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A SERMON,

DELIVERED JULY 13, 1823,

AT THE

ORGANIZATION

OF THE

THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN THE

CITY OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA.

——
BY REV. A. W. LELAND, D. D.

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REV. A. W. LELAND, D. D.

CHARLESTON, JULY 15, 1823.

SIR,

AT a meeting of the Third Presbyterian Church, held yesterday, the following resolution was adopted, which we were directed to present to you.

THOMAS NAPIER,
ROBERT B EDWARDS, } Committee.
JASPER CORNING,

" Resolved, That the thanks of this Church be presented to the Rev. Dr. LELAND, for his able and appropriate Sermon, delivered at the formation of this Church, and that a copy be requested for the press."

Extract from the Minutes,

JASPER CORNING, *Secretary.*

SERMON.



“YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.”—*MAT. V. 14.*

Such was the language of our Lord and Saviour, addressed to the little band of his disciples, whom he had associated together, as the first and original church, under the gospel dispensation. Doubtless that company of poor fishermen and publicans, was held in no very high estimation by the world around them. The eye of philosophy and political wisdom, in surveying society to search out the sources of improvement, or the elements of revolution, would have passed over them, as utterly beneath notice or consideration. Yet theirs was the most important community in the universe ; its formation was the noblest achievement of infinite wisdom and love ; and its principles and its progress were viewed by the hosts of Heaven with exultation and joy. Yes, that infant Church, so lowly and contemptible in appearance, was just commencing a career, which should fill nations with wonder and dismay ; was soon to evince an energy, and to exert an influence, before which thrones should tremble, and the pride of armies wither. It was the germ, from which soon sprang that glorious tree, whose branches overspread the earth, and whose leaves were for the healing of the nations. It was indeed the glory of the world, the only redeeming ark, floating on the wide and dreary

deluge of guilt and desolation. Hence it was that our Lord addressed his disciples, not as Gallilean peasants, obscure and powerless, destitute of all weight and efficiency in society, and occupying the humblest sphere of life; but as the most important personages in the world, as men holding a station and possessing an influence pre-eminently dignified and momentous. He addresses them as men, on whose exertions the destinies of unborn millions depended; to whose guardianship the treasure of human happiness was entrusted; and who were commissioned to cause the beams of Zion's sun to burst forth in full splendour upon the darkness of a ruined world.

And who that, from the commanding eminence which we occupy, surveys the whole extent and the grand results of the labours and instrumentality of that little church of Christ's original disciples; who that beholds them going forth in the midst of a hostile world, as lambs in the midst of wolves; unappalled by danger and death, uncrushed by the united vengeance of thrones and empires; denouncing the wrath of God against all sin; commanding men every where to repent; proclaiming a crucified Redeemer, as the only refuge from perdition; and planting the standard of the cross on every shore, amid the unceasing storm of merciless persecution; who that considers these labours of the disciples, and then surveys the amazing results of these labours in the moral revolution of the civilized world, in turning back the mighty current of human depravity, in subduing principalities and powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world; in causing the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad, and the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose; and in rescuing from the grasp of the second death millions of immortals, and

crowning them with glory in the paradise of God ; who that reflects upon these great revolutions, which the apostles were instrumental in accomplishing—can wonder that our Saviour should have addressed them as the “light of the world,” as the strength and beauty and glory of the earth.

Such they were in truth ; the great teachers and examples for fallen men ; heralds of mercy sent to propose terms of reconciliation with an angry God ; heavenly guides to lead perishing nations to the only Saviour. Their church was the pure fountain, whence have flowed a thousand rivers of love and mercy, bearing on their bosoms rich blessings to all nations and climes, and destined finally to convert this desert world into the garden of the Lord.

Such was the first Christian Church. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, was this our Zion, the city of the great king. And such in principle, spirit and tendency, is every true Christian church, a branch from the same vine, a stream from the same fountain, a member of the same body, a corps of the same noble army.

Every gospel church rests on the very foundation of the apostles, and is framed of like materials, by the same divine workmanship. There is unison of temper and purpose, and there is an entire consecration to the same holy cause. Therefore, to the members of every true church, the animating and impressive words of our Lord in the text are emphatically addressed : “Ye are the light of the world.”

There is, my brethren, a most affecting appropriateness in this passage, to the solemnity now before us. We are assembled on an occasion, in which every being in heaven and earth has a deep and awful interest.—

We are come here in the name, and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, to unite together a company of professed followers of the Redeemer, in a gospel church in the bonds of Christian fellowship, for time and for eternity. We are to set apart these men and women for the special service of God, to receive and record their solemn vows of fidelity to Christ and his cause, and witness their entrance into that holy covenant, which crucifies them to the world, and binds them to the cross forever. Who can estimate the importance of such a transaction ; who can comprehend the full measure and breadth of the results of this day's solemnity. Who is not filled with a trembling awe ; what heart does not swell with unutterable emotions, when we are about to witness the organization of a church, in which the presence and spirit of Christ will assuredly dwell, which for ages and ages shall successively be filled with penitent redeemed souls to witness a good confession, to ripen for glory and pass away to heaven, and leave their places to others ; until at last its members shall lift up their heads with joy, and hail the bright dawning of the latter day of millennial glory.

That we may properly and usefully improve the words of the text, in reference to this interesting and solemn occasion, let us, in the first place, consider the nature of a true church ; secondly, enumerate some of the blessings which are enjoyed and diffused by a true church ; and thirdly, mention some things which are essentially necessary to the prosperity, happiness and usefulness of a church of Christ.

I. We are first to attempt to unfold the scriptural character of a true church.

Few terms have been so grossly misapplied, or variously perverted as that of the church. Its most

common misapplication is when a place of religious worship is called a church, and when assembling therein is called, "going to church." Of much graver aspect, however, is the error, when any large religious denomination, embracing multitudes of unregenerate men, distinguished from others by forms and ceremonies, is called "the church."

And when a promiscuous congregation, associated by accident or preference in one place of worship, call themselves "a church," they widely depart from propriety of appellation.

The term church is used in two senses in Scripture, one general, the other particular. In its general signification, the church of Christ, is the congregated host of all the redeemed from among men, who partake his grace, are washed in his blood, and sanctified by his Spirit. All the spirits of just men made perfect, who constitute the general assembly and church of the first born, who are written in heaven; and all the children of God who are still in this world of sin and conflict; all who are born of the spirit, and are living by faith in the son of God—constitute that holy and blessed community of saints, which is called the church of Christ. Thus the whole family, in earth and heaven, is named. But the more common and interesting use of the term in Scripture, is limited to an individual society of Christians.

In this sense a church is an association of true believers, dwelling together, forming one pastoral care, united in a solemn covenant with God and each other, walking harmoniously in the faith and love and order of the Gospel, enjoying Christian ordinances and privileges, and striving with united zeal to promote the glory of God and the good of man. Such is a scriptural

genuine church. It is a spiritual community. None can rightfully belong to it, who are not created anew in Christ Jesus, and prepared for it, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewal of the Holy Ghost.—And though dissemblers and self-deceivers may intrude among the pious ; yet as the church is a spiritual community they cannot belong to it, and as its privileges and joys are spiritual and holy, they cannot be partakers in them. This we trust is a plain delineation of a gospel church. We define it to be a company of true believers, united together for mutual edification in the faith and love of Christ, and walking harmoniously in the laws and ordinances of the Lord.

II. We come secondly to consider the blessings enjoyed and diffused by a true church of Christ.

First. A true church is the visible body of Christ. Its communicants are united to him by the most intimate and endearing relations. Is he the head, they are the members—is he the vine, they are the branches—is he the foundation, they are the holy superstructure. In his church the spiritual presence of the Redeemer dwells ; he is king in Zion ; he claims her as his own heritage. The church is the special workmanship of Christ, and his spirit imparts all her vital energy. Rescued from guilt and pollution, by his redeeming grace, transformed into his image by the special agency of the Holy Spirit, robed in his righteousness, adorned with Christian graces, and animated with inextinguishable love, she stands the monument of a finished redemption.

Secondly. A true church is the garden of the Lord : the nursery for Heaven. The place she occupies is replete with heavenly gifts and blessings. There divine influences descend like dew upon the mown grass and like showers that water the earth. There the sun of righteousness sheds down his vivifying beams.

Into this vineyard of the Lord the penitent and the redeemed are transplanted by divine grace. Here surrounded by the guardianship of the Saviour, as by munitions of rocks, they grow in grace, and flourish as vines which God's right hand hath planted. Here they sit under his shadow with great delight, and his banner over them is love. Here, sheltered by his protection from the withering, blighting influence of the world, and the destroying blasts of temptation, babes in Christ are nurtured by the sincere milk of the word, and rise to the stature of perfect men. Thus amid this full assemblage of privileges, amid this accumulated affluence of spiritual provisions, the members of a true church are nourished into life and energy; bring forth the fruits of holiness, have their graces cherished, their evidences brightened, become mighty in the Scriptures and richer in experience than their teachers; shine as lights in the world, become eminently meet for the inheritance of the saints in glory, and finally pass from the church militant on earth to the church triumphant in heaven.

Thirdly. A true church possesses great riches.

In the world's estimation she is poor indeed. The church can always say with the Apostle, "silver and gold have I none." She has no worldly wealth, power or patronage; and her members are ever ready to confess, that in themselves they are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. Like the tribe of Levi, the church has no portion on earth, but the God of Israel is her portion. She is rich in spiritual possessions. On her is bestowed the full treasure of heavenly blessings in Christ Jesus. Her members have a title to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Theirs are all the treasures of wisdom

and mercy, and love, unfolded in the gospel ; even the unsearchable riches of Christ. Theirs are all the promises and consolations of the Bible. Theirs is an anchor of hope, an immoveable foundation of faith, and a fortress of defence utterly impregnable.

All the privileges of religion, the ordinances of the sanctuary, and the holy sacraments, are given exclusively to them, for their comfort and edification. Theirs alone are the joys and the benefits of public devotion, and theirs are all the praises and the songs of Zion. They possess the blessings of church fellowship and communion, and are surrounded with all the refining purifying influences of holy examples. Thus the church is poor, yet maketh many rich ; full of wants, yet possessing all things. Thus her members are rich in faith, and heirs of God even in this world. But their treasure, their glorious inheritance is beyond the grave—eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those who love him.

Fourthly. The church is an image and a beginning of heaven.

It is called in Scripture the kingdom of heaven. And as the patterns of heavenly things were given to Moses, that the holy vessels of the tabernacle, might bear their resemblance ; so all that is holy, and glorious, and happy in a church of Christ on earth, is derived from heaven, and is assimilated to heaven. He who reigns in heaven, reigns also in the church. The same principles and laws which pervade heaven, are found in every true church. The same experience which prepares a man for the communion of saints in this world, entitles him to heaven.

The vision of Christ, the experience of his love, the praises of redeeming mercy, and the exercise of holy

affections are the joys of the church ; and they are the joys of heaven. He who has no experience of these enjoyments in this world, is wholly unprepared for heaven. He who has no relish for the blessings of church communion in this world, would be miserable in Abraham's bosom.

The vast contrast between the actual happiness of Christians in this world, and Christians in heaven, consists not in the nature, but in the degree of their enjoyments. And the reason why true believers enjoy so little in the church below, is found in their remaining darkness and corruptions ; in the imperfection of their devotedness to God ; in the want of purity in the church ; and in the many errors and abuses which darken their views, impede their spiritual progress, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Still every true church is an emblem of heaven, and every genuine member finds in the privileges of the church a foretaste, an earnest of the joys of heaven.

Fifthly. A true church not only enjoys many blessings, but diffuses them all around. She is indeed the light of the world.

She is the living evidence, the visible manifestation of the great realities of religion. She presents to the world an assemblage of the actual effects of Christianity. She has living epistles known and read of all men. She presents human nature in a form utterly unaccountable by worldly principles. She calls the world to behold the practical demonstration of the truths of the gospel ; in its actual transforming efficacy upon the human character ; points to men who now evidently hate what they once loved, and love what they once hated ; presents a community who have turned their backs upon the world, and are evidently seeking

a heavenly inheritance; who by their holy lives and conversation, by their decided and growing indifference to all the joys, and treasures, and honors of this world, and by the entire consecration of their affections, and their exertions to the cause of Christ, do fully evince that they have experienced a renovating and sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God. A true church presents these her members, these men of faith and prayer, these men of charity and zeal, these men of self-denial and humility, as the unanswerable demonstration of the truth and power of the gospel.

A true church, therefore, becomes the most effectual and alarming preacher that a sinful world ever heard. Every thing, which exhibits the happiness of true Christians, proclaims the misery of all others. If believers have cause of rejoicing, sinners have cause of mourning. Those truths, which are most precious and consoling to the church, are most terrible to the ungodly. If the conduct of Christians be rational, it shows the course of sinners to be utter madness.

What an alarming sermon it was to the Antidiluvians, when Noah was building the ark of his deliverance. Precisely similar is the tremendous warning, addressed to careless and impenitent men, by the example of consistent Christians. There is nothing so eminently calculated to arouse the consciences, and strike terror into the hearts of a worldly congregation, as the spectacle of a church composed of praying faithful Christians. Their progress towards heaven, their evident preparation for leaving the world, their growing heavenly mindedness, their dread of sin, their watchfulness and discipline, their very trials and fears all proclaim in a voice of thunder, Woe to the wicked!—If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear.

Finally—The true church of Christ is the glory, strength and safety of the world.

Ten righteous men would have saved the cities of the Plain from utter extermination ; and it is for the sake of the church, that vengeance does not come upon this guilty earth to the uttermost. The humblest church of Christ in their despised sanctuary have more influence over human destiny than well appointed armies.

Such, my hearers, are some of the blessings enjoyed and diffused by a true church. Time has not permitted more than a very brief and hasty sketch of them. It would require volumes to unfold all their preciousness and importance. We come now,

III. To mention some things which are essential to the prosperity, purity and usefulness of a church. To prepare a church for the enjoyment and diffusion of these rich and precious blessings, she must possess no ordinary character. Something more than names and forms must be requisite to enable a church to look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. This high and commanding influence, this moral elevation of character, this practical, all-subduing demonstration of divine truth, this bright and attractive portrait of heavenly things, and these unanswerable witnesses of the transforming sanctifying power of Christianity, are not to be found, excepting where the church is under the pervading influence of the principles and spirit of the gospel.

Crowded congregations, rich and powerful establishments, splendid temples and eloquent preachers may exist in a community ; and yet Zion may sit covered with sackcloth, mourning over her desolations.

No combination of dark bodies can give light to the world ; no accidental accumulation of rude and shapeless materials can form structures, to charm the eye with symmetry and beauty ; and no church can flourish, unless it be formed after the model given in the New Testament, and be composed of such materials as are the workmanship of the Holy Spirit.

First. A true church is founded on the rock of ages. The doctrines of redemption from guilt and wrath by the sacrifice of a Divine Saviour ; and of the necessity of the special regeneration of the soul, by the power of the Holy Ghost, to rescue man from eternal misery ; are the corner stones on which she rests. Other foundation can no man lay than this basis of the Apostles and Prophets. On this rock Christ builds his church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.—And whatever church rests on other ground will fall, and great will be the fall of it.

These are the eternal, immutable principles of the gospel. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but these truths shall not pass away.

A true church, therefore, inscribe these doctrines on every step of their progress, on every measure they pursue. In a formal and full confession of the faith of Christ, they will entrench themselves, as the fortress of their strength. All compromise with error, all accommodating, worldly policy is their abhorrence.—They adopt a system of doctrines, agreeable to the oracles of God, and they adhere to them, and maintain them, with a holy zeal and an unyielding fidelity.

Secondly. A church must not only be established in these great principles, and embrace in her articles that system of faith once delivered to the saints, but her members must be in reality spiritual subjects of the

kingdom of Christ. The purest confession of faith, and the most orthodox and evangelical formularies, can never make an assembly of unconverted men a church of Christ.

Evangelical professions and forms are only the external appearances and evidences of the power of religion, and the sanctifying, transforming operations of grace upon the soul. And where these are wanting, all else is as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.—And a community of carnal, hollow-hearted professors is a whited sepulchre, and its members are wells without water, clouds borne about by the winds, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

There is no other possible way in which a church can be built up in a holy faith, can show forth the praise and glory of divine grace, can be a light to the world, can exert a redeeming influence upon society, but by the evident, acknowledged piety, devotedness and spirituality of her members. It is when Christians live above the world, and have their conversation in heaven; when they are really devoted to God, and earnestly engaged for the souls of men; it is when there is an entire harmony of character, a beautiful unison between the life and the profession; it is when the spirit of union, and love, and devotion evidently pervades their hearts; it is then that the world takes knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus.

It is then, that wicked men stand appalled at a host of witnesses, an accumulated force of testimony for religion, which they can neither gainsay nor resist.—No matter what doctrines men maintain, no matter what professions they make, no matter how strict and imposing a form of godliness they assume, so long as they are supremely devoted to worldly pursuits,

selfish and covetous in their dealings, and have their hearts evidently fixed upon the things of this life—their worldly acquaintances will be undisturbed by their words and their devotions. It was when Noah was evidently preparing to go into the ark, that those around him began to tremble, lest the deluge should come. It was when Lot turned his back upon his home, and was seen flying to the mountain, that his guilty companions began to look with shuddering horror upon the fearful indications of the fiery storm. Therefore,

Thirdly. A true church ever uses a prayerful and cautious vigilance in the admission of new members.

And here we must take it for granted, that a church at its original formation, and present state, is principally composed of real Christians, who feel the power of religion, and are truly engaged in the cause of Christ. For if there be societies calling themselves Christian churches, consisting principally of unregenerate men, where the predominating influence is of a worldly and secular character, where the door of Christian communion is freely opened to all respectable and moral persons, where the sacramental board is crowded by those who do not even profess to be born of the Spirit of God; if there be such societies we speak not of them. Our cause and their's have no connexion.—Their rock is not as our rock, they being judges. The essential principles for which we contend, the grand objects we have in view, are wholly contemptible and visionary in *their* estimation. We cannot view them otherwise than as the grand fortresses of the Prince of Darkness—the strong holds of rebellion and impenitence—the laboratories of sin, where souls are deluded and poisoned, and hardened, and ripened for destruction.

We suppose then, that a church is founded upon the basis of Gospel truth, consecrated to the glory of Christ and the promotion of his cause, and that its members are earnestly engaged and deeply solicitous to promote the purity and spirituality of their communion, to become eminently a blessing to the world. Of such we say, it is absolutely essential to their prosperity and usefulness, that they vigilantly guard against the admission of unconverted men.— They are bound by the most solemn obligations, by all their regard to the cause of the Redeemer, by all their love to immortal souls, to admit none to sealing ordinances, to communion and fellowship, without careful and patient and prayerful examination, and an evidence clearly satisfactory, of an actual experience of renewing, regenerating grace. Fidelity to the souls of men, requires this caution and vigilance.

No true Christian was ever fatally injured by being refused admission to the church, because his examination was not satisfactory. But thousands of souls have been sealed up to perdition by being received into the church unprepared. Thousands of awakened sinners have been lulled into a fatal repose, under a refuge of lies, by being hurried into the church, merely because they had begun to discover their awful guilt and danger. O, ye guardians of the sanctuary, who hold the keys of Christ's church, take heed whom ye admit or encourage ; admit no man hastily ; require of every man a reason of the hope that is in him : take heed that you be as strict and as conscientious in examining the rich and honourable man, as the poorest servant : take heed to yourselves in this matter, lest the blood of souls be found in your skirts at the great day.

Fidelity to Christ, and the interests of his kingdom demands this vigilance.

Nothing assails so vitally, so fatally, the peace of the church, as the admission of unworthy members.—What deep wounds have been inflicted upon the Redeemer in the house of his friends; what foul scandals have stained the church, and covered its members with shame and sack-cloth; what hateful corruptions have appeared in the very bosom of the church—in consequence of a criminal negligence, in guarding the door of church communion, against unhallowed intrusion. A pure church may be utterly destroyed, and made a den of robbers, by the incautious admission of a few artful, designing, unprincipled men. It is, therefore, essential to the well-being of a church, that none be admitted to its privileges, who do not, on careful examination, give evidence clearly satisfactory, that they have passed from death to life, and are, therefore, entitled to the fellowship of the saints, and the seals of the covenant.

Fourthly. It is important that a visible and broad line of distinction be drawn between the church and the world. Few popular errors are of more malignant tendency, than a general impression in a community, that no great importance is attached to membership in the church of Christ, that entering into such a relation is a very ordinary affair, that it is hardly noticeable, whether a man is a professor of religion or not, and that all public testimonials of personal piety and of zeal for the cause of Christ, are unnecessary and ostentatious. It is worthy of particular remark, that wherever this blending of the church with the world is witnessed; it is not because the world has risen, but because the church has fallen; not because the men

of the world have deserted their standard, but because professing Christians have abandoned theirs; not because the rushing tide of sin has ceased, but because Christians are borne down by its current.—Wherever Christians are what they ought to be, heavenly minded, and living by faith in the Son of God; wherever they take up the cross, and follow Christ; wherever the power of religion is felt, and Zion arises from the dust, and real believers feel and exhibit the energy of a living faith; you hear no more of this harmony between light and darkness; this communion between Christ and Belial. The line is instantly drawn; the distinction becomes evident at once.

The barriers which separate the church from the world, ought to be enlarged and strengthened and fortified. All attempts to unite the service of God and mammon, to blend the followers of Christ and the votaries of the world, are vain and impious. Who can unite what God has widely and eternally separated. There is an immeasurable contrast of character between true Christians and other men. Their principles are diametrically opposite—their journeys and their destinies lead them farther and farther asunder. Christians have been quickened by the Spirit of God, and a principle of spiritual life exists in them; while others are dead in trespasses and sins. Christians are working out their salvation with fear and trembling; other men are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Christians are reconciled to God, and his love is shed abroad in their hearts, by the Holy Ghost. Other men are enemies to God by wicked works.—Christians are pursuing the strait and narrow way that leadeth unto life. Other men are crowding down the broad way that leadeth to destruction. The course

they are pursuing, will conduct Christians to the right hand of God. The course all others are pursuing will lead them where their feet will stumble upon the dark mountains of destruction. Between Christians and other men an impassable gulf will roll forever.

When, therefore, there is actually such an inconceivably important distinction between Christians and others in this world, while they belong to different kingdoms, and fight under opposing banners, is it not proper that a broad line of distinction should be drawn between them? Is it not enjoined upon Christians to come out from the world and be separate? Ought not Christians to take a decided stand and openly display their colours, and rally round their standard. Let us remember the words of Christ, he that is not for me, is against me : and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad. These views led me to observe—

Fifthly. That the admission of members into a church ought ever to be attended by such public ceremonies as are appropriate to the solemnity and importance of the transaction. Many seem to cherish the thought that uniting with the church is not a step of much moment. As it may be done in a very private manner, with nothing to mark the event but a simple partaking of the sacramental elements, which is witnessed by comparatively few, it is often regarded as quite a trivial occurrence. Such a view of the subject is ruinously false. Joining the church is by far the most momentous transaction in which a man is ever engaged in this world. It is an absolute consecration of body and soul to God, for time and eternity. It is an utter abandonment and renunciation of this vain world, and an enlistment under the banners of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an assumption of all the privileges and

blessings, purchased by Christ for his followers, by the sufferings of the cross. It is an espousing of the cause of Christ, and therefore ought to be done with public solemnities.

Christ acknowledged none as his followers who were not openly and avowedly so. He expressly demands a public confession of his disciples' faith. "He that shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before the angels of God." The first Christians proclaimed their devotion to the cause of the Redeemer at the hazard of liberty and life. There is a peculiar fitness and propriety in a public admission of members. They are entering into covenant with God and with the church, uttering their solemn engagements and vows of fidelity, to which God and angels are witnesses : and the whole community ought also to be witnesses. In private admissions, men are apt to be unconscious of the sacred obligations by which their profession binds them ; but when they come before the congregation, and there dedicate themselves to Christ, the full import of the transaction is clearly perceived ; and a sense of the awful responsibility presses with all its weight upon the conscience. Thus when the young Christian takes his station under the banners of Emmanuel, and draws the sword against the world, the flesh and the Devil, let him throw away the scabbard. Let him hedge up all avenues of retreat ; let him bind himself to fidelity by every motive and every obligation.

Sixthly. It is moreover essential to the purity and prosperity of a church that strict scriptural discipline be maintained. Mutual watchfulness and admonition are among the richest blessings of church fellowship ; and without internal government, without salutary discipline, a church is continually exposed to corruption and

disorganization. Even real Christians may fall into sin, and bring a reproach upon religion ; but a proper course of discipline restores the breach, rolls away the reproach from the house of God, and restores the penitent offender in the spirit of meekness. After all the vigilance and care of a church, deceivers and apostates will sometimes be found among the faithful. Discipline prevents the deplorable evils which would result to the church, by cutting off such corrupted members, and thus save the cause of Christ from incurable wounds. But a church of Christ has but little left to her discretion upon this subject. She is bound by special laws given by Christ and his apostles, which regulate this whole matter. Our blessed Lord has directed our whole process towards an offending brother. If thy brother trespass, &c. (Mat. xviii. 15.) O, my brethren, could we comprehend the whole amount of evil resulting from a neglect of discipline—could we know how many souls are ruined by the inconsistency of church members—how utterly the efforts of the pious are paralyzed by the evident and glaring incongruity between the profession and practice of their brethren ; we should not need a single argument to prove that a strict and vigilant discipline is absolutely indispensable to the purity and usefulness of a church.

In cases of gross criminality and atrocious offences all churches will instantly expel the guilty. But let it be remembered, that while the ungodly can point to one professor, and say he is covetous and avaricious ; to another, and say he lives a prayerless life ; to another, and say he does not pretend to believe the doctrines of his own church ; while such causes of reproach exist in a church ; she cannot flourish ; she cannot enjoy her Saviour's smiles ; she cannot shine as a light in the world.

The presence and spirit of Christ are the very life and glory of a church; but can these be expected where the laws of God's house are neglected, and where his altar is suffered to be profaned by unhal-
lowed approach.

And can it be possible, that Christians should enjoy the blessings of fellowship and communion, while personal animosities, contrariety of belief, and utter inconsistencies of conduct, exist among them? No, my hearers, a church cannot be built up in faith and holiness, cannot be beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners, unless she be kept pure and blameless, by a strict and vigilant discipline.

We have only time to glance at a few other important particulars, and then hasten to a close.

The exclusive government and control of all her spiritual concerns, are indispensable to the prosperity of a church. In the choice of her pastor and her elders, and in the direction of her worship and psalmody, she *must* be independent of all worldly and secular interference.

There cannot be a greater absurdity, than that worldly men should attempt to appoint a spiritual guide and shepherd to a church of Christ, who shall break to them the bread of life; or designate the ruling elders to watch over the interests of Zion. And as it respects psalmody—who but the church can sing forth the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into marvellous light? Who but Christians are authorised to engage in this most exalted part of worship, and unite with the hosts of heaven in the songs of redemption? Are not many of our psalms and hymns filled with language, which no unconverted man can utter

in a place of worship without mockery and profanation? And yet how common is it to see church-members silent, during the celebration of the Redeemer's praise, while persons who make no pretensions to religion, are uttering "solemn sounds on thoughtless tongues."—The church ought ever to regulate, and, as far as possible, to unite in, the singing the praises of God.

Whenever the members of a church have their ministry appointed, and their worship regulated, by a promiscuous congregation, they may well put on sackcloth and mourn over the captivity of Zion. Whatever else a church may possess, if she be destitute of a faithful evangelical pastor, her glory will soon depart, and her light be shrouded in darkness. An unconverted minister, whatever may be his talents, acquirements, orthodoxy or morality of life, is a most terrible calamity to a church. His influence comes upon them as a chilling destroying blast, and all their hopes and joys wither before it. If the power of religion is ever preserved; if Christians grow in grace and ripen for heaven; and if sinners are ever brought to the knowledge of the truth under an unregenerate minister, it must be ascribed to the instrumentality either of eminently spiritual and active elders, or to a scriptural liturgy and evangelical formularies.

Finally. A church cannot be expected to flourish, and show forth the praises of God her Saviour, unless her members be consistent, engaged, growing Christians. They must let their light shine before men; they must be evidently united together in Christian love and fellowship. While members of the same church are seen to be estranged from each other by animosity, by cold indifference, or by worldly distinctions; the keen sighted world will take knowledge of them, that

they have *not* been with Jesus. Whereas, the example of a company of believers harmoniously pursuing their high calling, their holy destination, and obviously actuated by a spirit of affection and charity, has a most powerful efficacy.

Such, my hearers, are some of the characteristics of a church, which is the light of the world, which enjoys and diffuses the rich blessings of pure religion. Thus, a church, founded on the rock of ages, formed upon Gospel principles, composed of devoted spiritual members; guarded and purified by a vigilant Scriptural discipline, blessed with a faithful ministry, and with the special presence and grace of the Redeemer, is indeed the treasure and glory of the earth. She exhibits to men an attractive portrait of heavenly things, she points the path to heaven and leads the way. "Walk about Zion, tell the towers thereof, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following."

IMPROVEMENT.

I. We learn from this subject, that every church exerts an influence upon society exceedingly important and efficacious. Established in the principles of the Gospel, bearing the impress of a heavenly origin, a pure church is the treasure of any community.— She is surrounded by an atmosphere of moral healthfulness, which purifies and refreshes and invigorates all around. She holds up a standard of rectitude and morality, which is continually referred to as a test of character, which regulates public sentiment, and marks the boundary between vice and virtue. Her example is full of instruction and warning and admonition.— Her evident vitality detects the spiritual death which reigns around her. The fruits of holiness she exhibits

exposes the utter sterility of mere nominal Christians. The affluence of her consolations discloses the poverty of a worldly portion. And her evident progress against every opposition, towards a heavenly destination, clearly shows the rapidity with which the votaries of the world are swept down by the tide of ruin.

As a pure gospel church is the richest blessing to the world, so most evidently a society of unrenewed men, associated upon secular principles, having nothing of Christianity but the name and the forms, cherishing notions radically false of the nature of religion, and yet calling themselves a church of Christ, must be a terrible curse to all within the sphere of their influence. Hence, men draw conclusions ruinously false as to the nature of religion, and are lulled into a fatal security. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of a more deadly poison than that diffused by such a church. The arguments of open infidels, and the example of profligates, are comparatively harmless. It is a treacherous foe in the very garrison, ever ready to betray it to the enemy—a hostile band bearing friendly colours, and more to be dreaded than a host of open foes. Nor is the evil at all mitigated, though the members of such a church be honest and sincere in their intentions, and though, while they are crucifying the Son of God afresh, they know not what they do. While men really think they are doing God service, they may be inflicting the deepest wounds upon the Redeemer's cause. While they are pursuing a path which seemeth right to them, it may terminate in death. Nor will it at all assuage the anguish of the pit, for lost souls to discover that those who led them there were as blind as themselves.

II. Hence, we infer secondly, that professing Christians occupy a most important and responsible station. They must be viewed as the visible representatives of Christ upon earth, the embodied evidence of the nature and effects of his Gospel. Interests of vaster moment than those of material worlds are intrusted to them, and the consequences of their conduct will either brighten the glory of heaven, or deepen the gloom of endless despair, and aggravate the pangs of the second death. The cause of Christ in this world is actually committed to their guardianship, and consequently on their fidelity, consistency and devotedness, the eternal destinies of numberless immortals depend. The kingdom of God on earth, with all its glorious interests, is really intrusted to the management of professing Christians; and it is entirely consistent with the omnipotence of Divine Grace to assert, that this kingdom cannot flourish without their faithful exertions and evident personal holiness.

If offences come, wo to those through whose negligence and disobedience the offence cometh. If the Redeemer is wounded in the house of his friends: if churches are debased and polluted by scandals, corruptions and dissensions, their members must answer for the woful, disastrous consequences. And if the cold formality and neglect of duty, and evident worldly policy of churches, prove a stumbling block over which men fall into perdition, the blood of all such lost souls will be required of the members of those churches at the last day.

The time is come when Christians are called upon to put on their armour and take a decided stand on the walls of Zion. The inquiry, who is on the Lord's side, ought to be loudly repeated from one end of this

state to the other. All who love Christ are urged now, by every powerful motive, by every solemn obligation, to forget all unessential distinctions, and unite in defending and maintaining that kingdom, which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. The time is now arrived, when he that is not decidedly and openly for Christ, is against him. Therefore, let all church-members solemnly reflect upon their awful responsibility, and gird on their armour, and cluster around the Ark of God, and bid a stern defiance both to the wily treacherous flatteries, and to the open opugnation of the enemies of the cross and its doctrines. *Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, sound an alarm in my holy mountain.*

III. We may infer from this discourse, how desirable and important an event, is the formation of a new church upon pure scriptural principles, and how great the honour and happiness of those who are instrumental in accomplishing so good a work. If a true church be so dear to the Redeemer, as to be called his sister, his spouse; if it be the garden of the Lord, the nursery for heaven; if it be the blessed depository of all the accumulated blessings and treasures of the Gospel; if it be the holy, honoured habitation of the Divine Majesty on earth, then evidently there is no way in which Christians can so essentially promote the cause of Christ, or so extensively and permanently increase the means of human happiness, as in laying the foundation of such an establishment. How delightful an employment to provide rich blessings for generations yet unborn. How important a work, to lay the foundation and establish the form and proportions of a spiritual building, where the ransomed of the Lord may unite in his service, and go forth conquering and to conquer.

under his banners, where the sword of the Spirit shall achieve its mighty conquests, and where the embassy from heaven to rebellious men will be crowned with a full accomplishment of its purposes of mercy.

In such an undertaking what affecting prospects rise into view. How inconceivable the sum of good which may result from such a church, as it passes down through the future ages of the world, to the final consummation. Kingdoms rise and fall, and are forgotten ; armies and empires are swept into the gulf of oblivion ; but a church of the Redeemer is as imperishable as its Author. Its founders shall be held in everlasting remembrance ; and its faithful members and pastors shall *shine as the firmament, and as the stars forever and ever.*

Such we trust will be the character and principles of the church, which we are now about to organize, and consecrate to Christ and his cause. The plan was formed in faith and prayer, and all the steps in its progress have been manifestly taken with a single eye to the glory of God, and the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom. The history of the undertaking is brief and pleasing. Its origin has been eminently peaceful and harmonious ; wholly undebased by schism or contention. A number of professing Christians, not connected with any church in the city, with others who were members of several churches, were led to consider it their duty to form a new church, to consist solely of those who gave satisfactory evidence that they were born of the Spirit, and had passed from death to life ; and to be guarded and governed by that strict, vigilant discipline, which they deemed essential to the well being of any church. Accordingly, though they were members of

churches, and though several of them were ruling elders, they presented themselves to this Presbytery to be examined individually, as to their personal and experimental piety ; the result of which was eminently satisfactory. They have been accordingly admitted into their own church by the Presbytery ; and by the authority, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are now about solemnly to set apart and organize this church of the Redeemer.

It is, my hearers, a transaction solemn in its nature, and important in its results, beyond all finite comprehension ; a transaction which holy angels must view with deep interest, and in which the eternal destinies of a multitude of immortal spirits are essentially involved. We are now to behold a company of Christians uniting in an entire dedication of their souls and bodies, their time and talents, their labours and their powers, to the service of Christ. Men of prayer in this assembly, unite with us in earnest supplication that a special blessing may rest on these solemnities.

Permit me to address a few words to those who are now about to unite together in the communion and fellowship of the gospel. To you, Christian brethren, this is a most interesting, eventful day, and the present a most affecting occasion. Never again, until you stand before the Judge of quick and dead, will you take part in transactions of such moment, or be surrounded by circumstances of such soul-thrilling interest. You are now about to enter into a sacred, inviolable covenant with the Lord of glory ; to assume obligations which must bind you forever ; to lift up your hands to God and utter your vows of fidelity ; and in the presence of the heart searching Jehovah, of angels and men, devote

yourselves, and all that you possess to the special service of Christ, for time and eternity. The covenant which you have drawn up, and which you are now publicly and solemnly to ratify, will bind you to be the visible representatives of Christ upon earth ; to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints ; to strive after eminent holiness of heart and life ; to cherish towards each other that fervent love which your sacred union and the law of your Saviour require ; to watch over each other, reprove, rebuke, encourage and strengthen, with all affection and fidelity ; to employ all your energies, and combine all your influence and efforts, to extend the blessings of true religion ; and so to govern, guard and purify your church, as to render it a fit spiritual habitation for the Redeemer. Upon the faithfulness and perseverance, with which you fulfil the obligations of this covenant, who can conceive how much depends ; how much of the prosperity of Christ's kingdom in this world ; how much of the bliss or wo of immortality. You are to decide whether this church is to be a light of the world ; whether it shall be a living fountain, whose flowing waters shall gladden the city of God ; whether it shall be a fortress of impregnable strength in defence of the gospel ; and whether it shall be instrumental in training up for heaven a noble army of the redeemed, who shall stand before the Judge at the last day, as the blessed fruits of your fidelity and exertions.

In view of such an overwhelming responsibility, despair of your own strength, and wisdom, and piety ; and rely solely upon the power and grace of your covenant God. With a simple dependence upon his support and co-operation, go forward in your great and

glorious enterprize. Yours is his promise, that he will never leave you nor forsake you; and that he is with you always, even to the end of world. Therefore, be ye faithful unto death, and He will give you a crown of life.—AMEN.