselves, than that they are CERTAIN; or, in other words, that they will take

place in one way, and in no other. The principle of this certainty, the particular manner of it, the constitution on which it may be found to depend, is not at all touched by the fore-ordination out of which it takes its rise. We can conceive of different constitutions of life, equally compatible with the idea of absolute certainty, in all their results. A series of events may take place in conformity with one kind of law, or it may take place in conformity with another kind of law, and be in both cases equally certain. Mere certainty is not affected by the way in which things are brought about; and the decrees of God, in rendering human actions certain, need not interfere, and do not interfere at all, with the principle of moral liberty in accordance with which they take place. Actions may be absolutely certain, and yet absolutely free. Nay more; in order to be free at all, it is indispensably necessary that they should be certain.

Actions, I say, may be certain, and yet perfectly free. Certainty and freeness are not in opposition to each other at all, and do not in fact touch upon the events to which they belong, under the same aspect in any degree. To say, that an action is certain, has nothing to do with the question whether it be free or otherwise; it may be so, or it may not be so, and yet be equally certain in both cases. The will is free when it acts according to its own constitutional laws, though in thus acting its movements are just as certain, that is, just as sure to take place in one particular way and not in another, as any of the changes which are occurring in the material creation, under the different kind of laws to which it is subject. And the greater the determination with which, in any given instance, the results of volition may be brought about, the more conspicuously free will they appear. We may sometimes calculate with absolute certainty, how a particular individual will act in certain circumstances; but we never feel as if the certainty of the result that is to take place in such cases, stood at all in the way of its being morally free. We are sure, that a certain course of conduct will take place, we calculate upon it with as much confidence as we do upon the rising of the sun the next morning; and yet we are perfectly satisfied all the time, that not the smallest constraint will be put upon the will of the person by whom it is to be exhibited, and never dream for a moment of questioning the liberty with which he is about to act. And we find no difficulty whatever in holding these two ideas, at one and the same time, in our minds. We can think in this case of an action being perfectly certain, and yet perfectly free, without the least embarrassment in our feelings, or the most distant thought of the metaphysical contradiction, that rises so imposingly into view, when the subject of the divine decrees is brought into consideration. And if our foreknowledge of men's actions extended to all that they will ever do, so that we could in any particular case predict with absolute certainty a whole series

of volitions, purposes, and deeds, still future, it is plain that we should have no difficulty still on the question of human liberty, any more than we have without this knowledge. In other words, we could on this supposition admit all the actions of a man's life to be certain, as otherwise they could not be matter of foreknowledge or calculation at all, and consent at the same time to their being regarded as free in the fullest sense of the term. We should not feel, that certainty and freeness stood in any sort of contradiction to each other whatever. And in fact, this sort of foreknowledge, though not possible on *our* part, is allowed actually to have place in regard to human actions, by all who have any proper notion of God. Even those who reject the doctrine of decrees, are ready to admit the doctrine of divine foreknowledge. But foreknowledge implies certainty in the things which it respects. Whatever the principle may be on which this certainty is secured, the certainty itself must have place in order to any knowledge being had previously of what is to come to pass. Here, then, we are brought at once to a living exemplification of the thought which we have just been presenting in the form of a supposition. There is one mind, to which all the actions of men are revealed before they take place. The foreknowledge of God extends to all moral events. I do not raise any argument at present on this ground, in support of the opinion that God has *decreed* all that ever comes to pass; I do not infer eternal *purpose* from eternal *foreknowledge*, as being the only sufficient foundation for it to rest upon. All I care to have established from the fact at present is, that the actions of men are *certain*, before they take place. Whatever theory we may embrace relative to the grounds on which that certainty ultimately rests, the certainty itself cannot be denied. And thus we must admit, that the actions of men may be certain on the largest scale, and are in fact certain as to God, without having their freeness in any measure brought into question at all. Whatever we may conceive necessary to constitute an action free, we must allow that it may be absolutely **CERTAIN** before it takes place, or else deny entirely the foreknowledge of God.

If after all any doubt should be felt in relation to this point, it may perhaps be relieved by another view of the subject. No actions can be more certain than those which are already past, yet who imagines that this certainty has any thing to do with the question, whether they were free or not? But if the actions of yesterday may be looked upon as free actions, notwithstanding this certainty, it is hard to say, why the freeness of those which are to take place to-morrow, should be considered at all affected by the supposition of their being equally certain. If certainty is compatible with liberty in reference to past time, I know no reason for holding it incompatible with the same in reference to time that is to come. In the mind of God both are equally

present. He looks upon the events of the future, as he looks upon the events of the past. They are beheld under precisely the same aspect of absolute certainty, and this certainty has as little to do with the question of moral liberty in the one case as in the other. There is really just as little reason, why people should be embarrassed about the freeness of their actions, when they are seen to be certain *before* they take place, as there is that they should be thrown into doubt on the same point, by seeing them to be certain *after* they have taken place. The mere fact of men's actions being *certain*, either before or after their taking place, does not stand in contradiction at all to the supposition of their being morally free.

I have said more than this. I have said, that in order to be free at all, it is indispensably necessary that our actions should be certain. There can be no such thing as moral liberty without this kind of certainty. To act freely, is to act according to the principles of our moral nature; to act as the nature of our minds directs. But this nature has its own fixed constitution, and all the operations of will that grow out of it, either in the way of choosing or of refusing, are in conformity with it. They cannot be this or that indifferently, but in the same circumstances exactly, must always be the same thing. To suppose any thing else, would be to suppose that the human mind is without all rule or order, and that it acts only by accident or caprice at all times, and without any reason whatever. If such a supposition were true, could there be any such thing as moral liberty in its actions? No more surely than there is in the tossing of a feather, that is made the sport of every wind that blows. The perfection of our moral being is, that it is subjected to law; and the very idea of liberty must perish just so soon as this kind of subjection is thrust out of view. To be free at all, our actions must have their reason in our own nature. They must take place according to some constitutional principles established in our moral being. And this is but to say in other words, that they must be certain. If we had the power of acting in any different way, so that we could do things without the consent of our own nature, or in direct violation of the principles of thought and feeling in which our moral existence is grounded, it would deserve to be called any thing rather than liberty.

In fact, however, the very idea of a system of being of any sort in which all certainty might be wanting, is out of the question. Let any man attempt to *imagine* a constitution of things, in which events might follow one another without law or reason of any kind, and he will find the thing utterly inconceivable. In the very act of imagining a system of any sort, the idea of plan and law forces itself into the scheme. Let it be stripped as far as possible of all resemblance to the existing order of life, and re-

moved as far as possible from all ordinary conceptions of fitness or reason, so as to comprehend all the confusion and chance that ever entered into the wildest dream of the philosophy of Epicurus; still will it be felt, that in the very act of being conceived, the conception has embodied in itself the notion of some law, some principle of certainty, pervading the entire scheme with its presence, and constituting the groundwork of all its fancied action. It is impossible to form the idea of a merely *material* system from which all notion of law shall be excluded; and to form the idea of a *moral* system, a system comprehending the action of spirits endued with the capacities of thought and will, is if possible more impracticable still. The mind refuses altogether to admit the notion of a world without law, and even when it tries to dream of chance or a self-determining faculty in its own nature, is perpetually thrown back in its feelings upon the idea of some original constitution lying beyond, and giving certainty to every thing that takes place.

It appears, then, that actions do not cease to be free by being certain; but that, on the contrary, they cannot be free *without* being certain, and in fact *must* be certain whether free or not. But if all this be true, the whole difficulty that is supposed to have place in reference to the doctrines of God's absolute sovereignty and man's free agency, falls to the ground. The sovereignty of God in this case is simply the ultimate *groundwork* of that particular constitution of life out of which the actions of men proceed. The question, whether that constitution be one of strict moral liberty, is not affected at all by the nature of the reason or cause in which it may be found to be originally grounded, but must be determined by simply considering the character of the constitution itself. If this be such as to do violence to the attributes of thought and volition, it must be pronounced incompatible with moral liberty, whether grounded in the will of God or not; and so, on the other hand, if found to furnish all the proper conditions of free agency, it must be held strictly compatible with moral liberty, wherever the ultimate reason of it may lie. The mere circumstance of its being established by divine decree, or by the eternal reason of things, or by some blind fatality, or by strange unaccountable chance, has nothing to do with the moral nature of the constitution itself. That must be judged of irrespectively altogether of the groundwork in which it has its being. It is a fact, a phenomenon, in nature, the character of which must be determined just by an observation of the thing itself, and for the clear perception of which it is not necessary that we should first trace it to its fundamental reason, and determine on what bottom it rests in the scheme of universal being. It is what it is, and should be tried on its own merits.

The only question, then, that is left for consideration in regard to the general subject, is, what is the proper groundwork of the

constitution to which I have been referring? The constitution makes it certain that the actions of men will take place only in one particular way. Whether it be in strict accordance with the principles of moral liberty, must be determined by considering its own character. We take it for granted that it is so in all respects. Under this aspect it may be thought of as having the ultimate reason of its certainty laid in different grounds; it may be thought of as being grounded in the sovereign purpose of God, or it may be thought of as being grounded in something else. The question now is, where is it most reasonable to look for its groundwork, or where most desirable to find it? Surely this must be answered alike by all. God is the only proper groundwork of life under all its forms. He is the first cause of all things, and by him all things subsist. The constitution of the universe can have no other reason ultimately but his wise and holy purpose to have it just what it is. The whole scheme of life must be grounded in his will. His own glorious plan is the pattern, according to which all things take place. They take place according to the nature of the particular system to which in different cases they belong; the changes that belong to the material world according to the laws of matter, and the activities of the moral world according to the laws of mind. But whatever may be the constitution out of which they take their rise, whether material or moral in its order, it is all grounded in the divine Mind, and upheld by a constant energy from God still clothing with effect the bright idea of the whole which was with him from the beginning. And who would have it otherwise? Who would have the course of nature grounded, if the idea were possible, in chance or fate, and not in the design of an infinitely wise, holy, and benevolent God!

If it should be felt by any, that this part of the discussion has been metaphysical and abstract, I have only to say it could not be helped. Contemplated practically, as I have before attempted to show, the subject is not surrounded with any great difficulty; both doctrines are susceptible of overwhelming proof, and may stand together in the mind, and be acted upon, without its being felt that they come into collision at all. But in its speculative form the subject is one that is in its very nature abstract in a high degree; and if persons allow themselves to be perplexed with it in this form at all, they must not complain, if in endeavoring to satisfy their minds, we lead them into the world of pure thought, instead of trying to entertain them with representations drawn from the sensible world, or from the rich domain of fancy.

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**SERMON XVI.**

BY JOHN M-MILLAN,\* D. D.  
OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, PA.

**THE MORAL LAW ESTABLISHED BY FAITH IN  
THE GOSPEL.**

ROMANS 3: 31. *Do we then make void the law through faith?  
God forbid: yea, we establish the law.*

To understand the harmony that subsists between the *law* and the *gospel*, and how the one confirms and establishes the authority and glorious holiness of the other, is of great importance, and is that to which the passage before us directly leads. In the preceding verses of this chapter the apostle had been teaching the doctrine of justification freely by grace, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth on Jesus." And yet by this doctrine God is glorified; all boasting being excluded from the creature, he can plead no merit or righteousness of his own, as though by his own good works he had obtained the favor of God, for by the deeds of law no flesh shall be justified in his sight. Mankind have lost all the power to yield that obedience to the divine law which is necessary in order to their obtaining life thereby: therefore he concludes that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law: and then proceeds to show that this privilege belongs not to the Jews only, to whom the law was given, but to the Gentiles also: for, says he, "is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? yea, of the Gentiles also: seeing it is one God which shall justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision

\* The author of the following discourse is in the 81st year of his age, and in the 59th of his ministry.

through faith." The apostle foreseeing how prone the Jews, and with them every unrenewed person, would be to reject this precious doctrine, as if it did nullify the law, which they knew came from God; in order to prevent this, in the words of our text, he states their objection, and rejects it with abhorrence. The objection is, that this doctrine of justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law, renders the holy law of God void and of none effect, and destroys all obligation to yield obedience thereunto. To this he answers "God forbid" that we should say any thing dishonorable of the holy law of God; no, it is a perfect and perpetual rule of righteousness, and though we deny it a power to justify us, yet so far are we from saying that it was given in vain, or that it is now made void, that by this doctrine of faith we establish the law and maintain its honor.

By the law here, is certainly meant the *moral law*, which alone can be established by this doctrine of justification by faith in Christ; for the ceremonial law, which consisted entirely in types of of things to come, when Christ the great antitype appeared, of consequence ceased, and became void, and of none effect.

When the moral law was first delivered to man in innocence, it was both as a rule of life enforced with a penalty, and as a covenant having a promise of eternal life annexed, upon condition of perfect obedience being yielded thereunto. But as soon as sin entered, the law was broken, and as a covenant had no more power to justify; it became weak through our default: this the same apostle plainly teaches, in Rom. 8:3, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," that is, it became unable to justify us because we, by reason of our depravity, are incapable to yield that complete and perpetual obedience to it which it requires. In this sense, therefore, it is made void, as appears from Rom. 7:4, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ." And again, verse 6, "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held." Wherefore it must be as a rule whereby to order our lives and conversations before God, that in our text he affirms it to be *established*, made to stand more firmly, and its honor maintained by faith. From the scope of the apostle's reasoning in this place, it seems evident that by faith here is meant the doctrine of *justification by faith*, of which he had been treating in the foregoing verses; but if it be taken to mean the grace of faith, simply, yet in this sense also it establishes the law, as shall be shown hereafter. The words plainly contain the following doctrinal proposition.

**THAT BY THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH, THE MORAL LAW, AS A RULE OF LIFE, IS SO FAR FROM BEING MADE VOID, THAT IT IS FARTHER ESTABLISHED.**

In treating this subject, I shall, I. Endeavor to show that the *moral law, as a rule of life, is perpetually binding, and can never be made void.*

## II. Show how this doctrine of faith establishes the law.

I. In order to show that the moral law, as a rule of life, is perpetually binding, and can never be made void, I shall offer the following arguments.

1. To suppose that the moral law is changeable, and might be made void, would be to say that God might either not have given a law to his rational creatures, or might have commanded the contrary things, both of which are absurd. For although God was under no necessity to create rational creatures capable of, and fitted for moral government, it was an act of his mere good pleasure; yet when once they were created, it was impossible that he should lay aside all care of them, and leave them to themselves; one free act may lay an obligation to the performance of another. Thus if God promises absolutely, he is bound to fulfil his promise; if he governs, he must govern justly; if he will have subjects endued with reason, he cannot but be their Lawgiver: so rational creatures being created, it is necessary that God give them a law by which they may be bound to obey and worship him. For rational creatures to exist, and not be subject to God their Creator and Preserver; or be subject to him and not to be ruled by him; or to be governed by him, and not under a law, and that law most holy and righteous, are all equally absurd and impossible. But if the moral law is *mutable*, then he might not only not have enjoined it upon them to obey, love, and worship him, which is his due, and their most reasonable service, as he is the Chief Good, and their Creator, in whom they "live, move, and have their being," Acts 17: 28; and from whom they have received all their powers and faculties, and to whom they are indebted for every good thing which they enjoy; but have commanded them to hate God, to disobey their Creator, to worship idols, or even the devil himself; to commit all manner of uncleanness, and obey their own lusts and vicious appetites. Thus blasphemy, idolatry, uncleanness, and the worst of crimes would change their natures, and become virtues, because commanded, which is monstrous and absurd: God cannot command such things without denying himself; he is holy and righteous, and can never command that which is unholy and unjust, without contradicting his own nature. And indeed, if the moral law which is founded on the nature of God, and the reason of things, *may be changed*; then it follows that there is no natural and essential difference between virtue and vice; but the same temper which we now call vicious, might become virtuous; and that there is no intrinsic excellence in any thing, but as God commands or forbids it: but this certainly unhinges all our notions of the Supreme Excellence, and destroys the moral character even of God himself. It would not have any meaning then to say that he is infinitely holy, just or good.

2. The *sum* of the moral law is love to God and our neighbour. As our Saviour observes, Mat. 22:37,40. Jesus said

unto him, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." To love the Lord supremely, and our neighbor sincerely, for God's sake, is the end to which every precept of the law tends; which certainly discovers much of its excellency and perfection, and ought to induce us highly to honor and magnify it as a rule of duty. Besides, it cannot be imagined that a law enjoining this, should ever be made void, neither can it be thought that God, who himself is love, 1 John 4:8. should ever by any succeeding dispensation disannul a law enjoining that which is so agreeable to his own nature, so reasonable and just, and every way conducive to the greatest good of mankind. What can be more reasonable than that rational creatures should love their Creator and Preserver? what more just than that they should be found in the constant practice of all those duties of love and equity; both towards God and their fellow-men, which the law requires? Surely a law enjoining those things, so manifestly tending to promote God's glory, and our own benefit, that our chief happiness consists in a perfect conformity to it in every bent of the heart, can never be made void, but its obligation, as a rule must forever continue.

3. *The moral law being the same in substance with the law of nature*, which is immutable, and founded on the rational nature of man, must also be unchangeable, and of perpetual obligation. By the law of nature is generally meant those common practical notions of good and evil, (or the light and dictates of natural conscience,) which God has impressed upon the nature of every man, pointing out to him what is his duty and what his sin, and enabling him to discern between moral good and evil. While man continued in a state of innocency this law was perfect and sufficient to answer all the purposes for which it was given; but when sin entered the mind of man became blind, his will perverse, and his affections inordinate, and set on wrong objects. So that this law was much broken, and obliterated, and as it were, *only remains* thereof are now to be found in the hearts of all, insomuch that it became necessary that God should give a new edition of it, that the law of nature might be more confirmed, its defects supplied, and its corruptions rectified. But that there is such a law still remaining, though much enfeebled and darkened by reason of sin, is manifest from Rom. 2:14,15. "For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another." From this passage, it is plain that the Gentiles, the heathen nations, although they had not the written law of Moses, yet they had the

which was like to it; they had that which directed them what to choose, and what to refuse by the light of nature. By the force of their natural notions, and the dictates of their consciences, they apprehended a clear and vast difference between good and evil: they did by nature the things contained in the law." The light of nature taught them, that God should be worshipped, and their parents honored, that virtue should be practised and vice hated and avoided; and so they became "a law unto themselves:" and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another," according as they observed or violated these natural dictates, their consciences did either acquit or condemn them. All which shows that they were not without law, but had that which was to them instead of a written law, which could be no other than the law of nature impressed upon their hearts. Now the moral law, as to its substance, is the *same* with this law of nature, the same duties are commanded, and the same sins forbidden: the sum of the moral law, as was before observed, is love to God and our neighbor, and this is plainly impressed on the nature of man. The precepts of the moral law may be partially learned from the light of nature, they all perfectly agree to sound reason, and pertain to all nations, at all times, and are absolutely necessary to human nature to obtain its proper end; wherefore its obligation ought to be perpetual. Since human nature is always the same, and like itself, that which is founded thereon must be so also.

4. That the moral law still remains in force, as a rule of life, is manifest from several *passages of scripture*, particularly from Mat. 5:17,18, where our Saviour in his sermon on the mount, when he was about to clear the law of the false and carnal interpretations of the Scribes and Pharisees, and open it up in its extent and spirituality, plainly asserts the continual obligation thereof. "Think not," says he "that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." From whence it is clear that the law was not abolished by Christ, but fulfilled; so neither is it abolished and become useless to us who live under the dispensation which he instituted. Had our Saviour intended that it should be of no more use to his people, he would certainly have told them so, and left it on record, but so far is he from that, that in Luke 16:29. he says, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them;" and if we hear them, we must obey their commands, else hearing would be in vain. And as Christ has not, so neither have his apostles destroyed the law, but rather confirmed, and commended it to all to be observed and honored. Rom. 13:8,9. <sup>2</sup> Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that

oveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Again, love, which is the sum of the law, is called by the apostle John, 1 John 2:7,8. both an old and a new commandment. I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment, which you had from the beginning. Again a new commandment I write unto you. It was old with respect to its first promulgation under the *old* testament dispensation, but that it might appear to be still in force under the *new* testament, he calls it a new commandment. And in our text it is expressly affirmed that the law is not made void, but still farther established by the gospel dispensation. Besides the moral law, or the law of nature which is the same, being the rule whereby God will judge the world at the last day, and according to which every one will receive their final doom, Rom. 2:12, &c. must likewise be the perpetual rule of man's obedience, else how could the equity of God's proceedings in judgment be vindicated, and made manifest before men and angels at the great day.

II. I come now to the second thing proposed, which was *to show how faith, or the doctrine of justification by faith, establishes the law.*

If by faith in the text we understand that grace which unites us to Christ, and gives us a right to his person and all his benefits, then it establishes the law in the following respects. 1. *By conviction*, which is antecedent to believing; where conviction, or a faith of the law goes not before, no justifying faith can follow. The Spirit first convicts of sin, then of righteousness, John 16:8. Conviction of sin principally consists in an inward feeling of our lost and miserable estate by nature, and of our exposedness to the everlasting wrath and curse of God denounced in his law, as the just demerit of our aggravated guilt. The divine law is brought home to the conscience, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, which is hereby awakened out of its slumbers, and made to speak for God, against the sinner, in a more faithful and awful manner than ever heretofore. Conscience being God's deputy in the soul, takes account of things which are done against the law of God, and when the Spirit comes to awaken the sinner, it opens these awful records, and brings in clear, full, and terrible accusations against the poor trembling creature. *Secret*, as well as *open* transgressions, with all their aggravations, are brought in, and set in order before him, and they come with such clear and full evidence that he can no longer defend himself. Conscience is instead of a thousand witnesses against him, he becomes self-convinced and speechless, like the man that was found without the wedding garment. Mat. 22:12. The soul being thus accused and convinced of aggravated guilt, conscience

pronounces the sentence of condemnation against him, "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3:10. The soul now stands trembling and condemned before God, and in effect acknowledges that all the precepts of his law are just and righteous, and owns the equity of its condemnatory sentence. Else, whence arises that horror which seizes the soul, and these awful self-reflections that are found in convinced sinners; they know that they are guilty before God, that they have broken an holy and righteous law, and deserve the punishment therein threatened. Therefore their mouths are shut, and all their pleas are silenced, they have nothing to say in their own vindication. Moreover the moral law is the ordinary means of conviction of the need of a Saviour, for by it "is the knowledge of sin." Rom. 3:20.

2. The very *nature of faith confirms and establishes the moral law*: For the very essence of saving faith is the soul's receiving or accepting Christ as he is offered in the gospel entirely and undividedly, as clothed with all his offices, priestly, prophetic and kingly: this is plainly implied in John 1:12. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name." As many as received him, that is his person, as he is clothed with his offices, and *not only* his benefits and privileges; to as many as thus received him, "to them gave he power to become the sons of God." And since faith receives Christ as a King, it must also receive and submit to the moral law, which is his rule of government. Faith accepts of Christ as a complete Saviour, to free not only from the guilt, but also from the power and pollution of sin, which to every true believer is an heavy, loathsome burden, under which he often groans, earnestly longing for deliverance. The renewed soul breathes as earnestly for holiness as for pardon. And faith embraces Christ, who came both by water and by blood, 1 John 5:6. not only for righteousness, but for sanctification also, 1. Cor. 1:30. Therefore, faith in its very nature implies a love for, and a willingness to yield obedience to *the moral law, the rule of holiness*.

3. The *effect of faith also establishes the law*; I shall instance in a few particulars.

1. *Deep sorrow for sin, and evangelical meltings of heart* under the apprehensions of grace and mercy, are fruits and effects of true justifying faith. The scripture often makes mention of this, and sets it forth in the strongest expressions: in Ezek. 7:16. it is said, "all of them shall mourn, every one for his iniquity." Zech. 12:10. And "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born." When believers through faith

are enabled to see who it is that they pierced by their sins, how great! how glorious! how wonderful a person he was, that was so humbled, abased and laid in the grave for such wretches as they are; when they see him who is the beauty of heaven, the express image of his Father, the prince of life, hang dead upon a tree, pierced by their sins, and bearing the infinite wrath of God, which was due to them, in their room; this cannot but affect them deeply, make them to hate their sins, those crucifiers of their dear Redeemer, and cause them to mourn in bitterness of soul, as one that mourneth for an only son, or for a first born. Now, since faith in a crucified Saviour inclines the soul thus to mourn over sin which is a transgression of the law, it hereby puts honor on the law, acknowledges its equity, and the soul's obligation to be obedient thereunto.

2. *Love* to God, his ways, and people, is another effect of faith, Gal. 5:6. Faith worketh by love, wherever it is in truth it is a working grace; it always sets the soul to work, not to pay its debt; this it knows if ever it be done, must be by another; but the main spring of its obedience is to love God, and the great Redeemer. Faith represents the love of God to the soul, and makes use of this as an argument to constrain it to all acts of obedience, wherein it may testify the reality of its love to God and Christ: this the apostle intimates when he says, "the love of Christ constraineth us." 2 Cor. 5:14. Believers are bound by the strongest bonds of love, and feel themselves under the sweetest constraints to honor and glorify God: hence it becomes their chief joy and study to do that which is pleasing in his sight, therefore they choose his law as a rule to direct their ways, and would not be freed from their obligation thereunto, but would rejoice, were it in their power perfectly to obey it, not that they would hope, or even desire to be saved thereby, that is not the motive of their obedience: but they obey it out of love to God, because it is his law, the transcript of his nature and purity, and contains his will to them: and because that thereby they will avoid much sin, that abominable thing which God hates, and bring much glory to Christ their Saviour.

3. The last effect of faith which I shall mention is *heart purity*, Acts 15:9. purifying their hearts by faith. The heart is never purified until faith be implanted; other principles may lop off the branches, and restrain from gross external acts of impiety, but this alone strikes at the root, and aims at nothing less than the entire destruction and rooting out of sin: for where true faith is, there is also a real and deep rooted hatred of all sin, both of heart and life, secret as well as open, no sin is favored but all devoted to destruction; the soul can say with the Psalmist, Ps. 119:104. "I hate every false way:" and endeavors through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body, Rom. 8:13. Now since faith thus engages the soul, and sets it on work to mortify all those impetuous lusts and corruptions which would

excite it to break God's law, and cast away the cords of his commandments; it certainly hereby establishes its authority, and glorious holiness, and brings the soul into willing subjection thereunto.

But if by faith in the text we are to understand the doctrine of *justification by faith*, then it establishes the law in the following respects.

1. Hereby the *honor* of the divine law is maintained, in that a righteousness is provided equal to all its demands. None can be justified until God receive full satisfaction for all the violations of his law: but this no creature can give. If he set himself to work out a righteousness of his own by obeying the law, he shall find that instead of atoning for his former guilt, he is continually contracting more: the law requires *perfect* obedience, but this he cannot give, being an imperfect creature, under the power of sin: his corruptions are too strong to be restrained by all the dreadful curses and threatenings denounced in the law; he is altogether as an unclean thing, and all his righteousness is as filthy rags. Isa. 64:6. Every work, how good soever it may seem to be, is tainted with sin, as it proceeds from a corrupt, sinful heart; while the fountain is polluted, the streams issuing thence will be so also. The righteousness therefore which is equal to the demands of the law, in which we may stand justified before an holy God, cannot be found in us, nor wrought out by us. But that the honor of the law might be maintained, and sinners saved, the eternal son of God came into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh, Rom. 8:3. "made of a woman, made under the law," Gal. 4:4. and in our nature, in obedience to the law, wrought out a perfect and complete righteousness, and gave full satisfaction for all our breaches thereof: he became our surety, our debt was demanded of him, and he answered for it. Hereby the law, was magnified, and made honorable, more than it could have been by the perfect obedience or endless sufferings of all the human race, as these are but *finite* creatures: but hereby an *infinite* Being, the eternal, co-equal Son of God, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, was brought before its bar; and at one full payment satisfied all its demands, and made a complete atonement for its breaches. Hereby, it received more than it simply required, all it demanded of mankind was a perfection of obedience; but Christ yielded an obedience thereunto, which was not only perfect but had infinity stamped thereon, arising from the infinite glory and dignity of the person obeying.

2. By this doctrine not only the *honor* of the divine law is maintained, but its *holiness* and *equity* are also established, and openly proclaimed before men and angels. No where does the dreadful evil of violating the law of God appear in such a striking light as in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus; which were sharp and universal; no member of his body was free from torture, and every particular sense was afflicted. He had not a moment's ease by any

cessation of his pains, not a drop of comfort from heaven or earth to support him under all his agonies; his cruel persecutors reviled and mocked him, and his Father's wrath lay heavy on his soul, without the least degree of sparing mercy. Rom. 8:32. Thus was the beloved Son of God bruised for sin, even he, who from eternity had been his Father's delight, Prov. 8:30. and whom he loved with a perfect love, even as he loved himself. Surely then, if the precious blood of Christ was that alone which could satisfy God for our violations of his law, there must not only be an infinite malignity in sin, since it could not be expiated but by an infinite satisfaction; but the law itself must be holy and righteous, since God stands upon full satisfaction for every breach thereof, and without it will not be reconciled to any. Now the righteousness on which faith relies for justification, and which God accepts as though it had been performed by the believer himself, is no other than that which the Lord Jesus wrought out by obeying the law, and enduring its penalties, in our room; by both which its honor is maintained and its holiness and excellency established.

3. Lastly. The free grace and boundless favors which God bestows on believers, cannot but powerfully constrain them to live to his glory, and fill their hearts with love and gratitude to so bountiful a Benefactor. Being redeemed with such a price, even with the price of the blood of the son of God, surely gratitude must constrain them to glorify him with their bodies and spirits which are his. Cor. 6:20. But this cannot be done without sincere and active obedience to the divine law, and avoiding and detesting every thing that is forbidden thereby. Christ by his death and sufferings has purchased heaven and eternal life for us, so that we may now obtain it, not whether we will or no, or however we live, but only in case we be willing upon the terms he has proposed, that we live in obedience to his revealed will, and strive earnestly to obtain it; we must put our hands to the plough and sincerely labor for it with all our might. He redeemed us, but not so as to encourage us in sloth and disobedience to his law, which is a sin, and which therefore he can never be the author of; no, he did not so absolutely redeem us, as that we cannot miss of heaven act how we will, for then unclean things might enter there, which is plainly contrary to the scriptures, which expressly declare that no unclean thing shall enter into the mansions above, or have any inheritance with God and Christ in glory. But he redeemed us from that incapacity of inheriting, which by our fall we had brought upon ourselves, to a power or right of enjoyment upon the terms of holiness, without which no man, (think what he will) shall ever see the Lord in mercy. Heb. 12:14. Surely the dying love of a crucified Saviour, who redeemed sinners from the depth of misery, and opened a way whereby they may obtain an inheritance of eternal bliss and glory with himself in heaven,—all title to which they had abso-

lutely lost by sin,—and the consideration of their bodies being members of Christ's mystical body, and temples of the holy Ghost, are certainly powerful motives to cause them to detest every transgression of God's holy law, and to abound more and more in the duties of holy obedience. Faith opens to our view at once the amazing treasures of divine love, and the dreadful glories of divine justice in the bitter sufferings of our great Redeemer, which ought to awake our love, and alarm our fear, to procure our obedience to God's law, and excite in us an holy reverence of his divine majesty. I shall now conclude with a brief application of what has been said.

1st. Are the precepts of the moral law indispensable, and perpetually binding? Hence, see the abominable nature of Popery! The Pope, being that lawless one, that "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God," and worshipped, 2 Thess. 2: 4; that not only opposeth the divine authority, but exalts himself above it, in demanding greater regard to his commands, than to the commands of God, and assumes a power to dispense with God's most holy law to others. But this man of sin "shall the Lord consume with the Spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." ver. 8.

2d. Mankind being under a law, and that law indispensable, holy, and righteous, they die not as the beasts do,—which are not subjects of law, which are not capable of moral government,—but must expect to be accountable to God, the great Lawgiver, for all their actions. It is appointed for all men once to die, but after this the judgment, Heb. 9: 27. Let none think that because the penalties of the law are not speedily executed, they will therefore pass unpunished. God will maintain the honor of his law, though Christ himself should suffer to repair its breaches; and if he spared not his own Son when he stood in our room, to answer for our offences; how can we expect to escape, if we continue to slight his holy law, and walk contrary to his commandments? Though our actions in themselves are transient, yet their consequences are eternal. A word is soon spoken, a thought soon passes, an act is soon done; but when once spoken, thought, or done, it is placed to account, and that account remains against us, according to which all will at last be judged, and receive their final doom.

3d. Hence we see that the Gospel dispensation, or the law of faith, though it delivers believers from the curse and condemnation of the moral law, which, while out of Christ they were under, yet its obligation as a rule whereby to regulate our hearts and lives, still continues, and ever will remain in full force: and whatever doctrine is contrary to this, favoring the corrupt lusts of men, and licentiousness in practice, that gives any countenance to sin, or in the least opens a door to practical immoralities, cannot be from God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity, Hab. 1: 13. Accordingly, the idea that

under the gospel dispensation we are free from obligation to observe the fourth commandment, to keep the Sabbath "*holy*," is founded in a *mistake*, or, has arisen from a *desire* to disregard its requirements. The "faith" of the gospel has not made the fourth commandment "void," no more than either of the others in the decalogue. From a variety of reasons, drawn from the practice of the apostles, and from the nature of the Saviour's work and kingdom, it may be plainly inferred, that a change in *sacred* time was intended, but a change in the *time* of observing a law, expressed as the fourth commandment is—"the seventh day is the sabbath,"—does not repeal the law itself.\*

4. From what has been said let us examine ourselves whether our faith be such as establishes the law, and excites us to all the duties of holy obedience. This is the only justifying faith, and wheresoever it is not found to have these effects, it is but a dead faith. For faith without works is dead, saith the apostle. Jam. 2:20. Persons that have not had an effectual work of the spirit upon their souls, make their faith to serve as a pillow for spiritual sloth; they will not watch, and war, and work as they ought, but secretly maintain a truce with all or some of their corruptions: they will not be at the pains to purify their hearts and mortify their lusts; which yet they must do, or die in them and for them. Rom. 8:13. For if ye live after the flesh ye shall die. Now what is the foundation of their peace? They trust in Christ, as they say, and this quiets them: God is merciful, and they hope will not be strict to mark against them their iniquities: the best of saints have their infirmities, and none are altogether perfect in this life; therefore they rest at peace, and press not forward, earnestly longing for perfect freedom from all sin, which every true believer doth, but are content with just so much religion as will carry them to heaven, and desire no more. But these are not the effects of a true justifying faith. "Every man that hath this hope in him, (which arises from a lively faith,) purifieth himself, even as he is pure." 1 John 3:3.

5. Let all who profess themselves to be the followers of the Lord Jesus, be careful to imitate his example, and manifest to the world, the truth of their faith and piety by strict holiness and obedience to the law of God in all respects: this is the way to glorify God in the world, and bring true peace and comfort to the soul. Then, saith the Psalmist, shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments. Psal. 119:6. Then can the soul draw nigh to God with a holy boldness, when it is conscious of its own integrity, and the sincerity of its endeavors to obey the Lord in all things; then the soul enjoys great peace and comfort; conscience is at peace with him, God is reconciled to him, and the sweet smiles of his countenance rest upon him. If, therefore, we have any regard to our own peace and comfort,

\*See note at the end.

or for the glory of God, which ought always to be dear unto us, let us carefully maintain an holy walk with God, and cheerfully obey all his commandments, from a true, evangelical principle of faith, and love unfeigned.

6. Let all such hearers of the gospel as are not zealous to maintain good works, be convinced that they are destitute of an interest in the divine favor, and are still under the condemning sentence of God's righteous law. Let them acknowledge their guilt before God; and earnestly endeavor, without delay, to obtain an interest in Christ, and his justifying righteousness, by a living faith: let them work as though they could gain heaven and eternal life by their works, and after they have done all, to remember that they are but unprofitable servants, and can merit no good at the hand of God by all they can do or suffer: let them not depend on their own works, but on the righteousness of a crucified Saviour, received by faith; thus shall they obtain the favor of God, and be at last admitted to dwell with him in everlasting glory.

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NOTE.

Here we take the liberty to add a short section from the excellent little work of "DR. HUMPHREY, ON THE SABBATH," as peculiarly appropriate in connection with this discourse; and calculated to do much good to those who think the fourth commandment is repealed, or its observance left optional.

"It is a settled principle, in all governments, that there are but two ways in which any law can cease to be binding upon the people. It may expire by its own limitations, or it may be repealed by the same authority which enacted it; and in the latter case, the repealing act must be as explicit as the law itself: Now, we have it in proof, that the Sabbath was instituted by the infinite Lawgiver in paradise. In priority of time, it stands at the head of all his enactments. It is the very first statute, in that code of laws, which he has promulgated in the Bible. Of course, it has an authority entirely independent of the Jewish ritual, and is no more a part of that system, which has "waxed old and vanished away," than the sixth commandment is.

"The law of the Sabbath can never expire by its own limitations; and for the plainest of all reasons, that it has no limitations. *And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because that in it, he had rested from all his work, which God created and made.* Now if this solemn act made the Sabbath binding upon mankind at all, it made the obligation universal and perpetual, as no limitation, or exemption, is hinted at. If the divine consecration of one seventh part of time, made it the duty of our first parents to keep it holy, it clearly imposes the same duty upon their posterity. The law, then, still remains in force, and must remain to the end of time, unless God himself has seen fit, or shall hereafter see fit, to repeal it, there being no other authority in the universe that can strike out a letter of it.

“Has God abrogated the law? If he has, the place can easily be found by our opponents; and let them point it out to us; for we confess, that we have never yet been able to find it. The chapter and verse must be pointed out, in which the original sabbatical law is *expressly repealed*. Nothing else will satisfy a candid inquirer.

“If the repealing act is any where recorded in the Bible it is either in Rom. 14: 5,6; or in Col. 2: 16,17: No one, we believe, pretends to place much stress upon any other passage. Let these then be carefully examined, not as independent texts, but in connection with the obvious design and scope of the apostle’s reasoning. The text in Romans is this: *One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.* Does the apostle here mean to say, that under the new, or Christian dispensation, it is a matter of indifference which day of the week is kept as a Sabbath, or whether any Sabbath at all is kept? Surely those who thus construe his meaning, ‘do greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures.’

“Every attentive reader of the New Testament, must have observed, that for some years after the resurrection of Christ, the Jewish and Christian dispensations were, in practice, blended together; the former being gradually abolished, and the latter as gradually brought in to take its place. Hence arose many of those unhappy disputes, which disturbed the harmony of the primitive churches. Many of the Jewish converts, not only adhered strenuously themselves to their ancient ritual, but insisted upon the conformity of Gentile converts;—while these last as strenuously maintained, that since the ceremonial law was abolished, no further regard to its prescription of meats, days, &c. was either necessary, or even allowable. To settle these disputes, and inspire the parties with mutual charity and forbearance, the apostle took up the question *in form*, and disposed of it in the following wise and catholic manner. ‘Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye; but not to doubtful disputation. For one believeth that he may eat all things. Another, that is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not, judge him that eateth; for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord. And he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks, and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.’

“Now, it is plain, from every word of this quotation, that the inspired umpire refers expressly to the existing controversy, respecting the ceremonial law; and not at all to the question, whether the original Sabbath was abolished, or not. Indeed, it seems extremely doubtful, whether the passage contains the slightest reference to the *weekly Sabbath*. The religious observance of many other days, was strictly enjoined in the Levitical code. All that can fairly be gathered, therefore, from this quotation, is, that Christians in the early part of the apostolic age, might, or might not, keep those feast days;—that is, might act according to the dictates of their own consciences. If one man thought that he was bound to observe any particular day, let him observe it; but without censuring his brother who might be of a different opinion. *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*, and act accordingly. The law of the Sabbath then is not repealed here.

“Is it repealed in Col. 2:16,17, to which we have also referred? *Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.* ‘Here then,’ some have triumphantly alleged, “is the repealing act; and the Sabbath, as a divine institution, is no more!” Wo to the world if it be so. But to this construction, which strikes at the foundation of all Christian institutions, three distinct answers are ready.

“In the first place, it takes for granted the very thing to be proved;—viz. that the apostle is here speaking of the *weekly Sabbath*; when it is all but certain, we think, that he has no allusion to it. The plural form *Sabbath days*, which is here adopted, rarely if ever occurs in Scripture, when the original institution is intended. But there were other Sabbaths which the Jews were required to keep: as for example, the first day of the seventh month, and also the tenth day of the same, throughout their generations. See Lev. 33. ‘And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, speak unto the children of Israel, saying, in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, shall ye have a *Sabbath*, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work therein. Also on the tenth day of this seventh month, there shall be an atonement. It shall be unto you a *Sabbath* of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls.’ That these ceremonial Sabbaths, and not the holy rest of paradise, are referred to, in the passage above quoted is made nearly, if not quite certain, by the fact, that all the other specifications, such as *meat, drink, the new moon, &c.* are ceremonial. At any rate, the contrary can never be proved. To assert, therefore, that the repealing act is found here, is, we repeat, a mere begging of the question. This is our first answer.

“Secondly, allowing for argument’s sake, that the apostle had the Jewish seventh day Sabbath in his eye, and meant to release the Christian church from keeping that particular day, what does it amount to? To an abrogation of the Sabbath itself or merely

to a change of the day, which, however, in the twilight of the Gospel dispensation, was not authoritatively enjoined? The latter, (if the apostle alludes to the original institution at all,) we take to be the true meaning. A conscientious Jew who still adhered to the seventh day of the week, would be accepted, as well as the converted Gentile, who kept the first day. This is our second answer.

“The third, may be given chiefly in the words of an able foreign writer. ‘It is evident from the context,’ he observes, ‘that the apostle was speaking of the ordinances of the ceremonial law for the neglect of which, no Christian was to be condemned. *Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or drink, &c.—or of the Sabbath days.*’ In this passage, the apostle is clearly speaking of burdensome ordinances; of something that was against them, and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. But can any pious person conceive, that the spending one day in seven in spiritual services, could be ranked by the holy apostle, among the things which were against Christianity, and contrary to it? Was that institution which the people of God had been commanded to call ‘a delight, the holy of the Lord and honorable,’ now to be esteemed of so carnal a nature, as to be ranked amongst the things which Christ took out of the way, nailing it to his cross? Were those holy persons who had been accustomed to adopt the language of the Psalmist, ‘I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord,’ now taught to esteem a day spent in such services, as a part of that yoke, which neither the apostle, nor their fathers were able to bear? We must destroy all just ideas of the effects which the preaching of the Gospel was intended to produce, before we can adopt such an interpretation of the apostle’s words.’

“Where then is the repealing act? for surely it is not contained in either of the passages which we have examined. Let those who deny the perpetuity of the Sabbath, tell us where. But they cannot find the abrogation which they so anxiously seek. Here we might take our final stand in defence of the sacred institution; for God consecrated the Sabbath by his own authority and example, as soon as he had built the world, and breathed into man the breath of life. The law has no limitations, and, therefore, can never expire. It has never been repealed; and as the sacred canon is full and complete, we are certain it never will be. It is, therefore, binding upon every one of us at this moment; and will be upon all future generations. No human authority may expunge a single word from the statutes of Jehovah. It were infinitely less daring, for the meanest subject of the mightiest earthly potentate, to declare the fundamental laws of the empire null and void, than for man, who is a worm, to set aside the institutions of his Maker.”

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**SERMON XVII.**

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**CHRIST, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."**

GALATIANS 2:21. *"If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."*

A life of obedience is essential to the character of every true Christian. So the scriptures abundantly teach: so the desires, resolutions, and actual character of all true Christians decisively show. All just views of the christian system include this necessity of a holy life. The character of its Author, the nature of his precepts, the tenor of his doctrines, and the objects of the Christian's hopes, all lead directly to this, "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure," and "the grace of God which hath appeared unto all men, teacheth us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world."

But an important point is here to be examined. What is the necessity of this holy obedience? What are the reasons which require it? What is the end to be proposed by it? Is it the meritorious cause of pardon? Are we justified on account of our own good works? Does righteousness come by our obedience to the law? The text seems to have been designed as a reply to these questions. "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

This affirmation of the apostle contains the following propositions, which I will endeavor to illustrate.

1. God designs to save men, only in a way of righteousness.
2. That, to fallen man, righteousness can never come by any thing which he can render to the law.
3. That, to suppose it could, implies this awful imputation on the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God—that "Christ has died in vain."

**The first proposition is,—That God designs to save men, only in a way of righteousness.**

The reasoning of the apostle here, and elsewhere, manifestly teaches this doctrine. And scriptural views of the character, law and government of God, lead to this conclusion,—that no moral agent can be accepted, in the sight of God, on account of any thing less than perfect righteousness,—that if sinners be pardoned, restored and made happy, God will in that case, be seen, and known, and acknowledged as the just God, no less than the Saviour.

The character of a holy and just moral governor, is one which he assumed and distinctly asserted in the very first dispensation under which he placed man when created; and there, and then, he gave an awful monitory pledge and example of what his future administration should ever be. Adam suffering under the curse; the promise of deliverance by the seed of the woman; Abel approaching God by faith, and the shedding of blood, are all proofs of the truth, holiness, and justice of God; and that even the exercise of mercy, must not invade the rights of a perfect and eternal law. His relations to man, as his moral governor, are proclaimed in every dispensation of God, and in every page of divine revelation. It is a revelation of mercy; but it is as much a revelation of truth, holiness, and unyielding justice. The language of the text implies, that righteousness must come: that there must be somewhere, and somehow a righteousness in virtue of which sinners are justified. If this be not true, why this affirmation? If the salvation of men be without righteousness, why should it at all be a question whether it comes by the law or not?—According to this supposition, it may not, and never does come. The sinner escapes and lives: the law, in its authority and demands, suffers and dies: its claims are dishonored as unjust—its penalty as cruel, its declarations as idle sounds, falsehood, and lies: and satan told, and still tells the truth, when he assures the sinner that he “shall not surely die.” This is an unwarranted presumption in contradiction to all existing reason and evidence. There is no moral feeling more natural to man, none more universal among men; and none more fully sustained by the providence and word of God, than man’s responsibility to the divine government. All men have conscience, and conscience is a recognition that we are under law, and accountable to the supreme and eternal ruler of the world. All men acknowledge and feel more or less, that God is their creator, preserver, and benefactor; but they more generally and more deeply feel, that to him they are accountable for their actions. This is manifest not only from the holy fear of good men, but also from the terrors which haunt the guilty, and the fears which disquiet every sinful man. It is true of the idolatrous, the superstitious, and the savage, of the saint and the sinner. The human mind every

where responds to the announcement of divine revelation,—  
 “verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.”

I assume it as an incontrovertible truth, that there are no other characters, in which God is so prominently presented in divine revelation, as those of a moral Governor and Judge. Both these characters have especial respect to law. To administer, apply, and execute it, is the sum of all the acts to be performed in those characters. The law is the rule, and the only rule of conduct. A governor and judge must require all that it requires, and neither more nor less. Their demands and decisions must accord with it perfectly. They cannot accept less,—they have no right to ask more. Their judgment of actions, and their awards to the conduct of men, must be exactly according to the law. These are the characters and relations which God, in his word, teaches us that he sustains to men; and they lead us directly and necessarily to the conclusion before expressed; that the justification or acquittal of men, must be in a way of righteousness, that is, according to law. Righteousness is the law fulfilled; having, in all respects, all that it demands, and nothing less is righteousness. If man a sinner, be accepted with God, it must be in faithfulness to his high and holy offices as Governor and Judge. He may be a father, and have all the kind affections of a father; but these may not interfere with his more august and more sacred character. This distinction is one which every man can understand, and which every man recognizes. If the son of a public officer violates the law, with the execution of which his father is intrusted, the case may be a hard one, but all can promptly decide how his office requires him to act: and if affection spared, all would say that it was not the magistrate, but the father who acted. And for the same reason we reprobate and condemn public rulers who suffer their favorites to transgress with impunity. The faithful dispensation of justice knows no favorites, and must practically disclaim even nature’s tenderest attachments and claims. This is precisely and expressly the point of view in which the conduct of God the Father is exhibited in the sufferings and death of Christ. “God spared not his own Son.” In answer to the demands of the violated law he stood at the tribunal of justice: he was recognized and dealt with, not as a son, but as an offender: he was wounded, and bruised, and put to death. He undertook to redeem sinners from the curse of the law, he himself became a curse, by bearing the wrath and curse due to transgressors. All reasonings from the love and compassion of a father, in favor of the general and unconditional forgiveness of sin, are erroneous, and overlook the character which God sustains as the moral Governor of the world.

We must not suppose, that the sufferings and death of Christ, were intended to gratify a vindictive passion or feeling in God. He has no such feelings. It is the faithfulness of a holy govern-

or and a righteous judge, maintaining the honor and authority of the law. He may pity the offender and might willingly forgive, but government must be sustained, the authority of the law must be preserved:—the safety of the community demands punishment. To spare a guilty person might be an act of mercy, as respects him individually; but it might, in its full operation, be an act of cruelty to hundreds, who would suffer by the encouragement thus given to the wicked, by an example of impunity, in which the authority of the law was sacrificed to the safety of an offender.

The fact that the law was enacted and promulgated by God, impairs not, but augments the force of the preceding remarks. He has announced that law, as his will and the rule of his administration, and most solemnly affirmed its immutability and inviolability. He cannot and will not disregard and dishonor it. Christ's obedience unto death, was expressly intended to secure its honor, in consistency with the exercise of forgiveness, and the justification of the believer. In the obedience and death of Christ, as a voluntary and accepted substitute, the law is magnified and made honorable, and has in a full measure, all its demands. The believer who pleads and is accepted on this ground, is justified by a righteousness fully commensurate with law, and justice. There has been rendered for him, with divine approbation, and according to the divine purpose, the full measure of obedience and suffering which was due: so that God is just, when he pardons, and when he bestows on the believer eternal life, as the reward of perfect righteousness; and justification is in fact, what the very term denotes, an adjudgment of a moral agent to the full rewards of righteousness, in consideration of the demands of that law, under which he was, being fully satisfied. Christ is to him the end of the law for righteousness, neither his escape from punishment, nor his possession of eternal life robs the law of God, but "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord," and "God is just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Justification includes more than mere pardon. An offender, after being fairly convicted, may be pardoned; but by an exercise of mere mercy, he can never be justified. A debtor may, by a bounteous forgiveness, be absolved from his obligation to pay; but this could never be called payment, or an acquittal according to law. Justification, in its very import, implies satisfaction to the law. This idea prevails throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Every victim offered in sacrifice was to honor the penal requirements of the law: It was a death, in mercy substituted for him who deserved to die. It was obviously and strictly a satisfaction to law and justice.

We are in the habit, and very correctly, I believe, of saying that Christ made satisfaction for the sins of men. Walker defines satisfaction—"pleasing to the full,"—atonement for a

crime,"—"making payment." Each of these uses of the word *satisfaction*, is warranted and illustrated by the design of Christ's obedience unto death, and its actual effect as declared in scripture.

Did Christ by his obedience unto death, "please to the full" the holy Governor of the world? Hear the prophet Isaiah, 42:21. "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake: he will magnify the law and make it honorable."

Did Christ satisfy by making atonement, bearing the punishment of our sins, in order to our reconciliation with God? Hear the same prophet, 53:5, 6. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Hear Paul repeatedly, Gal. 3:13. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Col. 1:20. "Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself." Heb. 2:17.

Did Christ satisfy by paying the price of redemption? 1 Cor. 6:19. "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price." 1 Pet. 1:18. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Tim. 2:6. "Who gave himself a ransom for all:" and Rev. 5:9.

In the same manner Christ himself speaks—"The son of man came to give himself a ransom for many,"—"his body was broken for us,—his blood shed for the remission of sins." The notion of man's being pardoned, accepted, and saved, without satisfaction to the law, or without a legal acquittal, is manifestly unscriptural.

Mere active obedience to the law, cannot, in behalf of sinful man, constitute a saving righteousness.

It is readily admitted, that, in the case of Adam, while innocent, perfect obedience would have availed to justification: but his condition, when fallen, and the condition of all his posterity, as sinners, is essentially different. They have incurred the penalty of the violated law; and by its execution, that violation must be avenged. Every revelation and dispensation of mercy includes this doctrine. The religion of the gospel is a religion designed for sinners. By the expiation of Christ, the door of mercy is opened for their return, and the obstacle to their acceptance, otherwise immovable, is thus taken away.

The *second* proposition I stated is,—That to fallen man righteousness can never come by any thing which he can render to the law.

By the expression, "if righteousness come by the law," there

can be no doubt but the apostle means—if it comes by man's obedience to the law—if man can render that perfect obedience which the law demands, or in any way by works of righteousness of his own, give the law all it requires, then is "Christ dead in vain." The righteousness of Jesus Christ, on account of which sinners are saved, most certainly comes by the law—that is, it is constituted by that full satisfaction which he gave to the law:—but men obtain an interest in it, and in all the blessedness it secures, in a way of grace. "Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."

The case, then, which the Apostle here supposes, can exist only in one of two ways. If man will obtain a righteousness of his own, he must pay an obedience in all respects perfect, as to motive, manner, measure, times and continuance. "He that doeth these things shall live by them." But if he transgress, he must endure the penalty: or he must be able, after transgression, to do so much more than the law demands, or so much better than the law requires it to be done, as to atone for past transgression, so that in summing up his whole amount of service, he shall be able to show a measure of moral excellence in no wise inferior to what the perfect, holy, and spiritual law of God requires. This, we believe, is the supposition here made. "If righteousness come by the law"—if man can render that obedience which the law demands, or in any way, by works of righteousness of his own, give the law all that it requires—"then Christ is dead in vain."

That the case here supposed is wholly absurd and impossible, as respects fallen man, will be undeniably manifest if we duly attend to the two following considerations:—

1. The law requires all that we can do, and that forever.

2. Its penalty dooms the transgressor to everlasting destruction.

1. The law requires all that we can do, and that forever. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," &c. It is impossible that more than this should be given; and whatever is less than this is less than what the law demands. As the perfect employment of all our faculties is the amount of obedience required; so the term of its duration is to be the same as that of our existence. It is therefore impossible for man, by obedience, to make compensation for one omission, or one transgression; unless he can do more than he has faculties to do, or prolong his obedience beyond the term of his actual existence. If the law required less than the perfect employment of all our faculties, or, if it demanded only a portion of our time, then a sinner might have some reason upon which to build the hope of self-justification: but if the law requires all that we can do, and that forever, all such hope is utterly cut off. By one offence, on the score of righteousness, man is forever lost.

2. But let us attend to the second consideration, which is, that the penalty of the law dooms the transgressor to everlasting de-

struction. By suffering he cannot work out a righteousness. If he fall under the penalty of the law, his ruin is irreparable and everlasting. What is the sentence of the law? Death. Without some help elsewhere obtained, the dominion of death must be interminable. Death cannot produce life, or give rise to existence or happiness;—"the worm dieth not—the fire is not quenched."

The sinner cannot, by an excess of suffering, redeem what is lost, or vindicate to his own salvation, the honor of God's broken law. If he could endure more than everlasting death; or if there were a limited term, at which his merited measure of punishment would be complete; then, a sinner might have some ground upon which to build the hope of self justification: but the nature of death, and the declared purpose of God, utterly subvert all these grounds of expectation. The sentence which is gone out against impenitent transgressors is abandonment to utter ruin, and that commensurate with their existence. Righteousness cannot come, by the law, in the case of that person, who has ever, even once, transgressed. The race of man, as to any thing they can do, are irrecoverably lost, guilty, and without hope. They have destroyed themselves. By Christ's obedience unto death, alone, there is help. If man could have saved himself, the needless provision of a Saviour would not have been made. If the sinner by his own efforts, or merit, can stand in judgment before God, Christ has died in vain. Where was the necessity, the wisdom, the propriety, or, even the justice of the death of Christ, if sin may be pardoned without expiation, or satisfaction?—or, if the sinner can expiate his own guilt, and purchase heaven by his own merit, and obedience?—the absurd consequence is unavoidable—"Christ is dead in vain."—This is the third proposition to be illustrated, and considered.

*Thirdly*,—That the supposition that man can be saved without a perfect righteousness, or that he can by his own doings obtain eternal life, implies this awful imputation on the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God,—that, "Christ has died in vain."

There is no other reason of sufficient importance, which we can assign for that event. That we may understand, and feel the force of the apostle's argument, we must attentively consider the character, and death of Christ: who he was; what manner of death he died; and that all these were according to the counsel, and special purpose of God.

Who was he?—"Immanuel, God with us." "The brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." "The only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." What was the kind and manner of his death? A death preceded by unexampled sorrows—a scene of various, successive, increasing sorrows. A death attended with the most excruciating circumstances of external suffering—the taunts, revilings, false accusations, cruel insults, and mockings of his murderers—the crown of thorns, the bloody scourge, the nails, and the

spear.—A death attended with the most afflictive circumstances of inward anguish, conflict, agony, and sorrow—assaulted by devils, oppressed by a sense of divine wrath, and denied the light of his Father's countenance.

The constitution of his person, and all the circumstances of his death were according to the council, and special purpose of God. This necessarily follows from the fact, that God is the Creator of all things; and that they all are managed by his providence. Moreover;—the spirit of prophecy had previously announced his person, and his death, and, after his crucifixion, and resurrection, his apostles distinctly affirmed it to be, “according to the determinate counsel, and foreknowledge of God.”

Here then is an event in magnitude, and strangeness transcendent. Had it an object proportioned to its greatness; or, was it without any valuable, and determinate end?—was it a display of divine wisdom, or was it not?—was it an event of high, glorious, and awful necessity, value and importance, or was it wholly in vain? The Apostle affirms—“if righteousness,” &c.

If men can be accounted, and treated as righteous, though the law be not perfectly fulfilled by them, nor for them: or, if they can satisfy all its demands—there was no good reason for the death of Christ.—But the scriptures report, and affirm the death of Christ: they teach that it was to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness: that, “what the law could not do, in that it was weak, through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” “That he bore the chastisement of our peace, that we, by his stripes, might be healed,” and “made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”—But if righteousness come by the law all this was in vain. If man can justify himself, why need Messiah bring in a righteousness, or become obedient unto death? If mercy is exercised without respect to a propitiation, why was Christ set forth as a propitiation, through faith in his blood, that God might be just, and the justifier of those that believe in Jesus?—On the above supposition these ends can be otherwise attained; and consequently, here is a mighty expenditure of humiliation, and suffering, intended, as the scriptures affirm, to accomplish, what either need not be done, or, could by man himself be done well enough. If language is to be understood according to its common, and obvious import, the doctrine of scripture is, that Christ's obedience unto death was propitiatory, and vicarious: and that any who acknowledge its divine authority should deny this, is astonishingly strange. As we have before said, it was clearly presignified by types, and prophecies; and it has, since the death of Christ, been most explicitly affirmed by his inspired apostles. We feel clear in affirm-

ing, that, there is no other doctrine more explicitly revealed than this.

They preach another gospel who preach not this doctrine, and impliedly, if not expressly teach that "Christ is dead in vain."

But, let us try this question in another way. Christ has died, and if it was not in vain, we must be able to find some good reason for it. If it was not a vindication of divine justice—a vicarious subjection to the curse of the divine law,—and the ransom price for man's redemption, and salvation—why, and for what was it?

1. In the first place,—was his death for his own sake, and on his own account? If this was the fact, how shall we explain it? I can conceive of it, only, in one of three ways.—He was guilty, and deserved to die: or, he was absolutely innocent, and his death was undeserved, and unjust:—or, God by his future advancement, and glory, fully compensated him for his unmerited sufferings, and death. In adopting any one of these answers, we must find it encumbered with contradiction, and absurdity.

Was he guilty? Shall we say so?—The history of his life, and the uniform decisive testimony of witnesses, sacred and profane, refute this allegation. Pilate could find no fault in him. His most watchful enemies had no just charge to bring against him: so that he could fearlessly meet them with this challenge—"which of you convinceth me of sin?" The spirit of God has pronounced him "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." He was not guilty, and deserved not to suffer, and die.

Shall we say,—though he was absolutely innocent, yet he suffered death, and only on his own account? His death must then have been undeserved, and unjust. Death is the wages of sin: but he had no sin, and consequently, was not justly obnoxious to death. If he suffered on his own account, though innocent,—it is the only case of which we have ever heard, or known under the government of God, and does directly outrage, and oppose all our notions of the justice of God, and the order of his moral administration. Martyrs, who were, comparatively speaking, good men, have suffered death: but they were by nature and by practice sinners, and considered in themselves, were deserving of eternal death. In their case, no complaint can lie against the government of God. The case and character of Christ were essentially different: and on the supposition we are considering, perfect holiness was treated according to the deserving of the most enormous crimes.

This cannot be the fact.

Will it relieve us from the difficulty, to say, that God, by his future advancement, and glory compensated him for his unmerited sufferings, and death?—This reply might be admitted, if we allow that important ends were accomplished by his sufferings and death. And this, we believe, is the account which an apostle has given.—"For the suffering of death, God crowned him

with glory, and honor." But was his death on his own account? By no means. "By the grace of God he tasted death for every man,"—and "gave his life a ransom for many,"—made "his soul an offering for transgressors,"—"died the just, for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."—This is a case infinitely different from that above supposed;—which was, that Christ was a sufferer unto death, though absolutely innocent;—that his sufferings had no respect to any besides himself; and that the only vindication of divine justice, in this affair, is, that, God designed, by future glory, to compensate unmerited sufferings. Where was the wisdom, or benevolence of this? Is the scheme, or its execution, in any wise, like God? In no wise. Besides, this view of the subject changes its whole character. The sufferings, and death of Christ were not for us, as the scriptures teach, but, for himself; and his sufferings, thus signally rewarded, were expressions of love to him, and not to men.

2. What reason shall we assign for the death of Christ?

If it was not on his own account; nor in the stead of sinners: if it was not to expiate human guilt, and bring in a righteousness by which men might be justified; in what way is it to be understood? Shall we say, as some have said; that it is a general, and indefinite exhibition of God's hatred of sin; not the punishment of sin—nor the fulfillment of the penalty of the law;—nor, a satisfaction to justice, as offended by the sins of men;—but a general, and abstract exhibition of God's justice, and hatred of sin: not of man's sins in particular, nor of the sins of any creatures, but of sin, under a general and abstract view; that, in virtue of this exhibition having been made, God might, consistently with the honor of his moral government, bestow pardon, and eternal life on whom he would.

My first objection to this view is; that, it is never explicitly affirmed, nor clearly taught in scripture. The general tenor of revelation, on this subject, leads us to suppose, that the sufferings and death of Christ were specially vicarious, and for the sins of men. They are never represented as a general display of justice. If God had so designed to teach, he would have taught it plainly.

2. If it is a general exhibition of rectoral justice, it is as applicable to fallen angels, as to fallen men; and there was no special reason why the example should have been made in human nature—or, rather, why should it have been made at all? In fallen angels, an awful, and instructive exhibition had been already made,—and was more easily and obviously intelligible, as being vengeance inflicted on the guilty.

3. The sufferings, and death of Christ are most strongly and explicitly represented in scripture as having special relation to that law, under which man was. This must be the law referred to. To suppose any other, is absurd. "Christ was made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."—"He redeemed them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for

them." "God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." In what respects was the law weak?—Not in its penalty. The execution of its penalty, on man, a transgressor, would, as to expiation, have met all its claims; and the law would have operated with all its original power, and with all the effect which it was entitled to have:—but as to righteousness, the law, in the case of man a sinner, could not avail: man's weakness through the flesh, or depravity, rendered it impossible that he should ever answer the preceptive requirements of the law. To provide for this seems to be the special end here assigned. "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." And elsewhere—"that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,"—that we, in him by faith, and regarded as one in law with him, might have a righteousness such as God requires.

4. Once more, this scheme wholly abandons the interests of that law, under which man was. Neither its preceptive, nor penal requirements are ever satisfied. There is no perfect obedience rendered to it by man, nor by Christ, in behalf of man. Its penalty, though incurred, is not executed on man, nor on any other, specially, in his stead; because, Christ's obedience, and death, it is alleged, were not special, but general, and had no direct, relation to this law, more than to any other law. This scheme abandons this law altogether; the only law involved in the case of man: and so far is it from being magnified and made honorable, that it is robbed, and dishonored, both in its precept, and penalty. But if Christ's obedience, was obedience to this law; if his sufferings, and death were the endurance of its penalty in man's stead; and if man is thus justified, then this law is magnified, when man is saved.

This, I believe, is the scriptural doctrine. Christ's obedience unto death was specially vicarious, not a general display of divine justice.

There is another fiction, on the subject of justification, which has been published to the world.—That remission of sin is through the death of Christ; but that justification is on account of man's personal obedience rendered to the law. This separates what God, and the nature of the case, have joined—the pardon of the sinner, and his acceptance as righteous:—and it implies a denial that Christ's active obedience is the meritorious reason of the believer being accepted with God, and admitted to eternal life. But justification, in its whole amount, is in scripture ascribed to Christ." He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." "Him hath God set forth as a propitiation."—"By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."—Remission of sin is through Christ, and in that

remission God is just. Christ is the end of the law; that is, answers the claims of law for every one that believeth. What did the law claim of the sinner? Manifestly the payment of its penalty—the threatened death, or a full equivalent. Christ made his soul an offering for sin, and redeemed them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them.—But the execution of its penalty is only an indirect end of the law. Obedience is its first demand, and primary object. Laws are not enacted for the purpose of having their penalty executed; but that obedience may be secured: and if Christ is the end of the law, he is its first, and direct end, in fulfilling all righteousness: and, in this respect, he is the end of the law to every one that believeth—or, the affirmation of this text is untrue.

But it is alleged, that, he procured an abatement of the law, so that the sincere, though imperfect obedience, of the believer, is accepted as the consideration for honorable acquittal, and everlasting rewards. In relation to this scheme, which is designed to save the pride of the sinner, and leave him at least some reason of glorifying, a few questions naturally occur. 1. Why abate the law? Was it too high in its demands? Was it too much to require us to “love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.” If it required too much, for that reason it ought to be abated, and for that reason alone; and to require the mediation, and death of Christ, in order to that abatement, was to add cruelty to injustice and tyranny. This is not the fact. The law of God was always just, and good; and is now as just and good as it ever was, and God cannot repeal, or abate it. A second question is,—if abated, and made a milder law—what is the abatement? How much less does it require, and how much less does it threaten? How imperfect may obedience be, and yet be accepted and rewarded as if perfect? To this question of life, and death, God has given no answer. This new and milder law he has never promulgated: how far God is willing to deny himself, and be faithless to his government we are not informed:—nor will we ever know—for it is not a fact.—Heaven and earth may pass away; but his law cannot fail.

But though God has not, yet men have answered this question, and we are told, that it is *sincere obedience*. Sincerity is the measure of the law,—and admitting this answer as true;—who is there, for whom this law will avail?—who can plead full sincerity, even in his best services? and who is there, whose sincerity has not been, often, wilfully violated? Who can plead exemption from all guile? Who can appeal to God, that all he has done wrong, all he has omitted to do, and all he has imperfectly done was his invincible infirmity, and that, *in all*, his heart, and purpose were pure?—none, no not one.—Even this law will stop every mouth, and the whole world stand guilty before God.

I am aware that the believer's obedience is imperfect, and

that God graciously accepts his works of faith, and labors of love:—but, not as items in the account of justification:—no; they are favorably regarded, as the fruits of a regenerated heart. God is pleased with them as the results of his own grace, and symptoms, in the condition of the sinner, of returning life, and health, and every pious soul thus values them; not as reasons of boasting, but of thankfulness to the restoring mercy of God, and essential parts of a needful, and gracious salvation, that they are “redeemed from iniquity, and purified unto God, a peculiar people zealous of good works.

3d. If the death of Christ was not in the stead of sinners, nor designed to provide a righteousness in virtue of which God may pardon, and give them eternal life—what was the design? Was it to be a demonstration of the love of God?—So, it has been affirmed. The notion of satisfaction has been rejected, as dishonorable to God, and inconsistent with divine benevolence; and the death of Christ, we are told, is to be regarded only as a demonstration of the love of God. How does it make this demonstration? what does it show that God loves? or, how does it show it?

Does it show his love to his law, and to the holiness which it requires?—It cannot, if it had no special respect or relation to the law. If Christ's obedience was not obedience to the law; and if his death was not to vindicate its violated honor, it makes no demonstration of this kind, and cannot be a proof of love to that, to which it had no relation. But, if, as scripture teaches, it was intended to save the honors of the law, in saving sinners, then, it is a demonstration of God's love to law, and holiness.

Does the death of Christ show God's love to man? It cannot, if he died not for man. Sufferings, and death which were not for them, can be no manifestation of love to them; but, if for them, the evidence is demonstrative. This is the doctrine of scripture; and the only intelligible doctrine. In this was manifested the love of God, that he laid down his life for us. “He spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us.” If the death of Christ has not a special relation to the law, and to the redemption of man from its curse, I see no demonstration of wisdom, or holiness, of justice, or of love.

4th. We repeat our question, if the death of Christ was not to fulfil the righteousness of the law, in order that God may be just in saving sinners, why was it necessary, and what important end does it serve? Will it be said that it was intended only as an instructive example of fortitude, patience, and submission in suffering? So it is often said. That the sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ are to be regarded in this light, and that, in this respect, they furnish an instructive, animating, and authoritative example of patience, resignation, and pious constancy we readily admit, nay, thankfully acknowledge: but, that this was the only, or even the chief design of his obedience unto death we can, by

no means, believe.—If this had been the only purpose, why was such a mysterious, and exalted person necessary, a death so infamous, and such extremity of distress and agony? These facts then proved an objection, and a stumbling block; they led the multitude to revolt from him, his friends to be offended at him, and plunged his best followers into deep distress. The cross is still matter of offence, and nothing can reconcile the mind to it but a discovery of the glory of God, and the evil of sin; and that the death of Jesus was the means of glorifying God in the salvation of sinners.

If example was the great, and only design of the death of Christ, the scriptures would so teach, and this view would be distinctly prominent. This is not the fact. A more awful, and penal design is every where declared. "He was delivered for our offences."—"He made his soul an offering for sin."—"He was made a curse for us."

If Christ's death was only an example of patience, it was not peculiar in its end and design. The patient sufferings and death of apostles and other martyrs, were of the same character and design; and they may as truly be said to have died for us, as he; and they are saviours of men in the same sense, and by the same means as Jesus Christ was. Thus they are never recognized. To have been thus honored, they would have indignantly resisted as blasphemy. And why? Because they knew that in the sufferings and death of Christ, there was a dignity, a value, and a special design which belonged exclusively to him who is "the propitiation for the sins of the world."

If Christ's obedience unto death was only an example of patience and constancy, it was not more perfect, nay, it was less so, than that of many others. Martyrs often, says Saurin, "met death with unshaken fortitude: they braved the most cruel torments: their firmness struck their executioners with astonishment. In Jesus Christ, we behold nothing similar to this, though *he*, beyond all others who ever lived, had reasons for a triumphant death. Nay, I will go farther, and say, that the penitent thief discovers more firmness, in his dying moments, than the Saviour himself. He addresses himself to Jesus Christ, he implores his mercy, and set at rest by the promises given to him, he expires in tranquillity. Jesus Christ, on the contrary, seems equally to despair of relief from heaven and from earth. The opposers of the satisfaction of Jesus Christ will find it absolutely impossible to solve these difficulties: the doctrine of the satisfaction is the only key that can unlock this mystery."

I add, that, if martyrdom for the truth is not a duty, the example of Christ is calculated to mislead. They who deny the divinity of Christ, and affirm that his death was merely an example, deny also, that the belief of the gospel is essential to salvation, and consider heathens, Mohamedans, and all others, if sincere, equally safe; so that they can have no reasons to sacri-

life, to maintain or propagate the Christian faith, and the example of Christ, in this respect, deserves not to be imitated.

5th. I resume the main question once more. If the death of Christ was not to fulfil the righteousness of the law, in order that God may be just in saving sinners, why was it necessary? Will it be said that it was necessary to confirm his mission and his doctrines by sealing his testimony with his blood? That these ends were secured by the death of Christ, is certainly true: but that these were not a chief end, is as manifestly certain. It is rarely, perhaps never so stated in scripture—that he died to confirm his mission, or his doctrines; but as a sacrifice, a ransom, a propitiation, an offering for sin. If to confirm his mission was the chief, and ultimate object of his death, we think it was in vain, because he had abundance of other means, and more appropriate, by which to secure that end.—To him all the prophets bare witness—to them he appealed, and his appeal is well sustained.—He appealed to his miracles. They demanded, and deserved the confessions which they extorted.—“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” “No man can do the works, which thou doest, except God be with him.” “Go tell John what ye hear, and see—the blind receive their sight, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and to the poor the gospel is preached.”

He often referred to his death; but it was his resurrection, according to his own repeated prediction, not his death, that was to “declare him the Son of God with power.” Independently of this, his death proved nothing more than his sincerity; but decided neither the truth, nor falsehood of his claims, and doctrines. Many have resolutely died as martyrs to their own fond delusions, and errors. A host of appropriate, and invincible arguments sustained, and still sustain the doctrine, of the divine mission, and saving power of the Son of God. His death was an awful but glorious event: a necessary, infinitely wise, gracious, and holy expedient. It illustrates the perfections of God, magnifies his law, and redeems sinners “from the wrath which is to come.” God can now be just, and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus.” I now conclude with three remarks.

1. Salvation through Christ is a glorious display of the wisdom of God. It unites the great interests of holiness and mercy. The case of fallen man presents many questions of immense importance, and difficulty. Such as these—

If man be not saved, how can the mercy of God be known and honored? If mercy be exercised, what will become of the claims of justice? If justice have all its demands, what room will there be for grace? If grace be extended to sinners, how shall personal holiness be secured?—The answer to all these is summed up in that epitome of the gospel—“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Mercy

is designed, revealed and exercised. "God loved the world." The rights of justice are maintained by the obedience and death of God's Son, through whom mercy is exercised. "God gave his only begotten Son."—Yet grace reigns through righteousness. Redemption purchased by Christ is bestowed freely upon sinners according to the riches of divine grace. "Whosoever believeth is saved." The personal holiness of the sinner is secured, because it is a salvation from sin; and the sinner obtains salvation by receiving the truth in the love of it; believing and confiding in the Son of God as the propitiation for sin, the Saviour from sin, the example of holiness, the Author and finisher of faith.

Mercy and truth, justice and grace, the safety, holiness and happiness of the sinner, all combined, form a constellation of glory—each has a glory of its own, but all are here blended together in a glory that excels—"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

2. They who reject the mediation of Christ are without any hope of divine favor. The favor of God is offered to the inhabitants of this world through Christ alone, and those only are promised an interest in it, who cordially trust in him as the Lord their righteousness: "He who believeth not; shall be damned." Redemption through Christ, is an instance of goodness eminently divine: no other blessing is so great: no other display of the divine character so lovely. Unbelief is ingratitude most criminal, insolence most daring, and is threatened with a vengeance most justly due. "How will you escape if you neglect so great salvation?" Let every unbeliever tremble at the thought of approaching judgment. Let him no longer say to himself, peace, peace: sudden destruction is coming upon him. Let him turn to the strong hold whilst he is yet a "prisoner of hope."

3. A self-righteous spirit involves in it—presumption, folly, and impiety.

Presumption: that a weak and miserable sinner should adventure to the throne of a just and holy God, pleading his own merit, and claiming for it, eternal life!

Folly: because the plea is false, and unavailing. He has no merit; even his righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and God has declared, that by the deeds of the law no flesh living shall be justified.

Impiety: because it virtually charges God with folly, and needless expense in sending his Son to redeem; and especially in laying upon him the iniquities of us all; it reproaches the doctrine of the cross as foolishness, and attempts to rob Christ of all his glory!!

Who is chargeable with this presumption, folly, and impiety?

Who will dare to persist in a course so criminal and so ruinous?

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**SERMON XVIII.**

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**THE PRESENT STATE AND DUTIES OF THE CHURCH.**

ISAIAH 11: 3, 4, 5. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

THAT is a very feeble interpretation of this passage, which makes it refer to the proclamation of Cyrus, and the return of the Jews to Jerusalem after their captivity. The Lord Redeemer coming to take away the sin of the world, and not his people returning to him, is predicted. The character and office of the forerunner of the Lord, and not the proclamation of any earthly potentate, form the subjects of this prophecy. Of this we are assured by the application of these words to Jesus Christ and John the Baptist, by the Evangelists.

It is worthy of remark, that each of the four evangelists has applied this passage of Isaiah to John, and Luke has given us an almost literal quotation of the whole of our text. The passage has been translated by G. Campbell.—“The voice of one proclaiming in the wilderness prepare a way for the Lord, make for him a straight passage, let every valley be filled, every mountain and hill be leveled, let the crooked roads be made straight, and the rough way smooth, that all flesh may see the Saviour (sent) of God.” This seems to me to be a good translation of Luke, and a good comment on Isaiah. By adopting this reasoning we obtain a very important sense. The leveling and straightening of the way is not only to facilitate the passage of this august personage, but that he might be seen at a greater distance. “That all flesh might see the Saviour, the sent of God.” And this seems to me to be the most appropriate sense; because

no obstacle can obstruct the passage of the omnipotent Saviour, whereas the smallest intervening object will intercept him from our circumscribed view.

There can be no question, but the future glory of the church is one great object of this prophecy, and particularly of the church as it respects its *extent*. "All flesh shall see it *together*," that is, at the same time and essentially under the same light, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." The *church*, then, and its future condition, is the principal idea contained in the words.

#### I. THE PRESENT STATE OF THE CHURCH.

1st. **THEIR NUMBERS.** It is granted that less than *one third* of the whole population of our world are Christians. The remaining two thirds, are Mahometans, Pagans and Jews. The heart of piety sinks when this fact is announced; and the crest of infidelity is proudly erected, while the disciple of the philosopher of Ferney, triumphantly asks, "are you christians, being but a handful, not ashamed to say you have the only heaven-born faith, that "there is none other name under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved," but the name of Christ? A moment's impartial review of this subject, both as it respects ancient and modern times, will serve to tranquilize the heart of piety, and lower the escutcheon of infidelity. What was the religion of antiquity? It was a system of wickedness, engrafted exclusively upon *human pride and human appetite*. Hence deity and humanity were blended together. The vices of their great men were overlooked, and even applauded because they were the vices of the gods themselves. The passions, and the most loathsome lusts of the common people, were palliated, for Juno and Jupiter had their intrigues, Venus and Bacchus their orgies. Nor can any wise man for a moment be surprised that countless myriads of depraved, and sinful and corrupted beings should have crowded around altars polluted, should have worshipped deities who practised and approbated wrath and jealousy, and pride and lust in their very worst forms. And who does not know that the mythology of antiquity was interwoven, thread by thread, with the religion and jealousy of the nation. Touch the religion, and you change the policy, or change the civil policy, and the religion was endangered. Of the truth of these remarks we have abundant proof in the Acts of the Apostles, as recorded by Luke, and if further proof were wanting it is furnished in the fact that the religion and policy of antiquity perished together. We have not time to pursue these thoughts; had we, the investigation would awaken in our minds the most profound astonishment, that during the first ages of Christianity, she was not borne down; we would wonder, not that she had so *few*, but that she had so *many* votaries. Nor can the fact be accounted for upon human principles; we are compelled to refer them to heaven.

But we are told christianity is 2,000 years old: That 2,000 years is a long time: That ancient superstition has long since passed

away, and that but one third of the human family are yet, even professedly, christianized. Now all this is granted. But let it be remembered that the death of one system of error, did but give birth to others, engrafted upon the same corrupt stock, and equally replete with crime and folly. What is Mohamedanism but a flattering appeal to the worst passions of our nature? Is any Mussulman taught to curb his ambition, to love his enemy, or to subjugate the evil propensities of his heart? So deeply does sense imbue the whole of his system, that the heaven of Mohamed is nothing better than a brothel. Now when it is remembered what we are by nature—that from infancy to old age we are a mass of sensuality; who would wonder that there are so many Mohamedans? Have we not reason to be astonished that this religion of *sense*, has not desolated the whole human family? Nor need we be at all surprised, in our intercourse with men of certain principles, to find them rather leaning to the Alcoran than the Bible. This is no more than sailing with the current—embracing that which is pleasing to a corrupt taste, and rejecting that which calls upon us to reform and amend our ways—to be holy. The above remarks refer with all their force to every system of Pagan religion upon earth. We defy their admirers to find any thing like purity of heart and life, in one of them. There sits enthroned the **DEMON OF LUST**. He is surrounded with a priesthood as loathsome as himself, and the millions who bow in homage at his feet, are driven to self-sacrifice and death, under the hope that the extinguishment of the lamp of life, that burns too feebly for their raging desires, will, beyond the grave, be immediately so rekindled that all the fancies of their polluted imaginations will then be realized. Such, if we mistake not, is the true philosophy of Mohamedanism and Paganism.

And now, my friends, with these thoughts present to your minds—with the immaculate purity of the Bible in your eye—remembering its unbending rigidity—the holy demand which it makes upon all its adherents—the unsensual character of the christian's present joys, and future heaven: when you look at all these things, and then look again to the polluted fountain within thy own bosom—are you not astonished that the gospel continues to subjugate individual after individual, and nation after nation—that it bows the hearts of the sensual worshipers of the sensual gods of the heathen, and enables them to put on the purity, with the faith of Christ? That though slowly, yet certainly, it is new-creating the world, bringing at once, glory to God, and felicity to man? Let the **GENIUS** of Infidelity stand by and witness the triumphs of the **CHURCH** to-day. She, so far from blushing at the fewness of her numbers, triumphs in the fact, that in such a world, and among such beings, such a pure and holy religion, should, from such a small beginning—from a handful of corn upon the top of the mountains, in so short a time as 2,000 years, have achieved such wonders.

2d. **HER CHARACTER.** The character of the members of any community is a legitimate subject of inquiry in forming an estimate of that community. Who are Christians? What part of our world is under the influence of Prince Immanuel? Europe, and christianized America contain less than *three eighths* of the inhabitants of our world. But do Europe and christianized America possess no more than three eighths of the humanity and good-doing spirit of our world? Do Europe and christianized America appropriate to themselves no more than three eighths of that tide of felicity which is perpetually flowing from the beneficent hand of the Giver of all good? Let the infidel answer, yes, no more than three eighths, if he dare. Be as cold and philosophic as you please, analyse with any severity you may choose the pretensions of the Church, and, to gain your purpose, sarcastically repeat the cant phrase, "Every man thinks his own country the best, and his own philosophy the wisest," yet can you persuade yourself that there is as much humanity in China as in Great Britain,—as much felicity in Pekin as in New York—or as much good-doing in India as in Europe?

What has given those parts of the world, which in the beginning, and for thousands of years after the beginning, were nothing but howling deserts,—what has given them in these latter days, so far the ascendancy over the regions round about the site of the garden of Eden, and those no less delightful regions watered by the Indus and the Ganges? Why are Europe and America the wonder and admiration of the world, as it respects every thing that ennobles our species and felicitates man? Say not that it is the fertility of the soil, and the salubrity of the clime. Does the valley of the Mississippi exceed that of the Ganges, the Thames that of the Euphrates, or that in which Paris stands that in which proud Babylon once reared its head to heaven? Oh! my Christian brethren, *you* can solve this matter, and yours is the only rational solution. You come up to the solution of this question with hearts at once confident that you are right, and glowing with the most ardent gratitude. You believe that Europe and America flourish like the green bay-tree, not because they are under a more or less vertical sun, not because the clouds of Heaven drop down more fatness here than elsewhere: but because we feel the influence of the Sun of Righteousness, and are partaking of the root and fulness of the good olive tree.

3d. **THE PRESENT ADVOCATE OF THE CHURCH.** Science is her advocate. When we speak of science, we mean that kind of knowledge which embraces the universe in all its actual states and dependencies. That science which recognizes God as the head of all things, and the whole frame as established by his will except so far as it has been deranged by sin. That apprehends God in Christ *alone*, and bows with holy deference to the high mysteries of God manifested in the flesh. We do not mean the

kind of philosophy, which makes man a bundle of nicely arranged and well organized materialities, and then would set this material, reasoning, and thinking being, to expound God and his works independently of what God has said. We do not mean that kind of heathen philosophy which would offer incense at the shrine of nature, and at the same instant trample nature's God and his laws under foot—which would set nature to the work of self-regeneration and creation, and exclude the hand of a wise and holy Providence. Nor do we mean that kind of Christian philosophy, the enemy of truth, and the present bane of the church, which would at once rob our Saviour of his proper divinity, and the sinner of his native pollution and responsibility, until "moral action" commences; and then sets this yesterday-made agent to enlightening his own mind, and regenerating his own soul by the exercise of his own power, or the moral suasion of his minister, independently of the Spirit of grace.

The church triumphantly, but meekly, asks an infidel world, what religion is that which at first put forth its claims in the very center of all the philosophy which was in the world, two thousand years ago; which has ever since delighted to accompany with science; which sought the light, and coveted the scrutinizing eye of sound literature; which has exalted Europe and America, and which has been exalted by Europe and America? The church, this day, is surrounded and sustained by her thousands and millions of enlightened advocates; the most august philosophers throughout the Christian territory delight to do homage to Prince Immanuel and his church; and every statesman, and every lawyer, is compelled, however reluctantly, to cast a respectful eye upon the Bible, while they lend their talents to perfect our civil institutions, which are all connected with the gospel.

4th. PRESENT ASSUMPTIONS OF THE CHURCH. The church has never, except under the influence of the grossest mistake, assumed any thing to herself as it respects the civil policy or government of this world. "My kingdom is not of this world," is a declaration of our Saviour which should never have been forgotten; and which is more sacredly regarded at this time by the church, than it has been at any former period. Yet the church has always had, and especially has at this time, very high assumptions.

The church *assumes* to herself the honor of having deposited in her hands, all the *moral truth* of any permanent and substantial worth, in the world. The church allows to philosophy all its just claims. It allows the astronomer to measure the heavens—the mathematician to describe his diagrams—the chemist to heat his retorts—the civilian to perfect codes of human policy—the moral philosopher to analyze mind, and develop the *natural* perfections of God. But she says to philosophy, here you must stop. The *moral* character of God, and future destiny of

man, together with the whole doctrine of pardon, are of heaven's telling.

The most important question ever asked by man, is, "who is God my Maker?" The church says, to this question no adequate answer can be returned, but by the aid of her bible. Does a trembling sinner come and ask, "What shall I do to be saved from the wrath of this terrible God?" The church talks not of merit, nor of morals, nor of power; she simply says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and then goes on to point the sinner to that Spirit, which, when asked, is given to work in us both to will and to do.

The church *assumes* to herself, in a peculiar manner, the care of *the rising generation*. This she believes she is compelled to look after, and of her faithfulness in this matter, she is persuaded she is to tender her account to her great Head at last. In this assumption, she pleads the authority of God in the first organization of the church in the family of Abraham, and the nation of Israel, and the confirmatory example and precept of the Saviour, when he came to complete the organization of the same church.

Who will take care of the young, if the church do not? To whom will you commit the training of your child for immortality? To persons who scarcely believe in an immortality, and profess to have no interest in any thing beyond the grave? To whom will you consign the work of eradicating those evil propensities which have had their spontaneous growth in every bosom for six thousand years, and which have converted our world into a field of blood and house of violence? To those who know of no such passions belonging to human nature—of no innate propensity to evil? To one whose unsteady hand cannot draw the lines of demarkation between virtue and vice; who in morals makes that crooked which is straight, and that straight which was crooked? The world may abandon their offspring, having fed and clothed them during infancy, and taught them how to provide for the first sixty or seventy years of their existence. The church cannot do so, nor can she stand quietly by and see the world do so, without being, in some measure, participators in their guilt.

But is this a pompous assumption of the church, unaccompanied with any appropriate effort to take the effective guidance of the rising population? Shew me the well organized school in Europe or America, where the voice of the church is not heard, and where she has not been able, in some form, to introduce the gospel. But she busies herself not alone about our public schools; the church minds not "high things" only; she condescends to things of "low estate." As a proof of this, look at her Bible classes and Sabbath schools. Can we doubt as to the effective operations, when in the American Sunday School Union at Philadelphia, they had during the year ending May, 1832, 542,424 scholars in connection, scattered over America?

The church stands at this moment, in the most important attitude to the whole family of the poor and the miserable in our world, especially as it respects their *mental* wants. She has assumed to herself the special charge of their interests. The child of wretchedness is visited by the church, in the person of one of its members. He brings food in one hand, and the balm of life in the other. Whilst he gives the sufferer the bread that perisheth, he speaks of the bread of life. While he throws over him the covering which shall shelter his wretched limbs from the frost of winter, he speaks to him of the robe of a Saviour's worth. While he soothes him under the sorrows he feels, he speaks to him of the sufferer who was wounded for our transgressions. While he listens to his tale of woe, he endeavors to affect his conscience with a sense of his own sin, and ingratitude against God. While the sufferer exclaims, "there is no rest for me in this world," the Christian speaks to him of the rest prepared for the people of God, where the weary are at rest, and the wicked cease from troubling.

Nor have the poor sailors been forgotten. A sailor and a sinner, until a few years ago, were connate ideas in almost every man's mind. It is no longer so; and that it is no longer so, is solely owing to the interest that the church has assumed to herself in these wandering sons of the deep. How much national wealth and prosperity may be advanced by the reformation of seamen, it would be difficult to calculate; we know that the sum of human happiness and goodness, has been greatly augmented by these means.

The church has assumed to herself the sublime and godlike work of *enlightening* the world. This is one of her most interesting attitudes.

Among all the countless millions who have peopled our world during six thousand years, only two men have been found who have indulged the chimerical hope of conquering the world by *arms*. The madmen of Macedon and of Corsica, have both passed away, and with them have perished their projects. Now the idea of subjugating the world to the control of PRINCE IMMANUEL, is one that plays warmly about the heart of every true son of the church. Lord Gambier, Elias Boudinot, and their countless fellow-laborers, have nerved and put into operation the faith and hope of Newton, of Tillotson, of Doddridge, of Howard, and of thousands such men. Modern Christians are applying active labor and effort, to those things which were but in prospective and hope to our forefathers.

That the subjugation of the world to the faith of the gospel, is a high assumption, an imposing attitude of the church, we are willing to grant; but that it is a chimera, we do positively deny, and hope to prove presently.

To the CHURCH, I this day solemnly address myself. I call upon her to come and survey again the elevated ground she has

assumed. It is too late now to talk of difficulties. To the declaration of her Lord, "YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD," the church has returned her solemn and deliberate AMEN, "yea, Lord, we know we are the light of the world, and the world will be enlightened." We will roll back upon guilty infidelity in full tides of gospel blessedness, the scoffs and contempt she has cast upon our efforts. We will penetrate the cave of Mecca with the light of heaven. We will spread the gospel day through the almost interminable darkness that lowers over Asia and Africa. We will convey again to the family of Abraham, that lamp which they extinguished with the breath of malice. Nor are these mere boastful words. The Christian world are in some good degree alive. The church is beginning to put on, not only her beautiful garments, but her whole armor. She pours floods of tears over the impenitent—she commiserates the heathen—she enters the abodes of wretchedness—she exults in the triumphs of the cross—she mourns over the waste places of Zion—she trains up her sons to be Christian heroes—she nurses the schools of the prophets—she multiplies bibles by millions—she sends her dauntless missionaries wherever they are called for—she prepares asylums for converted and persecuted Jews—she goes into the high-ways and streets, and fills her Sabbath schools with myriads of children—knowing that the silver and the gold are the Lord's, she devotes her millions to the support and spread of the gospel—she covers up party spirit with the mantle of charity, while she contends earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints—and from her humblest knees, she is ever saying to her Lord, "thy reign come, and thy will be done, upon earth as it is in heaven." Does the world behold this with indifference? The answer to this question we must defer for another discourse. We will close with two reflections.

1. Nothing is better understood, or more frequently practised by the grand enemy and his coadjutors, than the *power of union*. It is no secret in hell, nor to bad men on earth, that all the evangelical churches, are at this moment throwing aside their minor differences, and rallying around the cross. Prayer, and effort, and money, are thrown into a common stock, and the united effort is to unfurl the banner of Prince Immanuel in every land. What is got up by our grand enemy in opposition to all this? The repairing of the old crumbling partitions, which have separated one branch of Christ's church from another? No. The stream of charity is too fully set to be stopped. It is by arraying brother against brother, and Christian against Christian. It is by clothing the most deadly error in the habiliments of truth, so that the common church, can scarcely discern one from the other. It is by reviving obsolete errors under a new nomenclature, propped up by "philosophy falsely so called." By new and unscriptural measures, aided by fanatical zeal; and all this ruin is often carried on by good men. Satan has inflated

their vanity, by prompting their pride of talent or distinction. "Let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall."

2. A second reflection. From what quarter is the church hereafter to look for her most dangerous foes? I answer, within her own bosom. I do not say the world will go asleep and permit the church unmolested to pursue her present splendid career. Interest and wickedness, will both combine to induce a different course. But opposition from this quarter is comparatively harmless, because to this the church has been accustomed. But as the Saviour's deepest wounds were from the Jews, his brethren according to the flesh; so his church may look for, and even does now experience her deepest affliction, and greatest danger from those within her own bosom, many of whom are her sons. Even under the name and guise of truth—a continued toleration of the most flagrant departures from the truth, under the name of charity—hidden and unceasing warfare under the semblance of *peace* and *love*. These are sources of danger with some; while others, perhaps, are making beams of motes, and mountains of mole-hills. Is it not time we should cease to lacerate our own flesh? But we should tremble lest we incur the woe of causing offences. Why should we not all delight to speak of that which I hope we all love—the *cross*, the simple *cross*, and throw ourselves upon our great work of saving sinners and enlightening the world? Amen.

## SERMON XIX.

BY JAMES BLYTHE, D. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE AT SOUTH HANOVER, IA.

### THE PRESENT STATE AND DUTIES OF THE CHURCH.

ISAIAH, 11: 3, 4, 5.<sup>1</sup>

HAVING in a previous discourse pointed out the *present state* of the church, we now come to treat of the *duty of the church*, under existing circumstances.

May I hope for the prayerful attention of my audience? This is the important part of our subject. Of what avail is it to know our *present condition*, unless we realize our *present duties*?

We closed the last discourse, by asking the question, "Does the world behold all this effort of the church with indifference?"

We now answer the above question. The world does not behold the present strenuous efforts of the church with indifference. Investigate the matter when you please, it will be found that the present state and efforts of the Christian world, form, not only one of the leading features, of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, but they are considered by reflecting men of all parties, as that which is likely to give a new complexion to the whole subsequent history of our race, and by Christians as that which must open to man a fountain of happiness, of usefulness, and of glory, where nothing but desolation and death have hitherto reigned—as that which must dry up the thousands of sources, whence have issued moral pestilence and ruin. I am not able to say whether the great mass of the leading men of the age be *for* the church in her present splendid career, or *against* her. Suffice it to say, many are for her, and many are against her.

Many are AGAINST HER. Now can this annunciation be made in the ears of the church, and be believed by her, without opening to view, an almost interminable train of duties and of conflicts? Let it be, my brethren, as the alarm-gun, the trumpet of war to us to-day. It is not in natural warfare, as it is in this war. There you cut off an enemy's head, and you have done with him. Not so here. How often has an infidel foe, or an errorist, been foiled, wounded, and killed, and at the next corner, you meet with the same foe dressed in the old fractured armor of a Herbert, of a Ched, of a Voltaire, of a Socinus or a Pelagius, and you have the battle to fight over again?

There are those among us now, who in their gay hours deride your whole scheme of Christianizing the world, and when in a philosophical mood, deprecate it as inducing certain ruin to them and their party. When they attempt to reason, they ask you what right you have to interfere with the religion of other nations and other people—to come in between God and his creatures? You are asked, is not the homage of one man's heart as pleasing to Jehovah, as the homage of another man's heart, provided it be made in sincerity? Why should not the sacrifice of Jugernaut be as pleasing to the Deity as the sacrifice on Calvary? Now my brethren, it is but a very small part of the duty of the church, when she hears such blasphemies as these uttered against the Gospel, to tell the gain-sayers that she has her Lord's command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, and God's promise that the heathen shall be given to Christ as his possession. This is well; but the main part of her duty is not to *reason* but to *act*. Let the church so act, that a voice will fall back from the heathen world, upon the ear of infidelity; this, or the voice of the last judgment, will reach the sinner's heart.

The church must convert heathens and Jews, that heathens and Jews may convert Christian infidels. I have more than once seen the face of hardened sin turn pale, at the reading of the story of a converted Jew, or heathen, which face has smirked and smiled under the solemn eloquence of the pulpit. Such facts speak volumes to the church.

They say the first grand duty of the church, is *to see well to the pulpit*. The *pulpit* is of heaven's ordination. It stands pre-eminent among God's appointed means of grace. "For that after the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." If ever there was a time when it became imperatively the duty of the church to guard the pulpit with vigilance, that time is the present. The whole world is in a state of excitement and effort. Look to what department you please, the whole is in commotion. The philosophy, the policy, but especially the *theology* of the world, seem to be in danger of being loosened from their ancient moorings and set afloat. Let the philosophy and the policies of the world take their course. "Let the potsherds of the earth, strive with the potsherds of the earth." But shall the guardians of the pulpit stand by and whisper *peace* to themselves and their friends, when their bosoms quake at beholding the pulpit fast changing into an arena, upon which metaphysics and "mental philosophy" are to display their subtilities, and supplant the simple gospel? Shall the friends of the cross stand patiently by, and see the faithful representative of the errorists of the fourth century approach it, and wipe from it the sacred blood with which it was stained on the day of expiation, and take from it all its imputative value? Shall Pelagius, resuscitated from his grave, and decked out in the metaphysics and philosophy of the nineteenth century, stand up in our pulpits, and

teach our people, that the minds of their children are as pure as the driven snow, until something that is called "*moral action*," takes place, and that then and not until then, are they amenable to God's law? Let the guardians of the pulpit see well to it, that the doctrines of the reformation—of our standards—of our Bibles, be not one by one wrested from them, until nothing shall be deemed heresy except Socinianism—until imputation in all its forms, shall be deemed a fragment of those times, when the "philosophy of the human mind" was not understood as it is now—until human reason and human power shall be substituted in the place of the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit.

2. *Our Schools.* It is the duty of the church to look well to her schools, especially to the schools of her prophets. This is amongst the most sacred duties entrusted to the church.

When we cast our eyes over the middle, southern and western parts of these United States, how many thousands and hundreds of thousands of children do we find, some of them the children of the church, who are growing up without any knowledge of letters! Who will take care of these hapless children, whose parents are too poor, too careless, or too wicked to provide for their education? In many parts of the country no provision is made by law in their favor. *Their only hope is in the church.* Politicians will speculate. They will talk of the necessity of an educated community, in order that the liberties of the country may be perpetuated. It will all end in speculation. The *grand* principle of human effort and enterprise is wanting, viz. *conscience*. I repeat it, the only hope of the uneducated part of the community is in the church. It is the grandest enterprise in which the American church could engage. It ought to be distinctly laid before the church. It must, it will be taken up by the church.

But the schools of the prophets! who can look at them but with the deepest interest? Who can pray for them, with a cold heart—who can labor in them without feeling that he is laboring in the center plat of his Lord's vineyard. Let the church keep a vigilant eye over these schools. Let the authorities of the church, see well to it, that they be fountains of simple gospel truth; firm, but kind supporters of their several standards. And whenever any such school changes its character, and becomes the advocate of heartless speculation, of new and unscriptural doctrines and measures—let it be abandoned.

3. *The present attitude of infidelity and its cure*, call especially at this time, for the attention of the church.

The absorbing question presents itself, what present means have the church to meet this old foe in his new armor?

Of so substantial, and matter-of-fact a nature is the gospel, that it cannot be propagated alone by words, or didactic precepts. What gave the gospel its power at first among the Gentile nations? The presence of the apostles. It could not then, nor can it now be diffused over the world upon the bosom of the *air*, it

must float upon the bosom of *facts*. Christianity cannot even be proved to be true, to the satisfaction of every one, by argument alone. It derives its substantial demonstration from **FACTS**. The Christian is constantly appealing to *facts, facts* ancient and living. *These* with the hand of triumph, he points out to his antagonists. Not that we would underrate argument. But argument alone will not do. We all know that the whole field of argument as it respects Christianity, was nobly fought over during the last century. Never was an intellectual conflict more worthily sustained on both sides; and since the origin of man, never was there so much talent brought to bear upon one subject, as was brought to bear upon the single question, "Is the Bible of Divine authority?" As far as argument could go, the question was settled; candid infidels themselves being judges. Yet still infidelity lingers among us. How is the many-lived monster to be conquered? Has he either the courage or ability to enter the field of manly argument again? I answer, he must be conquered by the practical prowess of the church—by overwhelming him in light—in light that may be felt—a light that shineth as brightly about the domestic altar as in the consecrated dome—light that plays as constantly about the path of the christian, as about his public ways—light that seeks to push its way to the ends of the earth, and visit the darkest corner, and the most desolate hovel among the abodes of poverty. But who is to inflict the last deadly wound upon the monster, infidelity? Do you imagine the honor is reserved for philosophy—or is it to be confined to the winning eloquence of the pulpit? These powers have been resorted to, and with noble effect, still the monster is seen walking in our streets; and he will continue to walk there, till his death's arrow be sent quivering to his heart by the hands of the Jews. The Jews are a wonder, both to the politician and the divine. The politician has no way by which he can account for the unparalleled fact, that amidst all the wars and turmoil of 2,000 years, the Jews have remained a perfectly distinct people, every other people having been whelmed in the overflowing tide of political power and assimilation. These people have remained the infidel's stumbling block, and the Christian's wonder; an inscrutable wonder upon every other principle than that of supposing the immediate hand of God to be in this thing. We believe the Jews have been preserved by God, a distinct people from all others, for two purposes. *First*, to be a safe depository for the old scriptures; and, *secondly*, to put to silence the last surmises of infidelity—not by argument, but by their general conversion. The first of these purposes they have already answered, for there are at present, thousands of Hebrew scholars in the church, as capable of preserving their invaluable deposit, as have been the Jews. God and the church have no further use for the Jews in this respect. The time we believe, is just about to come, when the Jews are to improve the second grand purpose of their distinct preservation. The spirit

of Abraham's God, has at once fallen upon the seed of Abraham, and upon the Gentile churches. The movements, the feelings are simultaneous, because produced by that God, in whose hands are all hearts, and he turneth them whithersoever he will. We this day announce it as a duty, distinctly indicated by the train of events, extending back 2,000 years, and binding upon the church, to labor to convert the Jews, that the Jews may be the instrument of silencing infidelity, and regenerating the world. Nor are these the baseless conjectures of a theory-loving fancy; they are precisely the ideas of the Apostle Paul, for he says, "Now if the fall of them, (speaking of the Jews,) hitherto have been the riches of the world, and the dispersion of them the riches of the Gentiles, *how much more their fullness*—for if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the gathering of them be, but *life from the dead!*"

4. Therefore it is the imperative *duty of the church* to come up one and all to the *aid of the missionary cause*. It is a proposition that admits of no proof. The missionaries of the church must preach the gospel to Pagans, to Jews, and to Catholics, or they will remain Pagans, Jews and Catholics forever.

Two principles are vital to the missionary cause. 1st. It is the business of the church in her *distinctive or church capacity*. 2. It is the duty of every distinct branch of the church to have its own distinct missionary associations. Until both these principles are fully realized and acted upon, the missionary cause never will fully prosper. The command of Christ to preach the gospel was given to the church as such, not to individuals alone. Individuals and unrecognized associations *may* do it. The church *must* do it, or disobey her Lord.

We must have studied human nature very imperfectly, if we can suppose the various evangelical denominations in America ever can heartily unite in any grand missionary enterprise. Say the difference among them is only about church government—say they agree in all the grand essentials of religion—still the matters in which they differ, are, with every Presbyterian—every Congregationalist, every Baptist, and every Methodist, things, though not of vital, yet of considerable importance. And however much these Christians of various denominations ought to love one another, and labor together at home, and however this happy spirit is gaining ground among us; still, when the question is the planting new churches, or the evangelizing the heathen, these peculiarities will, and, permit me to say, ought, to a certain extent, to have their influence. One of God's methods hitherto, of blessing the world, has been by means of different denominations, agreeing about the great fundamentals of religion, but differing about minor matters. And who is prepared to say this is not the best plan?

When every evangelical denomination in our country shall be a missionary society, and every member of such church

shall feel bound to be an active and contributing member of such association, then, and not till then, will the world be converted.

5. Another duty on this subject, presses itself strongly upon my mind. We all know that there are many associations in the church at this moment; they are differently denominated, but their object is one and indivisible. *It is to promote the coming of the reign of Christ.* Now I think no proposition is susceptible of more distinct proof, growing out of our very nature, and drawn from obvious Christian duty, than that every child, in every Christian family in the whole church, *should be a member of some one of these associations.* And to me it is a mystery, how Christian parents can employ themselves in putting their children forward in the *world*, as it is called, and so utterly neglect to pursue that course with them, which would so obviously tend to blend their feelings and interests with that cause which involves all worldly, and all eternal interests. I know of no mean of grace, that at so tender a period, addresses itself so powerfully to the feelings of a child as this. It is making them feel that they are co-workers with God and with his church, before they can work for their parents, or earn their daily bread. It is giving them an elevation and a stand in society, which cannot fail to have the happiest effect upon their moral and social character. Let not the matter of expense be pleaded by any person. There is not a child in ten thousand, even descending down to the poorest orders of life, no, not one in fifty thousand, that might not, by proper care and management on the part of parents, be taught either to make, or spare more in each year, than would entitle to membership of some society of this kind.

But there is still another point of view in which this subject must be contemplated. Say the church of Christ covers a territory containing at present three hundred millions of people. Say that in all that extent, there is only twenty millions of children, the descendants either of pious parents, or of parents friendly to the present glorious effort of the church to convert the *WORLD*; say that each of these children either make or save in each year one hundred cents. Here is twenty million dollars at once, to be annually expended by the church; which added to at least half that sum, the munificence of opulent piety, or honest industry, would put in circulation more bibles, and send forth more missionaries in one year, than the last eventful thirty years have produced. Nor is this a chimerical project. It is perfectly practicable.

*Finally:* We have said that the church has assumed to herself the splendid work of converting the *WORLD*. It is the bounden duty of the church to redeem this pledge. She must perform the work she has so nobly begun. Some valleys have already been exalted, and some mountains have been made low. But the command of God is, "make straight in the desert a highway for

our God, exalt every valley, and make low every mountain, and straight every crooked way, that all *flesh* may see the Sent of the Lord." Now who shall do this but the church? There is no power on earth can be used by God as an instrument to effect this great work but the church. The *Sent* of God is obscured from the sight of the Jews, by an obstinate unbelief, and vain looking for another, which have been the growth of two thousand years. Christian effort, persevering strenuous effort of the church, must melt this obstacle down, and show the Jews that in vain do they look for another; that Jesus is indeed the Christ. An interminable waste of native darkness, cold and chilling as the hand of death, rests upon the Pagan and Mohamedan world. The light of science has not reached even the frontiers of these territories of the prince of darkness; the hand of investigation is trimming her fitful lamp before their eyes, which corruscates for a moment, and then sinks back into darkness, while the gospel is slowly winding her gentle current around their borders. Who but the church shall show these countless millions the Sun of Righteousness, arising with healing under his wings, accompanied with all the blessings of science and civilization? Let it not be said the work is too difficult. Let it not be said, "Whither shall we go up; the people are greater and taller than we, their cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there." Suffice it to say, "The Lord your God, who goeth before you, he will fight for you." Has God promised, saying to his Son, "I shall give the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." And will he not do it? Has Christ come to take away the sin of the world: and shall not the sin of the world be taken away?

Let the church this day consider how far she has gone, what vantage ground she has gained—what struggle she has made to awaken the present tone of feeling and of effort—what expectations she has excited—what terror she has awakened in the camp of the enemy. With all these things in view, let us suppose every thing sunk back again into the apathy of only thirty years ago; what triumph to the foe—what withering to weak faith—what centuries must roll away, in all probability, before a similar state of feeling could be again awakened. The heart grows sick at the prospect. Thank God it is nothing but a phantom. The present spirit of the church will never die. It may wax and wane, as all human efforts in doing good have done, but the present spirit, the main body of it will, I believe, never decline. The conversion of the world is fairly commenced, the proper instruments are at work, the circulation of the bible, and the sending forth the missionaries, the schools of the prophets, the schools of the sabbath. And let all the congregation of the church of Christ say this day, Amen, praised be the Lord!

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**SERMON IX.**

BY REV. EZRA FISK, D. D.

A PROFESSOR IN THE WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

**THE NATURE, LAWFULNESS, AND PROPER USE  
OF CREEDS.\***

2 TIM. 1:13. *Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.*

THE serious and important matter of this whole epistle cannot fail to engage the attention of every Christian minister. All parts of the letter are interesting; but, as we are about to engage in business of church judicature, there seems to be a special appropriateness in the charge, which I have selected for present meditation. I allude also to a fact, familiar to you all; the prevalence of error at the present day. In all branches of the Christian church, there is a tendency to much philosophical speculation, through which errors are introduced, with more or less subtlety, disturbing their peace and destroying the purity of their doctrine. This is now a painful fact; and threatens to become still more distressing. Can we seriously contemplate the obligations which our office involves, and look at the present state of the church, without acknowledging the appropriateness of the charge? Surely we must all be ready to use it as an exhortation to one another, "let us *hold fast* the form of sound words, which we have received in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus."

We all believe the preliminary principles of our form of government, for we have adopted them—"that truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness; according to our Saviour's rule, 'by their fruits ye shall know them.' And that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd, than that which brings truth and

\* This sermon was delivered before the presbytery of Hudson, New-York; and is published at the unanimous request of the members.—Ed.

falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover truth, or to embrace it."\* If we fully believe the principles contained in this extract, there must come over our minds some thrilling emotions, when we think of the multiplied errors which abound, and of their destructive influence in the church.

We ought to ponder seriously in connection with those sentiments, the apostle's charge to Timothy, until our minds shall be imbued with the same feelings which he uttered in close connection with the text: "nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Then shall we be able to "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and to speak the things which become sound doctrine."

The meaning and application of this charge may be developed in answer to the two following inquiries:

**WHAT FORM OF SOUND WORDS WAS INTENDED?**

**WHAT SORT OF ADHERENCE WAS ENJOINED?**

I. The *form of sound words* intended in the charge, cannot be intelligently and satisfactorily ascertained, without some attention to the principal words used by the apostle.

The Greek word *υποσηκωσις*, rendered *form*, means a sketch, or concise representation of a thing. It was applied to painting, and signified a first draught or sketch of the picture: and was opposed in its meaning to a full delineation. In this place it is applied to religious doctrine, and denotes some concise formula of the truths which Timothy had received from the inspired apostle, and which he was bound to teach. The proper meaning is the same as creed, or confession of faith. Every symbol of faith may be called *υποσηκωσις λογων*, a form of doctrine. According to the appropriate meaning of the Greek term, it could not be applied to the whole revelation of God, for then it would be a sketch, or concise representation of itself. Such can not be its meaning in this case. A concise representation of the doctrines contained in the bible, or sketch of its truths, must have been a collection of those which are most important and controlling, arranged in proper order for convenient reference. Some such formula was

\* Form of Government, Chap. I., § 4.

intended in this charge; but whether it was written cannot be determined.

It can now be only matter of conjecture, what were the books and parchments which Paul desired Timothy to bring with him from Troas, but there may have been among them an autograph of a creed, as well as of decrees and epistles sent to the churches. However that may have been, the appropriate meaning of this word is not difficult to ascertain; it indicates the same as we intend by a confession of faith. The word is used only twice in the New Testament. In 1 Tim. 1:16, the only other place, beside the text, it is rendered *pattern*. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering, for a *pattern* to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." In this place, it means an *example* of long-suffering mercy. The abstract meaning is nearly the same as in the other case, which may be translated a *pattern* or *example* of doctrine, or belief in the truths of revelation. Paul's case was an *example* of God's long-suffering; so a creed is an *example* of important doctrines contained in the holy scriptures. In conformity with this interpretation, it seems probable that evangelists, pastors, and particular churches received a creed, or *form* of sound words, from the apostles at a very early period of the New Testament dispensation. There are several passages in the writings of the apostles, which seem to indicate the fact as highly probable. It is true there is no explicit declaration of the fact, but there are allusions to a "*form of doctrine,*" "*sound words,*" and "the faith delivered to the saints," in such a manner as to render it probable, that in the apostle's days, the church had a formula of doctrine to which there was frequent reference. Paul commends the Romans for having "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered them." He often charges Timothy "to take heed unto *the* doctrine, to regard wholesome words, to continue in the things which he had learned, and to hold fast the form of sound words."

The history of the church confirms the interpretation which I have now given of the text, and other indications of an apostolical sanction to the adoption of a creed. There was a very early adoption of the formula called the apostles' creed. It is not probable that it was written by any one of the apostles, in the form which has reached us, but it was early adopted by the church as containing the doctrines taught by them: This fact is well attested by Irenæus and several other Fathers. It was doubtless the most ancient form of a confession which has been preserved to the present time. But there are several other very ancient forms and scattered remains of creeds, found in the early records of the church. Such are the form of apostolical doctrine collected by Origen, the fragment of a creed preserved by Tertullian, a remnant of one in the works of Cyprian, another com-

posed by Gregory Thaumaturgus, the creed of Lucian the martyr, and the Apostolical Constitutions. Besides these scattered fragments of confessions, and frequent references to them in history, there are now extant some entire formulas, as of Jerusalem, Cæsarea, Antioch, and a few others. In the fourth century, the history of creeds and confessions of faith becomes more definite and easily traced. This was probably owing to a prevalence of the Arian heresy, which it became necessary to investigate and expose. From that period to the present time, formulas of doctrine have been used and esteemed scriptural and necessary in the church. There have, indeed, been some individuals, in almost every age, who have denied both their necessity and their scriptural authority. But I am not aware that any *no creed* advocates have been long found among the sound in faith.

Take the whole history of the church, to which I can now only allude in its general character; and the uniform testimony will be found, directly or indirectly, to show that, from the first, there has been a general and almost uniform belief, that forms of faith collected from the revelation of God are sanctioned by apostolical example. I refer to this fact for the purpose of showing, that there has been among the pious and orthodox, in all ages, a practical interpretation of this charge, in accordance with the historical meaning of the Greek word rendered *form*.

There yet remains to be examined, the Greek word *υγιασμοντων*, translated *sound*. This term is used *twelve* times in the New Testament: *three* by Luke, *once* by John, and *eight* times by Paul. Luke and John employ it to express the health of the body; as, "they that are *whole* need not a physician"—"they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant *whole*" "thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him [thy brother] safe and *sound*."\* John, in his epistle to Gaius, wishes that he may "prosper and be in *health*." These are the only passages in which the word is applied to any thing except doctrines or faith. In all the other passages of its occurrence, Paul connected it with religious truth. The first is 1 Tim. 1:10, rendered "*sound*" doctrine—the second is in the same epistle, chap. 6:3, and translated *wholesome*. The whole connection is worthy of notice. "If any man teach otherwise and consent not to *wholesome* words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." The next passage is our text; and the fourth is 2 Tim. 4:3, "For

\* Luke 5:31, 7:10, and 15:27.

the time will come when they will not endure *sound* doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." In Paul's epistle to Titus, among the qualifications of a bishop, he is to "hold fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by *sound* doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." Tit. 1:9. After observing that there are "many unruly and vain talkers,"—and others "teaching things which they ought not," the apostle charges Titus to "rebuke them sharply, that they may be *sound* in the faith." Tit. 1:13. Again, in the second chapter, Titus is charged to "speak the things which become *sound* doctrine: that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, *sound* in faith, in charity, and in patience." These are all the passages in which the word is found, but these render the meaning very plain. It signifies the agreement of the doctrine with the holy scriptures. Doctrines, which entirely agree with the revelation of God, are *sound*; and none others are so, in the sense of this term.

Thus, the meaning of the text is a formula of doctrine, containing the most important truths of inspiration. It is not now important to ascertain precisely what was that "*form* of doctrine," which the apostle enjoined on Timothy to hold fast, and which the primitive saints used in the profession of their faith. There was no inspired formula or creed, the terms of which were enjoined on all branches of the church. But on this subject the injunction is, that the form of doctrine must be *sound*, or, in other words, consist of the main theological truths, revealed in the bible. Whether Paul gave Timothy a written creed, or whether it was orally communicated, cannot now be known: all that I contend for is, the fair interpretation of the text authorizes the use of a creed, provided it be *sound* according to the scriptures. I repeat it, the proper meaning of the terms fully indicates this: in addition, the decision of the synod at Jerusalem, the references before mentioned, to some formula, the testimony of the Fathers, and the whole history of the church, confirm the interpretation.

## II. WHAT SORT OF ADHERENCE WAS ENJOINED?

"*Hold fast* the form of sound words," [formula of scriptural doctrine] "which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." In answer to this inquiry, and to develop the meaning of this injunction, I make a few short remarks.

Our *adherence* to a scriptural creed is to be *intelligent*. An attachment to a form of words without understanding the import, is a matter of prejudice and very liable to become bigotry, which is always wrong and injurious. Although the prejudice may be in favor of the truth, and much less injurious than a prejudice

against it; yet an intelligent apprehension of the truth as it is in Jesus, in its excellent loveliness, majesty, and glory, is vastly more desirable and profitable, than the attachment of ignorance.

We are commanded to understand and know the truth: to search the scriptures, for they testify of Christ, and in them we think we have eternal life. We are not to place a creed before the bible, nor substitute a confession of faith in the place of God's revelation. But we adopt the formula as a collection of important and controlling doctrines, taken from the bible, arranged for convenient reference, and considered as a basis of agreement and bond of union. A creed may be considered a wise expedient to acquire an accurate and familiar knowledge of the most important doctrines contained in the scriptures. Such an arrangement of those doctrines facilitates their recollection and due estimate, according to their connections and relations in a regular system.

I shall not plead for prejudice or bigotry, but the cry of bigoted prejudice, often raised against men because they adhere to a creed, which they have thoroughly investigated only in part, is foolish and wicked. It is foolish, because it proceeds from those who have rejected the creed without examination, and criminal, because it would induce men to reject the confession without investigation, and so enthrone a prejudice still more ignorant and bigoted than that which would be displaced. We ought, as far as it is our province, to know the things of God; and for the rest, be sure that it is taken from revelation.

This adherence is to be "*in faith*." There are things which ought to be included in a scriptural creed, that are incomprehensible, and yet they are to be as fully believed as those which can be understood. Such are the being and perfections of God, the incarnation and two natures of the Messiah, the special agency of the Holy Ghost, and many other things essential to be received. If they are all scriptural doctrines, they are to be believed. It is so manifestly absurd, for a man to adopt a creed which does not express his faith, or the important parts of which he does not believe, that no man who does it, can have credit for common honesty. This form of sound words is to be received in faith, not only as containing the *system* of doctrines taught in the holy scriptures, but as expressing, accurately and appropriately, all the most important truths, and containing nothing of importance, which is not found in the word of God. In a word, the adoption of a creed is making it my creed, the expression of my faith on all the important subjects which it contains.

I do not say, in my adherence to a confession of faith, that every word and sentence of it are expressed in the best possible manner, nor that the arrangement could not possibly be better, nor that there is no shade of meaning which I do not entirely approve, nor yet that there is no one article which I would not

prefer, just as it is expressed. But I do say, that as a whole, I adopt it as well and truly expressing my faith; in all its important truths, I cordially receive it in the plain, obvious meaning of its language. Adherence to a confession, which is held to be susceptible of various interpretations and in a sense opposite to the plainest construction of language, avails nothing to the purpose of a creed. If I adopt a confession, it is for the purpose of expressing, in an appropriate and plain manner, my faith. In this manner I apply the apostle's injunction, "*Hold fast the form of sound words—in faith.*"

This adherence is also to be in "*love, which is in Christ Jesus.*" A faith which does not operate by love, is dead—and although the possessor may "*hold the truth,*" it is "*in unrighteousness.*" Taking the formula as the doctrine of Jesus Christ, we are to love it as his truth, as the matter of his teaching. Love to Christ is the first and most distinguishing emotion of a soul renewed by the Holy Spirit, consequently the truths and instructions of his gospel are dear to the same soul. All those doctrines, bearing his image and authority, are said to be loved in him, because loved for their resemblance and relations to him.

A cold speculative assent to a formula of gospel truth, is comparatively useless. It warms not the heart, influences not the life, gives no zest to the sweetness and loveliness of its doctrines. We must feel a strong attachment to the symbol of gospel doctrine; and not be as willing to substitute something else in its place, as to hold the form of sound words. If the confession be what it purports, a collection of the most important doctrines of gospel truth, we are bound to love it as the truth in Christ Jesus. It contains the fundamental principles of grace and salvation; those principles, upon which we rest our hope and seek for everlasting life. Can it be, that we collect into one view the dearest instructions of our blessed Saviour, place them before us that their light may beam upon our pathway to heaven, and we not *hold them fast in love?* They must surely be loved.

Without separating, for distinct illustration, other characters of this adherence to the confession of our faith, let me say in few words, it must be held *firmly, perseveringly, in reliance* on Christ, and by *aid* of the Holy Ghost. *Holding fast* the form of sound words must, of course, indicate *firmness* and *perseverance* in the truth, "*not driven about by every wind of doctrine.*" There are those, who consider a creed of no importance, and any alleged obligation to observe it as nugatory. It is quite sufficient for such, that the confession purports to have been compiled by men, without inquiring whether it contains the doctrines of revelation or not. They consider it manly, independent, and dignified, to be free from all formulas of doctrine, that, in their own estimation, they may follow the truth wherever it shall lead them. All this is said with as much confidence as if it were to be taken

for granted, that the truth of God, if found imbodyed in a **creed**, is not to be followed or regarded. Such a spirit is the opposite to that, which I mean by *reliance* on the promise of Christ, and which leads men to seek the gracious influences of the Holy Ghost to keep the heart and mind in the faith. That man, who trusts not in Christ and seeks not the Holy Spirit's influence to keep him in the truth, will be very likely to become restless under any adherence to a creed; and may soon break loose from the whole system of revealed truth. I repeat in brief summary the thoughts contained in this injunction. Every man should *intelligently, in faith, in love of the truth, firmly and perseveringly* adhere to the form of sound words; in reliance on the promise of Christ, who engages to keep him, through the truth and in its love; and under an abiding sense of dependence on the influence of the Holy Ghost, who is commissioned to take of the things of Christ and show them unto him.

I might here properly say many things on the *advantages* of creeds, or "forms of sound words," as *instruments* of union, orthodoxy, firmness, and consistency in the faith; as conducive to practical godliness and the church's salutary influence in the world. Much also might be appropriately said, to illustrate the soundness and excellency of our Confession of Faith, recognized as containing the principles of union in the Presbyterian church. But I have prescribed a different course on the present occasion. If I have given a plain exposition of this passage, one part of my object is gained; and the other will be attempted in some uses of the subject.

This brief exposition may be used for *several purposes*. I suggest some of them in a few remarks.

My *first* remark is, that a creed or confession of faith is *lawful, necessary, and scripturally enjoined*.

When I say it is lawful for a society of Christians to compile an epitome of scriptural truth, in form of a creed, for adoption by its members, I mean several things—that it contravenes no law of revelation, or of the country in which we live—that it is the recognized right of a Christian society to adopt its religious creed; and the laws of the country defend those who peaceably exercise the right—and that it is in accordance with the spirit of the bible. I speak not now of any positive enactment to be found in God's word, which binds a religious community to adopt and publish its creed, but of the considerations above named. In this sense it is lawful, because it interferes with no statute and with no right of any one, and is in accordance with the spirit of God's revelation.

When I say that a confession of faith is *necessary* for every Christian society, I mean that their *purity* of doctrine, their *unanimity* and *peace* render such an instrument indispensable. **The whole history of the church shows this most conclusively.**

The nature of the case seems to decide this point, on the face of the church's organization and relations. The church of God is a society, consisting of *many members* but composing *one body*. This church is bound, by the law of her only Head, to maintain "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"—to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind." Moreover, this church is bound to reject heresies, to avoid such as preach another gospel, to rebuke those who sin, to withdraw from such as walk disorderly, and to cast out such as are unworthy. Take these two relations and classes of obligations; the one to maintain *purity, unanimity, and peace*; the other to exercise discipline towards the disorderly and heretical—and tell me if it be possible, without a creed, to fulfil these obligations? I do not ask, is it expedient to have some well-defined and understood test, but is it at all practicable to accomplish the objects without it? Every candid and well-informed judgment will at once say, it is not possible.

When I say that the Christian church is bound by *scriptural injunction* to adopt a confession of faith, I mean something more than what I have explained to be its *lawfulness* and *necessity*. All the injunctions to maintain purity of doctrine, union, and peace in the church—to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints—to hold forth the word of life—and all the directions to exercise discipline in the church,—imply the adoption of a creed. What is more, the fair interpretation of the text and several other passages already considered, enjoin the adoption of a creed and a firm adherence to a scriptural confession of faith. This remark is worthy of careful attention. It places us on commanding and unassailable ground. Creeds are *lawful, necessary, and scripturally enjoined*.

My *second* remark is, that a creed or confession of faith must be *sound* and *judicious*, embracing the fundamental and important doctrines taught in the holy scriptures.

It was a "form of *sound* words," which the apostle enjoined upon Timothy to "*hold fast*." This scriptural right and duty may be abused to bad purposes: and creeds, in defiance of divine authority, may contain for doctrines the commandments of men. This has been done and probably will yet be done. The Scribes and Pharisees of old did it, the Papists are now doing it, and I know not how many others have thus erred, or may hereafter thus err. Simply what God has enjoined as indispensable, is to be incorporated in the confession as *fundamental*; and what God has revealed as important to the purity, union, and peace of his church, that is to be included in the creed, for all the purposes of its revelation in the bible, and for no other.

It is not necessary that every truth in the bible should be embodied in the formula of our faith. There are certain leading and controlling principles, which if a man hold correctly, he will be sure to receive the other parts of the system to which they

belong. My meaning may be thus expressed: if a man has correct views of the perfections and government of God, correct views of the character and relations of man, correct views of the divine Mediator, the Holy Ghost, and the plan of salvation by Jesus Christ, there are many things involved in the system of truth, of which these are controlling, which need not be expressed in a formula, while there are others which cannot be omitted without impairing the whole scheme of gospel truth. When I say the creed is to be *judicious*, I mean a wise selection of those doctrines which occupy a conspicuous station in the scriptures, and exert a controlling influence in the system. We cannot be too cautious against error, and careful that all the articles of our faith stand upon a "thus saith the Lord" and not in the wisdom of men. The revelation of God alone can bind the conscience and the faith of intelligent, responsible men. We adopt a confession of faith for the purpose of agreement in the articles of revealed truth, not in the principles of philosophy or speculation. Our standard is the truth of God, imbodyed in a form of sound words, which we adopt and by which we abide.

My *third* remark is, that we ought thoroughly to *investigate* and well to *understand* our creed.

It is possible that some have adopted the confession of faith, in that branch of the church to which we belong, without having examined its truths and doctrines. This may have been better than to have rejected it without examination: a fault perhaps more common than the other. Although it is not the worst thing a man could have done, it is certainly not the best. For presbyters, especially ministers and elders, it is inconsistent and ought never to be done. It is a very solemn transaction to adopt a religious creed, having for its articles the doctrines of Christ, on which salvation depends; a creed, which recognises the way of access to God and to his acceptance; doctrines, which are to encourage men in all the way of their pilgrimage to heaven.

I fear there are not a few members of ecclesiastical courts, who know very little of that "form of sound words," called the Presbyterian Confession of Faith. There is too much ignorance of that formula of doctrine among us. It is a rich document of truth, which, as ministers and elders, we ought to study. Let us carefully examine and compare it with the scriptures in all its details.

I must say, in this connection, that a neglect to teach our children those important doctrines of our confession, imbodyed in the catechisms, is a criminal omission of duty, and must be attended with great evil to the church. Allow me to mention one fact, which others have doubtless observed. In all the examinations of candidates for admission to the church communion, which have come under my notice, I have had occasion to observe a great difference in the distinctness and intelligence

with which those persons gave the reasons of their hope in Christ, who had, from their childhood, been familiar with the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, and those who had never learned that formula. It is not a matter of sectarian training, but storing in the mind a "form of sound words," which helps greatly to recollect the truths of the bible, and to apply them in ascertaining the reasons of our hope.

But what shall I say of the elder of the church, or minister of the gospel, who neglects to study the formula which he has subscribed? He deserves rebuke, and in this day of theorizing speculation, he cannot be too strongly urged to examine that document, which is so indispensably necessary to the purity and harmony of the church. Let us, my brethren, study this confession, with much prayer and deep interest, comparing all its doctrines with the scriptures of truth, and learn how to estimate its particular parts. Some of its doctrines are more vitally important, and a departure from them far more dangerous, than others. It should be our object to estimate all the doctrines as they are estimated in the word of God. I am persuaded that in proportion as we faithfully examine our creed, so shall we hold it fast as a form of sound doctrine not to be gainsayed.

My *next* remark is, that the same firm and consistent adherence to our creed, which this subject demands of us as presbyters, we are bound to exact of those who unite with us.

If a man is to hold fast the summary of gospel doctrine, which he professes to receive, the transaction involves the adoption of both the form and the sentiment. This tampering with a creed, adopting a part and rejecting a part, receiving some of its contents according to the obvious meaning of its terms, and others in a sense opposite, or entirely different from the common and obvious meaning, is introducing a confusion into the church. Are not the facts so at this hour? Are there not many presbyteries in great difficulty, from having neglected to require an adherence to the standard of faith in its obvious sense? It is passing strange, how men, claiming to be honest, can adopt a creed, many of whose essential features they do not believe, and by which they do not consider themselves at all bound. Such cases have doubtless occurred. We ought to guard against the admission of such persons. We ought to exact of every man, who would enter our connection, an agreement with us in the essential and important articles of our confession. The right of presbytery to examine every man, who seeks admission as a member, is just as clear as the obligation of the man so admitted to hold fast "the form of sound words" which he adopts. Can there be any doubt on this subject? Certainly every presbyter is bound, intelligently, consistently, and firmly, to hold the confession of faith, which he has adopted. He owes it to his divine Master. Has he adopted a summary of faith from the inspired

directions of his Lord; and is he not bound by it? If obligation can bind a conscience, it reaches him. But he owes it to the church, and to his brethren who bear office in the church. They have a right to know what he believes and what they may expect him to teach. The church looks to that form of sound words, which he has said he "sincerely receives and adopts" as his pledge to teach them gospel truth. To hold a sentiment opposite to this would subvert all confidence, and destroy all security that the church will not become the sport of philosophical speculation—it would unsettle the principles of verity, soundness, and peace. Are ministers of the same communion and fellowship, bound to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and yet are they to have no common principles of union, no recognized test of soundness, and no admitted basis of peace? The supposition is absurd and ruinous. Every minister who adopts the confession, owes to the church the fulfilment of his pledge; and the judicatory is bound to exact both, from all who unite with it or come under its care as religious teachers. At such a time as this, the presbytery would be untrue to its responsibility, in neglecting to exact of its candidates for admission, this adherence to the standards of the church.

*Another* remark may here be made; whenever a minister changes his views of religious doctrine, and abandons the creed he had formerly adopted, he ought to leave that branch of the church, and give his presbytery the earliest notice of his change of sentiment and instruction.

Plain, simple honesty demands all this of him. The pledge which a man gives when he unites with a judicatory, is not a declaration that he is infallible. I admit that a man may honestly change his theological views, and embrace doctrines at variance with his formerly adopted creed. But the same conscientious honesty should induce him peaceably to withdraw from the connection, and connect with some other branch of the church. The principle and object of the creed demand this honest course.

It also follows from the same premises, that those who abjure their formula, and at the same time refuse to withdraw, must be treated according to the rules of discipline adopted along with the creed.

Such cases of change and refusal, we know have occurred in many instances, both in the earlier and later history of the church. But how to reconcile them with the principles of honesty and truth is to me unknown. That a man should be under a promise to do one thing, and be bound to do the opposite, in such a case, is inexplicable. His pledge covers his whole continuance in the relations assumed. Here it should be remembered, the change of relations only can absolve from the pledge. If he believes his pledge was wrong, he must change his relation to his brethren, in order to withdraw his consent to abide their

decision in the Lord. If he now believes that the presbytery is not a court of the Lord Jesus Christ, is he to testify that by defiance; in all the effrontery of his self-gratulation, to trample on the order and authority of the judicatory, to disregard the feelings of his brethren, and to despise their conscientious attachment to their creed and form of government? Because he happens to think differently from what he once thought and what his brethren still think, is he to treat them as bigots and persecutors, when they insist on fulfilling their pledge given to him most solemnly and, as they think, in the fear of God? If he believes the formula, which he once adopted, is not a form of sound words, let him orderly and peaceably withdraw his pledge; then, and not till then, will we give him credit for his honesty, however we may regard his zeal.

It has been alleged that the church of God is not a voluntary society, and therefore a man cannot withdraw from any one of its branches. In order to appreciate this objection and take away all apology for its use, we will glance at a few facts relating to the organization and character of the church of God. Our time will not admit of an extended discussion of this topic. There are many passages of the scriptures, which authorize the following descriptions of the church: "It is a society of believing and holy persons, whom God has called, by the gospel, out of all mankind, to the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ"—it is also "a spiritual, independent, regular and visible society." The scriptures designate the qualifications of membership in the church. So far the society is organized on the divine plan, and under the divine direction. It must have these characteristics to be a church of Christ, and in this sense is not voluntary. But how is this organization effected? How do believers, who receive the truth, become a visible church, to enjoy, as a society, the comfort and advantages, and to perform the duties of brethren in unity? It must be by *mutual agreement*. When men receive the truth, they give themselves to the Lord; and then to one another by the will of God. This is the history of the organization, and all additions to the church are on these principles. In this respect, therefore, the church of God is a voluntary society; and can be no other.

This view is confirmed by a scriptural statement of the objects to be attained, by this church union, viz: to maintain and exhibit soundness in the faith, simplicity of gospel worship, impartial exercise of discipline, propagation of the gospel among the nations, and purity of life, becoming the religion of Christ. Finally, the whole character and duties of members in the church, confirm the statement that the form of union is by *mutual agreement*.

Now if there were but one branch of the church, and there were no room for different forms of mutual agreement, and nothing, in this respect, voluntary in this society, it would not

directions of his Lord; and is he not bound by it? If obligation can bind a conscience, it reaches him. But he owes it to the church, and to his brethren who bear office in the church. They have a right to know what he believes and what they may expect him to teach. The church looks to that form of sound words, which he has said he "sincerely receives and adopts" as his pledge to teach them gospel truth. To hold a sentiment opposite to this would subvert all confidence, and destroy all security that the church will not become the sport of philosophical speculation—it would unsettle the principles of verity, soundness, and peace. Are ministers of the same communion and fellowship, bound to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and yet are they to have no common principles of union, no recognized test of soundness, and no admitted basis of peace? The supposition is absurd and ruinous. Every minister who adopts the confession, owes to the church the fulfilment of his pledge; and the judicatory is bound to exact both, from all who unite with it or come under its care as religious teachers. At such a time as this, the presbytery would be untrue to its responsibility, in neglecting to exact of its candidates for admission, this adherence to the standards of the church.

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Such cases of change and refusal, we know have occurred in many instances, both in the earlier and later history of the church. But how to reconcile them with the principles of honesty and truth is to me unknown. That a man should be under a promise to do one thing, and be bound to do the opposite, in such a case, is inexplicable. His pledge covers his whole continuance in the relations assumed. Here it should be remembered, the change of relations only can absolve from the pledge. If he believes his pledge was wrong, he must change his relation to his brethren, in order to withdraw his consent to abide their

decision in the Lord. If he now believes that the presbytery is not a court of the Lord Jesus Christ, is he to testify that by defiance; in all the effrontery of his self-gratulation, to trample on the order and authority of the judicatory, to disregard the feelings of his brethren, and to despise their conscientious attachment to their creed and form of government? Because he happens to think differently from what he once thought and what his brethren still think, is he to treat them as bigots and persecutors, when they insist on fulfilling their pledge given to him most solemnly and, as they think, in the fear of God? If he believes the formula, which he once adopted, is not a form of sound words, let him orderly and peaceably withdraw his pledge; then, and not till then, will we give him credit for his honesty, however we may regard his zeal.

It has been alleged that the church of God is not a voluntary society, and therefore a man cannot withdraw from any one of its branches. In order to appreciate this objection and take away all apology for its use, we will glance at a few facts relating to the organization and character of the church of God. Our time will not admit of an extended discussion of this topic. There are many passages of the scriptures, which authorize the following descriptions of the church: "It is a society of believing and holy persons, whom God has called, by the gospel, out of all mankind, to the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ"—it is also "a spiritual, independent, regular and visible society." The scriptures designate the qualifications of membership in the church. So far the society is organized on the divine plan, and under the divine direction. It must have these characteristics to be a church of Christ, and in this sense is not voluntary. But how is this organization effected? How do believers, who receive the truth, become a visible church, to enjoy, as a society, the comfort and advantages, and to perform the duties of brethren in unity? It must be by *mutual agreement*. When men receive the truth, they give themselves to the Lord; and then to one another by the will of God. This is the history of the organization, and all additions to the church are on these principles. In this respect, therefore, the church of God is a voluntary society; and can be no other.

This view is confirmed by a scriptural statement of the objects to be attained, by this church union, viz: to maintain and exhibit soundness in the faith, simplicity of gospel worship, impartial exercise of discipline, propagation of the gospel among the nations, and purity of life, becoming the religion of Christ. Finally, the whole character and duties of members in the church, confirm the statement that the form of union is by *mutual agreement*.

Now if there were but one branch of the church, and there were no room for different forms of mutual agreement, and nothing, in this respect, voluntary in this society, it would not

be competent for a church judicatory to recognize a withdrawal of any member in any other light than contumacy; and the fact, of a distinct organization, professing to be a branch of the church, only as schism.

But on the principle of voluntary, mutual agreement, entering into the form of the church's visibility, we may recognize, as branches of God's church, some who do not, in all respects, agree with us. If they hold the Head and essential truth, we may recognize them, although they dissent from our form and government. On this ground a respectful declination of our government, pleading a change of views and conscientious attachment to another form of church order, may be accepted. But to prevent all abuse of this principle, let it be understood, if there be a promulgation of dangerous error, or process of discipline has been commenced, the door is closed against its reception.

I cannot forbear to remark, that those, who refuse to adopt any creed, and oppose the use of all confessions of faith in the abstract, are generally opposed to the truth contained in the creed. They desire to be free in the propagation of error. Sooner or later this will be found their principal object and the main-spring of their objections to creeds. I have not time to gather the facts, which substantiate this remark; nor to trace the facts to that self-exalting spirit, which leads men to place as much confidence in the result of their own speculations as in a "thus saith the Lord." But I appeal to the whole history of the church, in which the course and conduct of all opposers of creeds will be found to confirm this statement.

Finally, my brethren in the holy ministry, suffer me to repeat the injunction, "hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard and adopted, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus." This is a time when the enemy of righteousness is employing his subtilty to root out the influence of gospel truth in the church. Already philosophy, so called, has transformed a portion of our denomination, to say nothing of what is effected in others. It is time, my brethren, to study well, and use freely, the language of our formula of doctrine. It is time to hold it fast in its spirit and letter. It is time to speak out plainly on this subject; to call old errors, new modelled, by their old and proper names. The cause of truth is too precious to be wrested from us by a specious philosophy. The responsibility under which we act is too solemn and fearful for us to be silent or indifferent. Souls are too precious to be neglected or misled by dangerous error. Let us be faithful unto death. May the Lord keep us in the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus.

[Contrary to the expectations of the author, the preceding discourse has proved insufficient to occupy our pages. We therefore give some short extracts from the Rev. Dr. Miller's lecture on "Creeds and Confessions," which may be studied with profit, in connection with Dr. Fisk's valuable sermon.—EDITOR.]

By a **CREED, or CONFESSION OF FAITH**, I mean, an exhibition, in human language, of those great doctrines which are believed by the framers of it to be taught in the Holy Scriptures; and which are drawn out in regular order; for the purpose of ascertaining how far those who wish to unite in church fellowship are really agreed in the fundamental principles of christianity. Creeds and Confessions do not claim to be in themselves *laws* of Christ's house, or legislative *enactments*, by which any set of opinions are *constituted truths*, and which require, on that account, to be received as truths among the members of his family.

Now, I affirm, that the adoption of such a Creed is not only *lawful* and *expedient*, but also indispensably *necessary* to the harmony and purity of the visible church. For the establishment of this position, let me request your attention to the following considerations.

1. Without a Creed explicitly adopted, it is not easy to see how the **MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF ANY PARTICULAR CHURCH, AND MORE ESPECIALLY A LARGE DENOMINATION OF CHRISTIANS, CAN MAINTAIN UNITY AMONG THEMSELVES.**

2. The necessity and importance of Creeds and Confessions appear from the consideration, that one great design of establishing a church in our world was, that she might be, in all ages, **A DEPOSITORY, AND A WITNESS OF THE TRUTH.**

3. The adoption and publication of a Creed, is **A TRIBUTE TO TRUTH AND CANDOR, which every christian church OWES TO THE OTHER CHURCHES, AND TO THE WORLD AROUND HER.**

4. Another argument in favor of Creeds publicly adopted and maintained, is that **THEY ARE FRIENDLY TO THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, AND OF COURSE, TO THE PREVALENCE OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.**

5. It is an argument of no small weight in favor of Creeds, that **THE EXPERIENCE OF ALL AGES HAS FOUND THEM INDISPENSABLY NECESSARY.**

6. A further argument in favor of Creeds and Confessions, may be drawn from the remarkable fact, that **THEIR MOST ZEALOUS OPPOSERS HAVE GENERALLY BEEN LATITUDINARIANS AND HERETICS.**

7. The only further argument in support of Creeds on which I shall dwell, is, that **THEIR MOST ZEALOUS OPPOSERS DO THEMSELVES VIRTUALLY EMPLOY THEM IN ALL THEIR ECCLESIASTICAL PROCEEDINGS.**

The favorite maxim with the opposers of Creeds, that all who acknowledge the *Bible*, ought, without hesitation, to be received, not only to christian, but also to ministerial communion, is invariably abandoned, by those who urge it, the moment a case turns up which really brings it to the test. Did any one ever hear of a *Unitarian* congregation engaging, as their pastor, a preacher of *Calvinism*, knowing him to be such? But why not, on the principle adopted, or at least *professed* by

Unitarians! The Calvinist surely comes with his Bible in his hand, and professes to believe it as cordially as they. Why is not *that* enough? Yet we know that, in fact, it is *not* enough for these advocates of unbounded liberality. Before they will consent to receive him as their spiritual guide, they must be *explicitly informed*, HOW HE INTERPRETS THE BIBLE; in other words, WHAT IS HIS PARTICULAR CREED; whether it is substantially the same with their own or not: and if they are not satisfied that this is the case; all other professions and protestations will be in vain. He will be inexorably rejected. Here, then, we have, in all its extent, the *principle* of demanding SUBSCRIPTION TO A CREED; and principle carried out into practice as rigorously as ever it was by the most high-toned advocate of orthodoxy.

We have before seen, that the friends of truth, in all ages, have found, in their sad experience, that a general profession of belief in the Bible, was altogether insufficient, either as a bond of union, or as a fence against the inroads of error. And here we find, the warmest advocates of a contrary doctrine, and with a contrary language in their mouths, when they come to *act*, pursuing PRECISELY THE SAME COURSE WITH THE FRIENDS OF CREEDS, with this difference, that the Creed which they apply as a test, instead of being a written and tangible document, is hidden in the bosoms of those who expound and employ it, and, of course, may be applied in the most capricious as well as tyrannical manner, without appeal; and further, that, while they really *act* upon this principle, they *disavow it*, and would persuade the world that they proceed upon an entirely different plan.

Can there be a more conclusive fact than this? The enemies of Creeds themselves cannot get along a day without them. It is in vain to say, that in their case no Creed is *imposed*, but that all is voluntary, and left entirely to the choice of the parties concerned. It will be seen hereafter that the same may be with equal truth asserted, in all those cases of subscription to articles, for which I contend, without any exception. No less vain is it to say, again, that in their case the articles insisted on are few and simple, and by no means so liable to exception as the long and detailed Creeds which some churches have adopted. It is the *principle* of subscription to Creeds which is now under consideration. If the *lawfulness* and even the *necessity* of acting upon this principle can be established, our cause is gained. The *extent* to which we ought to go in multiplying articles, is a secondary question, the answer to which must depend on the exigencies of the church framing the Creed. Now the adversaries of Creeds, while they totally reject the expediency, and even the lawfulness, of the general principle, yet they cannot proceed a step without adopting it in practice. This is enough. Their *conduct* is sounder than their *reasoning*.—And no wonder. Their *conduct* is dictated by good sense, and practical experience, nay, imposed upon them by the evident necessity of the case; while their *reasoning* is a theory, derived, as I must believe, from a source far less enlightened, and less safe.

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**SERMON XXI.**

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BY STEPHEN BOVELL, D. D.  
OF ABINGDON, VIRGINIA.

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**DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE.**

**ROMANS 8:29,30.** *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

THAT all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ shall inherit eternal life, is a sentiment in which all denominations of Christians are agreed. All who acknowledge the divinity and the atonement of the holy Redeemer are cordially united in adoring him as the true God, and eternal life. It is well known, however, that there is a diversity of opinions among Christians concerning the plan of salvation, and some of the important and precious doctrines which are comprised in it. For this reason it may be seasonable and profitable to endeavor to exhibit correct and scriptural views of the great leading principles which belong to the scheme of God's saving mercy, as every doctrine connected with it must be acknowledged to be highly interesting, and essentially important.

The apostle Paul bestowed much labor in stating and explaining the mysterious and controverted doctrines of divine sovereignty and grace. His epistle to the church at Rome, in which the text is contained, is wholly employed in discussing, illustrating, and confirming some of the deepest and most difficult points in divinity. It contains the most satisfactory elucidation, and the ablest defence, of what are generally called the peculiar doctrines of grace, that has ever been given to the world in so small a compass. In the verses which we have at this time recited, the whole scheme of salvation is brought to view in a very few chosen expressions. In them, we see that golden chain, which, being let down from the everlasting throne of God, (if we may so speak,) is to draw all his chosen people up to heaven, and put

them in full possession of everlasting happiness and glory. This portion of the sacred word evidently contains the following doctrines, viz: God's foreknowledge—eternal election—effectual calling—justification—perseverance in grace—and the eternal glorification of the saints in heaven. Each of these important and interesting topics might afford ample matter for a separate discourse.

The subject which I propose to discuss on the present occasion, is, **THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.**

To treat of the foreknowledge of God, as it relates particularly the *plan of redemption*, and to the *salvation of his chosen people* is intended. That God has devised and in his word revealed to mankind a plan of salvation, we presume will not be controverted. That infinite wisdom, (which our reason necessarily leads us to ascribe to God,) brings us naturally to the conclusion, that whatever is done by his agency or ordering, is brought to pass in consequence of, and agreeably to his own sovereign, benevolent, and wise determination. God's gracious purpose to save a number of Adam's apostate race from sin, and from perdition, we call his plan of salvation. When God devised the plan of salvation, he viewed the whole human family as lying in the ruins of an apostate condition. He viewed sinners of mankind as being not only in a state of guilt and misery, but in such a state of enmity against every thing spiritually good, that if left to themselves, they would be disposed to reject the provisions of sovereign mercy, even when made and tendered to their acceptance. Now it appears from evident fact, that multitudes of the human family have never had that enmity of heart subdued or removed. And on the other hand, comfortable *facts* occur, which demonstrate that some sinners, by the efficacy of sovereign grace, are brought to lay down the weapons of their carnal warfare, and to embrace, with gratitude and joy, the precious overtures of divine love. These things were all in the view of the omniscient mind when the plan of salvation was devised. God, we must believe, had a perfect foreknowledge of every descendant of fallen Adam, that ever would turn to him by sincere repentance for his sins, and would embrace with cordial faith the provisions of his saving mercy. We argue this point from a principle to which all parties subscribe, that is, "that the sinner's conversion is the work of God." If it is by God's sovereign agency, that the sinner is converted, we think the inference fair and undeniable, that he *knew beforehand all those sinners* of the human family whom he determined to convert. This conclusion, we must arrive at, unless we could admit the unreasonable supposition, that an infinitely wise God does not certainly foreknow, and predetermine his own acts. It must appear entirely consonant to reason, and to the infinite wisdom of the Divine Being, that he should in every instance have predetermined, and, therefore, foreknown, whom he would convert. This is what we

mean, and all that we mean, by the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, as it relates to the plan of his mercy in the salvation of mankind.

We are well aware, that in view of this doctrine, many serious persons are perplexed with great difficulties, and some have not only doubted the truth of the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, but flatly contradicted and denied it. We will, therefore, endeavor to solve the difficulties which are connected with the doctrine, that the pious, humble christian, may have rational, consistent, and comfortable views of it; and that those by whom it may have been exploded and condemned, may be induced to examine it again, and satisfy themselves—that there are indeed no evidences of its falsity either in the bible, or in the principles of *sound and unbiassed reason*. In our observations we shall endeavor carefully to avoid giving any offence to those brethren in Christ, who differ from us in opinion.

The difficulties which attend the subject of God's foreknowledge, arise, principally, from the indistinct and erroneous views which have been entertained in relation to it, and the serious and shocking inferences which have been thought to be deducible from it.

1. A difficulty arises from not being able to perceive, if God foreknows the conversion of a part of mankind, because in the eternal purpose of his grace, he predetermined to convert them, how he is to be freed from the imputation of *partiality* in not having predetermined to convert all men. This is one of those deep mysteries of the *sovereign* dispensations of God, which we are free to acknowledge we cannot fathom, and which we do not pretend to be able fully to explain. Some considerations, however, we trust, can be offered, which may serve to cast some light upon the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, and cause the pious and candid christian to view it in a more favorable manner.

We can have no reasonable objection to the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, if we reflect that God certainly has wisdom and goodness enough to enable him to manage all the affairs of his moral government, and of his kingdom of grace according to the unerring standard of moral rectitude. From the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, we may certainly conclude that he never formed *one purpose*—and that he never will perform *one act*, which are not entirely consistent with the infinite perfection of his own character, and with the best interests of his universal kingdom. The conversion and salvation of sinners is on all hands acknowledged to be a work of God, and a work worthy of his sovereign wisdom and benevolence to determine and to accomplish. Christians of every denomination are agreed in praying for the conversion of sinners, and also agree in professing to believe that God alone can convert them. We believe it is right for God to convert and save sinners, that it is an illustrious display of the riches of his grace; *how* will we go about to prove, then, that it is not *right* for God to form an *intention* or to entertain

a purpose to perform this glorious and desirable work of conversion? It cannot be wrong for God to intend to perform a good action. We cannot see any good reason why God, who must by all be believed to have existed from eternity, might not consistently with his infinitely perfect character, have formed an *eternal purpose to display his mercy in the conversion and salvation of sinners*. If so, he might and did also *foreknow* that a certain part of mankind would infallibly be converted and become the subjects of salvation, according to his appointed means. If God be omniscient, the conclusion is inevitable.

But, perhaps, some may think, and say, that we have implicated our Maker in the serious charge of partiality. This difficulty we will humbly endeavor to obviate. We trust it can be successfully shown that God's foreknowledge of those whom he will convert and save, furnishes no evidence that there is any partiality connected with his sovereign plan of mercy.

It is admitted, and believed on all hands, that the whole race of Adam, are by nature in a state of sin, that every individual is under a just sentence of condemnation, and liable to all the pains and penalties of God's violated covenant. Now admitting the supposition, that God, according to his sovereign purpose and grace, did from eternity predetermine to convert from a life of sin, and save with an everlasting salvation in heaven, a part of the apostate family of Adam, what injury has been done by this his gracious purpose, to the remaining part? If God has determined to shew unmerited favor to the elect, in recovering them from the ruins of their apostate condition, by regeneration and efficacious grace, how does it appear that the mercy which he manifests to them, serves in any sense to render the *remaining part* of mankind more guilty or more miserable than they would have been, if none had been saved? Does the grace bestowed upon the regenerate, throw any obstacle in the way of the conversion of those whose natural depravity inclines them voluntarily to continue in impenitence, and to live without God in the world? Does it render the salvation of the careless and impenitent, more difficult or more hopeless in any respect than it would have been, if all had been left unregenerate and suffered to perish? The intelligent christian must give these questions a negative reply. Some good people have another way of solving the difficulty attending the subjects of God's foreknowledge and election. According to their views, God's plan is to *give to all men such a measure of grace as will be sufficient, if they duly improve it to insure their salvation*. But this allegation only serves to involve the subject in a new difficulty;—a difficulty fully as great, as that which was intended to be obviated. For since all sinners do not become the subjects of converting grace, which is a fact too obvious and certain to admit of controversy, it still remains to assign some reason why some sinners are converted and saved by God's sovereign and efficacious grace, while others

no worse by nature than they, are suffered to live and die unconverted, and to perish in that everlasting perdition to which all in strict justice were obnoxious. Here we would ask the humble and devout christian, who has made him to differ from hundreds of his acquaintances, who appeared to him to be less wicked, than he was before his conversion to God? Did God convert him by his efficacious grace, while he did not exert the same gracious influence upon his unconverted neighbors and acquaintances? Or is the difference to be ascribed to this, that he of himself did more towards effecting his own salvation than his fellow-men, who are still unconverted, ever did towards effecting their salvation? No, verily; the truly spiritual, humble, and experienced christian will give quite a different answer to these inquiries. He will acknowledge that his conversion was effected only, and entirely by the free, sovereign grace of God. He is fully sensible that there was nothing good in his heart, until he was savingly operated upon by the influences of the Holy Spirit. His doctrine, of course, is that of the apostle Paul: "By the grace of God I am what I am." Christians of all denominations will unite in these sentiments, but if you allege to some good people that God had *formed a purpose* to convert them, before he did so, and that he foreknew their conversion as an event which accorded with this his gracious purpose, they immediately become alarmed, lest the Divine Being by such a mode of representing things should appear partial in not having determined to convert and save all men. They forget that he is not under obligations to save any. It is a fact, however, which cannot be controverted, that all men are not saved, and we think there is as great an obligation *upon one christian* denomination as *another* to show, if it really be so, that this fact is not in accordance with the impartial benevolence of the great moral Governor of the Universe. At any rate, it will be exceedingly difficult to prove that this fact was not an object of the foreknowledge of God. Now, when we see evidence of the conversion of some sinners, while a multitude of others, who enjoy the same religious advantages, remain spiritually blind and hardened in impenitence, and find ourselves unable to account for the difference, why may not we, after the example of our blessed Saviour, resolve it into the sovereign will and good pleasure of our heavenly Father, believing the dispensation to be a righteous one, because it takes place under the government of an infinitely wise and holy God. We acknowledge we can assign no reason why God converts some sinners, and not others. The fact is incontrovertible, unless we adopt the principle of universal salvation, and one denomination of christians may as easily account for it as another. The mystery is alike puzzling both to Calvinists and Arminians, and we must think it would be the wisdom of both parties to abide by the solution furnished by our infallible Saviour, and say, "even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." If we find such a

state of things existing under the government of a God of infinite wisdom and goodness, we should beware how we construe his sovereign dispensations. Our duty seems to be not to explain what God does or permits, but to adore his sovereign wisdom and boundless goodness, which we see displayed in all his works, and in all his dispensations. The conversion of a sinner is a work of God. Christians of every religious denomination agree in declaring it a work of divine grace. All esteem it a glorious and good work, and unite in praising God for its performance. Why cannot all the dear people of Christ be united in believing and acknowledging that it was an instance of the infinite benevolence of God that he should have determined to accomplish this glorious work? Was it not right that a God of infinite goodness should have formed an intention to convert and save all those sinners who are found turning to him by sincere repentance? Can there be any reasonable objection to his having formed that gracious purpose from eternity? Now if God from eternity, consistently with his infinite goodness, might have formed a purpose to perform the good and glorious work of converting some sinners, then we think there is no danger or absurdity in believing that he might and did foreknow every individual person whom he had purposed that he would convert and save.

2. In the view of God, say some, all duration, past, present, and future, make but one eternal now; therefore, there is neither foreknowledge nor after-knowledge with God; all things from eternity to eternity being always alike present to him. There is some show of plausibility in this mode of speaking, but it is very easy to shew its fallacy and inconclusiveness. To say that all things past, present, and future, are one eternal now in the view of God, will, we think, be far, very far indeed, from disproving his foreknowledge. Rightly viewed, it must evidently appear to be one of the strongest and most conclusive proofs of that doctrine. For upon the very supposition itself, which we do not at all feel disposed to controvert, certainly all future events, at any given period, are as really present to the omniscient mind of God, as though they existed or had taken place at the given time. Even upon the supposition that all duration, past, present, and future, is in the view of God, one eternal now, it would most certainly be fairly implied, that God does always see and know every successive event, because, from the very supposition, he knows the end from the beginning. It is true, there is, strictly speaking, no succession in God's being, or in his knowledge, but it is evident that creatures come into being successively, and that those events which have a relation to the state and condition of created beings, mankind for instance, those events which relate to their moral existence, and their happiness take place, are brought about successively. They do not all take place at the same time, but are brought about or produced at different and successive parts or periods of duration. Now, it must be

evident, that in whatever part or period of duration any event, or events, take place, that event or those events were always present to the omniscient mind of the infinite Jehovah. Upon this very principle, to which all seem agreed, God must be viewed in every part or period of duration as possessing, (if we may so term it,) a perfect, present knowledge of all events, past, present, and future. God has as perfect a knowledge at any given period of those events, which at that period are yet future, as of those which at the period supposed are already past. This plain consideration, establishes incontrovertibly the doctrine of divine foreknowledge. The circumstance of all duration being one eternal now, in the view of God, will most evidently imply that his knowledge embraces all future, as well as all past, and all present things. Those events which we conceive of as future, are present to his eternal, omniscient mind; therefore, we conclude, that the bible declares the truth where it says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the creation."

3. But some seem to think, they have discovered a more excellent way. They object to the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, upon ground which appears to us strange indeed. A certain learned, elaborate, and critical commentator\* on the Holy Scriptures, has taught that although God is omniscient, *he is not obliged to know* all that he can know, any more than, because he is omnipotent, he is obliged to do all that he can do. Again, the same writer says, perfectly consistent with himself, "*God could know all things, but some things he does not choose to know.*"

We are perfectly astonished, we confess, that any christian divine or philosopher, should ever have conceived, or for one moment entertained in his mind, such an idea of the infinite and omniscient Jehovah. It might have been enough for the philosophers of the dark ages of antiquity, to have represented their supreme divinity Jupiter, as abandoning the exercise of government over the Universe after he had created it, and leaving all events to the direction and management of the *fates*, and as himself reclining at ease upon his throne, without paying any attention to the actions of men, or to any of the numberless events which are continually taking place in all parts of the vast creation. Of the great Creator and providential Governor of the Universe, the intelligent christian, with the bible in his hand, ought to entertain very different conceptions. We cannot believe, nor do we suppose christian brethren can believe, that a God of infinite perfection and rectitude of nature, either is, or possibly can be, indifferent about the moral conduct of the rational creatures he has made, or about those events which are to have a bearing upon their happiness, both in the present and in a future world. But, really, it would seem to us, that if God can know all things, and there are some things which he *does not*

\* We suppose the author alludes to the late Dr. Adam Clarke.—ED.

*choose to know*, then he must in a partial degree at least, be indifferent about attending to the moral conduct of his rational creatures, as well as about extending his superintending care and management to those numberless providential occurrences, every one of which have some connection with the interest and the happiness of his great moral kingdom. Surely, if God has a regard to the good of the universe, which has been brought into existence at the command of his creating word, he cannot feel indifferent in relation to the smallest circumstance, or event by which the interest or the happiness of any of his creatures is to be affected. His infinite benevolence, we must conclude, would determine him to *choose to know*, attend to, and manage every event, even the most minute, and to human view trivial, in such a manner as to make all subservient to the advancement and accomplishment of his wise and benevolent plans. According to the doctrine of our blessed Saviour, the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and not a sparrow can fall to the ground without our heavenly Father. Does not this most plainly teach us that every event is noticed, attended to, and of course, is intimately and particularly known by the omniscient God, whose kingdom both of providence and grace "ruleth over all?" It is a matter so plain, so self-evident, that we can see no necessity for any formal proof or comment. We cannot but esteem it passing strange, how any person who believes in the infinite perfections of God, of which his infinite omniscience is one, should ever have conceived the idea of denying the doctrine of divine foreknowledge. "Known unto God," must reason say, as well as the bible, "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the creation." His knowledge extends to all creatures, and to all events from eternity unto eternity. An over-strained solicitude to get clear of the doctrine of predestination, must have led our christian brethren to deny that a Being of infinite omniscience, was in every sense, possessed of the attribute of foreknowledge.

But we find the same idea extended and enlarged upon, in the writings of the learned commentator to whom we have alluded above, and the more he enlarges upon it, to us it appears the more absurd and inconsistent. After having asserted that God can know all things, but some things he does not choose to know, he goes on further to remark, "some things he (God) has thought proper to poise upon the possibility of being, or not being; leaving it to the will of intelligent beings to turn the scale." These we cannot but esteem very strange assertions to be made by any person who has been blessed with the light of divine revelation, or who possesses the most moderate portion of common sense. Let us examine them seriously and impartially.

"God can know all things; but there are some things which he does not choose to know." To say that God cannot know all things would be too barefaced an absurdity; therefore, it

seems to be that his power of knowing all things is admitted. But some things God does not choose to know. We would be very much obliged to our good friends if they would give us some reason why God does not choose to know some things. Is it because they are good things, or because they are evil, or is it because they are in their nature so indifferent that they are not likely to have any serious bearing upon the interests of his great moral kingdom in any respect? How is God himself, (with reverence we desire to make the inquiry,) to become acquainted with the nature or the tendencies of things which he does not choose to know? It would seem to us that *he must know things*, in order to his determining whether it is proper for him to know them or not. If God has chosen not to know some things, without giving them so much attention as to understand their nature and tendency, then he has made a choice, or he has exercised a volition without having any reason for it. But this seems to be a supposition utterly repugnant to all just ideas of the infinite wisdom of the Deity. We have always been led to believe that God has infinitely wise reasons for every volition he makes, and for every act he performs. We think it reasonable, too, that the Divine Being should possess a perfect knowledge of all things, in order to his forming a determination what things he would choose to know, and what not. It was necessary he should foreknow all things in such a manner, as to understand their true nature, that he might make a proper and wise choice in relation to the things he would determine to know.

If we say, again, that God has chosen to leave some things to be poised in the scale of being, by the will of intelligent creatures, we would ask as in the former instance, are they good things, or evil things, or is it to God a matter of indifference what is their real nature? Can we for a moment, seriously believe that indifference of this kind can be imputable to a Being of infinite wisdom and benevolence? Must not all the actions of the creatures, whether good or evil, have an important bearing upon the state of the universe? Must not every event be either propitious or disastrous in its tendency, according to its specific nature? Must not every creature, then, that God brings into existence, have either a good or a bad influence upon the state of the rational universe, according to the true moral character which pertains to it? And must not all the actions of the creatures be the occasion either of good or evil, of happiness, or of misery to the universe, according as those actions are in themselves of a good, or an evil tendency? Under such a view of things, can we suffer ourselves for one moment to believe or to admit the thought that there should be one single being in existence, the existence and the character of which is not known to God? Or can we suppose that there is a single action done by any of his creatures of which he would choose to remain ignorant? Such a supposition is manifestly inconsistent with the infinite wisdom

and goodness of God. We cannot but think it a much more rational idea, and more worthy the character of an infinitely wise and benevolent Being, who is good *essentially*, and is disposed to *do only good*, to represent him as attentively and wisely poising the scale of being, with his own unerring hand; and as ordering and directing all events in such a way as to maintain perfect order, and to produce the largest sum of happiness throughout his universal kingdom. If God is infinitely good, he must be disposed to have a wise regard to the good of his creatures. He must *choose* to know, attend to, and manage, by his own immediate agency, all events in all parts of his vast dominion, and through all duration, in such a manner as to manifest to the whole rational universe, the glory of his own wisdom, power, and goodness, and in the best possible way to promote the general interest of the universe. We can never reconcile it to our ideas of the infinite goodness, wisdom, and rectitude, of the great moral Governor of the universe, to suppose that there are or can be any events upon which he shuts his eyes, with careless indifference, and voluntarily determines not to know whether they shall happen or not. We cannot admit that there is any thing left undetermined in the Divine plan, any thing to be governed by chance, or any thing, even of the most trivial nature, left to be poised in the scale of being, or not being, by the will of intelligent creatures. We adopt the principle advanced by the royal Psalmist of Israel, contained in this declaration: "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens: and his kingdom ruleth *over all*." According to the doctrine of our blessed Saviour, too, so general, and so minute are the attentions which the providence of our heavenly Father gives to every event, and every circumstance, even the least, which takes place, that not a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed or unregarded. This doctrine of our Saviour, we think, must be much more comfortable to a good man, than a scheme which will leave any thing contingent. Any thing, even the most trivial, to be poised in the great scale of events by any hand, but that of God himself. No: blessed be God, this important, this truly interesting subject is involved in no dark uncertainty. Known unto God, our adorable Sovereign, are all his works and all his dispensations from the beginning of the world. He created all things for himself, for the manifestation of his own glory, and he will most certainly so order, overrule, and direct all things, that they shall infallibly answer the end for which he created them. We believe, therefore, on scriptural and rational ground, in opposition to the hypothesis of that learned commentator, to whom we have alluded above, and whose opinion is followed by some of our beloved brethren in the Lord—we believe that God chooses to know all things that exist, and all events that take place in all parts of the vast creation, in order that he may manage and direct them for the manifestation of his own glory, and the best interests of his great moral kingdom. We believe, as the bible

teaches, that God works "all things according to the counsel of his own will;" that it is his sovereign prerogative to know the end from the beginning. On this ground, we believe and affirm that God knew all things from eternity, which is the same as to affirm that he foreknew all things.

II. We will now proceed to advance a few quotations from the holy scriptures, in *proof* and *illustration* of the doctrine of God's foreknowledge.

This doctrine is to be found in almost every page of the bible. The sacred writers use no reserve on the subject. They appear to assume it as a principle which does not admit of controversy, that God foreknew all things. They advance this doctrine on every pertinent occasion without ceremony, and frequently without illustration. They advance no arguments or reasonings to prove it. They offer no apology for alluding to it, but evidently appear to consider it as a plain, common sense principle, which no impartial reflecting person can dispute.

The first proof we shall adduce of the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, you will find in Acts, 15:18. In this part of the history of the primitive church, we find the apostle James addressing an ecclesiastical council, which had convened at Jerusalem, to discuss and settle a question which had arisen relative to the circumcision of the believing gentiles. In the course of his remarks, the apostle takes occasion to observe, that all the works of God are known to him from eternity. In this observation he evidently alludes to the conversion of the Gentiles, an event which he affirmed to have been predicted by some of the ancient prophets, and of which it is clear that he is here speaking as being an event foreknown of God. The conversion of the idolatrous Gentiles the apostle justly considered as forming a leading and very important part of the dispensation of the grace of God towards the children of men. It was this work of God's grace, of which he was here particularly speaking, and without hesitation represents God as knowing from eternity, that he would extend his mercy to the Gentiles, and in due time call them into his church. This text then affords proof, conclusive and unanswerable, that God certainly foreknows all things; not excepting those events, which, to human view, would appear to be mere contingencies.

Again, we find the doctrine of God's foreknowledge advanced by the apostle Peter. This holy and eminent servant of Jesus Christ, in a public discourse which he delivered on the day of pentecost, in vindication of himself and his fellow-disciples, against the unreasonable cavils of the unbelieving Jews, boldly and plainly charged them with having crucified Jesus of Nazareth. The Jews had apprehended him, and had induced Pilate, the Roman Governor, to pass sentence of death upon him, and then, the Roman soldiers with wicked hands had crucified and slain him. This cruel and barbarous deed, Peter unhesitatingly charged home upon the consciences of the malicious Jews; but at the same time, observes, they had done it according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The Greek word, which in this instance is translated foreknowledge, according to some learned critics, properly signifies decree. The apostle, then, was of opinion that God not only foreknew, but that he also had decreed this great, and in its consequences, truly important event, for the most wise, righteous, and merciful purposes; and had,

moreover, inspired his holy prophets to predict it many ages before it was actually accomplished.

Yet God's foreknowledge of the crucifixion of the holy Saviour, and his sovereign decree concerning it, was no excuse for the malicious Jews, or for the barbarous soldiers in perpetrating that deed of atrocious cruelty and wickedness. God's foreseeing the event, and decreeing to *permit* it, and to *overrule* it in such a way as to render it the means of the salvation of sinners, and of manifesting in an eminent degree the glory of his own divine character and perfections, had *no necessary influence* upon the will of those who chose and determined to crucify the Saviour. Their own wicked tempers instigated them to put him to death. God, according to the ideas and the doctrine of Peter, foreknew, and inspired his prophets to predict that the wicked Jews would crucify the Messiah, and by his infinitely wise and benevolent decree determined to make their malicious act the means of salvation to his believing people. The apostle appears in this instance to have advanced the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, as a self-evident truth, of which no rational person would think of requiring formal proof. Indeed, we are at a loss to conceive how any rational person, who believes in the infinite perfections of the eternal Jehovah, should ever have conceived the idea of denying his attribute of foreknowledge.

In the quotations which we shall further make, we will have regard to two leading ideas. The *first*, taken from the consideration that God is the great moral Governor of the universe, by whom the plan of man's salvation was devised, decreed, and accomplished. The *second*, derived from the *prophecies* which we find in the sacred books.

1. The great plan of God's providential kingdom comprehends all the events which have ever taken place, or ever will take place in any and in every part of his vast dominion. If, then, the doctrine of St. Paul be true, in which he teaches us that God "worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will," he not only must have a perfect foreknowledge of every *event* before it takes place, but likewise of every *circumstance* in any way connected with its accomplishment. Without such foreknowledge, with reverence we would desire to make the affirmation, God would not be competent to the government of the universe. The great leading facts recorded in the bible relative to our salvation, afford conclusive and irrefragable proof of God's perfect foreknowledge of all things. The fact of a Saviour having been chosen, appointed, and "set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was," which is the language of the bible, is an undeniable evidence that God foreknew the revolt of our first parents; that he foreknew the temptation by which they would be seduced, and the very act of eating the forbidden fruit, by which they would transgress the covenant, and involve themselves and all their posterity in guilt and misery. The fact of the Son of God making his appearance in the world in the fulness of time, as the prophets had predicted, of his being made of the seed of Abraham, and of the lineage of David, according to the genealogical descent of both his parents, and of his being born in Bethlehem Ephratah, affords evidence incontestible, that every person included in the line of ancestry of the blessed Saviour, as well as all the leading circumstances belonging to the history of each, and every individual included in the long list, were all perfectly plain in the view of the omniscient Jehovah

from the ages of eternity, and every thing took place in perfect accordance with the counsels of his eternal wisdom and foreordination; and of course, agreeably to his divine prescience and sovereign determination. Of these truths no one can entertain the smallest doubt who will seriously reflect that the attribute of omniscience is essential to an infinite mind. Once more; the fact of the benevolent Saviour having suffered the pains of the cross, to make an atonement for the sins of his people, and his crucifixion being declared to be by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, is another conclusive proof, that all the leading and important events connected with the great and glorious plan of the salvation of God's chosen people, were predetermined and foreknown. It affords a most interesting and conclusive proof, that he has done and suffered all that God foreknew and predetermined, in order to secure the salvation of his chosen people. We have already spoken of the doctrine of the apostle Peter in relation to this matter, but we would beg leave to repeat an argument so peculiarly appropriate. He teaches us, expressly, that the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour was an event, which took place in accordance with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. He foreknew the event itself, and all the circumstances leading to it, and connected with it; and we have reason to believe, he wisely appointed, overruled, and determined every thing in that way, which he saw would be best calculated to manifest his own glory, and to effect the salvation and happiness of his chosen people.

2. We observe that the scriptures of truth establish the doctrine of God's foreknowledge by the *numerous prophecies* which we find in the sacred books. Every prophecy in the bible is an undeniable evidence of the foreknowledge of God. Without the inspiration of the Almighty, the prophets would have been as ignorant of the events of futurity as other men. God could not have inspired the prophets with the knowledge of future events, if those events had not been foreknown by him. If the Divine Being, then, had not possessed the attribute of foreknowledge, the bible could not have contained those inimitably sublime and interesting predictions of the holy prophets, which serve to nourish the faith and promote the edification of the humble disciple of Jesus Christ. Our first parents must have lived and died destitute of that precious consolation which they found in the first promise of mercy, in which it was predicted, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, if the God of mercy had not foreknown and decreed the accomplishment of that important and glorious event. That remarkable and interesting prediction which gave assurance to the patriarch Abraham, that in his seed "all nations of the earth should be blessed," never could have been recorded in the bible, if God had not predetermined and foreknown that the divine Messiah should be numbered amongst his descendants, and that through his divine mediation, and the successful administration of his kingdom of grace, millions of the Gentile nations, as well as the chosen tribes of Israel, should in due time be blessed with all spiritual and divine blessings. It was also in accordance, as we have reason to believe, with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of the everlasting Jehovah, that the same promissory blessing was pronounced successively upon the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, and was made a source of the richest consolation to them, and to every pious believing Israelite, who lived under that dispensation of the church which preceded the advent of the Saviour into the world.

But it would require much time and patience to quote *all* those important promises and predictions which relate to the merciful dealings of God towards his chosen people, and to the complete development of his plan of grace for their salvation. To do this, would be to adduce every gracious promise recorded in the bible—all those divine predictions which relate to the birth of the divine Saviour—to his sufferings and death—to his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension to that glorious heaven, where he dwelt in light and joy ineffable with the eternal Father before the world was created. It would also be necessary to speak of the very signal success of the gospel during the age which immediately succeeded the ascension of the blessed Saviour, and had been foretold by David, some centuries before the birth of Christ, in that inspired and sublime song, in which he celebrates the ascension of Christ with power and great glory to the heavenly Zion, and the illustrious spiritual gifts he should thence pour down upon men. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." In such sublime and eloquent strains does the holy prophet predict the glorious success of the gospel and kingdom of the risen and ascended Saviour. We would, moreover, be required to mention, as a subject of scripture prophecy, the preservation of the church of Christ, from age to age, notwithstanding the plots and machinations of her enemies, by which they have labored, and still are laboring to overthrow her. Thus we see fulfilled our Saviour's comfortable prediction: "On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And yet, again, we would have to notice the final glorious triumph, which, according to the "sure word of prophecy," the exalted Redeemer is destined to obtain over the prince of this world, and all his impious confederates, and the universal extension and establishment of his kingdom of grace and righteousness over the whole earth. In this extended and wonderful chain of events, how many things do we find, which to human calculation, would have appeared utterly improbable? How many events predicted as certainly to be accomplished, which men would call contingencies, which yet were so many essential constituent parts of God's general plan of grace, and each one necessary in some respect to its accomplishment? Surely, when we contemplate that almost countless multitude of events, in relation to the redemption of God's chosen people, recorded in the pages of the sacred volume, not one of which could have been foreknown by the prophet who predicted it, independently of divine inspiration, we must feel a full conviction that it requires that all comprehending intuition which sees the end from the beginning, and which can be the attribute of none but an infinite mind, to enable the omniscient Jehovah himself, (with reverence we would express it,) to communicate to his holy prophets the knowledge of the things which they from time to time have foretold. As a plain and undeniable consequence, then, the doctrine of God's foreknowledge is confirmed and illustrated by every prophecy recorded in the bible.

In order to see in a clearer and stronger light, the force of the argument in proof of the foreknowledge of God derived from the prophecies of holy writ, it may be useful to select some one special prediction in which some distant future event is foretold and specified, which nothing in the aspect of divine providence could have enabled the most sagacious

person to conjecture. In general we must be sensible that in relation to things which are to take place in distant futurity, all men are alike unknowing. Not one of us can foresee the events of to-morrow. Independently of divine inspiration, one person can know and tell as much about future events as another. The prophet in Israel who predicted, several ages before the birth of king Josiah, that the idolatrous altar reared by Jeroboam should be demolished by a man of that name, could no more have foreknown or predicted that event, without divine inspiration, than any other Israelite who lived in the same age. God himself, who foreknew the event, and had predetermined it, revealed it to the prophet, and hence it was that he was enabled to foresee and predict it. To adduce another instance: the prophet Isaiah by inspiration foretold that in one hundred years after his time, the illustrious Cyrus would be raised up by divine Providence to liberate the Jews from their captivity of seventy years in Babylon, rebuild their demolished temple, and reinstate them in the full enjoyment of all their ancient privileges. These remarkable and important events could be known to God alone, so long before their accomplishment; God revealed them to his holy prophet, and hence it was that Isaiah was enabled to predict them, for the encouragement and consolation of the church of God in his day. Without the inspiration of that omniscient God, who sees the end from the beginning, the prophet could no more have foreknown or foretold that such a personage as Cyrus would be raised up for such important purposes, and should render such signal services to the cause of God and to the interests of his church, than one of us could have foreknown, if we had lived a century previous to the present age of important revolutions and changes, both in the civil and religious world, that the circumstance of an obscure clergyman of the principality Wales in England, making application to some charitable friends in the city of London for a few bibles to supply the poor in his congregation and neighborhood with the word of life, should be destined by divine Providence to give rise to that noble and truly important and useful institution, the British and Foreign Bible Society, established in London, and to all those kindred institutions in Europe, and in America, also, by whose benevolent instrumentality, it is to be hoped, all the nations of the earth will in a few years be enlightened and regenerated.

1. We infer from the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, that there are no events which in the view of God are, properly speaking, *contingent*, or accidental. God not only foreknew all things from eternity, but he foreknew them as being *absolutely certain* in themselves. To us many things are contingent, because we are ignorant of the causes which have a natural tendency to produce them, or because we could not beforehand have foreseen, from any circumstances known to us, why those particular events should have taken place rather than others. But those things which we view and speak of as contingencies, or connected with the end, are *certain* in the view of God, because he possesses a perfect knowledge of the causes by which every event is to be produced, and is able to calculate with infallible certainty in what result the operation of those causes will terminate. We, therefore, fully, and unhesitatingly adopt a sentiment advanced not long since, that if God foreknows that a thing will take place, that thing certainly *will* and *must* take place. Some of our Christian friends, we know, esteem this the doctrine of fatality, and that view strenuously object to it; but why should we view the subject

in this light? or why deduce this inference from it? The foreknowledge of God is not to be considered as being the cause of the events which he foreknows, neither is it properly speaking the cause of their fixedness or certainty. God foreknows things because he has determined to *effect them by his own immediate agency*; or, because he has determined to *permit* them under his sovereign control. Both the things which God has decreed to *do*, and those things which he has decreed to *permit*, are in themselves certain and fixed according to his determinate counsel and foreknowledge. Nor can we see that such a declaration implies the idea of fatality, any more than do the words of the devout psalmist, when he makes this solemn asseveration, "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all."

2. Again, we infer from what has been said, that there is a *perfect agreement between God's foreknowledge and his divine purposes, or decrees*. The very circumstance of God's decreeing a certain thing or particular event, necessarily supposes that thing or event to be an object of his foreknowledge. Every thing, therefore, which God has decreed either to bring to pass by his own direct agency, or to permit to take place in the universe, was, from eternity, an object of his knowledge. Yet we are not hence to infer that God is in any sense the author or efficient cause of sin. God, as the apostle James declares, "cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." His decrees in relation to sin have no influence upon men to cause them to sin. They prove, however, that he foreknew men would sin, and that it was his sovereign purpose so to order and overrule all things that the entrance of sin should prove the occasion of manifesting the lustre and glory of his own divine perfections. In relation to these things, as we observed before, there is an exact harmony between God's foreknowledge and his eternal purposes or decrees.

3. We only once more infer from the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, that he will most certainly so order all things, and bring them to such a result as shall be best calculated to manifest the *glory of his own character*, and to secure and promote the *greatest good of his universal kingdom*. The bible teaches us that "the Lord hath made all thing for himself." The manifestation of his own glorious perfections is his great end in all his works, and in all his dispensations. On this interesting idea the twenty-four elders whom John in vision heard singing in heaven, were expatiating in their rapturous anthem of praise and adoration before the throne of the glorious and eternal I AM: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power; for thou hast created all things: and for thy pleasure they are, and were created." God has proposed his own glory as his highest end in all his works. This end he will most certainly accomplish. The omniscience of God, which implies his foreknowledge, enables him to foresee every thing which would obstruct the accomplishment of his wise and benevolent plans, and also every thing necessary to their accomplishment. On the ground, therefore, of God's foreknowledge, we are warranted confidently to believe that he will so order all things, that the wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder he will restrain. Alleluia, alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Amen.

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**SERMON XXII.\***

BY JOHN M'MILLAN, D. D.

LATE OF WASHINGTON CO., PA.

**THE SINNER'S INABILITY INEXCUSABLE, YET  
DIVINE INFLUENCE NECESSARY.**

JOHN 6:44. *No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.*

THERE is no doctrine to which mankind have a stronger and more inveterate aversion than that of the divine sovereignty:—that God should have a right to dispose of all events, and yet look upon the creature to be infinitely to blame, and chargeable with rebellion against God, and the ruin of his own soul. Sinful mortals would condescend to allow that God should dispose of events, if he would always, as they do, set up their interest, ease and happiness as his last end; and would act nothing beyond their inspection, and without their approbation. But when his wisdom goes a whit beyond their moon-light reason, and he projects any thing beyond their ken, he is to be arraigned at its bar. Nay, human reason, without any new creating power exerted, would condescend to receive laws from God as their sovereign, upon condition that he would admit them to be of his council, and that they should judge every command, and its penal sanction, whether it were holy, just and good, or not; that is, if he would lay aside his holy law, which is founded upon his infinite perfections, and take the depraved will of the rebellious creature as his rule.

From this unwillingness to submit to the divine sovereignty, and disposition to set up ourselves, as our last end, and to judge of the divine perfections by our own depraved taste, has arisen all those unreasonable quarrels against God's dispensations in all ages since our dreadful apostacy from God.

\*The venerable author of this discourse has deceased, since this sermon was received for publication.

Hence it is that those peculiar doctrines of the gospel, viz. The universality and immutability of God's decrees—of original sin—man's moral impotency, and the absolute necessity of the supernatural influences of the Spirit of God in regeneration—justification by imputed righteousness—and the perseverance of the saints, have, in all ages, been pitched upon as the mark of malice, because all directly aim at our great idol, self, and set up God as an absolute Sovereign.

And here we see indeed how far man will stoop to his own idol. To maintain it, he freely consents to dethrone his own reason and conscience. His idol, for speaking a word in favor of what would otherwise be as clear as noon-day, puts out man's eyes, and leads him about in chains, enveloped in the mists, which, had he but one eye open, he would soon discover, were raised only from this total enmity of heart. And now, proud man, unwilling to own his blindness, pretends to see what never was or can be discovered, viz. an inconsistency in some of the clearest declarations in the word of God.

Reason, the glory of human nature, being deposed, enmity against God rules with despotic sway, and sets the passions to riot in his court, who knowing that their conclusions and decrees will have no authority in the soul without his name, act the Jezebel, and seal them with the sick king's ring, and give them out as his. And now they cry, "It is contrary to all the dictates of reason that God should, from all eternity, foreordain whatsoever comes to pass, and at the same time be a proper judge of their actions, or be sincere in his commands, or invitations." That "it is inconsistent with moral agency for God to command his creatures what he knows they cannot do, and then punish them for not doing it." And with these is connected that horrible charge that God is the author of sin—and that he makes his creatures with a design to damn them, and the like.

In order to treat on this subject, and give as clear a representation of it as possible, I have chosen the words of the text. They are the words of him who is to be our Judge. And I would remark, by the way, that no man, clear of prejudice, can read this chapter through attentively, and then conclude that our Savior did not mean to hold forth all those doctrines which I mentioned as being opposed to the corrupt heart. However they may gloss upon it, they cannot but believe that Christ meant to hold forth the doctrines which they by nature do oppose.

In treating on these words, what I design is,

I. *To show wherein the inability, which is in every unregenerate sinner, to come to Christ, and to do every duty which God requires, does consist.*

II. *What drawings of the Father are consequently necessary in order to such a sinner's coming.*

III. *That the sinner's inability is so far from being any excuse, that, on the contrary, it is that for which he deserves hell fire every moment. And consequently,*

IV. *That it is no proper objection to the sincerity of his calls and offers, or the righteousness of his judgments in punishing those who will not accept of Christ.*

I. *I am to show wherein the inability, which is in every unregenerate sinner to come to Christ, does consist.*

Here I shall show negatively,

1st. It does not arise from any thing in the foreknowledge or decree of God. This is evident, because, as they are utterly unknown, they are not, either less or more, the motive upon which the soul acts, and for any creature to pretend that he acts from the divine decree or foreknowledge of God, is for him to assume the incommunicable prerogative of Deity, which is to work all things after the counsel of his own will. And what is no motive cannot be assigned as the cause of action in any moral agent. Nor,

2d. Is it any natural inability, consisting in a want of natural powers. Sinners do not reject Christ because their powers of soul are incapable in any sense to exert themselves agreeable to the moral taste, and the motives which are agreeable to it.

It is not for me here to inquire how far the natural powers of the soul are impaired by our fall. It is sufficient to show that the *weakness* of our powers is not the cause of rejecting Christ. And this is evident from these considerations. God requires us to love and serve him with all the powers of our souls—He never required us to exceed these—not with the powers of an angel—or, infinitely, as he loves himself. And we do find that there are no new physical powers added in regeneration. Nay, as to natural abilities, there are many souls go down to hell with bright and shining capacities, resembling Lucifer, the son of the morning; and so, capable of sharing greater degrees of condemnation, while some of the weak things of the world, persons of low genius, and mean capacities, are brought to a true knowledge of God in Christ.

When I speak of natural ability, I would be understood to mean *the native powers of the soul, by which it is capable to act according to its several ways of understanding, choosing, refusing, loving, desiring, hoping, hating, fearing, &c., according to the objects which are set before it, and their agreeableness or disconformity to the taste and temper of the heart, whence arise every motive of action in every rational being or moral agent.*

3dly. Nor is it owing to any want of clearness in the gospel offer. There is no want of any new revelation as to the object of

faith. Christ, as he is clearly revealed in the word, as Mediator, is the alone proper object of faith. But, positively,

4thly. All that inability which is in the unregenerate, consists in the total depravity of the heart, or what, for want of a term more familiar, I call, when speaking concerning sin and holiness, the *moral taste*, that is, *that capacity, wherein lies the power of discerning the beauty and excellence, or deformity of moral subjects*. This is the source from which every action of the soul, with respect to sin and holiness, has its origin: as the natural taste is the spring from which all activity, with respect to physical objects, has its rise. Without this, no motive could have any weight, or be any cause of action in any intelligent being. The soul of man, (could we suppose such to exist,) without this, must be a mere machine, actuated entirely by external causes, without any design, desire or choice. A few moments' reflection will convince any rational person that this is truly the case, and that it is impossible for any act of his will to take place, which is not actuated by motives arising from this quarter; that he sees no beauty in what is directly contrary to this taste and temper of heart; and that he feels an attractive force in whatever it be that is agreeable to it. Hence, then, arises every act of the will. Whatever is presented to the heart is chosen or refused, desired or rejected, according as it is agreeable or disagreeable to this power in the soul. And the notion of a sovereign power in the will to change itself, is as chimerical in philosophy, as it is dissonant to the sacred scriptures.

Herein then lies the depravity of human nature; this source of all its moral actions is so utterly ruined, that it can taste or relish no beauty or sweetness in that wherein the excellence of holiness does consist; so that in scripture language, we put darkness for light, and light for darkness, call bitter sweet, and sweet bitter.

Hence arises a disposition to set up self as our last end—to love sin as a real good, and our desires of holiness only have the *second* place: not from any beauty perceived in holiness, but only from selfish views. And could an unregenerate soul in this world view God's perfections as clearly, as its capacity would enable him, his hatred of God would be as complete, as it will be, if he leave the world in that state, at the day of judgment.

Now the moral taste being wholly depraved, is enmity against God, and every act of the soul arising from it, is an act of enmity. In this, therefore, lies the unregenerate sinner's inability. Through this depravity of heart, he can see no beauty in God's moral perfections. God and holiness are not therefore the objects of his desire; the law of God, which is a perfect copy

of these, has no beauty in his eyes. The salvation offered in the gospel, which eminently consists in being brought to a full conformity to the law of God, he has no true and genuine relish for; and therefore Christ, the holy one of God, who suffered the penalty of that law, and demonstrated by so doing that it was holy, just and good, has no beauty that he should be desired. Though angels and saints in glory adore him, and God, the Father, in him finds sweet delight, the poor blinded sinner has no drawings of soul after him. Were not the cause well known in heaven, amazement might well seize the first archangel in light. But it is well known that "the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the knowledge of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

II. *I come now to show what drawings of the Father are necessary in order to a sinner's coming to Christ.*

And here it is evident that he must have help where his impotency lies. As his inability lies *not in the want of natural powers*, but in the *moral taste and temper of the heart*, no degree of light let into the understanding, no degree of conviction of conscience is sufficient. All the affections and passions, and every natural principle in the unrenewed soul, exerted to the utmost of their capacity, can never do that which must be done, or the soul must perish forever. They will never bring it cordially to close in with Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. The reason is evident—no stream can rise higher than its fountain: they cannot be reverted—or if they could, as they are polluted streams, they never can have a tendency to cleanse the fountain whence they flowed. "Grapes of gall" and bitter clusters will be all the produce until the stock be made good. The tendency of the exercise of any power of the soul, cannot be the acquisition of any good of entirely a different nature from what was aimed at, or viewed as such by the heart which sets the power in motion. Now, an unholy heart can never aim at holy enjoyments: and therefore, the murmurings of a soul under common convictions because God does not bestow himself, his Christ, his heaven upon it, are all unreasonable, because these are things such a soul never sought. You will perhaps ask, then, why is light let into the understanding and conviction upon the conscience? Why does the Spirit of God, in his common operations, move and operate upon all the powers of the soul, if no degree of these will ever do the work of drawing a soul to Christ? And why is this God's ordinary way, when he brings sinners in adult years to himself? To this, I answer; God is a sovereign, and he will have his own way of bringing home sinners to himself—He will honor his own institutions—He will deal with his rational creature agreeably to rational nature.

And moreover, as sin has impaired even the rational powers of the soul, and through a continued custom in sin, every exercise of the soul is debilitated, God by these will fit and prepare the soul in the proper and rational exercise of its powers, so that when the moral taste is renewed, they may bring to it a proper representation of the great object of faith and love which is to be received from the word of God. But that none of the common gifts and influences are sufficient, is evident, because many go down to hell with great light, great gifts, and great convictions.

But to answer the question, Wherein consists this drawing of the Father? I observe:

1st. That it consists in a work of Almighty power, no less than that of creation, of the same kind, and wrought by the same means. He creates the soul anew in Christ Jesus—creates a clean heart and renews a right spirit. The subject of this mighty change is the heart or moral taste, as is evident from what has been said, and the clear representations which are given of it in the scriptures. There it is called a creating a clean heart, renewing a right spirit—God's writing his law in the heart—shining into the heart, to give the knowledge of the glory of God—"the new man, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness;" so that such a soul is now prepared to view God's perfections as glorious, beautiful, and excellent. It is moreover termed "regeneration"—being renewed in the spirit of the mind—and the production of the "new creature." These and the like expressions, frequent in the word of God, point out the giving a new capacity of viewing God's glory, and being properly exercised under such views, and therefore, can agree to nothing else but a changing the very temper of the heart, from which, as the fountain, every exercise flows. The same is held forth in such scriptures as describe the work by its effects; God's people are said to be willing in the day of his power, in the beauty of holiness—and they believe according to the working of his mighty power, &c.; now this willing, and this readiness to believe in Christ, can arise from nothing less than the renovation of the moral taste, as has been already said, and could abundantly be made appear.

2dly. The heart being now prepared for the reception of Christ, and viewing his glory, and the glory of the divine attributes shining through him, as a proper object of delight unknown before; the understanding being enlightened from without, by the word of God, and the Spirit dealing with the soul, (I speak of the work in adults,) and together with the will and affections renewed, as all flowing from the heart now prepared; God holds up, in the word of truth, in the hand of the Spirit, the great name of Christ as Mediator, which is the direct object of saving

faith. The soul is ravished with the view. His name is like ointment poured forth. The *eye* of faith pores upon his beauty—she sees wonders in his person, wonders in his offices. He is altogether lovely. Never did the soul discover such an object. The *ear* of faith listens, with no less wonder and delight, to what he reports from his word, of the wonders he has done:

“How on his Father’s breast he lay,  
The darling of his soul,  
Infinite years before the day  
Or heavens began to roll.”

And how readily, on viewing the ruins of our fall,

“Aside the Prince of Glory threw  
His most divine array,  
And wrapp’d his godhead in a veil  
Of our inferior clay.”

And how, rather than God’s glory should be stained, he stained his cross, and while she views the wondrous price of pardon which he paid, the worth of which could never be calculated by the arithmetic of archangels, or the brightest genius in glory, every divine perfection shines forth in the greatest clearness.

“Now does the law divine,  
In its true lustre shine,  
There God’s perfections join  
In concord sweet;  
But still the plan of grace  
Through Jesus’ righteousness  
Shines with distinguished rays,  
Full and complete.”

The soul now feels the power of divine love, as the genuine fruit of that change of heart, together with those views she has of Christ; she is ravished with his beauty, and all reluctance is sweetly overcome, and thus

“The soul he seizes in his arms,  
From the false world’s deceitful charms,  
With force divinely sweet.”

And now, with the greatest freedom, as the soul views the beauty of holiness, the will is drawn to him.

I would now ask such sticklers for sovereign power in the will over its own acts, who cannot bear the thought of invincible grace offering any violence to that noble faculty, Is it possible for such a soul to be unwilling, to refuse or defer one moment giving up itself to such a glorious Savior? If it can, then I acknowledge the will is not free. If there be any power, either within or without the soul, which can so control its acts that it cannot fall in with whatever is agreeable to the taste of the heart, then liberty is not to be predicated of the human will.

The hypothesis of a self-determining power of the will, therefore, and not the scripture doctrine, is to be charged with being contrary to human liberty. I proceed, now,

III. *To show that all the unregenerate sinner's ability to come to Christ, and to perform all the duties which God requires, is so far from being any excuse, that it is that for which he deserves damnation every moment.*

I have almost rendered the proof of this unnecessary. For if it be true that all the sinner's ability consists in his heart's being totally alienated from God and holiness, then for any one to excuse himself upon this account, is the same absurdity as to say that the more wicked any one is, the less he is to blame; so that perfect wickedness would render him entirely innocent.

Let it only be remembered that all the sinner's inability is of a *moral*, and not of a *physical* nature, and the absurdity of such excuses must appear in a proper light. Now it has been said, and proved agreeable to scripture and reason, that the unrenewed man is, while such, utterly incapacitated to view the glory of God, or the mediatorial offices of Christ; but this incapacity arises entirely from the disconformity of the heart from these glorious objects. The creature has full and free liberty of will to act agreeably to every object set before it, as it is agreeable or not. All the reason, therefore, why the sinner cannot love God and obey him, behold Christ's glory and believe on him, is because he has *no heart* for these things. He can find and feel motives enough to draw him to sin, vanity, and the world, because these are agreeable to his taste. Sometimes, too, he can fear hell, and hope and wish for his ideal heaven; and in order to shun the one, and to obtain the other, he may, upon mere selfish motives, be led to reform his life, pray often and earnestly, seek for stronger convictions, and delight in having his affections moved, hoping by these to be brought to salvation through his own righteousness, without the disagreeable necessity of denying himself, and stooping so low as to take all as a free gift of sovereign bounty through Christ. All this, and much more, he may be brought willingly to comply with; for there is a proper foundation in his heart for these; there being nothing in all this contrary to the inclination he has to set up self as his last end, so that to will is present with him. But as to coming to Christ, in our Savior's meaning of it, all the light that can be let into the understanding, from the word of God, and from the common influences of the Spirit—any convictions of conscience—fears of hell—or hopes of heaven, will never bring the unregenerate soul to behold spiritual beauty in its proper objects, and in such a point of view as to render them truly desirable. For though the understanding and conscience were properly enlightened by the word and Spirit of God,

(which, how far they may be in the unregenerate I shall not here inquire,) yet the more divine objects are viewed in their true light, the more hatred will the heart which is opposed to God exercise against them. Could the soul know all the truth which is revealed, yet unless the heart is changed, it would but exercise the *more enmity* against God, and the way of salvation through Christ. The truth of this we see in convinced sinners, the methods they take to fly from God and Christ. And a still clearer discovery will be made at the last day, when a view of Christ in his glory will drive the damned into the bottomless pit, filled with the stings of envy, rancor, and malice, the poison of which will prey upon their souls to an endless eternity.

Now none will pretend that such a total want of love to God and holiness, can be any excuse; and yet all may see that such a heart of enmity is an effectual bar to a sinner's coming to Christ, so long as he is under the power of it. None will pretend that it is any excuse for a murderer, that he is totally destitute of any principle of benevolence to his fellow citizens, and therefore cannot but desire and delight in their destruction. All would be ready to say, away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live. It would be deemed an insult to reason to plead such an excuse for wilful murder. But to reject Jesus Christ one moment is infinitely more criminal in God's sight, than the murder of our whole species could be, for this is crucifying the Son of God; yet for this, many are so hardy as to plead their inability, as though the greatness of their guilt could be an extenuation of their crime.

There is, therefore, no way left for the sinner to excuse himself, but to deny this total depravity of heart. But none can read the Bible through with any care, and not have a strong conviction that Jesus Christ, as well as the prophets and apostles, did verily believe that every unregenerate sinner is really totally and universally depraved. And he must be a great stranger to his own heart, whose experience has not taught him the same melancholy truth.

IV. From what has been said, it follows, *that the sinner's inability is no objection to the propriety of God's commands*—the justice of his threatenings—the sincerity of his complaints—the righteousness of his judgments—and the earnestness of his calls and offers.

Since our sinfulness can never break the bond of obligation which lies upon us to serve and obey God, no inability which is in us, which consists in sinfulness of heart, can render it improper that God should lay his commands upon us. To suppose the contrary, is to make the sinful depravity of the creature, the

measure and rule of duty: that is, instead of God's law, which is the copy of the divine perfections, we must have a transcript of the sinner's depraved heart, as a standard of holiness. Now this is exactly what every unregenerate sinner would have. This is exactly what the depraved heart means, when it finds fault with the law of God for commanding what he has no ability, that is, no inclination to do. Did not God's law require any thing but what the sinner has ability to do, it must be as unholy as the depraved, unsanctified heart. So that God must either cease to be what he is, and entirely give up his moral perfections, or every command of his must require that which the sinner has no ability, in a moral sense, to perform. And so when God's creatures turn rebels, he must give up the reins of government, the sinner becoming, *sui juris*, subject to no law but his own. Thus God's right to command appears not to be infringed by any inability in the sinner.

And if God has still a right to command, he may justly enforce his commands, by threatening punishment to the disobedient. If our moral inability to obey does not disannul God's right to command, that is, if the creature's being a sinner does not loose the bonds of obligation from his neck, then the great moral Governor of the world has an indefeasible right to enforce his laws by a penal sanction.

If God has not a right to threaten sinners, because of their inability to obey his law, then he can have no right to punish sin either on earth or in hell: wicked men and devils he might not punish, for they, as soon as they became sinners, lay under this inability, having no heart to obey God. He could only threaten holy beings, and set up his law, with its penal sanction, to terrify his angels. And this could only be in jest, as he must know, (and they too, if they can but reason half as well as mankind,) that his threatenings never could be put in execution, even in case of disobedience; for if they were to sin, it would be through the want of a taste for holiness, that is, moral inability to keep God's law.

Hence, if God has not a right to threaten sinners, and punish them too, instead of being the most worthy of reverence and veneration, he must be the most ridiculous of all beings; none of his threatenings, promises or offers, being to be depended upon. And it appears from the conduct of sinners in general, that they do thus look upon the Most High, as being altogether such an one as themselves.

Now, therefore, it follows, that God has a right to complain of the conduct of sinners, for their breaches of his law, and despising of his grace. This will be immediately granted, that if God has proper grounds to command, threaten, and punish sinners for these things, he has good reason to complain of their

conduct. Nor would any, perhaps, ever have entertained a thought to the contrary, had it not been for their unreasonable disgust to the sovereignty of God, which leads them to judge of the *divine conduct*, by *their own scanty* measure.

*Objection.* By this scheme of doctrine, God knew from eternity what would be the event. When he made devils and men, he knew they would sin, and who would, and who would not repent and turn to him. Therefore, for him to complain when all things turn out agreeable to his expectation is unreasonable.

*Answer.* This objection arises, as I said, from judging of God by ourselves. But even this is done with great partiality; for we do not judge from cases as nearly parallel as our state of being compared with that of our Maker would admit of; when even this would be improper, and an absurd ground of judgment.

Being inferior to the great Eternal, who *foreknows* all things with an *absolute certainty*, whereas we know nothing future, except what he has revealed, any further than as probable events, we cannot be brought to act upon those motives which he does. To pretend thus to do, would be to claim his prerogatives. He acts with regard to the *whole system of being*, with infinitely greater ease and perspicuity than we can with respect to the minutest object. Therefore, until *we can* look through the whole, we shall never be able to be influenced by *his motives*. As we, in such cases, are influenced to diligence and activity by the probability of success, and cannot easily conceive how we could seriously engage in, and strenuously prosecute *any affair*, the issue of which we certainly know would be unsuccessful, we are apt to judge in the same manner with regard to God; and so conclude, either that he must be ignorant of the event, or insincere in his manner of conducting matters.

I have already observed that the foreknowledge of God can never be any motive of action in men or angels, it being infinitely above their capacities. To this I now add, if God's infinite wisdom and absolute foreknowledge are any hindrance to his sincerity, so that he cannot be sincere, when he foreknows the event, then he never has been in earnest about any thing he has undertaken from everlasting ages to this day, nor can be to all eternity. Then his omniscience will be an eternal blot to his character, and (with reverence be it spoken) he had better have contented himself with fallible conjectures, so as to be capable of acting with as perfect sincerity as his creatures do, whose ignorance renders them capable of sincerely aiming at any thing where there is a probability of success. Thus he would have kept up a good moral character among his creatures. And as the least moral good is infinitely above any natural good, sincerity is preferable even to omniscience.

And if this be the case, the most ignorant and thoughtless

among this class of reasoners have done very wisely in stripping God of his foreknowledge, in order to make out his sincerity. For the moral perfections of God are more glorious than the natural. If, then, he must part with one or the other, so that he cannot be all wise and the God of truth at the same time, let them deprive him of that which will be the least scandal to him. They have, therefore, taken away his omniscience that so he may keep pace with his creatures, and represented him as in ignorance of future events. And when he gets disappointed, at any unexpected turn in his affairs, he may sincerely set himself to try some other scheme. But since they have undertaken to correct his mistakes in claiming absolute foreknowledge, they ought, to show their sincere affection for him, advise him not to lay his claims and pretences so high again.

It is necessary here to distinguish between *natural* and *moral* necessity. Nor are these metaphysical terms without a meaning, but really exist. Natural necessity is when such physical causes concur as have a natural tendency, whether we will or not, to bring about any event which is future. Thus there is a natural necessity that any ponderous body, which is not supported, should fall, from the natural principle of gravity. So there is a natural necessity that all men should die, because of the natural tendency of all bodies to dissolution. So, whether we will or not, we are all hastening to old age or death every moment.

Moral necessity is that which arises from the concurrence of moral causes, which may all be resolved into the holiness or depravity of the moral taste, and such motives as, in consequence hereof, have a tendency to influence the will of moral agents. Thus, sinners, under total depravity, cannot cease from sinning.

However nearly these two kinds of necessity are connected, and sometimes blended together, both meeting in the same subject, yet they are plainly and distinctly to be perceived. And it is no vain or groundless distinction, but founded on the nature of things, and agreeable to scripture: and every one of but ordinary capacity may distinguish them, if he be but willing to have his eyes opened. He may see that there is no natural necessity that he should continue in sin, in darkness and ignorance, no physical cause impelling him to it. But he may be under a moral necessity from the corrupt taste of his heart, which inclines him so strongly to find fault with God, and his dealings with his creatures, that he has no inclination to listen to any thing which would serve to set God's character in a proper point of light. But the more of this necessity lies upon any moral agent, the greater is his criminality.

## SERMON XXIII.

BY S. C. JENNINGS,  
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### THE EXCUSES OF SCEPTICS FOR REJECTING THE GOSPEL.

LUKE 14:18. *I pray thee have me excused.*

It will be recollected by the reader of the parables of our Lord, that the words of the text were used by two individuals, as the conclusion of their apologies for not coming to the "great supper" to which they were invited: which supper, parabolically, exhibits the provisions and blessings of the gospel.

As it is not possible, to notice the endless variety of excuses made by different classes of persons, for not embracing the christian religion "in spirit and in truth," I will only give a *summary* answer to some of those which are founded in *scepticism*.

1. Says the modern Atheist, *I do not believe that any religion is necessary for mankind, "I pray thee have me excused from receiving the offers of the gospel."*

To such an one I answer: 1st. The belief of a great Creator is absolutely necessary to account for the almost infinite variety of productions existing on the earth, evidently, the result of the *design* of a Being, uniting in his character, wisdom, power, goodness, &c. Every effort to account, rationally and consistently, for the existence of things without such a self-existent *first cause*, has failed. 2d. The belief of such a Being is necessary to elevate the faculties of man, in the contemplation of a perfect standard of moral excellence. 3d. Belief in the existence of a Being endued with power, and possessing a determination to punish transgression, is necessary to suppress the "vanity, ferocity, and unbridled sensuality," of men. 4th. A want of belief in the existence of a "Holy, Lord God," to whom men are accountable, leads not only to the *neglect* of all virtuous principles, but it *saps* the foundation of all morality.

The result of the effort to abolish *all religion* in France, fully justifies the preceding statements. Yea, the *lives* of modern Atheists adds to their confirmation. Facts, in some cases, would seem to justify the opinion, that the religion of some of the ancient heathen was better than *no religion*. The introduction of the Atheism of the Epicurus, into Rome, was followed by proscription, bloodshed, and an awful state of things, (as its direct offspring,) from which the republic could never fully recover—an *example of warning to the American republic*.

2. The modern freethinker says, *I esteem all systems of religion*

equally good for those who believe them, and "I pray thee have me excused" from giving an exclusive preference to the religion of Jesus Christ.

I ask him seriously to consider the following things: 1st. That that can only be a true religion which represents God as a being of *infinite perfection*. 2d. The limited nature of man's moral faculties, as well as the past history of the world, show, that he needs to be taught the *proper mode* of worshipping God. 3d. We need a religion which will inform us how we are to escape punishment for those sins which conscience accuses, and which the light of nature condemns. 4th. We need a religion which will make us happy, collectively and individually. 5th. We need a religion which will explain the causes of calamity, disease, and death. 6th. We need a religion which will give a consistent and correct account of the destination of the soul after death. That these *first* and important truths in religion are not found in the Koran of Mohammed, in any pagan, or every *nominally* christian system of religion, is evident to all who are acquainted with them. That they are only found taught in the Bible is equally evident, to those who have given it an impartial and sincere perusal. Any reflecting man, who abandons the sacred volume will find himself in distressing perplexity and in gloomy uncertainty on vitally important inquiries. The *latter end* of many sceptics who have been forced to think, in the prospect of death, fully confirms this declaration.

Farther, the *benefits* offered in the gospel of Christ are worthy to be offered by a Creator to his creatures. They excel the benefits of all other systems in the following particulars. They are adapted to persons of *every* description—they are chiefly spiritual in their nature, while those of the heathen are "earthly, sensual, devilish"—they are not only vastly greater in this life, than any benefits offered by any other system, but surpass all others, inasmuch as they are holy, glorious and **ETERNAL**. Other religions both corrupt the mind of the worshipper and degrade the supposed deity, while that of the gospel purifies the hearts, and reforms the lives of men; yet exalts the true God. Other religions bear the mark of human invention, while that of the Bible is worthy of God, its author.

In justification of this statement, I appeal, by way of comparison, to the *state* of the world. I direct the attention of the candid freethinker to the *facts* narrated by every accredited historian and traveler of ancient and modern times, respecting those portions of the world which are without the influence of the *true* gospel. I solemnly ask him to pause and consider them, before he gives himself to a destructive indifference about the invitations of the only Savior of sinners. I ask him to recollect that the adoption of the sentiment, "that all religions are equally good," and that it is a matter of indifference which he embraces, provided he is *sincere*, destroys all distinction between truth and error. It is to say, that there are not certain first truths, the belief of which is immutably essential to the welfare of every human being. It is to say, that all the abominable, cruel, and murderous rites of the heathen are just as good for them, as the benevolent and sacred precepts of Christ are for those who believe in him.

3. But a *third* person says, "I pray thee have me excused" from receiving instruction or benefit from the gospel. My *reason* and *conscience* are sufficient guides, and *repentance* is the only atonement necessary for errors.

The professed followers of human reason do not *know*, or will not *acknowledge*, that the most of the light which they possess was received, either directly or indirectly, from the word of God. For some truths which they profess to believe, and some things which they acknowledge as duties could never be learned by the exercise of mere reason, or from the dictates of conscience. This has been *fairly* evinced, by the fruitless efforts of the most learned and able men of former times, who had not the revelation of the sacred scriptures. But do not many of these worshippers of reason strip God of *some* of his moral attributes? Do they not refuse to worship God, which is to deny this obvious truth, if there is a God, he should be worshipped? Have not some of them doubted of the immortality of the soul, and felt willing to lead men back into the uncertainty of the dark ages? Do not the *lives*, and generally the *deaths* of these men, make a sad commentary on their plan of being governed by reason and conscience; which, when illuminated by the "Sun of Righteousness," may *help* to ascertain truth and duty, but when left to themselves are blind guides leading to destruction, rather than to eternal life? Has it not been found that *almost* every rejecter of the Bible leads, either secretly or openly, a dissolute life, and that reason and conscience are not sufficient safeguards? Much less are they able to guide in every intricate path of duty, or to solve the most solemn and interesting inquiries.

Repentance for crime, in human governments, does not make an atonement for it, nor certainly secure forgiveness. Neither will a mere selfish repentance be followed by acceptance with God, where the divine Redeemer, who has satisfied the divine law and made it honorable, and consistent for God to forgive, is not embraced by *true* faith. Few men forgive their fellow men their debts, simply because they are sorry they have contracted them. Much less will the great Lawgiver forgive actual transgression of his laws without a satisfaction being rendered. He will maintain the rights of his government, confirm his truth, glorify his justice, and condemn every one to the prison of hell, who does not accept of Jesus as his surety. "For there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved."

4. A *fourth* person says, "I pray thee have me excused" from following Christ; I have a *right to refuse or choose what I will in matters of religion*.

Knowest thou, O vain man, that in God we "live and move and have our being?" Before you can divest yourself of obligation to *believe* what he has taught, and to *obey* when he commands, you must become *independent* of your Creator and Preserver. You must show yourself in no *need* of a Redeemer, or else your guilt will be increased by a rejection of the salvation extended in the gospel. For thus saith the Judge of the "quick and the dead:" "*This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil.*"

5. A *fifth* apologist says, I am willing to acknowledge Christ and to receive his benefits, and to follow his example, but "I pray thee have me excused" from doing it, to the *same extent* as is declared necessary by some.

Such an one wishes to be considered a *liberal christian*, and others to be so charitable as to consider him such, not without some fundamental *errors* in doctrine, and *immoralities* in practice. But we ask the liberalist, do you find your liberality taught in the gospel? Does it renounce its essential doctrines or its just requirements, for any who may not wish to believe the *one*, or obey the *other*? The offers of salvation are freely made to all, but not on their *own* terms. If you say the particular doctrines are of no consequence; I answer, that any, and every particular *part*, is to the *whole* system of divine grace, what any particular part of an edifice is to the whole building. In either case, if you take away a corner stone, the whole will be in danger of being worse than useless. Christianity, received as a *whole*, is calculated to produce the most salutary effect on the hearts and lives of men, and to give unspeakable comfort to the soul. But if it is mixed up with error of a dangerous nature, its efficacy may be rendered unavailing. The most wholesome food may be counteracted by a small portion of poison. A belief of the truth is essential to participate in the blessings of the gospel. Truth is of importance in every science. Much more so, in that religion which is the only well-founded hope of a sinner. Says the apostle, Gal. 1:9, "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed." There are, then, certain *doctrines* to be believed—certain *duties* to be performed, without which there is no salvation by the gospel. They are all included in a saving faith in Christ as he offers himself in his word, and a true repentance for sin. For the neglect of which duties, you cannot be *excused a single hour*, by that "*God (who) was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on by the world, received up into glory.*"

Yea, by the authority of this glorified Redeemer, he is hereby offered to the *immediate* and *full* acceptance of sinners of *every* description. None can be *excused*, since he is *sued* to all. For,

"He is a path, if any be misled,  
 He is a robe, if any naked be;  
 If any chance to hunger, he is bread;  
 If any be a bondman, he is free,  
 If any be but weak, how strong is he!  
 To dead men, life he is, to sick men health,  
 To blind men sight, and to the needy, wealth."

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**SERMON XXIV.**

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**THE PURPOSE AND SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL.**

ISAIAH 55:10,11. *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; So shall my word be, that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please; and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

THE chapter, in which these words occur, is a very encouraging exhibition of the exceeding mercy of God to guilty men. It commences, by calling their attention to the munificent provision made, in the gospel, for their salvation; and proceeds to urge upon them the duty and benefit of consecrating themselves unto God. In the text, an argument is derived from the very *intention* of the gospel plan; and the appeal is to the *grace* of its author and His eternal *design* in making it known:—so that whosoever will hearken to the proclamation of Heaven, and obey the divine will, as therein exhibited, is certain to receive the entire advantage contemplated in the promise. All who love the kingdom and the cause of God, are, moreover, encouraged to hope, not only in regard to their own personal salvation, as thereby everlastingly secured; but in relation to the universal extension of the empire of holiness, over the whole ground, covered by the intelligent benevolence, and intention, and power of Him, who is *God over all and blessed forever*.

Our main design, is to contemplate the fact suggested in this argument, *viz:*

THAT, IN SENDING HIS GOSPEL INTO THE WORLD, GOD HAS AMPLY PROVIDED FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE GRAND DESIGN WHICH IT INVOLVES; AND THAT ALL THE BENEVOLENT PURPOSES INTENDED TO BE SUBSERVED BY ITS DISPENSATION, ARE AND WILL BE FULLY ACCOMPLISHED.

*For as the rain cometh down, &c.*

Two points, comprehended in this proposition, claim our attention, *viz.*

I. THE GOSPEL IS DESIGNED TO ACCOMPLISH A SPECIFIC PURPOSE; and  
II. THAT PURPOSE SHALL NOT FAIL.

I. THE GOSPEL IS DESIGNED FOR A SPECIFIC EFFECT.

Independent of every other consideration, this fact is sufficiently established, in the text. There is something contemplated in the gospel, which is "*pleasing*" and satisfactory to God,—and embraced in His *will*. He has not "*sent it*" at random; with a mere general, but uninfluential benevolence

Its purpose is definite; and in effecting that purpose—"THE THING WHEREOF *He sent it,*"—He has resolved that His "*word*" shall "*prosper.*"

Such being His own declaration, the inquiry arises, *What is that purpose?*

Here, it seems proper to remark, preliminarily, that, although the gospel plan and proclamation are the evidence of God's compassion toward the guilty, that compassion is nevertheless, in entire consistency with all His high attributes; and while it has the fullest scope for its exercise, it is not a weak and capricious regard for the happiness of individual sinners exclusively; but the wise and benevolent regard of the God of love toward the best happiness of His universal empire, and is in harmony with the very best exhibition and preservation of His own throne and glory.

1. *It does NOT comprehend the salvation of FALLEN ANGELS.*

For them no Saviour died. To them no mercy is offered. And 'hope that comes to all,' pays no kind and cheering visit to those gloomy prisons of eternal sorrow, in which *the angels that kept not their first estate are reserved in chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

2. *Nor have we any reason to suppose that the gospel actually and absolutely designs the salvation of EVERY INDIVIDUAL OF THE HUMAN RACE.*

For then, it would long since have appeared unto all, without exception; it would effectually and infallibly secure the faith and repentance of every sinner, without exception. Those who admit the special influences of the Holy Ghost, will, of course, I suppose, accede to the substantial correctness of this statement. And even those who deny the special influences of the Holy Ghost,—since they deny any *specific* and *efficacious* design in the gospel, eternally contemplated in the mind of God, and infallibly secured in every tittle of it, in regard to the regeneration of a part of mankind,—will equally allow, what is involved in and established by the *conceded* perdition of ungodly men.

The inquiry has not respect to the nature and extent of the atonement of Jesus Christ. *God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might have everlasting life.* He has *no delight in the death of sinners.* In itself considered, I believe that the benevolence of his nature prompts him to desire the salvation of all men. And accordingly he has **COMMANDED all men every where to repent.** This is his *law*; his holy *will*, by which, and *not his secret purpose*, mankind are bound. The proclamation of the gospel is *Ho every one that thirsteth; whosoever will let him come; he that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned.* This is all very plain; men are condemned and punished for rejecting God's testimony, thus making him a *liar*, and for refusing salvation, through the crucified Redeemer, sincerely offered, in the most ample manner, *to every creature and in all the world.*

Such is the provision. This redemption may be secured by every man that chooses to have it, on the terms fixed in *the grace of God which hath appeared and bringeth [or beareth] salvation unto all men.* But while this is the fact, the universal offers of the gospel do not, by any means, necessarily involve the *specific* intention on the part of God, infallibly to secure the repentance and salvation of *every individual* of the posterity of Adam. For,

(1.) Some men have been already lost. *Judas the son of perdition* has gone to *his own place*; and others have followed him, wilfully going down to *the chambers of death.* All who die impenitent die unredeemed, and likewise perish. This is conceded on all hands, except by the advocates of *Universal Salvation*, a heresy, not only, opposed to the whole spirit of the *pres-*

ent discourse;—but a delusion destroyed by its self contradictions and unholy tendencies, and by the plain, stern, and uncompromising tenor of the Bible; which, while it unfolds a scheme of mercy, wide as the wants of men, and extending throughout all the earth, and reaching to the end of time, that it may proffer a remedy as widely spread as the desolations of the curse, nevertheless refuses the salvation of the cross to every man who *will not come unto Jesus Christ that he may have life.*

(2.) While it is true that such is the general proffer of the gospel, the fact is very apparent, that many to whom it is proclaimed,—instead of being saved and sanctified by the truth, which is *able to make them wise unto salvation,—turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them, and put away from them the words of eternal life, and judge themselves unworthy of it.* They are commanded to repent; but they harden their hearts; they are urged to believe, but *they believe not the record that God has given of his Son,* and of the everlasting redemption which is in his blood. And accordingly, every impression made by the gospel is fainter and fainter; the emotions which it excites become more and more evanescent; until, in process of time the gospel is to them nothing but a *savor of death unto death,* and they are *given up to delusion that they may believe a lie, that they all may be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.*

God has, we believe, no positive agency in hardening the heart. That result is the natural and necessary consequence of repeated disobedience to the truth. Customary unbelief strengthens men in opposition to the plan of salvation and to all its holy demands upon them. And the process of their ruin is one of self-destruction, the more dreadful and criminal, because it takes place through the voluntary agency and obstinacy of a sinner, under a dispensation, the grand theme of which, and its central point of glory and goodness, is the death of the eternal Son of God, as the *propitiation for the sins of the whole world.*

Now, that God designed specifically to harden any sinner, originally subjecting him to such a process by an infallible, decretive, personal, and capricious, reprobation, we do not believe; nor is such a design involved in the declaration of the text. All that we deem essential to the integrity and unity of our doctrine, is that God has so arranged the plan of his gospel, in correspondence with the real laws of the human mind, that the effect of its direction to the hearts and consciences of men shall conform to all the analogies observable in appeals on any other subject. Frequent unsuccessful appeal only results in rendering the churl more obdurate and inexorable; he is not always *wearied* into compliance by the *often coming* of the petitioner; but still resists, and finally he becomes inaccessible; and truth and argument, and prayer, and motive, fall upon his heart as powerless as the gentle rain upon a globe of adamant. The common effect of obstinacy is witnessed here. The sinner hears and refuses to turn; the next appeal less powerfully assails the conscience; and in time, it is “seared as with a red-hot iron.” But who is to blame? You are, my impenitent hearer! Did not God speak? And did not you harden your heart, and refuse to obey his voice; until now, it may be, the entreaties of heavenly grace and the thunder of Almighty wrath equally fail to disturb the fatal slumbers and ominous calm of your insensible bosom.

And this falls in, I apprehend, with the design of God just here; that as He offers to save men, and *they regard him not, when he stretches forth his hand, and despise his counsel,* He withdraws his Spirit; no longer strives with them; and leaves them to their own hearts’ lusts:—And it is his purpose, that

while, to make his power known, He endures them through much long suffering, their perversion of his gospel shall only conduce to render them *vessels of wrath fitted for destruction*. Of this, the parable of the sower in the 13th of Matthew, and the correspondent testimony in the 6th of Isaiah, seem to me abundant proof. The first refusal to be saved would justify God, in destroying them at once; as would their first transgression of his law: but they are continued here, *laying up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgments of God*; and all the arrangements of divine providence, and the action of his own holy gospel, tend only, in their case, to produce in them a more depraved iniquity, until their cup is filled and the wicked are compelled to drink the fury of their insulted and rejected God. At all events it is perfectly evident from the hardening influence of a perverted gospel, in the actual observation of facts, that its mission never comprehended the *specific design* of saving every man.

3. But if God has *not designed to save all men; so has he not, on the other hand, designed that the whole race shall be ruined*. In the Sovereignty of his grace, he has *eternally designed*, afresh to interfere; and, notwithstanding the universal rebellion of ungrateful sinners, to interpose the influences of his Spirit, in his special, efficacious, renewing and saving energy. And, while he has resolved to leave some to their *chosen dishonor*,—AS HE MIGHT HAVE LEFT THE WHOLE RACE,—He has selected, *from the mass of sinful and righteously condemned men*, those whom he makes willing in the day of his power, that he may make known the riches of his glory, on the vessels of mercy which he hath afore prepared unto glory.

This he has a right to do. *As the potter hath power over the clay*, so hath God, in *having mercy upon whom, and in hardening whom he will*. And no man may reply against God. For his own damnation is the result of the sinner's own act; and just as certain and righteous, as far as he is concerned, as if the doctrine and truth of election had never existed; while the *election of grace* is the only hope of the redemption of a single soul. When men pursue so *wilfully and universally* the way to death, and Eternal Justice would be honored in their *universal overthrow*, the *gift of eternal life which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began* arrests the entire ruin; and the purpose and counsel of God shews its gracious and benevolent, as well as its real and operative power, in the salvation of those whom God has given in covenant to the Son; and whom He causes, in the dispensation of the gospel, and by the omnipotent energy of the Spirit, to come unto him, never to be lost,—never, *in any wise to be cast out*.

I pause here, to remark the difference between the *scriptural* doctrine of election and reprobation and the notions which are held, and the representations concerning them which are made, by some men. Those who hate the Bible doctrine upon the subject, misrepresent it as involving the positive determination of God to create the reprobate for no other purpose than to damn them; *as we be slanderously reported and some affirm that we say*.\* And, being

\* "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death." Conf. of Faith, chap. III. § 3. "The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the *unsearchable counsel of His own will*, whereby He *extendeth or withholdeth mercy*, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to *pass by*, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath, for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice." Ib. chap. III. § 7. "God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of His mere love, for the praise of his glorious grace, to be manifested in due time, hath elected some angels to glory; and in Christ hath chosen some men to eternal life, and the means

compelled to allow that there is an election spoken of, in the scriptures, many represent it as the purpose of God, to bestow eternal life upon those, who, He foresaw, would repent and believe. But the reverse is the truth. The purpose of God, in relation to the reprobate, and for reasons which *seemed good in His sight*, was to leave them in the sins, which he foresaw they would commit, as the whole race of mankind, without a solitary exception, naturally resolves to transgress;—while He determined also, for reasons the glory of which Eternity alone can fully reveal, and correspondent with all the high honor of His perfectly wise and holy dominion, that out of this immense and universal community of condemned sinners, there should be selected the heirs of illustrated, distinguishing grace; *CHOSEN in Christ Jesus, before the foundation of the world*, (NOT because He foresaw that they would be holy, but) *that they should be holy and without blame before Him, in love*. The efficiency of means and the result being alike ordained, they were *chosen unto salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto He calls them, by the gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ; having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to his good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth*.

The design of the gospel then, is to call from all the ends of the earth, the *sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty*—*predestinated* to this illustrious

thereof; and also according to His sovereign power, and the unsearchable counsel of His own will, (whereby He extendeth or withholdeth FAVOR as He pleaseth) hath passed by and foreordained the rest to dishonor and wrath, to be *for their sin* inflicted, to the praise of the glory of His justice." *Larg. Cat. Q. 13.*

Comparing these quotations, I think that we easily gather the doctrine taught in the standards of the Presbyterian church. In the order of time, and as affected by the decrees of *predestination to life and foreordination to death*, men are contemplated as *fallen sinners*, to whom *favor or justice* are to be shewn. The *election* obtains salvation of *grace*; the *rest* are *blinded* and, (such is the legitimate inference,) left, in *justice*, to perish.

These, I know, are *hard sayings*; and many cannot bear them. But they are *no harder* than Christ used in the 6th and 10th of John, when he was in danger of being stoned for the assertion; or Paul, among other places, in the 9th of Romans: And I should not object to the employment of the scripture declarations, in the plain, common sense, meaning of the terms; substituted in any case, instead of those which the framers of the Confession have adopted. The Epistles to the Romans and Ephesians are not less plain in the assertion of the doctrines of grace, than are the Confession and Catechisms. These latter are always understood to mean what they unequivocally avow; why the former should be *wreathed* to the support of meanings opposite to their express assertions, I cannot explain. If the inspired writers meant to be understood, their language is not less apt for my purpose than that of uninspired writers; and may safely be employed to express our views on this or any other topic of revelation. When our standards speak of the *decrees of God, providence, election, future punishment*, and the like, their meaning is not misunderstood: yet they are not less susceptible of *wresting and perversion* than the language of the Scriptures on the same topics.

It is for those who deny, as fully as for those who advocate, the doctrines of grace, to *show*, if they can, why a holy and merciful God chose to create so many myriads of angels and men, on the perfect foresight of their sin, and perseverance in rebellion, and necessary condemnation to eternal death. It is a point indeed, not illustrated in the revelation of that Spirit who *searcheth the deep things of God*. But it is equally embarrassing to Arminian as to Calvinistic views. The disposition to be made of men *when created and regarded as sinners*, is satisfactorily revealed in the scriptures; and with *that revelation only* is this discourse concerned; with that revelation only, the declarations of our Confession, in the premises.

*adoption.* It is one prominent and peculiar intention of the *word which goeth forth out of the mouth of God.* His children are scattered among all nations and kindreds of the earth; He has *much people* that are to be gathered, by the means, to use which Paul was divinely delayed at Corinth, out of other cities and regions of the world, and as the developments of His Providence, and the faithfulness of His church, prepare the way, *they shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

4. The gospel plan, we observe, moreover, has been arranged with the view of *declaring God to His creatures; and to explain and vindicate the great principles of His government; and clearly to develop the way of salvation and the whole duty of man.*

(1.) Here, He brings to view his Eternal existence, and all His natural and moral attributes, in a way, which no other plan, of which we have any knowledge, is calculated to exhibit. In the great facts of the redemption-scheme, and in the doctrine or truth of the facts, there is a practical and most magnificent illustration of the essential and glorious perfections of the Divine Being; the offices of the Holy Trinity; the justice, goodness and stability of the eternal throne; the matchless and universal Sovereignty of God; and the relation which these perfections and interests sustain to the happiness and immortal destinies of created beings; *and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God, who created all things, by Jesus Christ, to the intent, that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.* These exhibitions of the wisdom and grace of God are intended to be made, in such a manner, as to excite the contemplation, wonder and praise of all the holy and intelligent orders of the highest ranks in creation; and accordingly, when this world, which was to be the scene of such great and splendid events, as the gospel designs, sprung forth into being, and beauty, and fair proportion, from the hands of its Creator, *the morning stars sung together and the sons of God shouted for joy; at the announcement of the Saviour's birth, a multitude of the heavenly host, inspired by a theme, into the mysteries of which angels desire to look, and so eminently connected with the great Creator's honor and the security of human redemption, swelled high, in heavenly harmony over the plains of Bethlehem, the "harping symphonies of the celestial Choir," in celebration of that grand event which secures *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace good will toward men;* and, in like manner, when the Son of God had *destroyed death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil, having spoiled the principalities and powers of darkness, and made a shew of them openly triumphing over them* in his cross, then, "burst the bars of death and rose triumphant over the grave," *ascending up on high and leading captivity captive,* we may not inappropriately refer to Him, the splendid description in the 24th Psalm, as of the Mighty and Victorious Redeemer, returning from the field of his achievements, surrounded by the heavenly phalanx that come forth to meet Him, "with songs and honors sounding loud" and to instal him amid the sublime glories of His everlasting throne, *Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift**

them up ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory. The Church on earth celebrates the wonders of redeeming goodness, in the lofty ascription, *Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever; ever acknowledging the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; and, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.* With these sympathize the bright spirits of the just made perfect and the angels that are before the throne of God, saying *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honor and glory and power, for thou hast created all things, and, for thy pleasure, they are, and were created.* But highest and sweetest on the harps of God is the *Song of Moses and the Lamb.* The glory of creation, providence, holiness, justice, victory and grace ineffable, is all combined and harmonious, *Great and marvellous are thy ways Lord God Almighty, Just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints.* The doxology of the redeemed sounds forth the signal for sublimest praise, and awakens the glad response of all the holy and glorious beings of God's universal empire: the echoing praises of *Israel* and that *eternity which God inhabits* fill all worlds with joy, and summon up the hosts of the blessed to participate in the shouts and songs of celestial triumph as the seals of that mysterious book, in which are written the high purposes of God, are loosed by the hands of the Lamb; *ten thousand times ten thousand, and thou ands of thousands, cast their crowns before Him* and raise the NEW SONG saying *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor and glory, and blessing,— for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and every creature which is in Heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, respond saying 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.'*

What glory is this! What rapture to share it! How precious the gospel of the grace of God! How sublime and magnificent that *prosperity*, how venerable the *pleasure* of its Author; how worthy to be *accomplished*; and *His word to return unto him not void!*

(2.) Here too, is it intended, that men shall be informed concerning their duty, and the way of peace. All other systems of ethics are "defective and unsanctioned," and

"—————prove too weak  
To bind the roving appetite and lead  
Blind Nature to a God yet unrevealed."

But, in the possession of the gospel, *he that reads may run* to do God's will, in the way of His commandment. Morals the most pure; with sanctions the most impressive; and urged by authority the most obligatory, and by all the tender and winning argument which appeals from Gethsemane and Cal-

vary; are dictated here to the human heart and conscience, with power to bind our affections to the throne of God. It is the gospel *alone*, moreover, which discloses the way of salvation; and brings its direct and well-defined offer of eternal life to the wants and understandings of sinners.

"'Tis Revelation satisfies all doubts,  
Explains all mysteries, except her own,  
And so illuminates the way of life  
That fools discover it, and stray no more."

It exhibits with all needful accuracy the ways of God, asserts and vindicates Eternal Providence; and teaches His will concerning our salvation. It designs that men shall see light to guide them unto everlasting rest; and if they perish, that they shall *have no cloke for their sin*, but perish under *this condemnation, that light is come into the world, and they have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

5. Finally; we observe generally, that it is the intention of the gospel to *instruct, comfort, and sanctify the Church; and to extend the dominion and the triumphs of the cross, over the hearts and minds of mankind throughout the world.*

The former part of this statement needs no illustration, it is fully proved by the whole tenor of the gospel. With respect to the latter branch, the scripture teaches us, that the gospel is to be preached for a witness among the nations; to scatter abroad the blessings of knowledge, and civilization, and the refinements and sweet charities of life; and through its saving influence, the whole of this revolted earth is to be brought back, in willing subjection to its lawful Sovereign and gracious Redeemer. The Church which is the kingdom of Jesus Christ is destined to increased and universal triumph; *the heathen shall be given for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for the possession of Jehovah-Jesus. The Lord shall comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places, and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. The Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising; thy righteousness shall go forth as brightness, and thy salvation as a lamp that burneth; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters from the ends of the earth; the abundance of the seas shall be converted unto thee; the sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee, and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet, and they shall call thee The City of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel; I will make of thee an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations; thy people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified; I the Lord will hasten it in His time.* This is to be accomplished through the influence of the gospel. To secure the destruction of sin and the curse, and the overthrow of all the enemies of the Redeemer's throne, and the conversion of the world, the gospel is to be sent forth every where. *Zion that bringeth good tidings shall ascend into the high mountains; Jerusalem that bringeth good tidings shall lift up her voice with strength, and fearlessly call upon the nations to behold their God; the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

Such is the purpose of God in the gospel. This is the good pleasure of his will. For this, He has sent His word.

It remains to shew,

II. THAT THIS GREAT PURPOSE WILL BE EFFECTED.

I mean, by this remark, that the purpose of God, in the facts of the gospel record, and, in designing and sending forth the doctrine or truth of the facts, will infallibly be accomplished; that the death of Jesus Christ, the great foundation of the gospel scheme, will secure every thing that God intended to secure by it; that the gospel will be preached to all for whom it is designed; that it will secure the conversion of every individual among mankind, whose conversion it specifically intends; and that for this purpose, it shall spread and triumph eventually over the whole earth. There will be no disappointment whatsoever. In the progress of ages, and in the ultimate winding up of the great plan, it will appear that, although *the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die, in like manner,—His word shall not pass;* every tittle of it shall be fulfilled; *His salvation shall be forever, and His righteousness shall not be abolished.*

In the attempt to illustrate the purpose of God, as far as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and it is to be inferred from the course of divine Providence, I have necessarily, in some degree anticipated; and therefore, I shall not insist on all the topics properly comprehended under the proposition now to be considered; while some that have been merely introduced under the preceding head require here a fuller illustration and support.

With respect to the general tendency of the gospel to do good, and the certainty that it will diffuse itself and its blessings, and triumph over all opposition, and eventually establish the kingdom of God in the earth, thus securing every subordinate and specific part and minutest detail of its entire plan, I remark,

1. *That the intention of God contemplating just such a result, is necessarily efficient and infallible in its production.*

We have seen that such is the intention of God; His eternal counsel, unequivocally and explicitly asserted; and that *thus far*, the gospel every where is fulfilling His eternal will, in the very manner in which, His counsel and purpose designed it should operate. And if he has declared such an intention, and has formed such a purpose, in regard to the *future success and glory of the gospel*, it cannot fail to take effect. *The Lord hath prepared His throne in the Heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all. His counsel must stand, and His pleasure be accomplished.* Recal to mind the beautiful language of Holy Writ, quoted a few minutes ago, in which, He has so fully and solemnly declared, that through the gospel, *His kingdom shall come and His will be done in all the earth.* He has promised *that all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God:* and not all the faint-heartedness of His friends, nor the unbelief and opposition can make void that promise. *What He speaks shall be done; what He commands shall stand fast. He hath said it, and shall He not do it?*—THE ZEAL OF THE LORD OF HOSTS WILL PERFORM THIS. I THE LORD WILL HASTEN IT IN HIS TIME.

This is enough to settle the question. But the proprieties of the occasion will justify some further remarks.

2. *God has adapted His truth, with perfect wisdom, to operate successfully on the human mind, in accordance with the nature of mind, and to about the universal reign of holy principles.*

*Is not my world as a fire, saith the Lord, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces! The word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, the soul and spirit, and proving a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual; and are mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down high imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*

(1.) What a surpassing grandeur, is in the simple story of the cross! What power to arrest the thoughts, and captivate the imaginations of men! What appeals does it make to the conscience! What tender and moving argument does it address to the heart! How, when the charms of philosophy, and the alluring strains of human rhetoric, and the *enticing words of man's wisdom*, have failed to move the heart and to amend the life, has the preaching of the cross, which is *to them that perish foolishness*, demonstrated itself to be the *power and the wisdom of God unto salvation*. The enlightened and refined and courtly; the lofty and the humble; the ignorant and the degraded; *the Greek and the Jew; the barbarian and the Scythian*; the bond and the free have felt its power and submitted to its demands. Amid the splendors of imperial Rome; the learning of Athens; and the luxury of Corinth; in the frozen snows of Greenland, in the kraal of the degraded Hottentot, and amid the lust and blood and cruelty of Hindoo rites; man has been reached by the *foolishness of preaching*; believed and been saved. For,

(2.) The saving energy of the gospel is derived from the presence and influence of the Spirit of God. Without that influence, and as to the mode of its reception, man is properly compared to the *deaf adder which stoppeth her ears, and refuseth to listen to the voice of the charmer, though he charm never so wisely*. But in the *demonstration of the Spirit and of power*, this treasure, though it be *committed to earthen vessels*, has a secret and controlling *excellency* which is altogether of God. The truth always owes its triumphs to the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Without that agency it hardens and dooms. With it, men are brought under the agency of an influence, which *might and power* cannot emulate; nor the malice of Satan defeat. And while the promise is left us, that the Holy Ghost shall go before the heralds of the cross, as they advance and preach every where, *the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*; we rejoice to contemplate the success which is to attend His gospel, and diffuse its *grace and peace—according as His divine power hath given us all things pertaining to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue*.

3. *It is inconsistent with every intelligent and intelligible admission of the Divine Wisdom and Power, to suppose not only that so great an apparatus of means as He has devised, should not be adjusted to a definite result; but that it should fail of accomplishing the fullest success contemplated.*

Why was this world created; why was man so wonderfully endowed; and why permitted to fall; why did the Son of God, the *heir of the whole creation*, become incarnate, and die; and why are providence and its revolutions of the world; and the angels of God; and the very *wro*

as the piety of man; and the Eternal Trinity; all employed in furthering the *great salvation* of the gospel; unless it be, that God, the Supreme, designs, in the most glorious manner, to establish His Holy throne, and gracious rule, amid the *armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth?*\*

4. *The engagements of the Covenant of Grace require this result.*

In the everlasting councils of the Godhead, the divine veracity, and omnipotence, and grace, are pledged to establish Messiah's throne over all the world, and to make it *endure as the days of Heaven*. This stipulation cannot but be performed. *The Lord will not suffer His faithfulness to fail; His covenant will He not break; nor alter the thing that is gone out of His lips.*

5. *God is designing to exhibit His glory, through this very plan.*

He who, for the manifestation of His *glory* gave the world its being, and is bringing all events to pass, will lose nothing of the glory, which the full success of the plan of mercy is divinely adapted to secure. He is jealous of His honor; and *will not give His glory to another*. *All nations that He has made, shall come and worship before the Lord, and shall glorify His name*. This is the result of the gospel plan. *Christ Jesus, 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. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that JESUS CHRIST IS LORD TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER.*

6. Finally, *Experience and observation correspond with the declarations here made; and lead us to infer that the entire result will be gained, of which we already possess the earnest and first fruits.*

An ignorant objection has been urged against the gospel, on account of the comparatively little progress, which it has made, during the long period that has elapsed, since its original proclamation, and in the view of its high claim to be the only system of truth and salvation. For eighteen hundred years, it has been avowedly designed for the world; it has aimed at the conversion of the world; its Author is *the light of the world*; it is the last and best and exclusive hope of a ruined and dying world: Consequently, it is said, that it cannot be from God; for His Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, would have long since secured its universal diffusion and its universal triumph.

But I argue on the concession of the philosophic Gamaliel. *If it were not of God*, it would long since, have come to *naught*. And, independent of the limitations, which, it must be, and that not obscurely, conceded, divine Sovereignty has a *right to fix*; and of the criminality of the Church of God, in neglecting so long to attempt the *full* execution of that *command* which was given to her by the risen Redeemer,—her only rule of duty—; and without contemplating the *times and seasons*, assigned, for the universal exhibition of the truth of the gospel, and the universal extension of its influence, and its permanent establishment, by the *sure word of prophecy*, correspondent with the specific design of God, although that design is completely related to the agency and *immediate* duty, and enterprise, and prepared-

ness of the Church,—let us glance a moment at the *facts of primitive days*, and the *results of modern Christian enterprise*.

(1.) "Meek and beautiful as she was," remarks a fine, though anonymous writer, "Christianity commenced her course amid the frowns of kings; the jealousy of superstition; the contempt of philosophers; and the jeers of the rabble; but the star of her glory rose, with steadily increasing brightness, over all the troubled waters, until it ascended the very culminating point." In a little period, *the gospel was preached throughout the then known world*. Thousands in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, and in the *islands of the sea*, were converted to God; and almost every country witnessed the triumphs of a system, which was, emphatically, the *power of God unto salvation*. On the day of Pentecost, there were at Jerusalem, dwellers *in every nation under heaven*, who heard in *their own tongues* the *wonderful works of God*. By them; and by the apostles and their fellow laborers, who were *scattered abroad* by persecution, and *went every where preaching the word*; the gospel was carried to *Parthians and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and in the parts of Libya, about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians*. The apostle Paul preached the gospel as far west as Spain and it is conjectured also in Britain, and far in the east, modern travelers have discerned the traces of the Apostles' labors. While pure and kind as it came from the divine mind, it had *free course and run and was glorified*. It overturned the altars and destroyed the temples of pagan idolatry; and, in three hundred years, extended its power over the empire, and waved its sacred banner high over the palaces and thrones of Byzantium and of Rome, the proud dominion of the conquerors of the world.

At that early day, then, the truth had made astonishing progress. And the conversion of the first disciple to Christianity, it has been well remarked, illustrated the philosophy and the practicability of the world's conversion. Moreover, *all that the gospel then contemplated it secured*. Its early heralds went to the Jews; and many believed; many were awakened that never became real Christians; and as a body, they *put from them the words of eternal life, and judged themselves unworthy of it*. The heralds of the cross turned then unto the Gentiles; and many of them believed and *brought forth the fruits of righteousness*; flourishing churches were gathered, while many to whom the distinct offers of the gospel were made, rejected the truth, and it was justly *hid from their eyes*. All nations appear to have had the gospel. But there came a falling away; regions once trod by the feet of holy apostles, and honored by the presence of Christian churches, were doomed for sin to subjection for a time to the dominion of idolatrous superstition, and the sway of the beast and the false prophet; and even the churches apostatized, and their glory departed, and the destruction denounced against them by the apostle John,\* has swept them away. This has all been predicted in the gospel itself; and has fallen out in righteous and terrible punishment for the sin of refusing and neglecting the authority and salvation, which was published to them, in that *record which God has given of His Son*.

† Had the same efforts that were made originally, and the same success

\* Rev. ch. 2 and 3.

† It may be necessary to suggest, that it is not intended by the above remarks, that the Church is excusable, for her neglect and delay to spread Christianity throughout the world, as far as she has had the ability to do it. *The set time to favor Zion, is when she is setting herself in the attitude to be favored; and is preparing the way of*

been continued, the gospel, *speaking after the manner of men*, would have reigned long ere this day, *from sea to sea and from the river unto the end of the earth*. Unfaithfulness in those, with whom it was deposited, not less than the disheartening opposition of its foes, during a long and gloomy night, stayed its triumphs and obscured its glories, debased it to become the mere engine of state policy, and perverted it to become the instrument of ghostly tyranny and priestly selfishness. But *the Church* still lived. Though driven into the wilderness, God *sent out with her His light and truth*; and the *gates of hell prevailed not against her*.

(2.) The dawn again broke forth. *The captive daughter of Zion shook herself from the dust, and loosed herself from the bands of her neck*. The chaste bride of Jesus *came up out of the wilderness leaning upon the arm of her Beloved, and looked forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and TERRIBLE AS AN ARMY WITH BANNERS*. And though till this

*the Lord, and making straight in the desert a highway for our God*. Ours is the blame of sin; of neglected duty; and perverted opportunity. To God, belongs the honor, resulting from the establishment of holiness in the hearts of men, and from the perfection and success of His plans. The point which I am, here, endeavoring to illustrate, and, I am conscious how imperfectly, (a) is not so immediately the responsibility of the Church for the extension of the gospel, as the absolute certainty of the gospel triumph. If the Church is faithful, she will see, and share, as she must help to promote that triumph. God has connected her agency with that triumph, in His comprehensive and perfect plan; and the Church shall yet fully come up to her duty, with her most cheerful activity; *for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*. (b)

I would ever keep distinct, for all practical purposes, the subject of our commanded duty and reasonable service, from that of the *unrevealed* and of course *misunderstood secrets* of the Council chamber of the King of kings. *It is not for us to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power*; but to be witnesses unto Christ unto the uttermost part of the earth. Duties are ours; defined by His revealed command, and covering all our ability; and encouraged, by His promises, which are so far the revelation of His purposes. He has commanded a certain thing to be done. He has promised a certain result. This is all that we have to guide us. It is the rule of our duty. And we have no right to sit down, and leave to Him the conversion of the world without going to work ourselves, under the pretence that He has a time, and a controlling purpose, respecting the introduction of the latter-day glory. *Secret things, purposes, modes, reasons, times, belong to the Lord our God. Things revealed, commands, promises and some purposes too, though but parts of His ways, belong to us and to our children*, and measure our obligation; and every promise and rightly interpreted purpose of God, only increases our obligation to energetic and zealous action.

"Christians have not done what they could, to place Christianity in the midst of the heathen nations. No argument and no promise of the Bible, can make it certain that Christianity will prevail universally, so long as means and men are wanting, to carry out and sow these principles in heathen soil. That faith, which is not accompanied by action, in respect to this enterprise, is irrational and absurd." One subordinate reason of the highest importance, if it be not admitted to be the "only reason why the sound of the gospel has not vibrated through the most obscure corner of the heathen world, and reached the most distant isles of the sea, is that Christians have been remiss in their duty. The certainty that the world may be renewed in process of time by the means now in operation, does not exculpate us, while we make no effort to hasten the accomplishment of the work. If all nations could be instantly enlightened and saved, it would be our duty, yes, and if we are the true disciples of Jesus, we should rejoice to labor and pray for such a glorious event." (c)

(a) 2 Maccabees 15: 38.

(b) Isaiah 2: 2, 3. Mic. 4: 1, 2.

(c) See on this subject a valuable essay on "The Diffusive Nature of the Christian Religion," in the Christian Spectator for December; particularly, in the close of the article, the consideration of two objections to the view there taken, derived from "the decline of religion in the middle ages," and "the large portion of the world still enveloped in the darkness of paganism."

late period, since the Reformation, the true gospel has been spreading over nominally Christian lands, and there, making known its pure and peaceful nature, and discarding other than *papal* trammels, yet it has come to bless these shores, and dignify this empire of freemen settled and founded by Christian patriots who were taught by the Bible what true freedom is; and now again with all their gathering impulses to urge them forward, Christian truth and enterprise with renewed and increasing energy are spreading abroad, toward every land, and promise *the heathen and the uttermost parts of the earth, for the inheritance and possession of* JEHOVAH JESUS. With an intelligent beneficence, instructed and energized by its beneficent author, the gospel is going forth to *gladden the wilderness and the solitary place, and to make the desert rejoice and blossom like the rose*. It maintains its character as the permanent and essential principle of civilizing and enlightening mankind. Wherever it penetrates it is the pioneer of knowledge, and sanctity, and blessedness. It has invaded *the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty, and sorrow and sighing have fled away*. Unlike the devastating march of ambition, her progress is not to be ascertained by heaps of slaughtered victims; the groans of widows and orphans; and the smouldering ruins of stately cities and humble villages. Her course is marked by the industry and enterprise which follow in her train; by the monuments which learning, refinement and the arts have erected to her honor; and by the flourishing and smiling landscapes, which attest her beneficent triumphs over barbarian ignorance, and the unholy and savage nature of man. The gales which spread her banners are the grateful breathings of those whom she has delivered; and the motto inscribed upon it, in characters of living light,—the pledge of her own supremacy, and the hope and refuge of mankind—is “GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST! AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN!” and all the joy and magnificence of her character, are an emanation from the *glory of God and the Lamb*; the very light of Heaven reflected down to earth, to cheer and save and guide the soul to everlasting bliss, illumined with the beamy splendors of that brilliant throne, which radiates eternal day and every springing joy, throughout the upper sanctuary,—the dwelling place of the eternal Jehovah.

The course of this blessed gospel is onward: and the *signs of the times* indicate not faintly, that not long shall the chariots of salvation delay to roll around the globe. *It is prospering*; the word of God *returns not void*; it is *accomplishing the pleasure* of its Author. It ought not to be overlooked, that the *resources* of the gospel are proportionately enlarged by every conversion it effects. The revivals of religion, with which our country has been favored of late years, have been the occasion, of turning the hearts of a thousand young men, it is computed, to the *work of the ministry*. These will spread the news of salvation; and through their instrumentality, others will be converted; who, in course, will preach unto yet others. The heathen world will not be dependent for ever for an emigrant gospel and ministry. Our ancestors were once pagans; and were converted by the gospel; of them, came many ministers, who preached to their *kinsmen according to the flesh*; and it is just in this way that the world will hear the glad tidings proclaimed—even by many now born or yet to be born, in Hindostan, in China, and in the darkest regions of Africa. The Schools and Churches in the heathen world, are yet to be *Schools of the prophets*, and multiply continually native missionaries of the cross.

Our holy religion has maintained its *identity*, while other systems wane, and *fade as a leaf*, and are perpetually changing. It is the same that, in the

days of prophets and apostles, encountered and subdued the wrath of man ; warred successfully against superstition, and pride, and *spiritual wickedness in high places*; and, while philosophy and the Schools accomplished just nothing, she by the power of her moral means alone, effected her bloodless and shining triumphs, and extended over the hearts of men, that spiritual kingdom, which consists in *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*. It still goes on to conquer ; it still encounters the same character in its foes : and, by it, still, the rebel is subdued ; the sinner converted to God ; and the church of Jesus Christ, prompted by the demands of the gospel itself, is increasing her activity, and coming up every year, more and more to her duty of *holding forth the word of life*, to a benighted and afflicted universe.

The object of the gospel has never been defeated ; it never can be. While men may suppose that it has ; and they reason from false assumptions of the character of God, and from promises, commands, and apparent designs, the full comprehension of which is in the mind of God alone ; and while Christians may mistake and despond ; and ministers despairingly ask, *Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ?* and all suppose that but little good has been effected, or is likely to result, and that the progress of truth must be stayed for centuries and centuries yet to come, and fall more and more behind the wants of future generations, our unbelief is rebuked and our faith and activity encouraged, by the evidence of recorded facts, and by the illustrated promises and declarations of God.

"His purposes are ripening fast,  
Unfolding every hour ;"

and not more surely do the *rain and the snow from heaven* carry into effect the benevolent designs of God, than His word and grace that fall as the rain and *as showers that water the earth*, shall accurately accomplish the high purpose and eternally glorious intention of the gospel of the grace of God, which hath appeared, to offer salvation unto all men.

#### REMARKS.

The subject excites, in my own mind, many a delightful theme of practical-reflection ; and in consideration of the few minutes, for which I cannot but trespass on your patience, it is difficult to select and urge those only, that are more peculiarly appropriate to the spirit of the occasion.

In view of the subject, I observe,

1. *The very great importance of the ministry of reconciliation.*

*We have this treasure in earthen vessels.* The very simplest instrumentality of divine truth is effective. The word of God, uttered in disjointed syllables, by the lisping lips of an infant-school child, has more than once rebuked vice and ungodliness and profanity, and taught wicked men to tremble before the majesty of truth. A pious mother, in all the retiring modesty of her spirit, takes her child into her closet, and, with solemn mien, and affectionate earnestness, represses the waywardness of his feelings ; instructs him in the way of salvation ; and prays with him, and for him, that God would *command His blessing, even life for evermore* : and often is she permitted to see the fruit of her labor ; her heart is *made glad by a wise son* ; one perhaps who is honored to be the herald of salvation to thousands, and a missionary of the cross among the heathen : Or it may be that when her body rests in the grave, her rejoicing spirit looks down from the abodes of bliss, and, among the angels of God, indulges a *peculiar joy*, in contemplating the repentance

of a sinner, because that sinner is her own child, converted through the instrumentality and recollection of her pious cares.

And if such be the influence of means so comparatively humble, and unobtrusive, and unofficial, how great may that be supposed to be, which God Himself has instituted and ordained to be the *salt of the earth and the light of the world!* No matter how *weak their bodily presence*, and their *speech how contemptible*, the truths which the ministry proclaim are *weighty and powerful*. Although they are only *earthen vessels*, frail and dying men; they are the *depository of a treasure*, and instrumental in the diffusion of a power and influence whose excellency is of God. Truth and good sense and fidelity in the ministry, present a claim which may never be scorned; and the right by which they appeal to the faith and obedience of men, is derived from the appointment, and sanctioned by the averment of the Son of God, *Messiah the Prince and Regent of the Universe, and the glorified Head of the Church; He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* Let me *magnify mine office*. As the permanent means of correct and saving moral influence; as the main-spring which, under God, puts in motion the energies and efforts of the Church, in every department of holy enterprise, the ministry is indispensable. Let it die or be corrupted; let any other system of influences and means be adopted to its exclusion; and the church is paralyzed, degraded, and enfeebled; and the world loses its best means and surest hope of reformation and blessing. What is the *wise* and the *scribe* and the *disputer of this world?* God has poured contempt upon them, and turned their wisdom into foolishness; and it has *pleased God by the foolishness of preaching* to save *them that believe*. It is the pulpit, which succeeds, where other means, subordinate and simply auxiliary, or in open contempt of it,

“Spend all their force and make no proselyte:  
—the pulpit, in the sober use

Of its legitimate peculiar powers,  
Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,  
The most important and effectual guard,  
Support and ornament of virtue's cause.  
There stands the messenger of truth; there stands  
The legat of the skies; his theme divine;  
His office sacred; his credentials clear:  
By him, the violated law speaks out  
Its thunders; and, by him, in strains as sweet  
As angels use, the gospel whispers peace.”

Whether it be sustained by the rich eloquence of Apollos; or by the cogent argumentation of Paul; or by the slowness of speech and stammering tongue of one, in this respect, like Moses; the themes they utter are but entrusted to them; they are the inspired messages of God; and *able to make men wise unto salvation*. Excellency of speech and wisdom are not out of place; but *what is the chaff to the wheat?* Truth fresh from the mouth of God; simple and sincere; and urged by the kind affection of a renewed and devoted heart, is the grand means of converting the world.

None of the intelligent scriptural labors of the ministry, are, I suppose, without effect. They may be feeble; they may be few; but their *record is on high*. Where we utter God's truth, there is He present to bless it. Sometimes, it *reproves, rebukes and exhorts with all long-suffering and doctrine; sometimes it converts and instructs in righteousness, and thoroughly furnishes the man of God to all good works; sometimes it reclaims the*

backsliding; sometimes penetrates the heart of hard impenitence and unbelief, and brings it a contrite suppliant to the mercy seat of God; it *converts the soul; makes wise the simple; and rejoices the heart*; it "trains to glorious war the sacramental host of God's elect;" and not less operative is it when men are heedless; and as when they *behold their natural face in a glass, and straightway forget what manner of men they were*; reflecting not on the portraiture of themselves which the light of Heaven reveals, and rejecting the claims which the appeal of heavenly mercy makes upon their souls. It is a fearful influence which is exerted here; often confessed in that honest hour when men must speak their thoughts, and on their dying beds deploring, and mourning at the last when *their flesh and their body are consumed: How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.* Despised promises and overtures of mercy afford no relief; the threatenings of God are remembered in their solemn import; and the soul sinks under the pressure of His apprehended wrath; and the truth of God causes the *pains of Hell to take hold* on the dying sinner. Hell, too, has its revelation yet to make of the hardening power of the truth of God, when men abuse and pervert it. There is an awful implication of guilt and abandonment in the declaration of the Apostle, *If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*

The day of Eternity will reveal,—if it be obscured till then,—that no truth of God has ever been uttered ineffectually. Many appear indifferent, under the sound of the gospel; long falls the truth unheeded on the seemingly careless ear; but who shall say, in vain? Conscience has been at work, and the strivings of the Spirit of God, when the placid countenance and the undimmed eye, gave no token of the inward commotion. The most trivial remark has taken effect; and shown the mighty power of truth. The seed may be sown and long lie hid; and yet at length sprout forth; the *bread* which is *cast upon the waters*, may *return after many days*. One man may *plant*; and another *water*; and yet a third receive the *increase given of God*. One may *lay the foundation*, and another may *build thereupon*; but the full result shall appear *in due time*, if *we faint not*, and become not weary in *well-doing*. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening, withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

I have no doubt that the light of Eternity will disclose an important influence, in deciding and securing the everlasting destinies of individuals and of the world, from every word of God's truth faithfully addressed to the consciences of men; and that every sermon, and exhortation, and effort to do good, has had its place,—so indispensable to be occupied, that without it, the grand result of the gospel plan might not have been secured—(for so related are all the events and developments and, "parts of that stupendous whole," which is comprehended in the plan of God's universal system,) that each agent, no matter how despised and dishonored by men; each effort, howsoever illy received and estimated, is an important link, in that mighty chain of necessary agents and influences, by which the gospel plan is consummated; and which binds remotest time and the history of all worlds to the throne and purpose of the Eternal God.

*Now thanks be to God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ; and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place: For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; To the one we are a savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And this is always true when as of sincerity, as of God, in the sight of God, we speak the truth in Christ.*

We learn,

2. *The propriety of preaching the whole counsel of God.*

This includes the *doctrines*; and the *duties and reproofs* of His word.

(1.) Men should know the truth of God, and search the records of His revealed will. And they may not lightly esteem truths, dazzling and confounding though they may be, which He has seen fit to make known. Many think that there are some doctrines of the gospel which ought never to be preached. But why has God revealed them? *All scripture*, says the Apostle, *is profitable*. And if you would keep men from contemplating those doctrines of grace, which have animated and sanctified the children of God, you must shut up the Bible, and counteract the command of Jesus Christ, to *search the Scriptures*; for, on every page, appear those testimonies which elevate and establish the high sovereignty of God, and stain the pride of them that would *glory in His presence*.

(2.) In exhibiting *duty* and administering *rebuke*, the *servant of the Lord must not strive*, on the one hand; nor timidly shrink from declaring the will of their Master, on the other. Not in denunciation and wrath, but in tenderness and love, must they *persuade men, as knowing the terrors of the Lord*. He will bless His word; it is for the edification of men; it is necessary to instruct them in the way of life, and to teach them their danger; they are benefited by our faithfulness, and grateful for the intrepid rebukes of the gospel; but are hurt and lost by the silence of the *watchmen on the walls of Zion*; while they despise that timidity, which to retain their favor, fears to withstand their sins.

We learn,

3. *The ground of encouragement to prayer for needful grace; and for the success of the gospel.*

With such a blessed certainty as the word of God reveals, how are we excited to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*; and to come *boldly to the throne of grace for mercy and grace that we daily need*. *The foundation of the Lord standeth sure*. Hence we may *labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God*; and His purpose cannot fail, or His promise lie unredeemed. Guided by His truth, we solicit His Spirit, which is pledged to *them that ask Him; and we have this confidence in Him that if we ask any thing agreeably to His will, He heareth us*. In the midst of despondency and gloom, the disquieted spirit of the children of God may indulge in hope, and rejoice in Him who is the *health of their countenance and their God*. *The Covenant of His faithfulness shall not fail; nor will He alter the thing that is gone out of His lips*.

And as God has determined to *send forth His light and His truth*, and make the gospel the means of redeeming the world, how confidently may we approach Him, and pray the *Lord of the harvest that He would send forth more laborers into the harvest*; pray for the universal diffusion of the knowledge of the *true God and Eternal life*; and for the predicted *outpouring of His Spirit upon all flesh*.

Hence we remark,

4. *The very great encouragement afforded to the Church in prompting and sustaining benevolent enterprise.*

The duty of the Church to be co-workers with God, is not to be called in question even seemingly, by an effort to prove it.

We have no reason to despond, in view of the arduous labors and difficulties to be encountered in sustaining and diffusing a preached gospel. *Lo! I am with you, says Christ, to the end of the world.*

It is worthy of distinct remark that no intelligent scriptural effort to do good by the spread of religion has utterly failed. It were indeed, a "deed of noble daring," to perish in the enthusiastic attempt to accomplish some great and happy achievement. The moral sublimity, the lofty heroism of almost a visionary philanthropist, consecrate and justify his enterprise, and approve it to the admiration of the world. And it is worth all the expense of life and property that it may require to enterprise so splendid a consummation as the conversion of this world, by carrying the gospel to every creature. But this is no visionary; no needless scheme. *The work is not in vain.* God has vindicated it, as He does every thing, which on scriptural principles, intends His glory; and He *makes the wrath of man to praise Him.* How recently did the announcement of the *Temperance Reformation*, its plan, and its hope, excite the laughter and ridicule of the world: but **NOBODY LAUGHS** now. The grandeur and the majesty of the cause appear; its coming triumphs are too certainly seen and beheld too near; and it is regarded by its foes with stern hatred and the preparation for the conflict, between interest and appetite, on the one hand, and on the other, *humanity, morality and gospel truth* and the Spirit of God urging to glorious victory. The result to one party must be confusion, if not conversion; to the other the joy of the conqueror. What difficulties, of appalling character, beset the *missionary* enterprise; and when it was first conceived, (in our own country,) a little more than twenty years ago, how dark and desperate appeared the project. Yet behold the results already. See the vast preparation that is made and making; the field that is explored; the laborers already engaged in its cultivation; and the numbers that prepare to follow; the good that *is* accomplished, though it be like an oasis in the desert; the civilization and many social and domestic benefits conferred upon the heathen; the schools; and the churches of christian disciples planted among them; the obligations of science and commerce to this very enterprise; the cords of love by which christian denominations are drawn together; the principle of Union, inherent in the constitution of the Church, yet in her, almost the worst developed hitherto, but now in its rapid evolution and power; and the spirit of the Church, in meeting the demands upon her benevolence; and how the world itself is appalled at the magnitude of the undertaking; and openings in Providence are every where courting the enterprise of the gospel; and from every land, *the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain*, is literally imploring the Bible, and the Tract, and the living teacher, and *earnestly expecting such a manifestation of the sons of God.* See all this; and ask, *What hath God wrought!* Is it not true that the aspect of the times, is affording a fairer prospect of success than has been seen since the apostolic day? Who should regard the jeers and ignorant reproaches of infidelity; who fear in such a cause; with such earnestness; and with such a God of Salvation for the leader of our Host! Who shall *despise the day of small things?*

Even where the efforts seem to indicate failure, the *word of God returns not void*. How hopeless appeared at first the missionary efforts in the Sandwich Islands! Yet when God's arm was fully trusted, it might almost be said that a *nation was born in a day*. Even the very discouragements and failures that frowned upon the enterprise, only nerve<sup>d</sup> for exertion; and like the fabled Antæus, the adventurous friends of the cause of missions rise strengthened and refreshed from their apparently untoward prostration. Their falls have bid them raise their cry to Heaven, and God has appeared in their behalf. And, although precious lives have been sacrificed, those who have fallen, neither lived nor died in vain. They led the way for others; and their labors prepared the way for the greater efficiency of their successors' labors. And even, though the mysterious despersations of Providence struck our hearts, in the very commencement of that enterprise, with reference to which we are assembled to night, yet we see no reason to despond. A voice comes from the early tomb of the lamented Barr, whose youthful heroism but one short year ago enlisted our sympathies, as he plead for benighted Africa;\* and bids the Church to occupy the field, on the limits of which he was not permitted to enter. And from another youthful soldier of the cross, the missionary of a sister branch of the Church, who fell so soon upon that field, we hear a voice that comes like a commandment from the world of spirits. *Being dead they speak*, and in obedience to their voice, the young heralds of salvation, in greater numbers, are preparing to act in the spirit of that cheering cry, which, as if in presentiment of his own early decease, was uttered by the departing Cox, before he left these shores, and sweeps in echo from his grave across the Atlantic, to admonish and impel to ceaseless and uncomputed effort, "**LET THOUSANDS PERISH, BEFORE AFRICA BE GIVEN UP!**"

And this is the feeling which is to gather strength; and pour its accumulatif influence upon the dark places of the earth. It is the purpose of God that His word shall go forth, and all flesh shall see His salvation. By the power of the truth, through the agency of men, shall be accomplished "*Scenes surpassing fable, and yet true;*" a purpose,

———"which who can see,  
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel  
His soul refreshed with foretaste of the joy?"

The contemplation of the latter-day glory, seen through the dim vista of rolling centuries, and thousands of years to come, filled the bosom of the prophet with enraptured bliss, and bade him call upon the Church to sympathize in his joy, and behold the blest vision of her coming triumph; *arise shine for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee*. And when the vision of accomplished mercy seems already to arise, in near

\* Mr. Barr preached for the author, on behalf of the African mission, on the last afternoon, (Sabbath,) that he spent in New York. On that day at the table, while speaking of the trials which he expected, I inquired whether he were married, or intended to marry, previous to his contemplated embarkation, and referred to the importance of a missionary, particularly, having a wife. "What you say is true," he replied; "but dear as would be the solace of a companion, in my toils and privations, I cannot think of exposing a female to encounter the dangers and hardships that I expect; I had rather endure them alone; being *unmarried I can care more for the things of the Lord;* and if I fall, I shall leave no desolate widow, in that unknown heathen country!" The remark illustrated his *singleness of heart*, and the martyr spirit which he would have carried to his work.

prospect, and to fill the whole aspect of the future, may we not be animated to labor for its consummation? being *steadfast unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch ye know your labor is not in vain in the Lord.* May we not respond to the call, which bids us look for the day, and hasten its approach, and rejoice in its anticipation? Behold the exalted destiny of the Church of God!

“Rise, crowned with light, Imperial Salem, rise!  
 Exalt thy towering head, and lift thine eyes!  
 See a long race thy spacious courts adorn!  
 See future sons and daughters, yet unborn,  
 In crowding ranks on every side arise,  
 Demanding life, impatient for the skies!  
 See barbarous nations at thy gates attend,  
 Walk in thy light, and in thy temple bend;  
 See thy bright altars throng'd with prostrate kings  
 And heap'd with products of Sabea springs;

See Heaven its sparkling portals wide display,  
 And break upon thee in a flood of day.

One tide of glory, one unclouded blaze  
 O'erflows thy courts; the light himself shall shine  
 Reveal'd, and God's eternal day be thine!  
 The seas shall waste, the skies in smoke decay,  
 Rocks fall to dust, and mountains melt away;  
 But FIX'D HIS WORD, His saving power remains;—  
*Thy realm forever lasts, thy own Messiah reigns!*”

##### 5. *The vanity of infidel boasts and predictions.*

Their hatred and scorn are directed against the truth and gospel of God. Persecution has sought to destroy Christianity. But all the efforts of Pagan and Popish superstition and bigotry; and of Atheistic infidelity; have not only failed; but redounded to her honor, and illustrated the strength of her impregnable and everlasting foundations. Voltaire introduced the awful watchword of his party against the cause of Jesus, “*Crush the Wretch!*” and the wickedness and cruelty of his compeers led to the denouncement of Christianity by the whole nation, and ultimately brought on that deluge of blood, which insatuated France poured out in the madness of her Atheism. He hoped and boasted; and the nation afterwards vainly hoped that Christianity had received a blow which could not be survived; and that not many years would show the ruin of the gospel. But low in the dust lie the heads of the dishonored prophets; their predictions have failed; and truth has triumphed over the empty opposition, and unbaptized imaginations of mad and impious philosophy! And thus must it be ever. *No weapon that is formed against the cause of God can prosper.* To those who resist the gospel, it opposes an influence which hardens its perverters, and renders them ripe for ruin; for it arrays against them the mighty omnipotence of God. *Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands in sunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the Heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. He shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

While *the memory of the wicked shall rot*; and they that, in opposition to God, and in the ways of worldly enterprise, have sought an imperishable name, and the honor that cometh from men, shall be disappointed; and many be remembered in infamous notoriety; the gospel holds out to its disciples and ministers the meed of unfading renown. *They, and they only, that be wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that have turned many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.* The names that history has preserved in the annals of the earth, and sought to render immortal, shall be forgotten. But, the *names that are written in the Lamb's book of life*, the children of God, who have conquered and are clothed in white, and have palms of victory in their hands, and possess thrones and crowns of immortal joy in the *City of the Great King*, their titles and achievements shall be recorded in sublimest blazonry in the high registers of Heaven; made glorious in the history of the world's redemption by the Son of God; that theme of angelic study, and admiration forever of the intelligent universe.

6. *How full of personal responsibility and interest to every one of my hearers, is the present moment.*

Every gospel sermon has its purpose; and it is the duty of men to fall in with that purpose in its great and benevolent contemplations. It is fitted to convert and sanctify you; and to lead you to assist in the accomplishment of its design in the conversion of the world. *It commands you to REPENT.*

Recollect, I pray you, the awful influence of a perverted gospel; and that you hear that gospel *always for eternity.* Whenever you come under its sound, you are under the action of an influence that is forming your character for eternity. Every word bears upon eternity. It is constantly operating to save or to damn. Despise not then its message. It benevolently offers salvation; and as you receive or reject it, you are in the hands of a wise and powerful God, whose designs are every moment affecting you, and who is arranging His providence so as to meet your constant circumstances, and thereby making all His truth the means of your safety or the pledge of your ruin.

His purpose and command are kind. They leave you free; and no decree of God can diminish aught of your responsibility. His word and its intention urge you to repent. The truth of this text will meet you, in all its dreadful glory, at the bar of God, and seal your happiness or secure your miserable doom. God's omnipotence will effect all His designs. And He designs to *take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of His Son.*

Abuse not His Sovereignty: be not unmoved under the representation of His purpose. That purpose and sovereignty involve your responsibility, and require you to act; impel you to act. And without that action in accordance with the pressing claims of the gospel, you die. You do not any where rest in inaction. Seed time and harvest are pledged forever; yet does not the husbandman yield himself to careless sloth. The pledge is his argument and encouragement to plough and to sow. So are God's purpose and your dependence, the reason why you should *Repent and turn unto God and do works meet for repentance.* *What a man soweth that shall he also reap.* *If you sow to the flesh you shall of the flesh reap corruption, disease and death. If to the Spirit you shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.* God

sends His messages to invite your confidence in Him,—and because He has a purpose in His gospel, He bids and encourages you to repose in Him. His purpose, if you are wise, is the argument of your salvation. For the encouragement of sinners He has used the words of my text; to move them to come to Him, and see how true is His promise, how safe and secure the salvation of them that believe.

*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, and He will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*



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## SERMON XXV.

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### THE DIGNITY AND DUTIES OF THE MINISTRY.\*

ROMANS 11:13. *I magnify mine office.*

It will not be alleged by any one acquainted with the character of Paul, that this was the language of ostentation or self-importance. Distinguished as he was, by his transcendent talents, his literary attainments, his ardent piety, his labors, privations and sufferings, and by his unparalleled success in preaching the gospel; nevertheless, in his own view he was "less than the least of all saints," and "not worthy to be called an apostle." Under a deep and humbling sense of his own unworthiness, he is overwhelmed with the condescension of God in "in putting him into the ministry." It is in view of the dignity, the honor and importance of the *office* to which he was called, that he utters the language of the text. "I magnify mine office." I glory in it; I esteem it my highest honor. However others might despise, or hate, or account the preaching of the cross as "foolishness," he was not ashamed of it, but gloried in the blessed employment.

The words suggest, for our consideration,

I. The *dignity* and *importance* of the ministerial office.

II. The corresponding *qualifications* and *duties*.

I. The *dignity* and *importance* of the ministerial office may appear, from the several *names* and *titles* by which it is designated in the word of God. They who bear the sacred office are styled *ministers*, because they are the servants of God, and of the church. Bishops or *pastors*, because they are called to perform the duties of the pastoral or shepherd's office. They are styled *ambassadors*, because they are the representatives of the King of Heaven, authorized to negotiate between rebels and their offended sovereign; and in "Christ's stead," to propose to their fellow-sinners a treaty of peace, written with his hand,

\* Delivered in the Third Presbyterian Church, in Pittsburgh, at the installation of the Rev. DAVID H. RIDDLE, Pastor.

and sealed with his blood. They are called *stewards* of the mysteries of God, because intrusted with the keys of knowledge and discipline; authorized to dispense divine ordinances, and to bring forth out of their treasures "things new and old." They are called *watchmen* on the walls of Zion, because they are to sound the alarm of danger, and to watch for souls, "as they that must give account." *Angels* of the churches, because they bear the messages of the living God to dying men. O, how important is this relation! How unspeakable the honor of such an office!

The honor of this office, however, is not of this world. It is not such as worldly men either covet or appreciate. It consists not in external pomp, or splendor, or wealth; not in dignities and titles derived from an unhallowed alliance with secular power; not in shining in the circles of fashion; not in filling the "uppermost rooms at feasts," nor receiving "greetings in the market," nor in being "called of men, *Rabbi*." No; the honor of the faithful ambassador, is of a higher and nobler kind. It consists in bearing a resemblance to his blessed Master, who "went about doing good." His laurels consist in conversions, and the jewels which shall decorate his crown, are souls saved by his instrumentality, who shall shine as stars, when all earthly honors shall have vanished forever.

2. The importance of the ministerial office is manifest, from its *powerful influence on all the best interests of man, for time and eternity.*

An enlightened, pious and devoted ministry, such as the gospel requires, always has had, and always must have, the happiest influence on human society. Look the world around, and you will find the state of society elevated or degraded, according to the character of the ministers of religion. "Like priest, like people," is a proverb founded on just observation of facts. What nations or communities are most distinguished for civilization, intelligence and refinement? for domestic virtue and social order, and every improvement adapted to promote the happiness of man? Where is knowledge most generally diffused? Where do common schools, and academies, and colleges most generally flourish? Where are liberty and the rights of man best understood and maintained? Precisely in those nations or communities where the people are, or have been, favored with an enlightened and faithful ministry.

It is the *peculiar* glory and excellence of the religion of the bible, that it provides for the instruction of the *mass of the people*. The dogmas of the heathen were confined to their philosophers and priests, while no provision was made for general instruction. But "the poor have the gospel preached to

them." It provides a Sabbath of rest, as a stated season for universal instruction. The whole community is converted into a school. A class of men are set apart as instructors, and are *required* to "preach the gospel to every creature." The sacred treasures of divine truth are not to be locked up from the common people—but all classes are permitted and required to hear and read the oracles of God. And while the stated assembling of the people of every class, in a manner solemn, decent and orderly, naturally tends to refine their taste, to cherish the social affections and to promote morality, at the same time opportunity is afforded of communicating the most important instruction to a mass of mind, with a facility and cheapness, impracticable on any other plan. The effect has been such as might be expected. Look at Scotland, and the "land of the pilgrims," as contrasted with pagan nations, and with nations *nominally* christian, but destitute of a pure, enlightened, faithful ministry, where "ignorance is the mother of devotion!"

But it is *principally* from its influence on the *spiritual* and *eternal* welfare of mankind, that the gospel ministry derives its importance. It has pleased God, by the "foolishness of *preaching*, to save them that believe." The glory of God, in the salvation of the soul, is the great, the supreme object of the sacred office. And who can compute the worth of the soul—endless in its existence—boundless in its capacity of improvement—destined to ceaseless progression in happiness, or in woe! "The redemption of the soul is," indeed, "precious." For this, the Son of God came down from heaven, and expired on the cross. We are "not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,—but with the precious blood of Christ." But this redemption will avail only to those who believe. And "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" However useful and indispensable other instrumentalities may be, the *living* teacher must accompany them, to give energy, and action, and direction to the whole.

3. The *employment itself*, is one of the most interesting and delightful, in which we can be engaged. It is adapted to call forth into vigorous action, all our intellectual powers, to exercise every grace, and virtue, and generous affection of the heart: and amidst all the difficulties, toils, privations and sorrows which attend it, there are *pleasures* which the world "cannot give nor take away." Even in the most painful, and self-denying labors of his office, in scenes which present to the eye of a common observer, nothing but what is repulsive, the minister finds some of his purest satisfaction. When, like an angel of mercy, he visits the abodes of poverty, disease and affliction,

ministering consolations to the distressed, he enjoys a luxury which "strangers intermeddle not with;" the luxury of sympathetic affections—the luxury of "doing good." He need not resort to the fictions of fancy, "for the lovely joy of tears." The miseries of *real* life afford abundant occasion for the exercise of tender sympathies, not to vanish with the momentary scenes of fictitious distress, leaving the heart more cold and *callous* than before, but to be succeeded by the lasting pleasures of active benevolence. His resort is not to scenes of gayety and jovial mirth, but to scenes of suffering; to families in affliction; to beds of agony and death: and how delightful to apply the healing balm to the wounded spirit; to comfort the widow and the fatherless in their affliction, and pour into the agonized soul the consolations of the gospel.

With regard to the exercises of the *pulpit*, there is surely no employment which can furnish greater scope for every power of the soul. Every department of literature may be made subservient to the pulpit, while its more immediate and appropriate subjects are the most interesting which can be conceived. What subjects can there be, in themselves so grand, and to human sinners so worthy of their deepest consideration, as those presented in the sacred volume? The existence and attributes of the great *Jehovah*; the awful realities of eternity; the infinitely important relations of men; the resurrection and the judgment; the glories of heaven, and the terrors of hell; above all, the wondrous scheme of redemption, through the incarnation, agony and death of God's eternal *Son*?

Here are themes for reasoning, the most profound, and eloquence the most pathetic and sublime. Here, if any where, the orator may put forth the utmost energies of his soul. Here he may indulge his imagination in its loftiest darings, and infuse into his subject all the affections of his heart, without extravagance or excess.

His range is not confined to the paltry concerns of property, the petty conflicts of individual interests, or the more important concerns of nations. He pleads the cause of God. His object is the advancement of a kingdom which will survive the wreck of every other kingdom. "He pleads not for the property, or life, or liberty of his fellow-men, but for the eternal salvation of their *souls* and bodies; their deliverance from eternal bondage, infamy and torment; and their advancement to glory, honor and immortality."\*

And when God is pleased to bless the labors of a minister—"to pour out his Spirit," and accompany the word with almighty power, with what intense interest does he witness a "shaking

\* Dr. Gray.

among the dry bones;" stubborn sinners, pierced with the arrows of conviction, crying what shall we do? anxious crowds thronging the gates of Zion, "weeping as they go;" and with what thrilling delight does he share in the joy of angels, rejoicing over the conversion of sinners!

II. We are now to consider the *corresponding qualifications and duties of the ministerial office.*

On a subject of such variety and extent, our remarks must be limited to a few topics. The *qualifications* may all be included in two particulars, *cultivated talent*, and *piety*. It is required that this trust be committed "to *faithful men*, who shall be *able to teach others.*" A good measure of natural talent is obviously indispensable. Neither education, nor grace, nor both combined, can supply a radical defect of genius. Talent, to be useful, must be *cultivated*. The mind must be trained, and disciplined, and furnished with an appropriate fund of knowledge, to "be *able to teach others.*"

It seems now to be generally admitted, that literature is desirable, if not necessary, to a minister of the gospel. There is no branch of knowledge which may not be useful to him, and there is much that is indispensable. Studies, apparently the most remote from theology, have afforded assistance in solving difficulties in the sacred scriptures, or in repelling the assaults of adversaries. He, who is "set for the defense of the gospel," should be acquainted especially with the languages in which the scriptures were originally written, with antiquities and oriental customs, to which there are so many allusions in the sacred writings. He should be well versed in the history of the world, and of the church, to illustrate the wonderful providence of God, and the exact fulfilment of prophecy. He should have a comprehensive knowledge of the phenomena of nature, as exhibiting the wonderful perfections of God, and he should certainly not be ignorant of the philosophy of mind, as unfolding the intellectual powers of man and his infinitely important relations as a moral and social being; especially should he be well versed in theology, in all its branches, that he may be prepared to maintain the truth and meet the objections of infidelity, scepticism and heresy in all their varied forms: and that he may be "apt to teach," and communicate his thoughts with interest and effect, he should possess and cultivate a taste for style, composition and oratory.

He who would approve himself as a scribe, richly furnished and prepared to bring forth out of his treasures "things new and old," must be a *student*, a diligent, persevering student, to the end of life. Paul himself, though a giant in intellect, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and well versed in the literature of his time, did not remit study, even in his old age. We

find him, when a prisoner at Rome, near the close of his life, sending for his "books, but especially the parchments;" and he exhorts Timothy, who had been well instructed from his infancy, and then upwards of thirty years of age, to "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine," to "meditate on these things" and give himself "wholly to them." And it is certain, that those who have entered the ministry, and depend on the resources they have already acquired, without diligence to replenish their minds with fresh acquisitions, will not magnify their office. Their pulpit exhibitions will be little more than a stale repetition of old ideas, often heard and little regarded, and thus they will expose themselves and their office to neglect and contempt.

*Piety*, however, is the most excellent and indispensable of all ministerial qualifications. I speak not here of it *merely* as a *personal* concern of the deepest interest, nor of the meanness and drudgery, and wickedness of hypocritical services, nor of the dreadful condition of that man, who, after preaching to others, shall himself be cast away for ever—I speak of it as a *qualification for the ministerial office*. Without this, how can he speak or act for God? How feel for the glory of Christ, or take a lively interest in the salvation of souls? Can he be concerned for the salvation of others who neglects his own? How *difficult* as well as dreadful to preach an unknown Savior? He may study and understand the doctrines of religion as a *science*. He may defend the truth against its adversaries. He may expound the scriptures as a biblical critic. He may make a display in the pulpit as "one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument." He may even exhibit a zeal and excitement from mere *sympathetic* influences, which may be mistaken for the renewing and quickening influences of the Holy Ghost. But how can he give to every one a "portion in due season?" How can he preach with interest, truths, which he does not practically *believe*, or urge motives which he does not *feel*? How can he who has had no experience of the power of religion in his own soul, understand the experience of others? How shall he direct the anxious, the inquiring, the doubting? How feed the sheep and the lambs? How comfort others with the consolations whereof he not is himself comforted of God?

Nor is it enough for a minister to be a man of piety; he ought to be a man of fervent, eminent piety—burning with zeal for his Master, "full of faith and the Holy Ghost."

The tone of piety in the church, will usually accord with that of its ministers. There cannot be a greater curse to the church and to society, than a lifeless, ungodly ministry. Wherever it is found, a blighting and withering influence attends it. A minister

destitute of piety, though restrained from immoral practices, tangible by the discipline of the church, and though he may contend zealously for punctilios and forms, and the "shibboleths" of a party, yet will usually create around him an "atmosphere in which the flame of piety will not burn."

Piety is necessary to secure that consistent *example*, which all acknowledge to be indispensable in ministers of the gospel. They are to be examples to the flocks, and are expected to exhibit in *living* beauty the reality and excellence of the doctrines which they preach. This is a language which all can understand; a language which speaks to the heart and flashes conviction on the conscience, and must have a powerful influence. Julian, the apostate, was so sensible of this, that he thought he could make the false religion prevail over the true, if he could only induce the pagan priests to be as holy and exemplary as the Christians; justly ascribing the influence of the latter to their strictness and sanctity. On every thing belonging to a minister of Christ, should be inscribed, holiness to the Lord. "Like the star of Bethlehem, he should not only light, but lead his people to Jesus."

In a variety of ways, personal religion is necessary to ministerial *usefulness*. We do not say that in every case success is the measure of piety. But, as a general rule, other things being equal, a minister's usefulness will be proportionate to his piety. Genuine holiness is naturally connected with the use of appropriate means, whilst it invigorates in the prosecution of them. It assists in private study; fixes the attention on divine truth; seizes the strongest thoughts; suggests means of usefulness, and prompts to benevolent exertion. It is also one of the best preservatives against *heresy* in doctrine and practice. Where there is holiness of heart, there will be an honest desire to know what is truth, and what is duty; and they who honestly desire and seek after truth will not seek in vain. "If any man will do his will," we are assured "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." He has an unction from the Holy One, and knows all things. His own experience is in accordance with the doctrines of the gospel; and as the natural taste, when not vitiated, distinguishes wholesome food, so the spiritual taste of the renewed soul, has an intuitive perception of the reality and beauty of the truth, as it is in Jesus.

Above all, piety is necessary to prayer,—believing, importunate prayer. All success depends on God. Without the influence of the Holy Spirit, all efforts and means will be utterly vain; but this influence is given only in answer to prayer. The faithful and successful minister must be a man of prayer, wrestling mightily with God continually for *grace*, to cheer and sustain his own

soul, amidst his labors and trials, and especially for the blessing of God, to give success to the means of his own appointment.

With regard to the various *duties* of this sacred office, our remarks shall be confined, principally, to the great duty of *preaching*. This is no doubt the most important work of a minister of Christ.

1. The *subject* is the *gospel*. "Go ye,—and preach the gospel." This may be considered as including the whole of revelation, because every part of the scriptures has a relation to the "good news" of salvation by Jesus Christ.

The command is, "preach the word," not as the word of man, but as the word of God. Ambassadors must be governed by their *instructions*. The ambassadors of Christ have no authority to propose any other terms than those which God has given. They are to publish the messages of Jehovah, to "hold forth the word of life," relying on the power and promise of God to make it effectual. The word of God is the grand instrument of salvation. It is this alone which God will bless and make effectual for the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the sanctification of his people. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." "Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation." "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword." "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the *word* of God." "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth."

As then the *truth*, the *word* of God, delivered in his name, and by his authority, is the appointed means of salvation—how vain and how wicked to substitute any thing else in its place! How vain are mere human authorities and reasonings, and metaphysical dogmas, when substituted in place of the word of God, "the sword of the Spirit." Great advantages may be derived from reasoning, and the lights of philosophy and literature, in proving the *inspiration* of the scriptures, in ascertaining their meaning, and in the illustration and application of the truth; but when adduced as *authority*, to aid the authority of the divine word, they are worse than useless. When men desert the testimony of Jesus, and take upon them to prove the doctrines of the bible from mere natural religion and philosophy, it is an acknowledgment, that they themselves do not confide in the scripture report; and others are thereby taught to doubt and despise it. This is bringing a taper to aid the light of the sun amidst the splendors of noon-day. It is to abandon the weapons of celestial temper, which are "mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds;" for the paltry weapons of carnal wisdom.

2. As we are to preach the *truth* on the authority of God, so we are to preach the *whole truth*, and nothing but the *truth*. Of "all the words that I command thee," saith God, "diminish not a word." "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction." We ought therefore to imitate the example of Paul, who could appeal to the Ephesians, that he *had kept back* nothing, nor *shunned* to declare the *whole counsel* of God. The gospel revelation is a grand, harmonious system of truth, in which the several parts are intimately connected, and necessary to illustrate and enforce each other. If we then voluntarily withhold any doctrine, because it is unpopular or offensive to the carnal mind; or because it is mysterious and *above* our comprehension; or because we may not be able to reconcile it with a favorite *theory*; or because in our estimation it is unnecessary or injurious; we pretend to be wiser than God, and are justly chargeable with treachery to his authority.

It is not only by preaching *false* doctrines, that others may be led to adopt ruinous errors; the same may be effected, by neglecting to declare the *whole* truth. If for example, we present and urge exclusively, or principally the *precepts* and *duties* of *morality*, to the neglect of the *doctrines* of the gospel, the consequence will be, that doctrines will be considered of little importance, and ignorance and error on radical points, a matter of indifference. On the contrary, if preaching consist altogether in *doctrinal* discussions, to the neglect of experimental and practical piety; then the latter will be disregarded, sinners will be led to consider religion as requiring nothing more than a *speculative assent* to the truth—a mere dead faith which has no influence on the heart and life.

It is an old remark, that we are prone to extremes, and in avoiding one evil, we are in danger of its opposite! To avoid the errors of *Arminianism*, we may be in danger of the no less ruinous tendency of *Antinomian* errors. Because some have dwelt too exclusively on the sinner's duty and guilt, and his obligation to believe and repent, without bringing into prominent view his total depravity and helplessness, and absolute need of sovereign grace; others have too *exclusively* held forth the doctrine of divine sovereignty, and human inability, in such a manner, as to leave the sinner to draw the fatal conclusion that there is nothing for him to do.

Each extreme is alike dangerous, and leads to the same result. The sinner who is confident in his own ability, independent of sovereign grace, will remain secure, and postpone to a future period that which may be accomplished so easily, and at any time. And the Antinomian, or fatalist, who is persuaded

that he has nothing to do, or can do nothing—that he is alike destitute of all ability, physical and moral, will sit down as thousands have done, in indolent security; will consider his inability as his *misfortune*, and not his *crime*; and instead of attaching blame to his own wicked heart, for his impenitence and unbelief, he will cast the blame on God, or sit down in undisturbed indolence pretending to “wait God’s time.”

Such was not the manner of Paul. He could appeal to his hearers, that he was “free from the blood of all men”—that he *kept back* nothing, nor “shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.” Whilst he held forth, with all plainness and honesty, the sovereignty of God in the eternal purpose and plan of redemption—in the selection of the objects of his eternal love—in the application of it by the power of the Holy Ghost—the total depravity of human nature—the absolute need of salvation by grace, through the imputed righteousness of Christ; he at the same time urged on the sinner, his guilt, his inexcusableness, his obligation to repent, believe and obey, without a moment’s delay; and instead of encouraging indolence and inaction from the doctrines of grace, he used these very doctrines, as the most potent argument to urge the sinner to action. “Work out,” says he, “your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Let us go and do likewise. Let us never separate what God has joined to gether. Let us declare the whole counsel of God to men, trusting to his almighty power to give it effect.

3. The truths of the gospel should be preached in *due proportion*, *seasonably*, and with *suitable variety* and *adaptation* to the circumstances and characters of men. We should give to each subject, that degree of weight and importance which is given to it in the word of God. There are some subjects which are evidently of primary and fundamental importance; these ought to occupy that prominence in our sermons which they do in the sacred scriptures. And as in every audience there may be some, who, for the first or the last time, hear the gospel preached, it would be well if every sermon contained so much of gospel truth, as to point the sinner to Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Preaching should be *seasonable*. There are occasions and circumstances which demand *special* attention. The prevalence of particular sins; the danger of particular errors; prevalent ignorance on subjects of duty, or doctrine, or providential dispensations, may require special and appropriate instruction or warning. Unseasonable preaching is not only unprofitable, but calculated to be injurious. When, for example, the Spirit of God is poured out, and sinners awakened and inquiring the way of salvation, how *pernicious* would be any discussions,

calculated to divert the anxious soul from the great question of salvation through Christ, to rites and forms, and points of doubtful disputation! Discussions on the subject of *baptism*, for instance, have been often the occasion of "quenching the Spirit," destroying the convictions of sinners, and putting an end to a revival of religion. And when a people are cold, and lifeless in religion, what should we say of the minister, who, instead of warning them of their dangerous state, should deliver from Sabbath to Sabbath, lectures on the dangers of *enthusiasm*, and instead of pouring down upon them the truths of God, nor from heaven, should let fall upon his freezing audience, a shower of words cold as a "December snow?"

The word of God should also be preached in all its admirable *variety*, so as to give every one his "portion in due season." The law and the gospel, the doctrines and the precepts, the promises and threatenings, or whatever may be profitable for instruction, reproof, for warning or consolation, are all to be presented in suitable proportion. Careless sinners are to be awakened and alarmed; anxious souls to be directed to the Lamb of God; deceived souls to be *searched* out and driven from refuges of lies; backsliders to be reclaimed; disconsolate souls to be comforted; milk must be furnished for "babes" in Christ, and strong meat for those of mature age.

As to the *manner*.

1. The gospel ought to be preached with all *plainness*, so as to be level to the capacity of every hearer. Perspicuity is not a mere negative quality, but a positive quality of great excellence. It is consistent with the utmost purity, propriety and elegance of style. The most eloquent men, at the present time, in our public councils, are the most plain, and easily understood. In addressing a mixed audience, especially, every thing should be avoided, unfavorable to plainness and perspicuity.

Of this kind are technical and scientific words and phrases, scholastic distinctions, metaphysical reasonings professing great profundity, pedantic allusions and quotations, and all figures and ornaments for mere display, which, "like painted windows, keep out the light." In this particular, as in every other, we find the best models in the sacred writings, and especially in the sermons of Christ and his apostles. The manner ought also be *pointed* and *special*. We should not deal in abstractions or generalities, but endeavor to present truth so as to reach the conscience and the heart.

2. The manner should be *solemn*. Every thing demands this. The place, the subject, the relation of the speaker to God and his audience. If he recollects that he speaks in God's name, and his own dread responsibility, and the eternal results of what

he is about to say on the destiny of his hearers, he *must* be solemn. It is said of Luther, that with these impressive views, he never entered the pulpit without trembling. In close connection with solemnity is *earnestness*. The truths of the gospel are of such awful moment, as to render it impossible, for any man who cordially believes them, not to be interested: and such is the connection between the sentiments of the heart and the outward expression, that to appear earnest and interested, we must be so in reality. The true secret of an earnest, persuasive and impressive address, is to believe and feel the truths we utter.

3. We should speak with *tenderness* and *affection*. "Speak the truth in love." This is of great importance. An affectionate manner is, in itself, amiable and engaging; and words, uttered from a heart warmed with love and compassion, will more readily reach the hearts of others. The occasion also demands it. There is no employment, calculated to awaken the tender affections, more than that of a preacher. He comes to his fellow-men on an errand full of love. Naturally involved in the same condemnation with themselves, he comes to disclose the boundless mercy of God, in the redemption of sinners, by the death of his own Son. In the name of Christ, he offers salvation to his fellow sinners, guilty, and ruined, and exposed to endless misery: and as an ambassador of Christ, he is to *beseech* sinners to be reconciled to God. In this *also*, we have an impressive model in the great apostle of the Gentiles. It would appear as if all his epistles had been written with *tears*, and he appeals to the Ephesians; "Ye know,—after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility,—the with many tears." And again he says, "remember that by and space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears." And here we may see the necessity of piety, deep and ardent piety, to produce that genuine pathos and *unction*, which is the soul of pulpit eloquence. There is a language of the heart, which goes directly to the heart. It produces effects peculiarly its own. "It shines in the countenance; it glitters in the unaffected tear; it is heard in the fervent prayer; felt in the deep and mellowed tones of strong emotion." It is perfectly simple and artless; the most accomplished actor cannot successfully counterfeit it; and all attempts to imitate it in the pulpit, by those who have it not, are unnatural, hypocritical and disgusting.

By confining these remarks principally to the **PREACHING** of the gospel, it is by no means intended to undervalue other parts of ministerial duty. They are all important, intimately connected and mutually beneficial. *Catechising* and *pastoral visit-*

*ation*, especially, appear to be indispensable to the successful discharge of the pastoral office. By these exercises, a pastor is enabled to ascertain the condition of his flock; to know the character and the wants of families and individuals, so as to "speak a word *in season*." He has opportunity of bringing home the truth to the heart and conscience, with a particularity impracticable in a public address. By "teaching from house to house," by conversing solemnly and tenderly with families and individuals, and pouring out his prayers for them, he secures their affection and their confidence in him, as one who really "*cares for their souls*." By an intimate acquaintance with his people, he can sympathize with them in their varied trials, and as their intercessor, present their individual cases at a throne of grace. It is also one of the best means of preparing for the pulpit, as suggesting appropriate and interesting matter, to be delivered with a feeling and impressiveness not otherwise to be attained.

Catechetical instruction, too, has also *its peculiar* advantages. It is necessary to prepare the minds of the young for attending with profit on public instruction, without which, they will not even understand the terms in which it is conveyed. It is necessary to a correct knowledge of the doctrines of religion as a *system*, so as to fortify the mind against the specious seductions of error. Although very important auxiliaries are afforded by Sabbath schools and bible classes, these will require the careful supervision of the pastor; nor ought they entirely to supersede this important part of ministerial duty. All experience has shown that pastoral visitation and catechetical instruction are essential to the purity, and life, and *permanent* prosperity of the church. When a minister appears before his people *only* in the pulpit and on the Sabbath day, a blighting and withering influence will soon be visible among them. Vital piety will decline. Torpor and inactivity will prevail. Or, if any excitement should take place, ignorant and uninstructed, they will be tossed *to and fro* by every wind of doctrine; liable to be carried away by the wildest fanaticism.

In review of this subject, we may remark—how solemn the situation! how great the work! how dreadful the responsibility of a minister of the gospel! Who does not tremble at God's alarming charge to Zion's watchmen, and the woes and curses denounced against those that are unfaithful? "If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his *blood* will I require at the watchman's hand." Ez. 33: 6.

“Woe unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, saith the Lord. Woe unto the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing. Woe be to the shepherds of Israel, who have fed themselves, and fed not the flock. Woe to the idle shepherd that leaveth the flock. *Cursed* be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully; and *cursed* is he that keepeth back his sword from blood.” “If any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be *accursed*.” O what need for serious self-examination and searching of hearts! What need for watchfulness and diligence, and constant, prayerful dependance on God! Do any ask, with trembling anxiety, “Who is sufficient for these things?” To the sincere and faithful, the answer is, “my grace is sufficient for thee.” Many and powerful are the motives to cheer and animate the faithful ambassadors of Christ. Besides the pleasures and consolations attending their employment, already noticed, brighter scenes and higher enjoyments await them. Here they are often neglected, despised and persecuted. Their portion is, reproach, poverty and tears. But in the great day of retribution, these sorrows, and privations, and labors, will be graciously remembered, and meet with a glorious reward. “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, forever and ever.”

In conclusion. We infer the duty of a people to the servants of Christ. The duties and responsibilities of the ministers of the gospel involve corresponding duties and responsibilities on the part of the people. They come clothed with a commission from God. As ambassadors of Christ, they represent his person; they speak in his name, and the messages they bear are attended with this awful sanction: “He that receiveth you, receiveth me; he that heareth you, heareth me; he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.” If it is their duty to minister in holy things, it is the duty of the people to attend on their ministry, to hear the word, and to take heed *how* they hear; to receive it as the word of God; to believe and obey. The word preached, will prove either a savor of life or death. Sinners, therefore, ought immediately to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus, for, “he that believeth not, shall be damned.” And how aggravated will be that condemnation to such as choose darkness, while the blessed gospel sheds its glorious light around them. The professing people of God should remember their obligation to honor his servants, to “obey them that have the rule over them,” and to “esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake;” to provide liberally for their accommodation, that they may give themselves “wholly to these things”—that they may be free from distracting worldly cares—and that

they may not degrade nor lessen the usefulness and dignity of their office, by engaging in secular concerns. Ministers ought not to be left to labor alone. Their people ought to co-operate in every good work, to hold up their hands, and encourage their hearts, to bear with their infirmities; to defend their characters against the shafts of enemies; and by their kindness and counsels, and especially their fervent prayers, to guide and sustain them in their arduous labors. The kind attention shown to his servants, the Lord Jesus will consider as shown to himself. These labors of love will not be forgotten. He will remember them in the great day, when ministers and people shall be presented together at the bar of God. "Inasmuch, as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me."

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To fill up a vacant page the following remarks on ministerial support were sent by the author. The Rev. Dr. Bennett, (a Baptist and President of the College at Bristol, England,) wrote a necessary tract on this subject. Both he and our author, not relying on a congregation for support, may say in the language of St. Paul, when writing on the *same* subject, "*neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me.*" 1 Cor. 9:15.—Ed.

When men consecrate themselves to the ministry, and are thereby excluded from the opportunity afforded to all others, of providing for themselves and their families, their claim to a competent support, at least, is not a claim of mere *charity*. It is a claim of *right, of justice, and common honesty*. It is also the express command of God, that they "who preach the gospel, should live by the gospel." It is, however, too evident, that on this subject there is great negligence and guilt in many of the churches. It is a fact, notorious as it is disgraceful to professed christians, that no class of men among us are so badly remunerated for their services, as ministers of the gospel. If we except a few who are located in cities and large towns, scarcely can an individual be found, who could sustain himself and family by the support he receives from his people, independent of other resources. The tendency of this is to discourage young men of respectable talents from entering the ministry, with the prospect of being doomed to starvation. It also tends greatly to injure the usefulness of those who have already entered, by obliging them to engage in secular concerns. They must engage in some secular employment or starve. The consequences are, study is neglected; the stock of knowledge already acquired is soon exhausted; their ministry is barren. By engaging frequently in worldly transactions, the minister is merged in the man of business: and if he should be so fortunate as to save his family from absolute want, he will be *charged with worldly-mindedness*, perhaps by the *very men* whose niggardliness has imposed on him the necessity of laboring with his own hands at something worse than "making tents." These things ought not so to be.

The *slang* which is so often heard about *salary men*, and *preaching for money*, is what might be expected from profane wittlings and infidel scoffers. But when such language is reiterated by professors of religion, and sanctioned by ministers of the gospel, who themselves are better provided for than their neighbors, by fixed salaries, *indirectly* derived from their people, this is difficult to be borne with patience. Never was there a more ungenerous slander against ministers of the gospel, especially Presbyterians, and such others as have received a liberal education. That young man must be a consummate *fool*, as well as a knave and hypocrite, who, after spending seven years of his precious time, and probably all

his pecuniary resources, enters the sacred office for the sake of *money* and worldly advantages; when it is obvious, that by that very act, he excludes himself from the opportunities open to every other class. It is true, that in the face of all this discouragement, in the certain prospect of poverty, and toil, and persecution, there have not been wanting many who are willing to make the sacrifice. Among them, too, men of the first talents and literature in the land. Men qualified to rise to the highest worldly distinctions. These prospects they have renounced. They have literally sacrificed their worldly all, to preach *salvation* to dying sinners.

This is the case with *all foreign missionaries* under the direction of missionary societies. They receive nothing but their food and raiment, and that often none of the best. They are excluded from acquiring separate property. They have no means of making provision for their wives and children, as they ought to have, and would have, if circumstances permitted, and yet we often hear the infidel slander, of missionary operations being a "MONEY-MAKING CONCERN."

With regard to the great majority of ministers in our own country, especially in the west and south, their condition is such as has been described. And because there are generous spirits willing to make these sacrifices, and with apostolic heroism, willing to endure privation, and toil, and reproach, and death itself, in the service of their Master, let not these facts, so honorable to the ministerial character, be alleged by professing christians, as an apology for their negligence, avarice, and injustice, in withholding from their ministers that remuneration which is their right, and which God expressly commands.

"Let us not (says Dr. Mason) hear of self-denial, spiritual-mindedness, and a heroic indifference to worldly things, as characteristic of the true minister of Christ. Self-denial does not mean *starving*. The spirituality of the father will not stop the cravings of his children when they cry for food; nor is there any heroism in preferring tatters and a hovel, to decent clothing and lodging, when they may be had. It is very convenient, no doubt, for men who are adding house to house, field to field, thousand to thousand, to harangue in a religious style, on the necessity of a minister imitating his Master, "who had not where to lay his head;" when the practical inference from all this is in favor of their own pockets. They are wonderfully concerned for spirituality and self-denial to be practised by their minister, but as to their *own* share of these virtues, as to their parting with a pittance of *their* pelf to render him comfortable—why—that is another affair. It is one of the most wicked forms of hypocrisy, to plead for the cultivation of a minister's spiritual-mindedness, by way of an apology for cheating him out of his bread. The sin of the neglect complained of is not equally gross in all. In some it proceeds from thoughtlessness; in others from an incapacity to make a right estimate; but in most, it is the fruit of downright covetousness. There has been, on this subject, an absurd *sqeacamishness* in those whom the Lord has authorized to "live by the gospel." It is time for them to claim their due in a modest but manly tone, and throw the responsibility of expelling an *enlightened* ministry from the church, upon those who are able but not willing to support it honorably. We say an *enlightened* ministry. For we have no conception that niggardly provision will soon strip her of every thing in the shape of a minister. You cannot place the pecuniary recompense so low as that it shall not be an object for somebody. Fix your salaries at fifty dollars a year, and you shall not want candidates. But then they are fifty-dollar men. And it may be, little as congregations give, they give to the uttermost farthing "for value received." The mischief is, that the rule of abridgement becomes general, and the "workman who needeth not to be ashamed" must share the fate of him who is no workman at all.\*"

The solemn truth is, the churches of almost every denomination need to be aroused on this subject. Let professing christians shudder at the thought of uniting with infidels in their impious clamors against the authority of God. See Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 9:11—14; 1 Tim. 5:18.

\*Christian Magazine, Vol. 3, p. 285.

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**SERMON XXVI.**

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OF ALBANY.

**THE CONDUCT OF SINNERS TESTED BY THE RULES  
OF WORLDLY WISDOM.**

1 CORINTHIANS 10:15. *I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say.*

MOST men are ready to claim a considerable share of worldly wisdom, and not a few, it must be acknowledged, possess it in an eminent degree. There are those who know how to make the most of their means of becoming rich; who are always on the alert to take advantage of every turn of circumstances; and whose sagacity in a single commercial speculation may bring into their possession a large fortune. There are those who understand well how to secure and advance their own fame; who, by simple management, attain some of the highest posts of worldly honor. And there are those who are sharp sighted to discern both good and evil as it respects the political relations of a community—men who will see a cloud in the distant horizon, and know that it is charged with lightning and tempest, when it is no bigger than a man's hand; men whose counsels in dark times are considered a safeguard to the public interests. In every department of human action there are indeed *pretenders* to wisdom; but there are also truly wise men;—men whose opinion on any subject which relates exclusively to this world is justly entitled to consideration and respect.

But while these men are sagacious to understand and secure the interests of the present life, in many instances at least, their wisdom utterly fails them in respect to the life that is to come. In the one case, they show themselves giants in wisdom; in the other, the merest dwarfs. In the one case, you may listen to what they say as if it were oracular; in the other, you may witness what they do, (for they generally *say* little,) and it will leave you wondering at their infatuation. My design, in this discourse, is to reason a little with this class—with all, indeed, who have a common degree of worldly wisdom, in respect to those great interests which they are prone to regard so lightly. I am going to speak to you as wise men; and ask you to judge of the course you are pursuing in respect to religion, by those common and acknowledged principles of wisdom which you are accustomed every day to apply, in your various professions and employments.

1. There is a large class who do not come to any definite and intelligent decision of the question whether the Bible is really a revelation from God; though they have all the means at hand for forming such a decision. I ask them, as wise men, honestly to pass judgment on their own conduct.

I can suppose there may be some danger here, that some of the class to which I refer, will not recognize this description as applicable to themselves.

Many of these persons no doubt take the comfort of thinking that they believe the bible because there is something in the thought of being an infidel that shocks them; but in order to ascertain the nature or the strength of this conviction, let them inquire whether they do not allow themselves in practices which they would not dare to allow, if they felt that it were absolutely certain that God had spoken in this book; and whether they do not feel less anxiety than they would feel, if the thought did not sometimes occur to them, that possibly the bible might turn out to be a mere matter of imposture. If conscience answers in the affirmative, then clearly they belong to the class I am now considering. But I doubt not there are many others who never lisp a word in favor of infidelity during their lives, and who pass in the world for firm believers in the bible, who yet purposely leave this matter entirely unsettled; who never take the trouble to inquire whether the bible is true or false, but who run the hazard of living precisely as if it were a set of fables. Now listen and judge whether, in adopting this course, you maintain the character which, in other respects, you choose to claim for true wisdom.

The bible *professes* to be a revelation from God. This you do not question; you do not even deny that it really *is* so; but in respect to this, you neither affirm nor deny: you are willing to remain unsettled. But the fact that your mind is not made up on the subject, proves that in your own view at least, there is a possibility that God has spoken in this book; and if he has spoken, he has spoken to the world to which you belong; he has spoken to yourself: and you may be sure he would not speak, if he had not something important to say. If there be a possibility, then, as you yourself acknowledge, that the great God in whose hand your breath is, and who, if there be any truth even in natural religion, will hereafter be your Judge,—if there be a possibility that he has sent you a message in the bible, what is the language of your conduct when you close the bible, and say that you shall not inquire whether it was inspired by God or forged by man? Without saying any thing here of the nature of the message it contains, do you not run the hazard of offering an awful insult to the Majesty of heaven, for which, let your character in other respects be as it may, he would require the blood of your soul?

Suppose a message were to reach you, professedly bearing the signature of some exalted personage, to whom you were under great obligations, and who had you completely in his power; who, while he was disposed to be condescending towards you, was still jealous for his own honor; and who withal, from the relation you sustained to him, and the circumstances in which you were placed, might be expected to address you; and suppose you should take what purported to be a message from him in your hand; and without any just reason to suspect that it was a forgery, should coolly lay it by, and say that it might or might not be genuine—you should not give yourself the trouble to inquire;—I ask you whether such conduct would seem to you rational and prudent? If another person were guilty of it, would you hesitate to pronounce him a madman? But with all your wisdom, this is precisely the part you are acting towards the great God in relation to the bible. Here is something placed in your hand that professes to bear the stamp of his authority. You do not pretend that you have any particular reason to question its claims. Nevertheless, you are willing to lay it aside, and treat it with neglect, on the ground that, *possibly*, it may not have been of divine origin. I ask again, do you not treat God in relation to this matter as you would not dare to treat a fellow worm whose breath is in his nostrils?

But look farther at the nature of the message which the bible contains. If it were a matter of mere indifference on which it professes to address you—

something which could not in any way materially affect your happiness, let the case result as it might, why then there might be some apology for your neglecting to settle the question of its authority; though if the point that God has spoken be previously determined, this certainly is evidence enough that the message is an important one. But, in the present case, there is surely no room for doubt: he who looks into the bible, must perceive at a glance that the message involves your most important interests; and that if it is really from God, the manner in which you treat it must decide your everlasting destiny. The most momentous interests of a state or an empire dwindle to nothing, compared with the interests which the bible professes to regard; for these are the interests of the soul; and the soul will live when all earthly states and empires are blotted out of being. Here again, what is the language of your conduct in remaining voluntarily undecided concerning the authority of the bible? It is that in a case in which you acknowledge God *may* have spoken, and spoken that in which your eternal all is bound up, you still will not take the trouble to inquire whether or not it is really God who has addressed you.

For the sake of further illustration, recur to the case I have already supposed. What if this message, purporting to come from some exalted personage to whom you sustained peculiar relations, should involve your highest worldly interests—your character—your fortune—your all—would not this be a consideration that would stand in the way of your lightly passing it over and treating it as if it were altogether questionable whether it was genuine? Or if there were actually some reason to doubt its genuineness, would not this consideration make you careful thoroughly to test it, and would you cast it from you, so long as you could see a shadow of ground for believing that it was not a forgery; or do you believe you would rest, till you had settled the point whether it were so or not? The course that wisdom would prescribe in this case is obvious. Believe me, the dictates of wisdom are uniform. She marks out for you precisely the same course in respect to your treatment of that momentous message which professes to come to you from the King of kings.

But it is supposable, in the case to which I have referred for illustration, that there might be nothing that should give you any just occasion to doubt that the message which reached you came from the individual with whose authority it was professedly stamped; and suppose, moreover, that many intelligent men had examined it, and had unhesitatingly pronounced it genuine; would not this be a circumstance that would render your indecision in respect to it more unaccountable and more foolish? It certainly ought not to be a reason why you should forbear to look at it for yourself; but surely it ought to remind you that the means of coming to an intelligent conclusion were within your reach, and that you were chargeable at least with singular stupidity if you did not avail yourself of them.

But wherein does your conduct in relation to God's word indicate greater wisdom than would be discovered by remaining undecided in the case I have just supposed? You do not yourself profess to believe that there is any thing in relation to the bible with which you are acquainted, that proves that it *may* not be the word of God. Those who have examined it most attentively, and under circumstances most favorable to arriving at the truth, have been fully satisfied that it *is* the word of God. You have all the means for coming to a decision which *they* have had, or which you could desire; especially you have the record itself, and the question of its divine authority is fairly within the scope of your faculties. If it were a question of extreme difficulty—one in respect to which your means of coming at the truth were altogether inade-

quate, why then, inasmuch as it is a matter of so much moment, prudence would dictate that you should tax your faculties to the utmost. Though you might with more show of reason, plead discouragement. But as it is a subject every way within the range of your comprehension, and on which the light shines as brightly as the sun at noonday, what semblance of an apology can you plead for remaining undecided?

I ask you now, in view of all that has been said under this article, whether, as wise men, you can approve your own course? If the message which comes to you in the bible, professes to come from God; if it involves the interests of your whole eternity; if those who have examined it most thoroughly are fully persuaded of its genuineness, and if you have every opportunity of ascertaining whether it be genuine or not, I ask again, where is the wisdom of your remaining thus undecided?

2. There is another class who advance a step farther than the preceding; while they admit the divine authority of the bible, they have not, and do not profess to have, any definite views in respect to the system of truth it contains. Persons of this description sometimes even value themselves upon not being infidels; and they will speak of christianity in the general as an excellent system; but they have not, after all, exactly made up their minds on the question, what christianity is. They are willing to believe that all who assume the christian name, may, in the main, be right; and on a subject upon which there are such various and contradictory opinions, they think they cannot hazard much by remaining without any definite opinion at all. I wish to inquire of *this* class, whether they discern any wisdom in this course; and if so, where it lies?

On the question whether the bible contains a divine revelation, you profess to have your mind made up; and if you were to hear that some body had whispered that you are an infidel, you would probably say, in a tone much above a whisper, that he is a slanderer. Well now, judge honestly, what does this belief, so long as it is disconnected with any distinct views of christian truth, amount to? Only let a man say that he believes the bible to contain a revelation from God, and whether he knows or believes a word of what God has spoken in it, becomes, in your estimation, an unimportant matter. But where lies the charm in believing the simple proposition that the bible is the word of God? Let me revert to the case which I have already used in the way of illustration. Suppose you should receive the message that should be brought to you from some earthly benefactor or potentate, and should express your full conviction that it was genuine, and should perhaps compliment him for having thus honored you; and to an inquiry which should then be made, what the message contained, you should reply that that was a matter of no moment, that it might contain one thing or another; and that as there would probably be different opinions in respect to its true import, you should not give yourself the trouble particularly to examine it, but should charitably presume that all might be substantially right, and that the whole benefit to be derived from it would be secured to you on your believing that it really came from the individual whose name it bore. Where is the man who would dare to hold up his head after having been guilty of such folly as this? But this is precisely a fair representation of your conduct in reference to the authority and doctrines of God's word. You make much of the one; you make nothing of the other. You will have it that God has spoken, and you would resent the imputation of believing the contrary; but as for what he has said, you regard that too unimportant a matter to trouble yourself about.

When we look into the bible, and contemplate the nature of the truths it

reveals, we have no difficulty in perceiving how it operates in the sanctification and salvation of man. There is that in the great truths of the gospel which must, when cordially received, exert the very influence which the gospel claims for itself; which must render it quick and powerful; a sovereign balm for every wound. But tell me what there is in the insulated fact that God has made a revelation to the world, which could produce this effect? What is there in it which the most depraved man on earth might not fully and cordially believe, and yet not lose a particle of his depravity? What is there which a heathen might not believe and be a heathen still?

3. Let me proceed to a third class, who are still a little upon the advance of the preceding;—who not only admit the authority of the bible, but intelligently give their assent to its doctrines; who nevertheless, in their heart and life, do not yield to its influence. Let us see whether, as wise men, *they* can justify their conduct.

Suppose the message of which I have been all along speaking, to have been addressed to a criminal under sentence of death, and to contain nothing less important to him than the offer of a free forgiveness, which yet he was at liberty to reject; and suppose he should not only be fully satisfied that it had come from the proper authority, but should examine it, and fully understand its nature; and then, instead of gratefully accepting the pardon which it proffered, should indignantly or insultingly reject it, and should hug his chains, and seem determined that the law should have its course in his execution—would you have any doubt that that poor criminal, however it might have been with him when he committed the act for which he had been condemned, was *then* bereft of his reason? Would you not say, “the love of life is natural to man; but this man, in choosing death rather than life, does violence to the dictates of nature: he must be a maniac!”

Or suppose the message to be addressed to yourself, and to be nothing less than that there was an immense fortune, or if you please, an earthly kingdom, at your command, which would be made over to you in a formal way, provided you would consent to receive it as a free gift: you are perfectly satisfied of the authenticity of the communication, and the sincerity of the offer; but instead of taking measures to make it your own, you practically treat it with absolute indifference; and that too, when you profess in words to place upon it the highest value—would *this* conduct savor of wisdom? Should you dare stake your character for worldly prudence on such conduct?

• The message which God sends you in his word, corresponds in its different aspects to both these cases. It comes to you as a criminal condemned by God's law, and contains the offer of a full and gracious forgiveness. It extends still farther, and contains the offer of a heavenly inheritance, an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. You profess to believe that the message comes from God; that your condition is just as bad as the message presumes it to be; that the provision made for your salvation is every way adequate; that there is a crown of life offered you, and a seat at God's right hand. And then with these sentiments on your lips, you fold your arms, and go to sleep over these amazing interests. You suffer yourself to be altogether engrossed with the things of the world; with objects which, by your own confession, compared with those you neglect, are as insignificant as the playthings of children. I surely need not stop to ask whether this is wise. You cannot dream that there is wisdom in acting contrary to your own convictions; in professing to believe that religion is every thing, and then acting as

if it were nothing. He who should do so in his worldly transactions would never get trusted after it; for he would be set down as a knave or a fool.

I observe, once more, that there is a class of men who not only admit the authority of God's message, and understand well what it means, but fully intend to yield obedience to it; though they are putting off such obedience to a future season. How will *their* conduct bear to be judged by the rules of wisdom?

You admit that religion is a matter of infinite moment, and that it must be attended to before you die. You have no expectation of getting to heaven in any other way than by repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and if you should die before you have complied with these conditions, you fully believe that there could be no salvation for you.

Now in order to make it appear that this delay to which you are inclined to yield is marked by true wisdom, you must show at least two things:—First, that you are certain you shall have a future period for repentance; and, second, that that period will be more favorable than the present.

Show me, vain mortal, your security for a single day. Is it youth? Is it health? Is it beauty? Go with me to yonder sepulchre, and I can show you the death worm, revelling amid the ruins of each. Do you speak of early promise or of parental hopes? These also death mocks without distinction; and writes the father and the mother childless. The truth is, you have no security. You are living in a world where the arrows of death are flying in every direction; and there is not one of them of which you can say with certainty that it shall not pierce your own heart. When you put off the concerns of religion to a future day, you put it off to a day which, for aught you know, may dawn upon your grave. It is consummate folly to do this, even if you are young; for how many monuments are continually rising up to tell of the departure of those who had but just begun to live! And if it is folly for the young, what is it for the man of grey hairs? What for him who already walks tremblingly, as if he were near the borders of the grave?

But even if you were certain of a future day, would you be under better advantages to repent then than now? Will repentance be an easier work? Is it the nature of habit to grow weaker by indulgence? Do you really believe that you would enter upon the work with better hope of success than at this hour? Are you certain that God will give you grace to repent, after you have abused his grace by long delay and presumption? Are you sure that when the anticipated season shall come, provided you are yet among the living, your heart will not be as insensible as a rock; that the curse of reprobation may not have fallen upon you, and frozen up the very fountain of feeling?

I know, my friends, that I have your judgment and conscience on my side, when I enter a protest against this delaying spirit. I know you cannot but feel that in what you are doing in respect to this matter, you adopt precisely such a course as you would expect, in your worldly affairs, would lead to disaster and ruin. Let me entreat you then to do at present what you intend to do hereafter; because the difficulties of the work of repentance are constantly accumulating, and because *to-morrow* is a word which ought not to be found in the vocabulary of a probationer for eternity. I only ask you to act in accordance with your own honest convictions. I have spoken to you, my friends, one and all, words of truth and soberness. I have spoken to you as unto wise men: judge ye what I what I have said.

## SERMON XXVII.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

OF ALBANY.

### CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTIONS AGAINST COMING TO THE LORD'S TABLE, ANSWERED.

**ZECARIAH 4:10.** *Who hath despised the day of small things?*

THIS interrogation makes part of a prophecy which was designed to encourage the Jews in respect to the success of their enterprise in rebuilding the temple. There were many things at the commencement of it which seemed discouraging: it was emphatically a day of small things; but the prophet intimates that such a day is not to be despised; and that that which had a feeble beginning, would issue in a glorious result. The head stone should be brought forth with shoutings, of "Grace, grace unto it."

There is something analogous to this in the common course of divine operation. A seed is cast into the earth, and it germinates; and begins to shoot upward; and perhaps, in your walk you tread it under foot without observation; but ere long a tree rises and stretcheth forth its boughs toward heaven, and takes its place among the majestic oaks of the forest. The first dawning of the day-star is but feeble—like one solitary ray falling on thick darkness; nevertheless this almost imperceptible glimmering is a sure precursor of the brightness of noon-day. When the little company of pilgrims who originally settled in New-England, were collected on the shores of their native country to embark for a wilderness, which to them lay beyond the ocean, doubtless it seemed to many who looked on, a desperate enterprise; and certainly it was the day of small things; but long since has that enterprise proved itself to have contained the elements of national greatness and glory; and at this hour it reflects back light and joy upon the country in which it originated; and I may add, is carrying a healing influence to all the nations. The cause of temperance, as it exists in this country, took its origin in an accidental conversation between two individuals; and had you listened to that conversation, not improbably it might have seemed to you an unimportant one; but there grew up out of it a great moral institution, which in these few years, has wrought the greatest change which any country, perhaps, has, in the same period, ever experienced. And you may look through all the great works which have been accomplished

in the providence of God, and you will find, in respect to each of them, that there has been a day of small things; that each has been like the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Now, as it is with other things, so it is with the experience of the Christian: it has a small beginning. I know, indeed, that when the principle of religion is first implanted in the heart, there is often a more intense rapture than is felt at a more advanced stage of religious experience; but this by no means indicates that the principle of piety exists in a higher degree of strength. Every Christian is born a babe in Christ, and it not uncommonly happens that the functions of spiritual life are, for a while, so feeble, that after the soul has parted with its first joys, it begins to doubt whether it has not been yielding to delusion. There is often in these circumstances a melancholy vibration from burning rapture to deep despondency; and while faith is extremely weak, hope trembles, and sometimes well nigh expires.

There is one circumstance in particular which renders this, to the young Christian, a moment of the deepest interest. There is a question of great moment pressing upon him, in relation to which he has to decide, and in the decision of which the state of feeling of which I have spoken, often subjects him to great embarrassment. It is the question, whether or not he shall make a public profession of religion. The obligation of this duty he clearly perceives; but either from looking too much on the dark side, as it respects himself, or from some mistaken views of the nature of the duty, he is often painfully in doubt whether he has a right to come to the table of the Lord. To a person in this state of feeling the text comes in the way of encouragement:—"Despise not the day of small things." And this is the use which I purpose to make of it in this discourse. More particularly, I will endeavor to meet some of the most common objections which occur to a young Christian, under the influence of a tender conscience, against making a profession of religion.

Before proceeding to this, however, let me offer a single remark to guard you against misapprehension. Far be it from me to say a word to diminish the solemnity of the act of taking upon you the vows of God. Far be it from me to detract aught from the scriptural qualifications of coming to the Lord's table; or to lift a hand to open the door of the church to those who have no reason to believe that they have been taught by the Spirit how to appreciate its privileges, or to wish to see the borders of the visible church enlarged, at the expense of its internal purity. And I will add that I have no intention in any thing I shall say, to induce any individual to come into the church, who is not, or who does not become, persuaded in his own mind that it is his duty to do so; nor would I, in any case, have him come otherwise than with deliberation and reflection. My purpose is to relieve from needless anxiety; and if I can, to clear away the darkness which, in some cases, may hang over the path of duty. There are those who turn their back on a christian profession, because they practically disregard their own salvation as well as the command of Christ.

With such I have at present nothing to do. My business now is exclusively with the sincere and the conscientious; who have a desire to confess Christ before men, but are kept back by honest, though mistaken considerations.

1. It is sometimes objected by an individual, against making a profession of religion, that he has never been the subject of peculiarly deep and pungent conviction.

But you cannot, my friend, have made any observation on this subject, without having noticed that some persons who are brought into the kingdom, are the subjects of a much more powerful divine operation than others, according to the original constitution and previous habits of mind, as well as various other circumstances. This variety is what always has existed, and what always must exist, from the very laws of human nature; and it is abundantly proved by experience, that where the work of conviction is comparatively silent and gradual, it may result in as genuine a conversion as where it is more rapid and overwhelming. If there are those who are now adorning the doctrine of God their Savior, whose conversion was preceded by awful forebodings of wrath, and even by absolute despair; so, also, there are those of an equally spiritual and heavenly mind, who can scarcely say when their conviction began, and what was the occasion of it. If you take the result of your own observation, then, you cannot but perceive that the objection at which you are halting amounts to nothing.

Besides, the bible has no where declared that a particular amount of conviction is necessary as a preparative to conversion. It has decided that conviction is necessary; that a sinner must understand and feel his guilt and ruin, before he will ever accept the gospel offer; but it has no where declared, that unless the sinner is awfully alarmed, and visibly agitated, and even convulsed with terror, as some are, he is not prepared to accept an offered Savior. The bible, in this respect, as well as every other, is exactly accordant with the laws of man's intellectual and moral nature; and in every thing that it prescribes or declares, in respect to the regeneration of the soul, it takes man just as he is; and recognizes the variety that exists in the human constitution.

The only question, then, which you have to settle in respect to your conviction, is, whether it has been such as to bring you to feel your need of a Savior? Have you realized that you are a sinner, guilty, polluted, liable to eternal death? Have you *felt* that God's condemning sentence against you is just, and that you can be saved in no other way than through the mediation of Christ? If this has been your experience, then, be assured, if you are not a Christian, it is not for lack of the necessary conviction; nor has there been any thing in your case, so far as conviction is concerned, which ought now to minister to your despondency. Whether you have laid hold on the hope of the gospel, is, indeed, another question, and to be de-

cided partly on different grounds; but so far as the preparatory work is concerned, you have no reason to write bitter things against yourself.

2. There are those who object against making a profession of religion, that they cannot point to any particular time when they were converted. But where do you find any such standard of Christian character as this in the bible? Where do you find it written, that in order to have evidence of being a Christian, a man must know when he became one? I admit that there is a moment when the regenerating act passes upon the sinner; when his relations to God, and his character in the sight of God, are radically and eternally changed; but I do not believe that the man lives who has a right to say, with undoubting confidence, of any particular moment, that then the Spirit of God certainly performed the regenerating work upon his heart; for though he may point to the time when he observed a great change in his feelings, yet he can never decide that he took cognizance of the very first operations of the principle of grace in his soul: he knows too little of the manner of God's operations to decide this: and how can he know but that the principle may have been implanted a considerable time before it began to operate, at least to his perceptions; just as it sometimes seems to lie well nigh dormant in a subsequent state of the Christian's experience? Remember that the existence of religion in the heart is one thing: the evidence of its existence quite another. I repeat, then, though there may be those who are able to refer to a particular moment when they experienced a great change in their views and feelings, there are none who can say, without presumption, that that was the very time of their regeneration.

There is another consideration on this subject: those who profess with the most confidence to refer to the very moment when they were renewed, are often obliged subsequently to acknowledge their mistake; and in many instances, where they do not acknowledge it, it is palpable to every body else; that is, it is manifest that there has been no conversion at all. And on the other hand, many who have not dared to point to the month, or even the year of their conversion, have, by a godly and devoted life, given every evidence that could be desired, that they have been born of the Spirit.

The result of all these considerations is, that there is nothing in your ignorance of the period of your conversion, which ought to embarrass you for a moment. The great question you have to decide is, not, when you became a Christian, but whether you really *are* one. If the Savior is precious to you; if you find the graces of the Spirit actually in your heart, and if it is your deliberate purpose, in the strength of God's grace, to live a humble, self-denied, devoted life; then it admits not of question, that it is your duty to confess Christ before the world; even though you can say nothing more of yourself than "whereas I was once blind, now I see."

3. There are others who shrink from making a profession of religion, on the ground that they have never felt the rapture which they have heard described by some as making part of *their* experience. There is, in this respect, the same variety of religious experience, as in the cases already mentioned. Some, no doubt, who are renewed, experience much more joy than others; while the conversion in the latter case is not less sound than in the former. This variety is usually attributable, not so much to the different degrees of grace that exist in the heart, as to the different susceptibilities of the physical constitution, and the different external influences to which the individual is subject. The amount of joy which exists in the heart at any given time, is, by no means, the measure of christian attainment. And I hardly need add, that mere joy, even when it mounts up to rapture, does not of itself constitute any evidence of a spiritual renovation; for we are all familiar with the fact, that many who profess and actually feel the most burning raptures, come, in a little while, to regard the whole subject with absolute indifference. It is only when joy is accompanied with humility, and love to God, and confidence in Christ, and the spirit of christian obedience, that we can regard it as one of the fruits of the Holy Ghost.

If, then, there is, and always has been, a great variety in this respect, in the experience of Christians, and if many who claim the most on this ground, give no evidence of christian character, you surely are in the wrong to erect this into a standard by which to form a judgment of yourself. If God gives you joy, intense joy, be thankful for it; but if the state of your mind is only peaceful, without any thing that even borders upon ecstasy, be thankful for that too; nor need you regard the latter as furnishing less evidence that you have been renewed than the former. If you grow in grace, and are faithful in the discharge of duty, you may reasonably expect that your joy will increase; but if you decline obedience to Christ's dying command, because you have nothing above tranquillity of mind, be not disappointed if even that tranquillity should desert you, and should give place to the most distressing doubts, and ultimately to spiritual torpor closely resembling death.

4. There are some who hesitate to make a profession on the ground that the ordinance of the Supper, to which it introduces them, is invested with so much solemnity that they fear to approach it. But you surely will not venture to carry this principle through your whole conduct, unless you have renounced every pretension to christian character. You certainly will not suffer it to keep you from a throne of grace: And let me ask, whether even the communion service brings you more directly in contact with the omniscience and holiness of God, than does this common duty of prayer? When you kneel down in your closet, or when you rise in the sanctuary to engage in this duty, you, who are but dust and ashes, take it upon you to speak to Him in whose sight the heavens are not clean: You un-

dertake to hold direct communion with the Being before whom angels veil their faces—with the God of the whole creation. And though I would fain hope that the solemnity of this duty always impresses your spirits, and makes you reverent and humble, I venture to say that it never deters you from engaging in it, or even makes you approach it with hesitation.

Why then, I ask, should you make this a reason for staying away from the table of the Lord. True the sacramental service is one of deep solemnity—But what then? Will you dare practically to tell Jehovah that you cannot or will not obey his direct command, merely because it requires you to engage in a solemn duty? What you have to do is, not to turn your back upon the duty because it is solemn, but to approach it with a corresponding frame of feeling. This indeed constitutes a reason why you should come with reverence and self-abasement; but not the shadow of a reason why you should not come at all.

5. Another common objection against making a profession of religion is, that the individual feels himself unworthy. So you are unworthy, my friend; and so you always will be. And this is not the only thing of which you are unworthy—You are unworthy to pray; you are unworthy to read God's word; yes, you are unworthy even to live. Because by your sins you have forfeited every claim upon God; and for all you experience that is better than the sufferings of the pit, you are indebted to sovereign mercy; of course you are unworthy of it. But happily for you, you are permitted to plead, in your approaches to God, whether at the communion table or in the common duties of devotion, the infinite worthiness of the Redeemer; and let your attainments in holiness be as great as they may, and let your hope of heaven be as bright as it may, you must, after all, plead this as the ground of your acceptance, or you can have no reasonable hope of being accepted. You cannot but perceive that this objection will keep you away from the communion table forever; for whenever the question is to be decided whether you shall approach it or not, you will have to settle the question whether an unworthy sinner shall come or not. And let me say, that while your unworthiness ought never to keep you back, a deep sense of your unworthiness constitutes one important qualification of your coming with acceptance. If, when you think of approaching this ordinance, you feel abased before God in view of the greatness of the privilege, and of your unworthiness to enjoy it, you are in the very state of mind in which the Savior bids you come.

6. It is urged as an objection by some against coming to the Lord's table, that they have no *assurance* that they have been renewed; and they fear to come, lest, being unregenerate, they should be guilty of an awful sin; should bring upon them the curse of eating and drinking damnation to themselves.

This objection is removed partly by a correct understanding of the apostle's declaration, in connection with the particular circumstances to which it referred. The truth is, that the Christians to whom he was writing, had shockingly profaned the Lord's supper by turning it into a luxurious meal; and in consequence of this, God seems, in judgment, to have sent certain diseases among them. Hence the apostle, in reference to this, declares that "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh *judgment*" (for that is the true rendering of the word, and not *damnation*, as we have it in our version) "unto himself;"—such judgments as the Corinthians were, at that moment, experiencing. So that this passage, which has given so much trouble to persons of a tender conscience, has in it, after all, nothing that ought to alarm them. It refers primarily to a case which we have no reason to believe has existed since the days of the apostles; and in no sense can it be legitimately understood to imply any thing that ought to give alarm to one who is conscientiously desirous to know and do his duty.

But you will say, perhaps, that if coming to the communion while you are unrenewed, does not necessarily involve eternal perdition, still it must be a great sin, and you dare not run the hazard of committing it. But how dare you run the hazard of disobeying a plain command of Christ, in turning your back upon this ordinance? He has instituted it as a memorial of his death; and he has not left it at your option whether to celebrate it or not, but has laid his command upon you; and do you believe that he will regard you guiltless, in practically refusing to submit to his authority? The true state of the case then is this: having a hope, however feeble, that you have been born of the Spirit, you have also reason to hope that you will be in the way of your duty in coming to the Lord's table; but if you stay away, you *know* that you do wrong; because you violate the Savior's direct command. Is it not best, at least, to look well to both sides of the alternative, before you make up your mind in favor of what you *know* involves disobedience to Christ?

7. Some persons object to making a profession, on the ground that they want more time to think of it. This, I acknowledge, is sometimes an objection that ought to be sustained; for instance, I would always have a person, after a hopeful conversion, take proper time to examine himself, and test his feelings, and gain some evidence that the new set of feelings he has acquired, are not to be as the morning cloud that quickly passeth away. But beyond this, I confess I can find no warrant in God's word for delaying a profession. You think you shall be better prepared to come at a future time than at present: but most probably you are in a mistake; for in the greater number of cases of this kind—at least of those which have fallen under my observation—the individuals have receded rather than advanced, in their evidences and comforts; and sometimes have reaped the reward of their neglect in a long night of spiritual apathy. Take care that

you do not quiet your conscience in a deliberate neglect of this duty, by thinking that you will keep it in mind, and that in due season you will be the better prepared for it. Remember that thinking of a duty is a very different thing from performing it; and that the one can never be substituted for the other. You may think of this duty till you die, and if you do nothing more, you will die chargeable with having refused to commemorate the death of Him who hung on the cross that sinners might live.

8. It is objected by some against making a profession, that they have so little confidence in themselves that they fear they shall dishonor the cause. Perhaps you are naturally inclined to levity, and you fear that this passion will sometimes break out in an unguarded moment, to the discredit of your profession. Or perhaps your besetting sin is the love of the world; and you apprehend it may sometimes bring you into captivity, and cause the world to say of you, "What do they more than others?" But is the fact that you are weak, or only partially sanctified, or that you have your lot in a world of temptation, any reason for disobeying Christ? He knew that these would be your circumstances when he laid this injunction upon you; and rely on it, he requires nothing of you but what he will give you grace and strength to perform. The true use to be made of the fact urged in this objection is, not to carry you away from your duty, but to bring you to rely entirely on his strength in the discharge of it. No doubt you will have enemies to encounter, duties to perform, in the christian life, that may put your fortitude and your faith to a severe test; but these duties and conflicts you have no right to decline; and there is not the semblance of a reason why you should shrink from them: because Christ commands you to meet them on the one hand, and promises you grace adequate to their performance on the other. The fact, then, that you distrust yourself is nothing against making a profession: it is only a reason for trusting Christ altogether.

But there is another thing in connection with this which you must not lose sight of. Suppose you stay away from the Lord's table, do you thereby free yourself from the obligation of the other various duties included in the christian life? By not coming to the communion, do you purchase the privilege of being more indulgent to your evil passions, or in any respect more lax in your deportment. Far from it: You are just as truly under obligation to keep your heart with all diligence, to set a watch at the door of your lips, to be scrupulously correct in all your intercourse with the world, to deny ungodliness and every worldly lust, if you stay away from the Lord's table as if you come to it: the difference is, that in the one case, you avail yourself of an important means of gaining strength for these various duties and conflicts; in the other case, you refuse to avail yourself of it, and either shrink away from duty, or else meet it at a comparative disadvantage. Every Christian who has been accustomed to wait upon

God faithfully in this ordinance, will testify that it has served to increase his spiritual strength; and that in consequence of it, he has discharged all his other duties with more success and delight. Every Christian who has voluntarily neglected this ordinance, from whatever cause, has found himself comparatively weak amidst difficult duties; miserably equipped for severe conflicts.

9. I observe, once more, that some object to making a profession, on the ground that it will bring them out more before the world; and will render all their imperfections more conspicuous. And what then? Do you not desire to be delivered from your imperfections—to be holy as God is holy? Then surely you ought to rejoice to place yourself in a condition where the motives to a holy life will bear upon you with the greatest weight. And it is part of the design of God in bringing you into the church—in placing you on this elevated ground, where the world are looking at you, and even watching for your halting, to increase your motives to circumspection, and self-denial, and holy living. I say, instead of shrinking from this, I am sure you ought to rejoice in it. And you ought thankfully to avail yourself of it as one of the means by which God designs to train you up for himself.

Recollect, moreover, that one reason why God requires you should make a profession is, that you may thereby benefit the world. "Let your light shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." Yes, he requires you to come into the church for the very purpose of exemplifying his religion to the best advantage before the world; and it is your privilege to hope that if you do thus exemplify it, you may be instrumental of saving souls from death and hiding a multitude of sins.

Now then, my friends, shall not these meditations lead you not to despise the day of small things? Your faith is now feeble; and ought this to be considered strange, when you remember that it is the operation of a newly implanted principle of spiritual life? But the bruised reed Christ will not break. If you have faith only as a grain of mustard seed, if you realize your own weakness and unworthiness, and desire to have your place at the foot of the cross; if you feel that you would regard it a blessed privilege to commemorate your Redeemer's death, and show forth his love, then, I say unhesitatingly, come; the Savior himself says, Come; the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and you have good reason to expect, that in a compliance with the invitation, you will experience such manifestations of the Redeemer's love as are never made to the world. Stay not away because you are not all that you ought to be—all that you desire to be; but in the faithful discharge of this duty, look for grace for the more faithful discharge of all other duties to which you shall be called. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." "Wait upon the Lord, and be of good courage: Wait, I say, upon the Lord."

I have been addressing those who are conscientiously doubtful in respect to their duty: but how many are there before me who never trouble themselves with this subject; and who habitually act, not only in this respect but in all others, as if they were independent of God's authority! My friends, I cannot stop without reminding you that you are miserably—there is reason to fear—fatally deceived. This very subject of making a profession of religion, concerns no mortals more deeply than yourselves; and the spirit with which you regard it shows, that you may be well nigh ripe for the world of despair. Oh! trifle not thus with God's authority. Trifle not thus with your own salvation. I cannot ask you to come into the church as you are, but I entreat you to yield yourselves to the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, and come as you ought to be. No doubt there will be those at the marriage supper of the Lamb, who never sat down at the communion table on earth; but rely on it, they will not be such as you are: they will not be those who have kept away from this ordinance through indifference or neglect. God grant that you may all have the spirit of disciples, and thus be prepared to enjoy the privilege of disciples, in coming humbly, and affectionately, and reverently, to commemorate your Redeemer's death.

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## SERMON XLVI.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.  
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### THE CONDUCT OF SINNERS TESTED BY THE RULES OF WORLDLY WISDOM.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:15. *I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say.*

Most men are ready to claim a considerable share of worldly wisdom, and not a few, it must be acknowledged, possess it in an eminent degree. There are those who know how to make the most of their means of becoming rich; who are always on the alert to take advantage of every turn of circumstances; and whose sagacity in a single commercial speculation may bring into their possession a large fortune. There are those who understand well how to secure and advance their own fame; who, by simple management, attain some of the highest posts of worldly honor. And there are those who are sharp sighted to discern both good and evil as it respects the political relations of a community—men who will see a cloud in the distant horizon, and know that it is charged with lightning and tempest, when it is no bigger than a man's hand; men whose counsels in dark times are considered a safeguard to the public interests. In every department of human action there are indeed *pretenders* to wisdom; but there are also truly wise men;—men whose opinion on any subject which relates exclusively to this world is justly entitled to consideration and respect.

But while these men are sagacious to understand and secure the interests of the present life, in many instances at least, their wisdom utterly fails them in respect to the life that is to come. In the one case, they show themselves giants in wisdom; in the other, the merest dwarfs. In the one case, you may listen to what they say as if it were oracular; in the other, you may witness what they do, (for they generally *say* little,) and it will leave you wondering at their infatuation. My design, in this discourse, is to reason a little with this class—with all, indeed, who have a common degree of worldly wisdom, in respect to those great interests which they are prone to regard so lightly. I am going to speak to you as wise men; and ask you to judge of the course you are pursuing in respect to religion, by those common and acknowledged principles of wisdom which you are accustomed every day to apply, in your various professions and employments.

1. There is a large class who do not come to any definite and intelligent decision of the question whether the Bible is really a revelation from God; though they have all the means at hand for forming such a decision. I ask them, as wise men, honestly to pass judgment on their own conduct.

I can suppose there may be some danger here, that some of the class to which I refer, will not recognize this description as applicable to themselves.

Many of these persons no doubt take the comfort of thinking that they believe the bible because there is something in the thought of being an infidel that shocks them; but in order to ascertain the nature or the strength of this conviction, let them inquire whether they do not allow themselves in practices which they would not dare to allow, if they felt that it were absolutely certain that God had spoken in this book; and whether they do not feel less anxiety than they would feel, if the thought did not sometimes occur to them, that possibly the bible might turn out to be a mere matter of imposture. If conscience answers in the affirmative, then clearly they belong to the class I am now considering. But I doubt not there are many others who never lisp a word in favor of infidelity during their lives, and who pass in the world for firm believers in the bible, who yet purposely leave this matter entirely unsettled; who never take the trouble to inquire whether the bible is true or false, but who run the hazard of living precisely as if it were a set of fables. Now listen and judge whether, in adopting this course, you maintain the character which, in other respects, you choose to claim for true wisdom.

The bible *professes* to be a revelation from God. This you do not question; you do not even deny that it really *is* so; but in respect to this, you neither affirm nor deny: you are willing to remain unsettled. But the fact that your mind is not made up on the subject, proves that in your own view at least, there is a possibility that God has spoken in this book; and if he has spoken, he has spoken to the world to which you belong; he has spoken to yourself: and you may be sure he would not speak, if he had not something important to say. If there be a possibility, then, as you yourself acknowledge, that the great God in whose hand your breath is, and who, if there be any truth even in natural religion, will hereafter be your Judge,—if there be a possibility that he has sent you a message in the bible, what is the language of your conduct when you close the bible, and say that you shall not inquire whether it was inspired by God or forged by man? Without saying any thing here of the nature of the message it contains, do you not run the hazard of offering an awful insult to the Majesty of heaven, for which, let your character in other respects be as it may, he would require the blood of your soul?

Suppose a message were to reach you, professedly bearing the signature of some exalted personage, to whom you were under great obligations, and who had you completely in his power; who, while he was disposed to be condescending towards you, was still jealous for his own honor; and who withal, from the relation you sustained to him, and the circumstances in which you were placed, might be expected to address you; and suppose you should take what purported to be a message from him in your hand; and without any just reason to suspect that it was a forgery, should coolly lay it by, and say that it might or might not be genuine—you should not give yourself the trouble to inquire;—I ask you whether such conduct would seem to you rational and prudent? If another person were guilty of it, would you hesitate to pronounce him a madman? But with all your wisdom, this is precisely the part you are acting towards the great God in relation to the bible. Here is something placed in your hand that professes to bear the stamp of his authority. You do not pretend that you have any particular reason to question its claims. Nevertheless, you are willing to lay it aside, and treat it with neglect, on the ground that, *possibly*, it may not have been of divine origin. I ask again, do you not treat God in relation to this matter as you would not dare to treat a fellow worm whose breath is in his nostrils?

But look farther at the nature of the message which the bible contains. If it were a matter of mere indifference on which it professes to address you—

something which could not in any way materially affect your happiness, let the case result as it might, why then there might be some apology for your neglecting to settle the question of its authority; though if the point that God has spoken be previously determined, this certainly is evidence enough that the message is an important one. But, in the present case, there is surely no room for doubt: he who looks into the bible, must perceive at a glance that the message involves your most important interests; and that if it is really from God, the manner in which you treat it must decide your everlasting destiny. The most momentous interests of a state or an empire dwindle to nothing, compared with the interests which the bible professes to regard; for these are the interests of the soul; and the soul will live when all earthly states and empires are blotted out of being. Here again, what is the language of your conduct in remaining voluntarily undecided concerning the authority of the bible? It is that in a case in which you acknowledge God *may* have spoken, and spoken that in which your eternal all is bound up, you still will not take the trouble to inquire whether or not it is really God who has addressed you.

For the sake of further illustration, recur to the case I have already supposed. What if this message, purporting to come from some exalted personage to whom you sustained peculiar relations, should involve your highest worldly interests—your character—your fortune—your all—would not this be a consideration that would stand in the way of your lightly passing it over and treating it as if it were altogether questionable whether it was genuine? Or if there were actually some reason to doubt its genuineness, would not this consideration make you careful thoroughly to test it, and would you cast it from you, so long as you could see a shadow of ground for believing that it was not a forgery; or do you believe you would rest, till you had settled the point whether it were so or not? The course that wisdom would prescribe in this case is obvious. Believe me, the dictates of wisdom are uniform. She marks out for you precisely the same course in respect to your treatment of that momentous message which professes to come to you from the King of kings.

But it is supposable, in the case to which I have referred for illustration, that there might be nothing that should give you any just occasion to doubt that the message which reached you came from the individual with whose authority it was professedly stamped; and suppose, moreover, that many intelligent men had examined it, and had unhesitatingly pronounced it genuine; would not this be a circumstance that would render your indecision in respect to it more unaccountable and more foolish? It certainly ought not to be a reason why you should forbear to look at it for yourself; but surely it ought to remind you that the means of coming to an intelligent conclusion were within your reach, and that you were chargeable at least with singular stupidity if you did not avail yourself of them.

But wherein does your conduct in relation to God's word indicate greater wisdom than would be discovered by remaining undecided in the case I have just supposed? You do not yourself profess to believe that there is any thing in relation to the bible with which you are acquainted, that proves that it *may* not be the word of God. Those who have examined it most attentively, and under circumstances most favorable to arriving at the truth, have been fully satisfied that it *is* the word of God. You have all the means for coming to a decision which *they* have had, or which you could desire; especially you have the record itself, and the question of its divine authority is fairly within the scope of your faculties. If it were a question of extreme difficulty—one in respect to which your means of coming at the truth were altogether inade-

quate, why then, inasmuch as it is a matter of so much moment, prudence would dictate that you should tax your faculties to the utmost. Though you might with more show of reason, plead discouragement. But as it is a subject every way within the range of your comprehension, and on which the light shines as brightly as the sun at noonday, what semblance of an apology can you plead for remaining undecided?

I ask you now, in view of all that has been said under this article, whether, as wise men, you can approve your own course? If the message which comes to you in the bible, professes to come from God; if it involves the interests of your whole eternity; if those who have examined it most thoroughly are fully persuaded of its genuineness, and if you have every opportunity of ascertaining whether it be genuine or not, I ask again, where is the wisdom of your remaining thus undecided?

2. There is another class who advance a step farther than the preceding: while they admit the divine authority of the bible, they have not, and do not profess to have, any definite views in respect to the system of truth it contains. Persons of this description sometimes even value themselves upon not being infidels; and they will speak of christianity in the general as an excellent system; but they have not, after all, exactly made up their minds on the question, what christianity is. They are willing to believe that all who assume the christian name, may, in the main, be right; and on a subject upon which there are such various and contradictory opinions, they think they cannot hazard much by remaining without any definite opinion at all. I wish to inquire of *this* class, whether they discern any wisdom in this course; and if so, where it lies?

On the question whether the bible contains a divine revelation, you profess to have your mind made up; and if you were to hear that some body had whispered that you are an infidel, you would probably say, in a tone much above a whisper, that he is a slanderer. Well now, judge honestly, what does this belief, so long as it is disconnected with any distinct views of christian truth, amount to? Only let a man say that he believes the bible to contain a revelation from God, and whether he knows or believes a word of what God has spoken in it, becomes, in your estimation, an unimportant matter. But where lies the charm in believing the simple proposition that the bible is the word of God? Let me revert to the case which I have already used in the way of illustration. Suppose you should receive the message that should be brought to you from some earthly benefactor or potentate, and should express your full conviction that it was genuine, and should perhaps compliment him for having thus honored you; and to an inquiry which should then be made, what the message contained, you should reply that that was a matter of no moment, that it might contain one thing or another; and that as there would probably be different opinions in respect to its true import, you should not give yourself the trouble particularly to examine it, but should charitably presume that all might be substantially right, and that the whole benefit to be derived from it would be secured to you on your believing that it really came from the individual whose name it bore. Where is the man who would dare to hold up his head after having been guilty of such folly as this? But this is precisely a fair representation of your conduct in reference to the authority and doctrines of God's word. You make much of the one: you make nothing of the other. You will have it that God has spoken, and you would resent the imputation of believing the contrary; but as for what he has said, you regard that too unimportant a matter to trouble yourself about.

When we look into the bible, and contemplate the nature of the truths it

reveals, we have no difficulty in perceiving how it operates in the sanctification and salvation of man. There is that in the great truths of the gospel which must, when cordially received, exert the very influence which the gospel claims for itself; which must render it quick and powerful; a sovereign balm for every wound. But tell me what there is in the insulated fact that God has made a revelation to the world, which could produce this effect? What is there in it which the most depraved man on earth might not fully and cordially believe, and yet not lose a particle of his depravity? What is there which a heathen might not believe and be a heathen still?

3. Let me proceed to a third class, who are still a little upon the advance of the preceding;—who not only admit the authority of the bible, but intelligently give their assent to its doctrines; who nevertheless, in their heart and life, do not yield to its influence. Let us see whether, as wise men, *they* can justify their conduct.

Suppose the message of which I have been all along speaking, to have been addressed to a criminal under sentence of death, and to contain nothing less important to him than the offer of a free forgiveness, which yet he was at liberty to reject; and suppose he should not only be fully satisfied that it had come from the proper authority, but should examine it, and fully understand its nature; and then, instead of gratefully accepting the pardon which it proffered, should indignantly or insultingly reject it, and should hug his chains, and seem determined that the law should have its course in his execution—would you have any doubt that that poor criminal, however it might have been with him when he committed the act for which he had been condemned, was *then* bereft of his reason? Would you not say, “the love of life is natural to man; but this man, in choosing death rather than life, does violence to the dictates of nature: he must be a maniac?”

Or suppose the message to be addressed to yourself, and to be nothing less than that there was an immense fortune, or if you please, an earthly kingdom, at your command, which would be made over to you in a formal way, provided you would consent to receive it as a free gift: you are perfectly satisfied of the authenticity of the communication, and the sincerity of the offer; but instead of taking measures to make it your own, you practically treat it with absolute indifference; and that too, when you profess in words to place upon it the highest value—would *this* conduct savor of wisdom? Should you dare stake your character for worldly prudence on such conduct?

The message which God sends you in his word, corresponds in its different aspects to both these cases. It comes to you as a criminal condemned by God's law, and contains the offer of a full and gracious forgiveness. It extends still farther, and contains the offer of a heavenly inheritance, an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. You profess to believe that the message comes from God; that your condition is just as bad as the message presumes it to be; that the provision made for your salvation is every way adequate; that there is a crown of life offered you, and a seat at God's right hand. And then with these sentiments on your lips, you fold your arms, and go to sleep over these amazing interests. You suffer yourself to be altogether engrossed with the things of the world; with objects which, by your own confession, compared with those you neglect, are as insignificant as the play-things of children. I surely need not stop to ask whether this is wise. You cannot dream that there is wisdom in acting contrary to your own convictions; in professing to believe that religion is every thing, and then acting as

if it were nothing. He who should do so in his worldly transactions would never get trusted after it; for he would be set down as a knave or a fool.

I observe, once more, that there is a class of men who not only admit the authority of God's message, and understand well what it means, but fully intend to yield obedience to it; though they are putting off such obedience to a future season. How will *their* conduct bear to be judged by the rules of wisdom?

You admit that religion is a matter of infinite moment, and that it must be attended to before you die. You have no expectation of getting to heaven in any other way than by repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and if you should die before you have complied with these conditions, you fully believe that there could be no salvation for you.

Now in order to make it appear that this delay to which you are inclined to yield is marked by true wisdom, you must show at least two things:—First, that you are certain you shall have a future period for repentance; and, second, that that period will be more favorable than the present.

Show me, vain mortal, your security for a single day. Is it youth? Is it health? Is it beauty? Go with me to yonder sepulchre, and I can show you the death worm, revelling amid the ruins of each. Do you speak of early promise or of parental hopes? These also death mocks without distinction; and writes the father and the mother childless. The truth is, you have no security. You are living in a world where the arrows of death are flying in every direction; and there is not one of them of which you can say with certainty that it shall not pierce your own heart. When you put off the concerns of religion to a future day, you put it off to a day which, for aught you know, may dawn upon your grave. It is consummate folly to do this, even if you are young; for how many monuments are continually rising up to tell of the departure of those who had but just begun to live! And if it is folly for the young, what is it for the man of grey hairs? What for him who already walks tremblingly, as if he were near the borders of the grave!

But even if you were certain of a future day, would you be under better advantages to repent then than now? Will repentance be an easier work? Is it the nature of habit to grow weaker by indulgence? Do you really believe that you would enter upon the work with better hope of success than at this hour? Are you certain that God will give you grace to repent, after you have abused his grace by long delay and presumption? Are you sure that when the anticipated season shall come, provided you are yet among the living, your heart will not be as insensible as a rock; that the curse of reprobation may not have fallen upon you, and frozen up the very fountain of feeling?

I know, my friends, that I have your judgment and conscience on my side, when I enter a protest against this delaying spirit. I know you cannot but feel that in what you are doing in respect to this matter, you adopt precisely such a course as you would expect, in your worldly affairs, would lead to disaster and ruin. Let me entreat you then to do at present what you intend to do hereafter; because the difficulties of the work of repentance are constantly accumulating, and because *to-morrow* is a word which ought not to be found in the vocabulary of a probationer for eternity. I only ask you to act in accordance with your own honest convictions. I have spoken to you, my friends, one and all, words of truth and soberness. I have spoken to you as unto wise men: judge ye what I what I have said.

## SERMON XXVII.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.  
OF ALBANY.

### CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTIONS AGAINST COMING TO THE LORD'S TABLE, ANSWERED.

ZECHARIAH 4:10. *Who hath despised the day of small things?*

THIS interrogation makes part of a prophecy which was designed to encourage the Jews in respect to the success of their enterprise in rebuilding the temple. There were many things at the commencement of it which seemed discouraging: it was emphatically a day of small things; but the prophet intimates that such a day is not to be despised; and that that which had a feeble beginning, would issue in a glorious result. The head stone should be brought forth with shoutings, of "Grace, grace unto it."

There is something analogous to this in the common course of divine operation. A seed is cast into the earth, and it germinates; and begins to shoot upward; and perhaps, in your walk you tread it under foot without observation; but ere long a tree rises and stretcheth forth its boughs toward heaven, and takes its place among the majestic oaks of the forest. The first dawning of the day-star is but feeble—like one solitary ray falling on thick darkness; nevertheless this almost imperceptible glimmering is a sure precursor of the brightness of noon-day. When the little company of pilgrims who originally settled in New-England, were collected on the shores of their native country to embark for a wilderness, which to them lay beyond the ocean, doubtless it seemed to many who looked on, a desperate enterprise; and certainly it was the day of small things; but long since has that enterprise proved itself to have contained the elements of national greatness and glory; and at this hour it reflects back light and joy upon the country in which it originated; and I may add, is carrying a healing influence to all the nations. The cause of temperance, as it exists in this country, took its origin in an accidental conversation between two individuals; and had you listened to that conversation, not improbably it might have seemed to you an unimportant one; but there grew up out of it a great moral institution, which in these few years, has wrought the greatest change which any country, perhaps, has, in the same period, ever experienced. And you may look through all the great works which have been accomplished

in the providence of God, and you will find, in respect to each of them, that there has been a day of small things; that each has been like the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Now, as it is with other things, so it is with the experience of the Christian: it has a small beginning. I know, indeed, that when the principle of religion is first implanted in the heart, there is often a more intense rapture than is felt at a more advanced stage of religious experience; but this by no means indicates that the principle of piety exists in a higher degree of strength. Every Christian is born a babe in Christ, and it not uncommonly happens that the functions of spiritual life are, for a while, so feeble, that after the soul has parted with its first joys, it begins to doubt whether it has not been yielding to delusion. There is often in these circumstances a melancholy vibration from burning rapture to deep despondency; and while faith is extremely weak, hope trembles, and sometimes well nigh expires.

There is one circumstance in particular which renders this, to the young Christian, a moment of the deepest interest. There is a question of great moment pressing upon him, in relation to which he has to decide, and in the decision of which the state of feeling of which I have spoken, often subjects him to great embarrassment. It is the question, whether or not he shall make a public profession of religion. The obligation of this duty he clearly perceives; but either from looking too much on the dark side, as it respects himself, or from some mistaken views of the nature of the duty, he is often painfully in doubt whether he has a right to come to the table of the Lord. To a person in this state of feeling the text comes in the way of encouragement:—"Despise not the day of small things." And this is the use which I purpose to make of it in this discourse. More particularly, I will endeavor to meet some of the most common objections which occur to a young Christian, under the influence of a tender conscience, against making a profession of religion.

Before proceeding to this, however, let me offer a single remark to guard you against misapprehension. Far be it from me to say a word to diminish the solemnity of the act of taking upon you the vows of God. Far be it from me to detract aught from the scriptural qualifications of coming to the Lord's table; or to lift a hand to open the door of the church to those who have no reason to believe that they have been taught by the Spirit how to appreciate its privileges, or to wish to see the borders of the visible church enlarged, at the expense of its internal purity. And I will add that I have no intention in any thing I shall say, to induce any individual to come into the church, who is not, or who does not become, persuaded in his own mind that it is his duty to do so; nor would I, in any case, have him come otherwise than with deliberation and reflection. My purpose is to relieve from needless anxiety; and if I can, to clear away the darkness which, in some cases, may hang over the path of duty. There are those who turn their back on a christian profession, because they practically disregard their own salvation as well as the command of Christ.

With such I have at present nothing to do. My business now is exclusively with the sincere and the conscientious; who have a desire to confess Christ before men, but are kept back by honest, though mistaken considerations.

1. It is sometimes objected by an individual, against making a profession of religion, that he has never been the subject of peculiarly deep and pungent conviction.

But you cannot, my friend, have made any observation on this subject, without having noticed that some persons who are brought into the kingdom, are the subjects of a much more powerful divine operation than others, according to the original constitution and previous habits of mind, as well as various other circumstances. This variety is what always has existed, and what always must exist, from the very laws of human nature; and it is abundantly proved by experience, that where the work of conviction is comparatively silent and gradual, it may result in as genuine a conversion as where it is more rapid and overwhelming. If there are those who are now adorning the doctrine of God their Savior, whose conversion was preceded by awful forebodings of wrath, and even by absolute despair; so, also, there are those of an equally spiritual and heavenly mind, who can scarcely say when their conviction began, and what was the occasion of it. If you take the result of your own observation, then, you cannot but perceive that the objection at which you are halting amounts to nothing.

Besides, the bible has no where declared that a particular amount of conviction is necessary as a preparative to conversion. It has decided that conviction is necessary; that a sinner must understand and feel his guilt and ruin, before he will ever accept the gospel offer; but it has no where declared, that unless the sinner is awfully alarmed, and visibly agitated, and even convulsed with terror, as some are, he is not prepared to accept an offered Savior. The bible, in this respect, as well as every other, is exactly accordant with the laws of man's intellectual and moral nature; and in every thing that it prescribes or declares, in respect to the regeneration of the soul, it takes man just as he is; and recognizes the variety that exists in the human constitution.

The only question, then, which you have to settle in respect to your conviction, is, whether it has been such as to bring you to feel your need of a Savior? Have you realized that you are a sinner, guilty, polluted, liable to eternal death? Have you *felt* that God's condemning sentence against you is just, and that you can be saved in no other way than through the mediation of Christ? If this has been your experience, then, be assured, if you are not a Christian, it is not for lack of the necessary conviction; nor has there been any thing in your case, so far as conviction is concerned, which ought now to minister to your despondency. Whether you have laid hold on the hope of the gospel, is, indeed, another question, and to be de-

cided partly on different grounds; but so far as the preparatory work is concerned, you have no reason to write bitter things against yourself.

2. There are those who object against making a profession of religion, that they cannot point to any particular time when they were converted. But where do you find any such standard of Christian character as this in the bible? Where do you find it written, that in order to have evidence of being a Christian, a man must know when he became one? I admit that there is a moment when the regenerating act passes upon the sinner; when his relations to God, and his character in the sight of God, are radically and eternally changed; but I do not believe that the man lives who has a right to say, with undoubting confidence, of any particular moment, that then the Spirit of God certainly performed the regenerating work upon his heart; for though he may point to the time when he observed a great change in his feelings, yet he can never decide that he took cognizance of the very first operations of the principle of grace in his soul: he knows too little of the manner of God's operations to decide this: and how can he know but that the principle may have been implanted a considerable time before it began to operate, at least to his perceptions; just as it sometimes seems to lie well nigh dormant in a subsequent state of the Christian's experience? Remember that the existence of religion in the heart is one thing: the evidence of its existence quite another. I repeat, then, though there may be those who are able to refer to a particular moment when they experienced a great change in their views and feelings, there are none who can say, without presumption, that that was the very time of their regeneration.

There is another consideration on this subject: those who profess with the most confidence to refer to the very moment when they were renewed, are often obliged subsequently to acknowledge their mistakes; and in many instances, where they do not acknowledge it, it is palpable to every body else; that is, it is manifest that there has been no conversion at all. And on the other hand, many who have not dared to point to the month, or even the year of their conversion, have, by a godly and devoted life, given every evidence that could be desired, that they have been born of the Spirit.

The result of all these considerations is, that there is nothing in your ignorance of the period of your conversion, which ought to embarrass you for a moment. The great question you have to decide is, not, when you became a Christian, but whether you really *are* one. If the Savior is precious to you; if you find the graces of the Spirit actually in your heart, and if it is your deliberate purpose, in the strength of God's grace, to live a humble, self-denied, devoted life; then it admits not of question, that it is your duty to confess Christ before the world; even though you can say nothing more of yourself than "whereas I was once blind, now I see."

3. There are others who shrink from making a profession of religion, on the ground that they have never felt the rapture which they have heard described by some as making part of *their* experience. There is, in this respect, the same variety of religious experience, as in the cases already mentioned. Some, no doubt, who are renewed, experience much more joy than others; while the conversion in the latter case is not less sound than in the former. This variety is usually attributable, not so much to the different degrees of grace that exist in the heart, as to the different susceptibilities of the physical constitution, and the different external influences to which the individual is subject. The amount of joy which exists in the heart at any given time, is, by no means, the measure of christian attainment. And I hardly need add, that mere joy, even when it mounts up to rapture, does not of itself constitute any evidence of a spiritual renovation; for we are all familiar with the fact, that many who profess and actually feel the most burning raptures, come, in a little while, to regard the whole subject with absolute indifference. It is only when joy is accompanied with humility, and love to God, and confidence in Christ, and the spirit of christian obedience, that we can regard it as one of the fruits of the Holy Ghost.

If, then, there is, and always has been, a great variety in this respect, in the experience of Christians, and if many who claim the most on this ground, give no evidence of christian character, you surely are in the wrong to erect this into a standard by which to form a judgment of yourself. If God gives you joy, intense joy, be thankful for it; but if the state of your mind is only peaceful, without any thing that even borders upon ecstasy, be thankful for that too; nor need you regard the latter as furnishing less evidence that you have been renewed than the former. If you grow in grace, and are faithful in the discharge of duty, you may reasonably expect that your joy will increase; but if you decline obedience to Christ's dying command, because you have nothing above tranquillity of mind, be not disappointed if even that tranquillity should desert you, and should give place to the most distressing doubts, and ultimately to spiritual torpor closely resembling death.

4. There are some who hesitate to make a profession on the ground that the ordinance of the Supper, to which it introduces them, is invested with so much solemnity that they fear to approach it. But you surely will not venture to carry this principle through your whole conduct, unless you have renounced every pretension to christian character. You certainly will not suffer it to keep you from a throne of grace: And let me ask, whether even the communion service brings you more directly in contact with the omniscience and holiness of God, than does this common duty of prayer? When you kneel down in your closet, or when you rise in the sanctuary to engage in this duty, you, who are but dust and ashes, take it upon you to speak to Him in whose sight the heavens are not clean: You un-

dertake to hold direct communion with the Being before whom angels veil their faces—with the God of the whole creation. And though I would fain hope that the solemnity of this duty always impresses your spirits, and makes you reverent and humble, I venture to say that it never deters you from engaging in it, or even makes you approach it with hesitation.

Why then, I ask, should you make this a reason for staying away from the table of the Lord. True the sacramental service is one of deep solemnity—But what then? Will you dare practically to tell Jehovah that you cannot or will not obey his direct command, merely because it requires you to engage in a solemn duty? What you have to do is, not to turn your back upon the duty because it is solemn, but to approach it with a corresponding frame of feeling. This indeed constitutes a reason why you should come with reverence and self-abasement; but not the shadow of a reason why you should not come at all.

5. Another common objection against making a profession of religion is, that the individual feels himself unworthy. So you are unworthy, my friend; and so you always will be. And this is not the only thing of which you are unworthy—You are unworthy to pray; you are unworthy to read God's word; yes, you are unworthy even to live. Because by your sins you have forfeited every claim upon God; and for all you experience that is better than the sufferings of the pit, you are indebted to sovereign mercy; of course you are unworthy of it. But happily for you, you are permitted to plead, in your approaches to God, whether at the communion table or in the common duties of devotion, the infinite worthiness of the Redeemer; and let your attainments in holiness be as great as they may, and let your hope of heaven be as bright as it may, you must, after all, plead this as the ground of your acceptance, or you can have no reasonable hope of being accepted. You cannot but perceive that this objection will keep you away from the communion table forever; for whenever the question is to be decided whether you shall approach it or not, you will have to settle the question whether an unworthy sinner shall come or not. And let me say, that while your unworthiness ought never to keep you back, a deep sense of your unworthiness constitutes one important qualification of your coming with acceptance. If, when you think of approaching this ordinance, you feel abased before God in view of the greatness of the privilege, and of your unworthiness to enjoy it, you are in the very state of mind in which the Savior bids you come.

6. It is urged as an objection by some against coming to the Lord's table, that they have no assurance that they have been renewed; and they fear to come, lest, being unregenerate, they should be guilty of an awful sin; should bring upon them the curse of eating and drinking damnation to themselves.

This objection is removed partly by a correct understanding of the apostle's declaration, in connection with the particular circumstances to which it referred. The truth is, that the Christians to whom he was writing, had shockingly profaned the Lord's supper by turning it into a luxurious meal; and in consequence of this, God seems, in judgment, to have sent certain diseases among them. Hence the apostle, in reference to this, declares that "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh *judgment*" (for that is the true rendering of the word, and not *damnation*, as we have it in our version) "unto himself;"—such judgments as the Corinthians were, at that moment, experiencing. So that this passage, which has given so much trouble to persons of a tender conscience, has in it, after all, nothing that ought to alarm them. It refers primarily to a case which we have no reason to believe has existed since the days of the apostles; and in no sense can it be legitimately understood to imply any thing that ought to give alarm to one who is conscientiously desirous to know and do his duty.

But you will say, perhaps, that if coming to the communion while you are unrenewed, does not necessarily involve eternal perdition, still it must be a great sin, and you dare not run the hazard of committing it. But how dare you run the hazard of disobeying a plain command of Christ, in turning your back upon this ordinance? He has instituted it as a memorial of his death; and he has not left it at your option whether to celebrate it or not, but has laid his command upon you; and do you believe that he will regard you guiltless, in practically refusing to submit to his authority? The true state of the case then is this: having a hope, however feeble, that you have been born of the Spirit, you have also reason to hope that you will be in the way of your duty in coming to the Lord's table; but if you stay away, you *know* that you do wrong; because you violate the Savior's direct command. Is it not best, at least, to look well to both sides of the alternative, before you make up your mind in favor of what you *know* involves disobedience to Christ?

7. Some persons object to making a profession, on the ground that they want more time to think of it. This, I acknowledge, is sometimes an objection that ought to be sustained; for instance, I would always have a person, after a hopeful conversion, take proper time to examine himself, and test his feelings, and gain some evidence that the new set of feelings he has acquired, are not to be as the morning cloud that quickly passeth away. But beyond this, I confess I can find no warrant in God's word for delaying a profession. You think you shall be better prepared to come at a future time than at present; but most probably you are in a mistake; for in the greater number of cases of this kind—at least of those which have fallen under my observation—the individuals have receded rather than advanced, in their evidences and comforts; and sometimes have reaped the reward of their neglect in a long night of spiritual apathy. Take care that

you do not quiet your conscience in a deliberate neglect of this duty, by thinking that you will keep it in mind, and that in due season you will be the better prepared for it. Remember that thinking of a duty is a very different thing from performing it; and that the one can never be substituted for the other. You may think of this duty till you die, and if you do nothing more, you will die chargeable with having refused to commemorate the death of Him who hung on the cross that sinners might live.

8. It is objected by some against making a profession, that they have so little confidence in themselves that they fear they shall dishonor the cause. Perhaps you are naturally inclined to levity, and you fear that this passion will sometimes break out in an unguarded moment, to the discredit of your profession. Or perhaps your besetting sin is the love of the world; and you apprehend it may sometimes bring you into captivity, and cause the world to say of you, "What do they more than others?" But is the fact that you are weak, or only partially sanctified, or that you have your lot in a world of temptation, any reason for disobeying Christ? He knew that these would be your circumstances when he laid this injunction upon you; and rely on it, he requires nothing of you but what he will give you grace and strength to perform. The true use to be made of the fact urged in this objection is, not to carry you away from your duty, but to bring you to rely entirely on his strength in the discharge of it. No doubt you will have enemies to encounter, duties to perform, in the christian life, that may put your fortitude and your faith to a severe test; but these duties and conflicts you have no right to decline; and there is not the semblance of a reason why you should shrink from them: because Christ commands you to meet them on the one hand, and promises you grace adequate to their performance on the other. The fact, then, that you distrust yourself is nothing against making a profession: it is only a reason for trusting Christ altogether.

But there is another thing in connection with this which you must not lose sight of. Suppose you stay away from the Lord's table, do you thereby free yourself from the obligation of the other various duties included in the christian life? By not coming to the communion, do you purchase the privilege of being more indulgent to your evil passions, or in any respect more lax in your deportment. Far from it: You are just as truly under obligation to keep your heart with all diligence, to set a watch at the door of your lips, to be scrupulously correct in all your intercourse with the world, to deny ungodliness and every worldly lust, if you stay away from the Lord's table as if you come to it: the difference is, that in the one case, you avail yourself of an important means of gaining strength for these various duties and conflicts; in the other case, you refuse to avail yourself of it, and either shrink away from duty, or else meet it at a comparative disadvantage. Every Christian who has been accustomed to wait upon

God faithfully in this ordinance, will testify that it has served to increase his spiritual strength; and that in consequence of it, he has discharged all his other duties with more success and delight. Every Christian who has voluntarily neglected this ordinance, from whatever cause, has found himself comparatively weak amidst difficult duties; miserably equipped for severe conflicts.

9. I observe, once more, that some object to making a profession, on the ground that it will bring them out more before the world; and will render all their imperfections more conspicuous. And what then? Do you not desire to be delivered from your imperfections—to be holy as God is holy? Then surely you ought to rejoice to place yourself in a condition where the motives to a holy life will bear upon you with the greatest weight. And it is part of the design of God in bringing you into the church—in placing you on this elevated ground, where the world are looking at you, and even watching for your halting, to increase your motives to circumspection, and self-denial, and holy living. I say, instead of shrinking from this, I am sure you ought to rejoice in it. And you ought thankfully to avail yourself of it as one of the means by which God designs to train you up for himself.

Recollect, moreover, that one reason why God requires you should make a profession is, that you may thereby benefit the world. “Let your light shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Yes, he requires you to come into the church for the very purpose of exemplifying his religion to the best advantage before the world; and it is your privilege to hope that if you do thus exemplify it, you may be instrumental of saving souls from death and hiding a multitude of sins.

Now then, my friends, shall not these meditations lead you not to despise the day of small things? Your faith is now feeble; and ought this to be considered strange, when you remember that it is the operation of a newly implanted principle of spiritual life? But the bruised reed Christ will not break. If you have faith only as a grain of mustard seed, if you realize your own weakness and unworthiness, and desire to have your place at the foot of the cross; if you feel that you would regard it a blessed privilege to commemorate your Redeemer's death, and show forth his love, then, I say unhesitatingly, come; the Savior himself says, Come; the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and you have good reason to expect, that in a compliance with the invitation, you will experience such manifestations of the Redeemer's love as are never made to the world. Stay not away because you are not all that you ought to be—all that you desire to be; but in the faithful discharge of this duty, look for grace for the more faithful discharge of all other duties to which you shall be called. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” “Wait upon the Lord, and be of good courage: Wait, I say, upon the Lord.”

I have been addressing those who are conscientiously doubtful in respect to their duty: but how many are there before me who never trouble themselves with this subject; and who habitually act, not only in this respect but in all others, as if they were independent of God's authority! My friends, I cannot stop without reminding you that you are miserably—there is reason to fear—fatally deceived. This very subject of making a profession of religion, concerns no mortals more deeply than yourselves; and the spirit with which you regard it shows, that you may be well nigh ripe for the world of despair. Oh! trifle not thus with God's authority. Trifle not thus with your own salvation. I cannot ask you to come into the church as you are, but I entreat you to yield yourselves to the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, and come as you ought to be. No doubt there will be those at the marriage supper of the Lamb, who never sat down at the communion table on earth; but rely on it, they will not be such as you are: they will not be those who have kept away from this ordinance through indifference or neglect. God grant that you may all have the spirit of disciples, and thus be prepared to enjoy the privilege of disciples, in coming humbly, and affectionately, and reverently, to commemorate your Redeemer's death.

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**SERMON XLVII**

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**OUTWARD RITES AND INWARD GRACES NOT  
IDENTICAL AND INSEPARABLE.**

**ROMANS 2:28,29.** *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

MAN is a complex being, possessing both corporeal and spiritual nature. Hence God, in his divine communications, treats him according to this compound character, employing his senses to assist his faith. Natural objects, so familiar to sense, are adopted as appropriate representatives by which moral instruction is conveyed. As there is a close intimacy and familiar correspondence between the interior and the exterior man, therefore, the great head of the Church hath appointed significant signs and emblems, in the rites and ceremonies of his moral kingdom, for the express intention to make the *visible*, a true symbol of the *invisible*. 'So that SENSE and FAITH, from their close alliance in man's present state, forming the *amalgam* of mind and matter, are unitedly employed in the things of religion, to train up a fit subject for the interior world of blessedness and glory.'

But man, as a religious creature, is so prone to a superstitious reliance on outward ceremonies, that the Jews seem early and too generally to have mistaken the real nature of circumcision, though set forth by Moses and the prophets with a degree of plainness that could not be misunderstood. Hence, they built upon it as capable *in itself* of making them really God's people. Even some of the Hebrew converts to christianity, who should have known better, insisted upon the impossibility of being saved without circumcision, saying: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." To counteract this false sentiment, was evidently the design of the apostle. In prosecution of that design, he shows that ancient circumcision, though it had an important meaning, ought now to be laid aside, because the end of it was answered: that in christians that meaning was accomplished, because they were virtually 'circum-

cised, with the circumcision not made with hands.' The phrase 'not made with hands,' of frequent occurrence in the New Testament, always denotes the spiritual reality of something adumbrated. And by the phrase 'the circumcision of Christ,' is to be understood the christian rite of baptism which was instituted by him in the room of circumcision, and which could not, in the nature of the case, communicate, but only represent and require the renunciation and burial of the old man of sin, and a new life of faith in Christ.

It is made quite plain from the text, that circumcision was a rite by which a change 'of the heart,' a change 'in the spirit,' was the thing signified. But to infer that an external rite, however significant, introduces the subject of it into a spiritual and saving relation to God, was an error into which not only the ancient Jews had very generally fallen, but from which many professing christians, at the present time, are not free. It is here clearly taught, that persons being circumcised in the flesh, was no proof of their being circumcised in the spirit. And we may conclusively argue with the apostle, from the analogy of Divine dispensations, that 'He is not a (Christian) which is one outwardly; neither is that (baptism) which is outward in the flesh: but he is a (Christian,) which is one inwardly; and (baptism) is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.' That this is the true spirit and meaning of the text, we have no doubt. No other correct interpretation can be given it. It meets the approbation of sound expositors generally. We shall attempt to establish the following proposition:—

That no external rite or ceremony can of *itself* avail any thing to salvation.

In pursuance of this design, we shall adopt the following plan:—*First*, External and internal circumcision under the Legal Dispensation, answer to baptism and regeneration under the Gospel Dispensation. *Secondly*, That as a Jew may be outwardly circumcised in the flesh, *without* being inwardly circumcised in the heart; so a Christian may be outwardly baptized with water, *without* being inwardly regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

I. External and internal circumcision under the Legal Dispensation, answer to baptism and regeneration under the Gospel Dispensation.

That circumcision, which was outward in the flesh, did shadow out regeneration, or what the prophets called *circumcision of heart*, is fully evinced by the scriptures of both Testaments. This correspondence is clearly established by the following scriptural phraseology: 'Circumcise the foreskin of your *heart*;'—'If then their uncircumcised *hearts* be humbled;'—'And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy *heart*, and the *heart* of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God

with all thy heart;’—‘And all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart;’—‘Ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart;’—‘Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.’ The following passage makes the matter clearer still. ‘For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a *new creature*,’ or *new creation*. Here, circumcision and regeneration, or the new creation, are placed antithetically, or in contrast, the one over against the other; and, *comparatively*, the one is nothing, when weighed in the opposite scale with the other. Now, if outward circumcision did not symbolize inward regeneration, can you see any fitness or adaptation in the usage of these terms in the corresponsive relation they sustain to each other? If circumcision had no emblematic relation to the *new creation*, why are they here employed by the Holy Spirit in such studied, designed, contrast? The intention surely cannot be mistaken. Take another scriptural evidence of a similar character. ‘For we are **THE CIRCUMCISION**, which worship God *in the Spirit*, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.’ Here, the apostle calls real christians, whether Jews or Gentiles, *the circumcision*, meaning in a spiritual sense the *circumcised*; the noun being used for a participle, and the *abstract*, as elsewhere, put for the *concrete*. But they were not circumcised *outwardly*, i. e. ‘outward in the flesh.’ In this sense they were uncircumcised; but in another sense, they were evidently represented as circumcised. There is no other principle on which these two can be reconciled, without adopting christian baptism as the christian circumcision spiritually,—that they are substantially the same ecclesiastical seal, differing in *form* only,—and that external baptism is the *sigillistical* successor and substitute of outward circumcision long since abolished.

Once more, and the evidence is complete. The passage about to be cited is very important. Col. 2:10—12. “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye are also risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” The sum of this passage is this: *First*, That persons interested in Christ, have a complete acceptance in him. *Secondly*, That those who are so interested, have a complete substitute, both internal and external, for the circumcision which was abolished. They had *internally* that which the external circumcision represented, and which is called ‘circumcision made without hands:’ that is, the circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit. And they had *externally* the ordinance of baptism, called ‘the circumcision of Christ,’ or the christian circumcision; an ordinance appointed by

Christ in the place of circumcision. We find, *Thirdly*, That baptism, the external substitute for circumcision, required of them conformity to Christ in whom they were complete: and, *Fourthly*, That this new life, which was both signified and required by baptism, was actually entered upon by faith—through faith of the operation of God.'

Let any unbiased lover of biblical literature, critically examine the above passage collaterally with our text, and with his eye upon the analogy of the two dispensations, and we are greatly deceived if he does not discover that, 'as the Christian Church is but the completion and perfection of the Levitical; the same ordinances which had been established in the one, were transferred in spirit, if not absolutely in letter, to the other. Hence, the Lord's Supper having succeeded to the place of the Passover, analogy requires us to conclude that baptism has succeeded to the place of circumcision.' Both are alike *symbols* of regeneration: but neither of them is regeneration *itself*. Both are, evidently, two outward sacramental signs of exactly the same import, differing only in their *external forms*. The forms only have changed, the faith remains the same. In this point of view they are manifestly, effectively, and identically the very same under different forms. And being signs of the same spiritual grace, they must to all effective purposes, be mutually the same with each other: so that 'water seals the blessing now, that once was sealed with blood.' The appointment of different signs to represent the same thing, presents no difficulty. A sign is altogether an arbitrary affair with God. And had it pleased him to adumbrate, or symbolize regeneration by a hundred different signs, they would all represent the same thing, and therefore constitute but a single sacrament. A few additional remarks in this place, will finish this branch of our subject.

If baptism under the Gospel, has taken the place of circumcision under the Law, as we think is clearly established, then the manifest *identity* of circumcision and baptism, seems abundantly to determine the question of infant baptism. But God has decided the question in the matter of circumcision; and no argument against infant baptism, derived from the want of knowledge, or of active faith on the part of children, can be raised that will not be equally cogent against infant circumcision. If it be denied that baptism has come in the place of circumcision, then it may be inquired, what did? If circumcision was once the initiatory rite, and an *essential* to the visible recognition of membership in the 'Congregation of the Lord,' by what rite *now* is ecclesiastical membership recognized? Let circumcision under the Law look forward for its *successor* under the Gospel, and let baptism under the Gospel look back for its *predecessor* under the Law, and if they do look each other right in the face, and answer to

each other's call, then in vain do we look for correspondence, analogy, and harmony, in Divine dispensations.

If it be objected, that baptism is not a substitute for circumcision because it embraces both sexes, whereas circumcision was applied only to one; it may be replied, that this fact is of no consequence as to the argument, because females in that, as in many other cases, were evidently considered as represented by the other sex, and virtually included with them. This is manifest from the special direction God gave to Moses respecting the Passover, that 'no *uncircumcised* person shall eat thereof:' and yet each household, including both sexes, 'according to the number of the souls,' was required to participate in this service. But there is another consideration touching this matter, which may to some at first appear novel, but which, in our estimation, is of no small importance. Why was circumcision divinely restricted to *one sex* at all? And then why, by the same divine authority, appended, exclusively, or specially, to one *particular* part of the human body? As all God's institutions have a wise and appropriate significancy, so has this. When rightly understood, it will appear that no other member of the human body, whether of male or female, could express, appropriately and intelligently, the thing signified. The rudiments of our corporeal nature are, strictly speaking, *paternal*. For so the apostle says respecting Levi: 'He was yet *in the loins of his father* when Melchisedeck met him.' Human posterity is in the loins of *the paternal* ancestry. So does the word of God ascribe the active propagation of our species to the paternal agency,—'Abraham *begat* Isaac, and Isaac *begat* Jacob.' In close and inseparable alliance, somehow or other, with this human propagation, we find an *innate, inherent, corrupt, and totally degenerate nature*.—'Behold, I was *shapen in iniquity*; and *in sin* did my mother conceive me.'—'The imagination of *man's heart is evil from his youth*.'—'Foolishness is *bound in the heart of a child*.' Here is found, so early, the *uncircumcised* heart, the radical change of which can only be effected by 'the circumcision made without hands,' which is very strikingly and *significantly* indicated by 'the circumcision which is outward in the flesh.' *Feminine* circumcision, even could it have been literally and conveniently performed, would have answered no instructive purpose—it would not have responded to the divine intention. But Christ, the 'minister of circumcision,' having come, and having abolished all bloody and painful rites, he has so simplified the rites and enlarged the privileges of his visible kingdom, that now his 'yoke is easy, and his burden is light.' By milder institutions, but no less significant, he now proves his people's love. Circumcision and Passover have departed, and given place to Christian Baptism and the Dominical Supper, which recognize no distinctions among their pious applicants, for having put on Christ, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free,

there is neither MALE NOR FEMALE: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." We proceed to show,

II. That a Jew may be outwardly circumcised in the flesh, *without* being inwardly circumcised in the heart; so a Christian may be outwardly baptized with water, *without* being inwardly regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

This proposition admits of subdivision. We shall take up the first branch.

1. A Jew may be outwardly circumcised in the flesh, without being inwardly circumcised in the heart.

This will occupy but a moment. The terms *Jew* and *circumcision* have a more important signification, than those who 'sat in Moses' seat' were accustomed to teach. The real meaning of Jew, is, a confessor of Jehovah, a member of the true church of God. Such, in reality, they alone were, who worshipped God in spirit and in truth: 'for God is a spirit,'—'and seeketh such to worship him.' No matter how great attachment or zeal, the mere outward and worldly professors of the true religion, might discover for the name of a Jew, we read, 'They say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan.' Agreeably to this representation, circumcision, as we have shown, is expressly applied in scripture to signify a change wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God.—'And the Lord thy God will circumcise *thine heart*, to love the Lord thy God with all *thine heart*.' A real character and inward change of heart, were in fact signified by the terms Jew and circumcision.—The proof of the genuineness of which, the apostle tells us in our text, was not ascertainable by human approbation in accrediting the outward sign of profession, but by the approbation of God, who saw and prepared the heart. Not every member of the Jewish commonwealth, therefore, who had submitted to the outward rite of circumcision, answered to these appellations in their true spiritual meaning, or was entitled to those privileges which might be pointed out from scripture as belonging to the persons who bore them. Hence, one of these circumcised Jews, and a Pharisee, who came to Jesus by night, with a sincere desire to be taught the truth, was astonished above measure at the solemn assertion that 'a man must be born again.' Well had it been for many christian teachers, and professors too, had this been the last instance of palpable ignorance, or want of an experimental knowledge of the new birth or spiritual regeneration, without the real experience of which—whether its sacramental sign be 'the circumcision of the flesh,' or 'the baptism of water'—no one can be either a spiritual worshipper, or a true member of his Church.

The inspired author of our text, in his usually clear and powerful

manner, has shown that outward circumcision is nothing without a corresponding inward circumcision of the heart. And he has shown with equal force, that the one may subsist without the other. In pursuance of this design, he introduces two Jews, whom he places in studied contrast—the one who has received the outward sign of circumcision *only*, over against the other, who has not only received the same external sign, but has likewise experienced the inward circumcision of the heart. The apostle's argument most palpably requires this exhibition of the two examples, otherwise there is no contrast between them. But if the first Jew has received nothing more than the 'circumcision which is outward in the flesh,' and therefore liable to be classed with the 'stiff-necked and uncircumcised *in heart and ears*, who do always resist the Holy Ghost,' then it is at once established, that this outward sign under the Law was not *inseparably* connected with, or accompanied by, the inward thing signified, i. e. the spiritual circumcision, which it so significantly symbolized. But as we have seen that circumcision under the one dispensation, answers to baptism under the other dispensation, then, according to the analogy of Divine dispensations, the conclusion is legitimately clear and forcible, that, if circumcision under the former did not necessarily confer regeneration, neither does baptism under the latter. Which brings us to the second branch of our general proposition.

2. A Christian may be outwardly baptized with water, without being inwardly baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Many well meaning, but uninformed persons, may be ready to conclude that this is unnecessary labor—an undertaking wholly gratuitous. They cannot even anticipate its denial, much less its refutation, by any sober, intelligent, common-sense christian. They conclude, very naturally, that the proposition is in accordance with scripture, with analogy, with established facts, with reason, and common sense. Yet, strange as it may appear, there are not a few at the present time, who seem to believe that there is some mysterious efficacy in the mechanical observance of certain religious ordinances. Especially do some, both teachers and professors of christianity, attach as much importance and efficacy to outward baptism now, as ever the ancient Jews did to the 'circumcision that was outward in the flesh.' *These* taught, 'except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.' *Those* re-echo the same sentiment, only in a little different dress, and declare, 'except ye be baptized ye cannot be saved.' That this is no idle charge, will appear from the following instances. The deluded, superstitious Papist teaches, that "baptism brings to the soul sanctifying grace—washes away the guilt of original and actual sin—gives a new and spiritual

birth—makes us christians—entitles us to actual grace—preserves the sanctity gotten at baptism, and gives a right to eternal happiness.”\* The high-toned Episcopalian declares, that baptism ‘washes away the guilt of former sin and imparts the Holy Ghost,’—‘conveys the supernatural assistance of the Spirit of God,’—‘confers justification,’—‘not only washes away the guilt of all former sins, both original and actual, and procures acceptance with God, but also communicates a portion of divine grace,’—‘was invariably the instrument, or external form, by which justification was conveyed,’—‘to all persons by the holy mystery of baptism duly initiated to christianity . . . : the grace of God’s Holy Spirit certainly is bestowed,’—‘those who are baptized are immediately translated from the curse of Adam to the grace of Christ; the original guilt which they brought into the world is mystically washed away; and they receive forgiveness of actual sins which they may themselves have committed; they become reconciled to God, partakers of the Holy Ghost, and heirs of eternal happiness.’† And last, though not least, ‘in his own conceit,’ is the self-styled, arrogant Reformer,‡ like Daniel’s ‘little horn,’ having ‘a mouth speaking great things.’ He has, by his wonderful sagacity, and transcendent wisdom, recently discovered that, ‘under the government of the Lord Jesus, there is an institution for the forgiveness of sins, like there was no institution since the world began.’ He avers, that ‘The Apostle Peter . . . taught them, (the Jews) that they were not forgiven their sins by faith, but by an act of faith, by a believing immersion into the Lord Jesus;’—that ‘Christian Immersion . . . is inseparably connected with the remission of sins;’—that ‘Remission of sins cannot, in this life, be received or enjoyed previous to immersion;’—that ‘It is not our faith in God’s promise of remission, but our going down into the water that obtains the remission of sins;’—that ‘Immersion’ . . . is ‘essential to immediate pardon and acceptance;’—that ‘Regeneration and Immersion are two names for the same thing;’—that ‘Conversion, Regeneration, and Immersion, are terms all descriptive of the same thing;’ that ‘Regeneration is the act of being born; hence its connection ALWAYS with water;’—that ‘Immersion saves us, by cleansing . . . the conscience from its guilt;’—that ‘In Immersion a person is purged from all his former sins;’—and that ‘When the baptized believer rises from out of the water, is born of water, enters the world a second time, he enters it as INNOCENT, as CLEAN, as UNSPOTTED as an ANGEL.’

These kindred theories of this triumvirate of Bishops, indicate plainly, the same origin. All bearing the same family likeness, with a trifling difference only in provincial dialect, yet it may

\* Bishop Hays.

† Bishop Tomline.

‡ A. Campbell, Bishop of Bethany.

well be said of each, surely thou art of the mother of harlots, 'for thy speech bewrayeth thee.' And so far from the modern Reformer's being entitled to a *Patent Right* for his New Discovery, that his Babylonian brother, and his Episcopal kinsman, were, by patrimonial inheritance, in full possession and enjoyment of it long before either he, or his father before him, had existence. But whether ancient or modern—whether from Rome or from Bethany, such vague theories—such vain absurdities—such 'moon-struck reveries,' as the potency of baptismal water to cleanse the conscience, and the *inseparable* connection between outward baptism and inward regeneration, and the like, need only the refulgent light of God's word, with a little sober reason and common sense, to dissipate them in a moment. Let us examine this theory a little.

1. *It is contrary to Scripture.* The spiritual purification of the soul is positively ascribed to the blood of Christ, and the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; the one as the *procuring* cause, the other as the *efficient* agent. It cannot, therefore, for one moment, be attributed to the *physical act* of immersion, in any mode whatever. The language of scripture is very plain and decided. 'The blood of Jesus Christ *cleanseth* us from all sin.'—'Unto him that loved us, and *washed us from our sins in his own blood.*' The white-attired Saints that John saw, 'have *washed* their robes, and made them white *in the blood of the Lamb.*' The divine *agent* in the work of internal purification is plainly identified. 'That which is born of *the Spirit*, is spirit.'—'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but *by the Holy Ghost.*' 'Not by might, nor by power, but *by my Spirit*, saith the Lord of hosts.' The saints are 'Elect . . . through sanctification of *the Spirit.*'—'chosen to salvation, through sanctification of *the Spirit.*'—'It is *the Spirit* that quickeneth,'—'hath quickened us together with Christ.' This is but a small specimen out of a great number which might be multiplied to an indefinite length. But brief and pointed selection is our object, and not enumeration.

This subject will present itself to great advantage in another form. It is well known to be a scriptural usage of great frequency, to ascribe salvation, *synecdochically*—i. e. taking a part for the whole, or conversely, the whole for a part—sometimes to faith—to repentance—to conversion—to regeneration, and to love; but to the *rite* of baptism, or the *mode* of that rite, or any other *costume* of religion—never. A few instances may suffice. In the following passages, salvation is ascribed to faith, or believing:—'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt *be saved;*'—'He that *believeth* on the Son hath *everlasting life;*'—'By him all that *believe* are *justified;*'—'Through his name who-

soever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins;’—‘Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.’ Let us next see the inseparable connection between repentance and remission of sins. ‘Repent . . . that your sins may be blotted out;’—‘It behoved Christ to suffer . . . that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations;’—‘Him hath God exalted . . . to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins;’ ‘Repent therefore . . . if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee;’—‘If thy brother . . . repent, forgive him.’ This sentiment being fully established, the opposing theory, of course, falls to the ground.

But do not some passages seem to justify the opposing sentiment? Do they not appear to establish the inseparability between baptism and remission of sins, or salvation? Not if ‘the scripture cannot be broken:’—not unless it palpably contradicts the point just now so plainly and so forcibly established. If the book be divine, it does not contradict itself. If it did, it were no record from God. A very brief attention to some of the passages relied on by modern reformation to support its baseless fabric, is all we can afford within our short limits.

John 3:5. ‘Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’ It is maintained from these words, ‘that a birth from water is immediately associated with a birth from the Spirit; that a birth from both one and the other is represented, as being a necessary qualification for the kingdom of Heaven; and that an inseparable union of the two may thence plainly be inferred.’ This does not follow from the text. That the emphasis is to be laid on *the Spirit* and not on *water*, is evident from what Christ immediately and guardedly subjoins in the next verse: ‘*That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit.*’ There is nothing here said about water; the mention of it is entirely dropped, and the agency of the Spirit alone insisted upon. To ‘be born of water,’ is to be baptized, as emblematic of purification. And to ‘enter’ legally and visibly as a member of the terrestrial, professional, or temporal kingdom of grace, a man must be ritually, professionally, or externally purified by baptismal water. But to enter into the celestial, ultimate or eternal kingdom of glory, he must be internally, or actually sanctified, regenerated, by the Spirit of God. By the phrase, ‘born of water,’ we understand that, in a figurative sense, we are brought into a new state of things—into a new state of *relative* existence, to Christ and his Church, new privileges and obligations, new associations and services. To infer from this text that the external rite of baptism introduces the subject of it into a *spiritual* and *saving* relation, is to adopt the old error of the Jews respecting circumcision.

Mark 16:16. 'He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.' Here are two propositions: in the first, FAITH and BAPTISM are *both* specified: in the second, UNBELIEF *alone* is specified; and respecting *the omission* of baptism, not a word is said. The form of the two propositions are studiously varied. Christ does not say, *He that believeth not and is NOT BAPTIZED, shall be damned.* But why the omission, if baptism have such an important place in the christian scale—if it have such an inseparable conjunction with regeneration that the one cannot subsist distinct from the other? Why this marked difference in the form of the two propositions? As we may be sure that Christ neither *says* nor *omits* any thing without ample reason, who so adventurous as to affirm that the *omission* of baptism in the second proposition was merely *accidental*? We infer from our Lord's studiously varied phraseology, that he intended to indicate a radical difference between *faith* and *baptism*, in regard to their importance; that the one is *essential* to salvation, but that the other is *not essential* to it. If the two were indissolubly united, then the one would be just as essential to salvation as the other; and so no one could enter into Heaven without baptism: in other words, he that is *not baptized*, quite as much as he that *believeth not*, must be damned. 'But our Lord makes' no such assertion: so far from it, even while in the very act of enjoining the baptismal rite, even while associating its due reception with faith itself, he industriously refrains from annexing the penalty of damnation to the omission of baptism; thus tacitly insinuating, that regeneration, which he himself peremptorily declares to be *essential* to salvation, may exist without the external symbolic ordinance.'

Another text in general requisition for the same purpose, is Acts 2:38. 'Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins,' &c. The use which the *perverters* of this passage make, is to convey the idea to the ignorant multitude, that they must be baptized as an *essential* to the *obtaining* remission of sins. The preposition *for*, (εἰς) connected with '*remission*' they interpret to mean, *Conducive to—In hope of—In expectation of* the remission of sins. Whereas, the proper meaning is, they were to be baptized *for* i. e. *Because of—In consequence of—In consideration of*, the remission of sins received in consequence of repentance. By a simple collocation, or easy transposition of the words, they will read thus: 'Repent — for the remission of sins, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.' This shows that remission of sins is in *consequence* of repentance, and baptism is urged *as a suitable mode of testifying* that repentance; because an instituted rite of entering into a new visible

relation to Christ, the true Messiah. This expresses the very same sentiment already established by other passages, shewing the inseparable connection between repentance and remission; and also harmonizes the apostle Peter with himself on another occasion, shortly after, where he preaches the same encouraging truth without the mention of baptism at all: '*Repent . . . that your sins may be blotted out.*' Acts 3:19.

It is further contended that Acts 22:16. is clear proof of the indissoluble connection of baptism and remission of sins—'*Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.*' But has it not been positively proved that our sins are cleansed, or washed away, in the blood of Christ? How then can this same effect be attributed to the baptism of water? The words, however, teach no such sentiment. By one of the most common figures in rhetoric, the *sign* and the *thing signified* are conversely and indifferently used in our ordinary forms of speech. Here is one at hand, just to fit the case before us: David when he prays, '*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean,*' figuratively ascribes to the *sign* what evidently belonged to the thing signified. So this is doubtless the meaning of Ananias' address to Saul:—'*Arise,*' or, literally, '*stand up,*' or, '*standing again,*' (*ανασταξ*) '*and be baptized,*' in testimony of your faith in Christ, and as a sign, or token, of being cleansed from the guilt and defilement of your sins, by the pardoning grace of God, and the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

Again: Titus 3:5. '*According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*' Great reliance is placed on this text to show that baptism and regeneration are terms of equal force, and therefore denote the same thing. This, however, is far from being the truth. The phrase *λουτρον*, *washing*, has reference either to the *fluid* with which the rite of baptism is administered; or the *action* by which it is performed; or the *vessel* containing the fluid. Let us suppose the latter, as being most agreeable to the general usage of the Greek language. The term *laver*, according to the ablest philologists, is the proper translation. Of the laver and its use, we have an account in Ex. 30:18—21. It was '*for Aaron and his sons*'—not to *immerse* or *bathe* their bodies *in*, but to—'*wash their hands and feet THEREAT.*' Let, then, '*the washing of regeneration,*' which is evidently figurative, have reference to the rite of baptism; what more can it prove, *than* that baptism is emblematic of purification by the Holy Spirit. '*It is the external profession of those intentions of the renewing of the Holy Spirit, mentioned in connection with it, is the prime mover and promoter; the outward and visible sign, of which the actuating principle is the inward and spiritual grace.*' But there is another

view of this passage, which is very plausible, if not the real one. 'It is well known that the conjunction (*καί*) is often used exegetically for *even*, or *namely*; and the nature of the subject requires it to be taken in this connection: since we cannot admit, without affronting the general tenor of the scripture, that God, according to his mercy, saves us by baptism—or that an external rite is an essential part of our salvation—or that the spiritual renovation is an immediate effect of it.' With this exegetical view of the text it will read thus: 'According to his mercy he saved us by *the washing of regeneration*, **EVEN** (*καί*) *the renewing of the Holy Ghost*.' The renewing of the Holy Ghost belongs to the scriptural birth, both in its *origin* and *progress*. This spiritual birth is allusively expressed by the periphrasis, '*the washing of regeneration*.' But whether the term (*καί*) be used in a *connective* or an *explanatory* way, it does not follow that baptism, a mere external rite, and a physical act too, is instrumental to our salvation.

Once more, and we have done with this investigation. 1 Pet. 3:21. 'The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth now save us,' &c. Does this attribute to the mere *water* a cleansing potency? That were a vain superstition, against which, Peter carefully and expressly warns us. As if aware that some might pervert his meaning, and form the erroneous conclusion of *water* baptism effecting our salvation, he particularly cautions us against such an inference. He tells us expressly, that it is not the *outward* baptism,—'not the putting away the filth of the flesh,'—that doth *save us*, but something internal and spiritual, which he says is 'the answer of a good conscience towards God;' the same that Paul describes, 'having our *hearts sprinkled* from an evil conscience.' We here see plainly in what light the outward form of baptism was considered. It was *a washing of the flesh*—an outward sign of an inward spiritual grace; the saving effect of which is attributed not to the washing—not to the external rite—not to the outward *profession*, but having 'a good conscience towards God,' the resurrection of Christ being the *basis* both of christian hope, and a sincere baptismal confession.

One word here respecting *Immersion*, which makes such a figure on the armor of one of the Babylonian fraternity. It is a term that no one has ever yet seen in the Bible. It is from the Latin word *immersio*, with the letter *n* added, to make it *English*. It has no word in the New Testament of which it is the *exclusive* translation. It is not the proper *mode* of baptism, because it does not correctly represent the intention, or convey the proper instruction intended by that ordinance, which is spiritual *purification* by the *effusion—outpouring—or shedding forth*, of

the Spirit's influences. All on whom the *Spirit was poured out*, are most explicitly affirmed to have been *BAPTIZED with the Spirit*. There is no doubt of this. So the promise in Acts 1:5. βαπτισθησθε, 'ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost,' was accomplished—not by *immersion*, but by *effusion*,—'he hath shed forth, ἐξέχεε, this which ye now see and hear.' So likewise, 'On the Gentiles was *poured out*, ἐκέχυται, the gift of the Holy Ghost,' which is the same as to 'be baptized with the Holy Ghost,' and 'the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he (ἐξέχεεν) shed on us abundantly.' Clearly, then, the βαπτισμα, *baptism*, is accomplished by *effusion*, and *not* by immersion. Set your foot at this point, and you may bid defiance to all opposition. As baptism is a figure of regeneration, and like all scriptural emblems of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is always spoken of as administered from above, never from beneath, so ought the ordinance to be administered to its recipient in an *erect posture*. Thus did Saul of Tarsus,—'He *arose*, (ἀναστὰς) and was baptized.' The word in its proper meaning is, 'To stand again, to rise from a sitting, or recumbent posture.' It is so translated in the following passages: Mark 14:60. Acts 1:15, 5:34, 11:28, and 13:19. The disciples too, on Pentecost, were baptized with the Spirit's baptism, in an *erect posture*—in 'the house where they were sitting.' In short, we are assured from competent authority, that 'there is no absolute certainty from usage, that the word βαπτίζω, when applied to designate the *rite of baptism*, means of course to *immerse* or *plunge*.\* The term βαπτω is never employed when this rite is designated. But βαπτίζω and its derivatives are exclusively employed, where the *rite of baptism is to be designated* in any form whatever, and in this case, βαπτω seems to be purposely, as well as habitually excluded.\* Paul, in treating of Levitical ablutions mentions the '*divers washings*,' διαφορῶν βαπτισμῶν, properly, *different sorts of baptisms*; and tells us plainly, that *sprinkling* was the mode of one of these baptisms: 'Moses ... took the blood of calves and of goats, with water ... and *sprinkled* ... all the people,' Heb. 9:10,19. It is further declared by the able authority just referred to, that 'we find no example among all the Levitical washings, or ablutions, where *immersion* is required.\* Baptism administered by *pouring*, *sprinkling*, or *effusion*, is therefore, not only the correct mode, but is likewise more convenient, more decent, more significant, and more expressive, than immersion.

We scarcely have room to notice a few more objectionable features of the Babylonian theory.

2. *It is contrary to the practice of the primitive Church.* It is a plain fact, that appears on the face of the christian history, and

\* Professor Stuart.

pervades the whole spirit and design of the christian dispensation, that adult converts were required to believe that Jesus is the Christ before they were baptized; and the apostles consequently baptized them as regenerated persons; for as believers they were born of God; as it is written, 'He that *believeth* that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God,' and therefore, is regenerated, according to the plain testimony of scripture.

3. *This scheme is contradicted by indubitable facts both ancient and modern.* Witness the cases, on the one hand, of Judas and Simon Magus, of Ananias and Sapphira, of Hymenius and Philetus, of Phygellus and Hermogenes, and thousands of others, from that time to the present, both dipt and sprinkled, who never experienced the inward grace signified by their baptism. On the other hand, witness the cases of 'the man sick of the palsy,' the woman 'that was a sinner,' the centurion Cornelius, the devout Lydia, the Ethiopian Eunuch, Zaccheus, and Saul of Tarsus—all these were regenerated, and their sins remitted, *before* baptism. Consequently baptism and regeneration are not inseparable. The penitent malefactor on the cross went to Heaven without baptism, having no opportunity before his death to obtain it. And such, doubtless, has been the condition of thousands since, who were regenerated and taken there under similar circumstances. Indeed, let the theory be carried out to its legitimate length, both negatively and positively, and it sends millions of hypocrites to Heaven on the ground of their baptism, while it equally brings down inevitable damnation upon hundreds of millions, because they died unbaptized. A scheme fraught with such mischief ought not to find patrons among sensible men.

4. *It is repugnant to analogy and common sense.* The Levitical Church and the Gospel Church are the same in substance, differing only in forms, or emblematic rites and ceremonies. Had the former her two classes of emblematic rites, the one denoting *purification* and the other the emblem of *atonement*? So has the latter, in more simple, but not less significant form. She has her Christian Baptism and Dominical Supper, emblematic of the same things, i. e. purification and atonement. But as the former could not *of themselves*, 'make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience,' so neither can the latter. The analogy is the same in both cases. A scheme, therefore, so at war with rational analogy, with observed facts, with primitive christian usage, with scripture testimony, and with common sense, making a *physical act*, as water baptism is, to be a certain medium of a *spiritual effect*, is about as congruous as to imagine that a substance is the immediate effect of a shadow,

and not only liable to the charge of folly, but also the derision of infidels, and ought, therefore, to be as strenuously exploded as a mere unauthorized human speculation, which rests not on a more solid basis than the unscriptural and unintelligible dogmas of transubstantiation and consubstantiation.

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The author "appended no practical remarks or inferences—supposing it already too long" for our pages.—Ed.