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SERMON CXI.

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NECESSITY OF DIVINE INFLUENCE.

ZECCHARIAH, iv. 6.—Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

WHEN Cyrus, king of Persia, issued his decree, giving the captive Jews permission to return to their own land, and rebuild their city and temple, a pious remnant, under Zerubbabel, gladly availed themselves of the opportunity. Their enterprise, however, involved great difficulties. They were few in number; their city and temple were in ruins, and could not be rebuilt without great labor and expense; and they were surrounded by numerous and powerful enemies. Shortly after they commenced their work, their adversaries, in a spirit of most determined hostility, endeavored by stratagem to interrupt it. After years of unavailing opposition, the rulers of Samaria, by gross misrepresentation and falsehood, procured from the Persian monarch a decree for the suspension of the work. To the great grief of Zerubbabel and his pious associates, they were obliged, after years of labor and peril, to abandon their undertaking. About three years afterward, by the reproofs and remonstrances of the prophets sent among them, they were brought again to apply themselves to the rebuilding of the temple. The writer of the text was commanded to encourage Zerubbabel and the Jews to prosecute their work, and assure them of success. Had the completion of it depended solely on them, their own weakness, the magnitude of the work, and the number and power of their enemies, might well have produced despondency. But God, by the prophet, assured them that the work was His, and should infallibly be accomplished. He directed the prophet to go to Zerubbabel, and say, for the encouragement of himself and his associates, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Accordingly, he influenced the Persian kings successively to favor their undertaking, defeated the opposition of their enemies, and enabled them to persevere till the temple was completed, and his worship in it restored. The whole history of this work, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, is a complete verification of the text. Nor has its truth been evinced only in those events. The temple at Jerusalem was a type of the church of God. In the erection of this spiritual building, he has from the first employed, and his word assures us that he will continue to employ, instruments

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which in themselves are utterly powerless. By mere human might no soul ever was or will be converted, and no saint has grown, or will grow in grace. Without the special blessing of God, all efforts to introduce pure religion into pagan lands, and augment its power where it already exists, will be unavailing. This is more than implied in the text.

The import of this inspired passage we shall endeavor to place distinctly before you, by showing,

I. THE REALITY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE MEANS OF GRACE; and,

II. THAT THEY OWE ALL THEIR EFFICACY TO SPECIAL DIVINE INFLUENCE.

That means are employed in the conversion of sinners, and the increasing sanctification of the saints, are positions supported both by Scripture and fact. And equally evident is it from the same authority, that revealed truth is the chief instrument employed to produce these blessed effects. It is written on the pages of that volume, which was sent from above to teach the science of salvation,—“The law of the Lord is perfect, *converting the soul*—Of his own will begat he us with the *word of truth*—Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the *word of God*, which liveth and abideth forever—I am not ashamed of the *Gospel of Christ*, for it is the *power of God* to salvation—Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the *word of God*.” Christ, the true and faithful witness, prayed for his followers, “Sanctify them through *thy truth; thy word is truth*.” These passages teach, beyond all contradiction, that revealed truth is the grand instrument in the production and increase of holiness.

The methods by which Divine truth is made to produce these effects, however, are exceedingly various. The dispensations of Divine Providence—both benign and afflictive, the religious education of children, Christian example and effort, the reading of the sacred Scriptures, prayer, and the preaching of the Gospel, are all employed in calling attention to Divine truth, and in fastening it upon the conscience and the heart. By all these and other methods have sinners been roused from spiritual slumber, convinced of their exceeding criminality, and converted to God. Among these means of conveying Divine truth to the mind, and rendering it effectual to the conversion of the soul, the preaching of the Gospel and prayer occupy a place of paramount importance. “Faith cometh by *hearing*.” “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Prayer, too,—humble, believing, fervent, and submissive, especially when offered in concert,—is attended with unspeakable efficacy. Hence the numerous promises made to prayer in the sacred Scriptures, the answers to it there recorded, and precepts like the following; “Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest till he establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” But enough has been said to show that God has appointed means of grace—means which he has in every age employed in the conversion of sinners and the increase of holiness in his people, and which he will continue to employ for the attainment of these momentous ends, till “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.”

And in the simple fact that these are Divinely appointed means, we have proof complete of their great importance. The same wisdom which devised, and benevolence which adopted the stupendous scheme of redemption, have made the best selection of means for its accomplishment. Nor is it difficult, even with a partial knowledge of the nature of God's government, to see their admirable adaptation to produce the desired result. What the Scriptures reveal concerning the character of God and his government both providential:

and moral, the astonishing exercise of his benevolence in providing salvation for sinners, the terms on which it is offered, their duty and their danger, and the awful retributions of eternity, are eminently calculated to arrest their attention, to awaken fear, and influence them to make an immediate and unreserved surrender of themselves to God. And the benign tendency of such revelations is vastly augmented when they are pressed upon the sinner's conscience by the tenderness and importunity of Christian friendship, and the significant look and impressive tones of the faithful ambassadors of the Lord Jesus.

The importance of these means, with reference to the conversion of sinners and their advancement in holiness till matured for heaven, is likewise evinced by a long series of indisputable facts. God could, indeed, accomplish his purposes of mercy without them. And were he disposed thus to employ his power, he could, without the labor of man, transform barren wastes and dark untrodden forests into fruitful fields. He could, too, have raised the temple from its ruins, and restored his worship in its hallowed courts, without the instrumentality of his servants. And it is equally true that he *can convert men* and mature them for glory without means and instruments; but when and where has he thus employed his power? The history of all nations unblest with the light of revelation, and of communities nominally Christian, among whom the Heavenly record has been disregarded, and the Sabbath has made no pause in secular pursuits and amusements, and the voice of the faithful ministers of Jesus has seldom or never been heard, confirms the inspired declaration, "Where no vision is, the people perish." Where have sinners been converted to God, but by the presentation of revealed truth to the mind by means of the benevolent efforts of the pious, a religious tract or book, or the written or preached word? Was a moral wilderness ever converted into the garden of the Lord without the labors of the spiritual husbandman? And after having been thus transformed, has it flourished and brought forth the fruits of righteousness without religious culture? These blessed effects never have been, and never will be produced by other means, because God will not bring his own institutions into disrepute. From this view of the reality and importance of the means of grace, we pass to show,

II. THAT THEY OWE ALL THEIR EFFICACY TO SPECIAL DIVINE INFLUENCE.

This is evident,

1. *From what the Scriptures teach concerning the character of man by nature.* They do not represent him as needing merely the urgency of those motives which are embodied in the system of revealed truth, and the common influences of the Holy Spirit, to subdue his rebellious will and fit him for Heaven. They do not, indeed, deny that he may have a high sense of justice and honor, and possess humane and social affections in a high degree; but they *do teach*, in language which it would seem admits neither of denial nor evasion, that his moral depravity is *entire*. The testimony of Him, who knows the character of man perfectly, and whose truth is everlasting, is, that "The whole world lieth in wickedness;—There is none that doeth good, no, not one:—And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This total reign of sin in the human heart was not peculiar to those who lived before the flood. Nearly two thousand years after that event, it was written by the pen of inspiration, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." An inspired apostle also affirms, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." From this fountain

of impurity proceed all the unholy actions of men ; nay, it pollutes and renders unacceptable to God their most specious performances. Hence it is written, "The ploughing of the wicked is sin ;—The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord ;—They that are in the flesh cannot please God." And can any thing short of Divine grace improve such a heart as this ? What will means, unaccompanied by the power of God, do towards prostrating the strong empire of sin in the soul ? Can unparalleled deceit lead to holy ingenuousness ?—desperate wickedness, to conformity to God's law ?—enmity to his character, to love ? and death in sin, to newness of life ? It is clear as a sun-beam, that the heart, unsubdued by Divine power, would resist all the motives to holiness which heaven, earth, and hell could furnish. Its renovation never has been, and never will be effected by human might ; and only by the special agency of the Holy Spirit.

2. That means are rendered efficacious only by special Divine influence, is evident from the fact, that *the Scriptures ascribe to God the entire glory of the sinner's salvation, and of the predicted triumph of truth and righteousness in the earth.* The means selected by infinite wisdom for the attainment of these most important ends are, in the estimation of a vainglorious world, weak and contemptible. This fact, with the reason for it, is thus stated by an inspired apostle :—"God has chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught the things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence." This Divine procedure, though foolish in the eyes of men, is worthy of God. Had he chosen means and instruments for the accomplishment of his stupendous purposes of mercy distinguished for what commands respect and veneration among men, the effect produced by the unseen efficient cause would doubtless be chiefly ascribed to them. That they are entitled to no share of the glory, attached to the effects produced by them, the oracles of truth abundantly testify. Why else is so much said of salvation by grace to the praise and glory of God, and the utter exclusion of boasting on the part of the creature ? Why those man-abasing and God-exalting interrogations, "Who maketh thee to differ from another ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive ? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it ?" And why else is it written, "Let no man glory in men—He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord ?" Moreover, we are taught that the objects of God's electing love, are "predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will ; to the *praise of the glory of his grace.*" The prayer of his redeemed people in every age has been, and while eternal ages shall roll will be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." The Apostle Paul, having shown that by the church redeemed from among men God would show unto the principalities and powers of heaven his manifold wisdom, concludes a most fervent prayer for the Ephesians with the following devout ascription of praise. "Unto him be glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.—Amen."

That the Lord Jesus is destined to receive the honors of universal empire and everlasting renown ;—that "He shall have dominion from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth ;—that all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord ; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him," no believer in Divine revelation will deny. That in

recovering his empire over our world's population which "the prince of the air" has usurped, he will employ means, we have already shown. But to whom will the glory of the conquest belong? to the instruments, or the hand that wields them? The evangelical prophet, when predicting the universal reign of the Prince of peace, says, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." And will not the undivided glory of the work belong to him! Let the anthem of the whole redeemed church in heaven answer. "They cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.—Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might be unto our God for ever and ever." And the whole church on earth and in heaven unite in the doxology,—“Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever.”

3. The Scriptures most explicitly and forcibly teach *that all the holiness consequent on the use of means is produced by special Divine agency.* Take the following as a specimen of multiplied passages inculcating this truth. "So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase." "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy *He* saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Such passages certainly prove beyond all contradiction, that the renewal of the heart is not produced by the power of natural causes, but by the special agency of the Holy Spirit. This truth, however, which has arrayed against it all the prejudice, and pride, and enmity of the carnal mind, should be presented in the clearest light possible. Allow me, therefore, to call your attention for one moment to the stress which the inspired writers lay on the power by which the change under consideration is produced. It is described by language borrowed from those works of God which furnish the most striking exhibitions of his power. What more stupendous acts of power has he ever exhibited than those of communicating sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead, the instantaneous production of light in the midst of total darkness, and the creation of all things? And yet these are the acts by which the renewal of the heart in the Divine image is described. "And in that day shall the *deaf* hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the *blind* shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness." "You hath *He quickened*, who were *dead* in trespasses and sins." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Nay,—the renewal of the heart in the Divine image he denominates a *new creation*; "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." "That ye may know—what is the *exceeding greatness of His power* to us-ward who *believe*, according to the working of his *mighty power*."

On these arguments we rest the proposition, that the means of grace owe all their efficacy to special Divine influence. With this truth, however, and indeed with every other which God has revealed, we have something more to do than merely to establish it by argument. It is adapted to make us holy; nor can we innocently fail to apply it to this end. Let us then attend to some practical deductions from the one we have just considered. From it we learn,

1. *That the only hope in regard to the salvation of sinners is in the sovereign mercy of God.* The means of grace to which multitudes trust while they only abuse them have no efficacy. They are indeed important. Without them the attainment of salvation is not to be expected. The enjoyment of them,

however, is no certain evidence that those thus favored will "inherit the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory;" for thousands exalted to heaven by privilege have sunk down to hell. No degree of *that attention* which the unrenewed give to means, and no degree of anxiety which they feel about their souls, furnish any certain evidence that they will finally be saved. From every degree of conviction multitudes have gone back and perished. We do not say they would not be saved were they to do their duty. Were they to use means with a penitent, believing heart, instead of abusing them, they certainly would. Their sin consists, not in maintaining the external form of duty, but in doing it with unholy affections. They are wholly destitute of love to God, of repentance for sin, and faith in Jesus Christ, without which it is impossible to please him. So long as they refuse to submit to him and from the heart obey his requirements, all their actions so far as they are of a moral nature are an offence to his holiness. Of course nothing which they do has any promise of a blessing. They obstinately refuse to submit to him, and will for ever, unless subdued by divine power. This God is under no obligation to exert. Of course the only hope in their case is in his sovereign mercy.

Do you say, as some did who heard the humbling doctrines of the Gospel from the lips of its adorable author; "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" If you do we cannot innocently neglect to disclose your danger, and point you to the only place of safety. Do you say, Then we may as well sit down in despair and neglect the means of grace as attend upon them? Nothing we have said warrants such a conclusion. If you thus pervert the truth of God, and convert the word ordained to life into an instrument of death, you must answer it to Him. Observe, we are not now speaking of your *duty*, but of the only ground of hope that you will do it and be saved. It is your immediate duty to love God, repent of sin, trust in Christ, and live to his glory. This is fairly within the limits of your ability; and if you do it, the veracity of God is pledged for your salvation. But this your stubborn hearts will not do unless constrained by Almighty power. You are therefore thrown, ruined and helpless, on the sovereign mercy of God. If he leave you, as he justly may, to follow the inclinations of your own deceitful and desperately wicked hearts, you will as certainly perish as he sits upon the throne of the universe; for the rescue of the soul from perdition is not effected by human might, but by his Spirit. If he please, he can soften your obdurate heart and make you an heir of glory. In the hands of this holy, just, merciful, and sovereign God I leave you, beseeching you in Christ's stead to become reconciled to him.

2. The subject we have contemplated suggests *one important reason why the means of grace are attended with so little success*. Too much reliance is often placed on them, and too little on God. Whenever this is the case, very little is to be expected from them. He will not give his glory to the instruments by which he works. When the necessity of special divine influence to render means successful is overlooked and reliance is placed on human power, he withholds his blessing, disappoints the misplaced confidence of his people, and rebukes their presumption. How did he disappoint the hopes of the projectors of the first mission to the Society Islands! The enterprise was marked by great zeal, and the most confident hopes of immediate success. These hopes were to a great extent evidently founded on mistaken ideas of the character and inhabitants of these islands, the nature of their government, the strength of their attachment to their system of idolatry, and especially on the readiness with which missionaries offered themselves for the service, and the

interest of the Christian community in the undertaking. No one who has attentively read the history of that mission can doubt that, connected with the Christian benevolence and faith by which the enterprise was distinguished, there was a criminal reliance on human efforts. Hence God withheld his aid, and for a long time it was visited with most appalling difficulties and trials. One calamity after another befell the mission, till the eyes of its friends were withdrawn from every other ground of confidence and intently fixed on God. When the pride of human effort was brought down to the dust, he took the work into his own hand, and the revolting system of idolatry was soon overthrown, and great numbers were made to feel the saving power of the Gospel. The failure of other similar enterprises, and the little success with which the means of grace are often attended, are doubtless to be ascribed chiefly to the unhallowed confidence which is placed in the wisdom and power of man. Brethren, in all our efforts to cultivate personal piety and promote the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, let us beware that we do not defeat them by presumptuous self-confidence.

3. From what has been said we learn *the great importance of giving due honor to the Holy Spirit*. Since the means of grace produce no saving results unless accompanied by his special influence, our dependence on him should at all times be felt and acknowledged. Nothing can more directly tend to arrest his sacred influences, than to withhold from him the honor to which he is entitled. Never were the obligations of the American church to the Holy Comforter greater than at the present period. The numerous and powerful revivals of religion, which within a few months past have brought such large accessions to her communion, form a new and most blessed epoch in her history. To the Author of this glorious work she owes an everlasting debt of gratitude. To refuse to acknowledge it would be highly criminal and dangerous. Ingratitude so base would in all probability be followed by dangerous error in doctrine, practices unauthorized by the word of God, the utter termination or fearful corruption of those glorious revivals with which our land is now blessed. And we cannot rid ourselves of the unwelcome apprehension that these dread evils may yet be experienced. While we rejoice in the belief that much of the obscurity which has heretofore rested on the subject of human obligation has been removed, and the duty of immediate reconciliation to God is urged with great ability and faithfulness, and honored with signal success, we fear that the indispensable necessity of the special influences of the Holy Spirit to incline sinners to do their duty, is too much overlooked. A necessity it is, to be sure, created and prolonged by their own voluntary rebellion. Still it is such as to suspend their eternal destiny upon the sovereign pleasure of Jehovah. And it is as important to them as salvation to see and feel their dependence. And we do fear that in this day of mercy some sentiments are gaining currency which are little adapted to abase human pride, and render due honor to the Holy Ghost. In these circumstances let the watchmen of Zion exercise the utmost vigilance. Let a note of alarm be sounded in the ear of the churches, lest being dishonored and grieved he should retire, and his work among us should cease. Should such a day arrive, the church, like Sampson when shorn of his locks, may go forth to her warfare as aforetime, but like him she will find that her strength is gone, that without the assistance of God's insulted spirit she can do nothing. Let none fear that a faithful presentation of the cardinal doctrine of man's absolute dependence on God for holiness will cut the nerve of exertion. If presented as it should be, in connection with his entire freedom and accountability, it will discourage no endea-

vors but those of pride and self-righteousness ; and such efforts cannot be discouraged too soon.

4. The subject we have contemplated teaches us that *when the means of God's appointment are diligently used in humble reliance on him, his blessing may confidently be expected.* He may for a season withhold it in order to try the faith, and patience, and humility of his people ; but in due time they "shall reap if they faint not." The diligent use of the means which he has appointed, in humble dependence on him to render them efficacious, honors his wisdom, and benevolence, and authority, and power. Did success depend solely on them or on an arm of flesh, we might well yield to the paralyzing influence of despair. We might then abandon the cheering hope that the spiritually dead in Christian lands will be raised to newness of life ; that the Jews will be converted from their infidelity ; and the nations long bound in the chains of ignorance, superstition, and idolatry emancipated and introduced into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. But is any thing too hard for Omnipotence ? Let the energy of the Divine Spirit be exerted on that aged sinner, who has enjoyed but abused the means of grace till the last sands of life are running, and his obdurate heart will instantly relent. Let the same influence touch that man of the world, who has hitherto lived as if he had no soul to be saved or lost, and he will renounce the service of mammon and become a devoted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let God but speak the word, and those graceless parents who have hitherto felt little or no concern about their own salvation and that of their beloved offspring, will regard both with the most intense interest. Touched by the grace of God, that child on whom the instructions, the entreaties, the prayers, and the tears of pious parents and the solemn services of the sanctuary have made little impression, will, with the repenting prodigal, cry out in the bitterness of his soul, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." Let the Spirit in his quickening influence descend on the youth of our land, and they will pause in their career of thoughtlessness and vanity, and make an unreserved consecration of themselves to God. Let him but grant pastors and teachers a heavenly unction, and their activity will be followed by the most happy results. And the same influence can with perfect ease raise up instruments and work by them, till the whole world is subdued to the obedience of the faith. And his word authorizes the belief that, when the means of his appointment are used in humble reliance on him, this influence will to a greater or less extent be granted. None, however humble their sphere, and apparently feeble their efforts to promote the cause of Christ, need despair of success. Let them diligently improve the talents committed to them, and confidently look to God for his blessing.

Say not, We are such weak instruments and have so few opportunities of usefulness, that we can do little or nothing for the honor of God and the salvation of souls. You can through Christ do all things required of you ; and the strongest can do no more. It may not be your duty to perform the same service which is demanded of others who are gifted with superior advantages for usefulness. Some are required to act a prominent, and others a more retiring, but perhaps not less useful part. Many by their contributions, and all by a holy life and importunate prayer, may render to the church of Christ essential service. Indeed, all her children must in some way or other contribute to her prosperity. There are no useless stones in this spiritual temple.

If any of you, however, who profess to desire her advancement and final triumph, wish to be excused from all instrumentality in the work, you can, on

your own responsibility, have the unenviable lot of doing nothing. Christ can do without you. If you choose, you can remain inactive till roused by some tremendous judgment of God, or by the midnight cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." And no marvel if you then make the agonizing discovery that your lamps are unfurnished with oil, and that upon you must rest for ever the curse of the servant who knew "his master's will and did it not."

SERMON CXII.

BY REV. GIDEON N. JUDD.

SINNERS URGED TO A RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

II COR. v. 20.—*We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

THIS passage exhibits by implication the standing of our race toward God as their righteous moral Ruler, and opens to our view the unsearchable riches of his condescension and love. The entreaty which it contains is based upon the implied fact, variously and explicitly stated in other parts of the inspired volume, that mankind by nature are enemies to God. Were they not in a state of alienation from him, the entreaty in the text would not only be irrelevant, but most manifestly unrighteous. While they were benevolently affected toward his character and administration, it would implicitly charge them with the fearful criminality of being adverse to both,—a supposition utterly incompatible with the infinite rectitude of Jehovah.

To exhibit the evidence that "there is none," until "born of the Spirit," that doeth good;—that all by nature are "alienated and enemies by wicked works;"—that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," in the abstract, forms no part of our present design. In the text, man's native alienation from God is assumed as a fact not to be disproved; and on the authority of this apostolic and inspired assumption, we shall proceed in God's behalf to urge the overture of reconciliation which it contains. That the reasonableness of this plea, and the importance of yielding to it may be duly appreciated, we propose,

- I. *To state the ground of the controversy between God and men.*
- II. *To consider the terms on which it may be settled,—and*
- III. *To urge a compliance with those terms.*

The ground of the controversy between God and his revolted creatures on earth is a claim for supremacy on the part of both. This, doubtless, many will be "slow of heart to believe," and others will unhesitatingly deny. It is a statement, however, characterized by the soberness of truth. God comprehends perfectly his own being and attributes, and the relations which exist between himself and all moral beings. Nor is it less certain that his unlimited excellences and righteous supremacy over them, justly entitle him to their highest love and cordial and unreserved obedience. This he authoritatively demands. Every subject of his moral kingdom he addresses, saying, "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, and thy neighbor as thyself."