

THE
AMERICAN PREACHER;

OR, A

COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE
MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

OF

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

VOLUME III.

ELIZABETH-TOWN, (NEW-JERSEY)

PRINTED BY SHEPARD KOLLOCK, FOR THE EDITORS,
WHO HOLD THE PRIVILEGE OF COPY-RIGHT.

M.DCC.XCI.

S E R M O N XLIX.

ON H O N E S T Y.

B Y

ALEXANDER MACWHORTER, D. D.

Minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Newark, New-Jersey.

H E B R E W S xiii. 18.

We trust we have a good conscience, in all things, willing to live honestly.

THAT kind of beauty, which arises from harmony and proportion, is in no writings so visible or so perfect as in the holy scriptures. The religion therein revealed to mankind, is a system of perfect and universal order and harmony. There is such a sacred connexion between the truths and duties, such a regular dependance of one part upon another, that any disadjustment or neglect of one, mars the general symmetry, and produces a measure of deformity and confusion. There is a just and universal tendency in the *whole*, to the same uniform effect and end; and every particular truth and duty unites to promote the ultimate design of the *whole*. In this system, there is no

interference in the several branches of truth or duty; one truth or duty does not juggle out another; each has its proper place and proper consequence; and, therefore, calculated in infinite wisdom to answer the general and great intention, which is the glory of God and the perfection and felicity of intelligent creatures. Those truths and duties, which relate to God, stand as the first principles of the system; those, which relate to ourselves and our neighbor, arise as infallible and necessary consequences from these. And so strict and certain is the connexion, that the whole is injured by an infringement of the consequences, as of the principal parts.

Thus is true religion described in the sacred oracles; and thus it is when transferred to the heart by the operations of the Holy Spirit. Religion in the heart, in some good degree, corresponds to religion in the word, as face answers to face in a glass. As the truths and duties of religion, promote piety to God, and an holy regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, so they also produce a due respect to, and a practical observance of every social virtue. Hence, how beautiful and amiable is a truly religious character! One branch of religion doth not exclude another; a Christian's respect and duty to God is so far from injuring, that above all things it promotes his duty to his neighbor. It is the divine commandment, *that he should love his neighbor as himself*; and he that loveth God,

will keep his commandments.—On the other hand, duty and respect to his neighbor, or the practice of social duties will never preclude or diminish his regard to God, or the duties of devotion. Every duty holds its proper place in the general system. Love to God, and faith in Christ Jesus, oblige us to treat our neighbor with propriety; and our honest and virtuous conduct towards our neighbor will never allow us to enjoy the approbation of our own minds, or to have a good conscience, without a supreme regard and duty to God.

From this view of things, it is evident that all appearances of religion are defective and wrong, which do not promote the duties incumbent upon us in our social connexions as men and christians. The more religion reigns in the heart towards God, the more love and duty will increase towards our neighbor; with more care and diligence will the social duties be cultivated and discharged. That religion, which is of the operation of God, purifies the heart from the old leaven of malice, wickedness, dishonesty and unrighteousness, and forms the soul to the love and practice of candor, charity, goodness, integrity and uprightness. All religious affections and exercises, unaccompanied with the moral virtues, are delusive and spurious. Holiness and social virtue are inseparable in the nature of things, and in the revelation of heaven to man. The former cannot exist without the latter, nor can the latter be genuine and durable without the for-

mer. Some persons in great zeal and apparent warmth in religious and devotional exercises, will speak meanly of morality and social virtue, and others again will cry up morality and social duties as all in all. But both these are deviations from that real religion which secures peace of conscience and leads to everlasting life. The holy scriptures teach us, that the practice of piety, godliness, social virtue, and morality, are all beautifully connected, and go hand in hand. They no where admit of such notions of religion as exclude morality, nor such a preference and practice of morality as weakens or supercedes the obligations of religion in its most exalted branches or spiritual exercises. Each must possess its due influence on the Christian life in all proper exercise, frames and practice. Accordingly we find our Lord and his apostles always inculcating the duties of both tables upon their hearers. Our divine Redeemer, when he exhibits a comprehensive view of the whole duty of man, and of the requisitions of heaven, does it in this manner. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.* And the great St. Paul, the supposed author of this epistle to the Hebrews, who was eminent for his displaying and dwelling upon the doctrines of grace, is no less distinguished for his enforcing the social virtues, and enjoining the duties of morality. He recommends them in general, agreeably to the example of his master, *in love to our neighbor*; and he enlarges throughout his letters upon every parti-

cular branch of social and relative duty. And here, in the words of our text, with great propriety and energy, he recommends the virtue of honesty.—This is a part of Christian morality of a superior kind. Without it we cannot expect the favor of God, the friendship and esteem of mankind; nor peace in our own minds, in moments of sober reflection. When the apostle hopes, with regard to himself and these Hebrew Christians, that they had a good conscience, he strongly intimates that the goodness of their conscience arose from the disposition they had to practise this amiable and necessary virtue. *We trust we have a good conscience, in all things, willing to live honestly.* Sincere desires and endeavors to live honestly, both procure a good conscience, and are evidences of it. A good conscience is a sweet companion and a continual entertainment; it brings in a large revenue of tranquillity, satisfaction, joy and consolation to the breast in which it dwells, under the frowns of the world, and all the varying aspects of divine providence.

Honesty is a Christian virtue of a very general nature; it extends to all the relations which take place among the children of men. But, in particular, it refers to our commerce; bargains, promises and dealings, one with another. It is truly a melancholy recollection, that there are so many violations of this virtue among mankind, especially among them who name the name of Christ, and

have thereby obliged themselves to depart from all iniquity. The considerations by which it is recommended to us, from reason and religion, however convincing and numerous, are not always powerful enough to impress the conscience, and hold us to the steady observation of honesty in our conduct. Such is the degeneracy of human nature, and so deeply are the seeds of depravity implanted in our souls, that slight occasions oftentimes prove victorious temptations to dishonesty, weaken our regards to righteousness, and lead us to injure our fellow-creatures. But to render our consciences more tender—to enable them more faithfully to perform their office—to cause us to avoid and abhor dishonesty more, and to strengthen our resolutions in favor of integrity, let us, a little, in the

First place, open the fountains from whence dishonesty flows.

Then, *secondly*, mention some considerations and motives to induce us to be conscientiously honest in all our employments, business and conversation.

First, In order to illustrate the excellency and importance of this virtue of honesty, we shall point out some of the fountains from whence the opposite vice flows, or some of the chief causes of dishonesty. Opposites frequently illustrate each other to great advantage. The beauty and charms of Christian virtue gain strength by arousing, in us, an indignation and abhorrence of mean, base and

immoral practices. Honesty will appear more noble, honorable and God-like, by awakening a proper disgust and hatred of the odious deformity of dishonesty.

With regard to the chief springs of dishonesty, they may be contemplated both in a general and particular view. Under a general consideration, dishonesty arises from the same common source with all other kinds of abominations and iniquities. It arises from the awful depravity and corruption of the human heart, which *is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*; and from whence, according to our Lord's account, *proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*. An evil fountain, indeed, that sends forth such streams of pollution!—But the more particular causes of dishonesty are such things as these.

1. Slothfulness, idleness and an aversion to labor and the business of our calling. In some, this vice may be considered, in a measure, as constitutional. They are naturally slothful and sluggish. They incline to do nothing with a proper spirit, either serviceable to themselves or others. In others it is contracted and acquired. They are naturally active enough; but, by improper management, by indulgence of a wandering fancy, by contracting a fondness for company and folly, they become impatient of application to business; they feel a reluctance to the confinement of labor

and of their occupation; industry is relinquished; an inattention to their word, and a breach of promises follow. These are in great danger of practising dishonesty in one sort or another. They offer a thousand untrue, dishonest and shuffling excuses to their employers for not having done their work—they lose their custom—their circumstances become pressing and uneasy—they can obtain credit no longer—they must have a livelihood—therefore, recourse must be had to some dishonest methods to obtain it. Hence they are tempted to over-reaching, cheating, defrauding, pilfering, and even, perhaps, to notorious theft and robbery.—They imagine evil upon their beds, and study schemes of dishonesty. This was the unhappy case of the unjust steward. To work he had not been used, and to beg he was ashamed; hence he resolves immediately to practise knavery and dishonesty. Behold, how readily evil devices occur to a proud man averse and disused from labor.—The forsaking of industry is the abandoning of honesty. How many are there whose honor and pride would be mortally wounded by returning to their trades or manual labor, and yet in the full gratification of their pride, and in consistence with their honor, falsely so called, they can be guilty of the most crafty, lying and villanous practices. O honor! how art thou prostituted and perverted! The greatest dishonor and disgrace to human nature must now be submitted to, rather than an honest and honorable application to the business of

our callings. If our notions of religion should become as wild and extravagant, as the notions of many are of honor, it will soon come to pass that the greatest villain will be deemed the most religious man.

Industry, and a careful attention to our employments in life, are of essential importance to true honor and honesty; and they are equally so to real religion and Christian morality. Idleness is an exuberant fountain of a multitude of evils. It contains not a tint of virtue or piety. It is an evil, pure and unmixed: It contains not a spice of religion, morality, honor or honesty. What must be the streams flowing from such an *avernian* source? All polluted, odious, and to be detested. Let every Christian turn away his head with abhorrence of the idol of indolence. Attend to St. Paul's address to the sauntering Christians in Thessalonica. *We hear there are some among you that walk disorderly, and work not at all, but are busy, and yet idle bodies; we command and exhort such by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness, they work and eat their own bread, and those who will not work; What does he say? Does he grant them an allowance of dishonest and shifting contrivances; No, they should starve, they should not eat.*

Now, my brethren, let us abhor idleness and laziness as odious vices, and the sources of horrid evils in time and in eternity. Let us be peculiarly careful to innure ourselves, and form our chil-

dren to habits of application and industry. Let us oblige them to a steady attendance upon their schools, and to such business as every year of their age is capable of. The great bulk of mankind are made or ruined, in soul and body for ever, before they are eighteen years of age. Hence, the wisest states, the most religious churches, and most christian governments, have employed their chief and principal care upon children and youth. *Train up a child in the way wherein he should go, and when he becomes old he will not depart from it.*

The *second* fountain and cause of dishonesty is avarice or covetousness. The influence of this vice hurries many persons into a thousand wicked and unrighteous practices. This unbounded desire of getting cannot be removed but by dishonest gratifications. Hence people are tempted to take what is not their due, or withhold what is due to others. They pursue dishonest measures to pinch from, or over-reach those with whom they deal. It is to this horrid root of bitterness, the false balance and deceitful beam owe their invention. Hence the seller puts off damaged wares for good, and the buyer, false money or counterfeited currency. This avaricious temper disposes the tradesman to work up base materials in a sligh-ty manner, and to impose upon the ignorance and credulity of his employer. This causes one to take the advantage of the present necessity of another, and obliges him either to dispose of, or pur-

chase at an improper value. Covetousness tempts persons to prevaricate, truckle, flatter and lie in their dealings; to break their promises, and delay their payments to their customers or creditors. The same dishonest humor makes men bring in extortionate bills, and overcharge for their services. What a world of iniquity, dishonesty and injustice flow from this awful source! Here we see the propriety of the frequent cautions we have from Christianity, *to beware of covetousness*.

A *third* fountain of dishonesty originates in luxury and extravagance. When persons live above their income, and their expences exceed their circumstances; when they attempt to shine at home and abroad in pomp and equipage, with those of better business and superior fortunes: What can be the consequence? Bankruptcy or dishonesty must be the necessary issue. From hence they borrow without designs of payment, and run into debt without a rational prospect of discharging it. Many support their prodigality at the expence of their creditors, and the ruin of their families. This vice drives some to gaming, and other practices of bad report, with a view of hasty and dishonest gains; and thus it becomes an awful source of dishonor, wretchedness, and misery.

Fourthly, Another fountain of dishonesty I shall mention, is pride and selfishness. These had a deep share in the first transgression, and probably had great influence in the fall both of angels and

men. These produce dishonesty towards our brethren of mankind of every sort; but more especially in regard to their persons and reputation. Pride tempts men to refuse due respect to their superiors, to be haughty to their equals, and to show a supercilious contempt of their inferiors.—Selfishness cannot bear the preference of another—it grows uneasy, and swells into dissatisfaction at his advancement or prosperity. It is hard to treat a proud and selfish man with reverence, submission and obeisance. When you are obliged to bow and cringe before him, and bite the lip, it is not in nature or grace, nor to despise him in your inmost soul.

It is pride also that raises envy at the growing fame of a neighbor, and induces to the spreading abroad of dishonorable things to his disadvantage. It takes an ill-natured satisfaction in seeing him mortified or brought down. Pride and selfishness often produce a malicious and revengeful temper, which is frequently an origin of much dishonesty. Malice and revenge form a detestable character, and near a-kin to hell. It is impossible, without horror, to relate the dreadful extremes these passions will carry persons to, in whom they prevail. They often stick at nothing, however dishonorable, shocking and inhumane, for their gratification. They direct to slandering, backbiting, stabbing another's good name. They destroy the peace of neighborhoods, dissolve the bonds

of friendship, break asunder the ties of blood, and affinity, scatter abroad firebrands, arrows and death, and work dishonesty with greediness, and feel the tormenting pleasure which the damned enjoy. Let some unhappy occasion open this source of ill, immediately all the faults, infirmities and blemishes of a worthy and good character will be proclaimed and aggravated; his best, most Christian and beneficent actions will be misrepresented and debased; confidences disregarded; secrets blazed and published; and the whole course of nature set on fire. Behold dishonesty, what a horrid spectre! It creates damnation in the soul, and turns earth into hell. Let us quit the odious and awful object, and proceed—

Secondly, To bring forward some considerations and motives to induce us to be conscientiously honest in all our employments, business and conversation with our fellow-men.

Can we now think a dishonest thought, contrive a dishonest scheme, or be guilty of a dishonest action? Consider the right every man has to enjoy his own, by the laws of nature, reason, religion and society, in respect to his person, property and character. These blessings are the benefactions of heaven to all. Their right to the undisturbed possession of them is founded upon the grant of the God of nature and of grace. To hesitate about the title of the lawful owner's quiet enjoyment of them, is to dispute the right of the supreme and

independent proprietor, the Lord Almighty. Therefore, all fraudulent and dishonest practices, from the evil thought in the mind to the highest acts of outrageous violence, are a reversion of the orders of heaven, a condemnation of equity and wisdom, and an invasion of the throne of God. It is as a poet inimitably expresses himself in another case, to

“Snatch from his hands the balance and the rod,
“Rejudge his justice, be the God of God.”

Will the Almighty Sovereign see his creatures and his children rifled of their immunities and blessings, which his goodness and bounty hath conferred upon them, and not conceive resentment? Will he not whet his glittering sword, and his hand lay hold on vengeance? Let all dishonest persons tremble; the eternal God will assert his own prerogative, and maintain the sacred rights of honesty.

Further consider, sincerity and honesty are the very bonds which hold society together. The religious observation of these virtues are the great means to advance its real interests. From whence it is plain, that the neglect or disuse of them, must destroy the advantages of society, and threaten its very existence. A dishonest person is a public nuisance, and may be viewed as a common enemy to mankind. None are safe from injuries who have any commerce or dealings with him. Can

there be such monsters in nature as professing Christians, and yet dishonest men? They sap the foundations of church and state, and are more dangerous than open and declared foes. An avowed enemy may be an honest man, but a deceitful friend cannot. What society, either civil or religious, can be secure, where dissingenuity and dishonesty are practised by its members? Can we hold such in estimation, or think favorably of them? How contrary is dishonesty to the treatment we wish and expect from mankind? We resent it, when done to ourselves; how should we avoid it in all our traffick with others? Let us never, in any instance, act a dishonest part, or be guilty of a conduct contrary to humanity, reason and christianity.

Lastly, Consider the practice of dishonesty is prohibited in a thousand instances in the word of God. The divine wrath is revealed against it, both in his declarations, and in many examples recorded in the sacred history. *That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, saith the Lord thy God, Ye shall not steal nor deal falsely, nor lie one to another. Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor nor rob him. The wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in weight, or in measure. A just balance and just weights shall ye have. The royal preacher informs us, That an unjust weight is an abomination to the Lord. Wo to him, saith the most*

high by the prophet, *who buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrang; who useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work.* What doth the Lord say to Christians, by the apostle James, of dishonest gains? *Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat up your flesh as fire. Ye have heaped up treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the laborers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries of them which have reaped, are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.*

Read the vengeance of heaven against dishonest men. Consider the end of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Behold the fate of an oppressive and dishonest Pharaoh. What insincerity, forfeiture of honor, breach of promises, and cruelty formed his character! And how was his kingdom deluged in blood by the slaying of the first-born; and himself and his whole host overwhelmed in the Red Sea! View the dogs licking the blood of Ahab, in the very place where he shed innocent blood, that he might dishonestly possess himself of his neighbor's vineyard. But there would be no end of retailing horrid instances of this kind.

Let us turn our eyes to our divine master upon this head, contemplate his conduct, and the design of the holy religion he instituted. Plain and solemn are his commands upon the mount, as also

on other occasions, *that honestly be practised between man and man.* He has given us an admirable, easy and universal rule of honesty, in that ever-memorable and golden maxim, *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets.* How beautiful, excellent and obvious to application is this divine direction! What a system of Christianity is here! And whole codes of morality cannot express more. Do unto all as ye would desire they should do unto you, were you in their circumstances, and they in your's, then you will be honest men and good Christians. Dreadful is the curse which Jesus pronounces upon the dishonest religionists of his day. *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye pay tythe of mint and annise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith!* that is, ye are neither charitable, honest, nor true believers. Your neglecting honesty towards your fellow-creatures under the specious pretences of high religion, much devotion, and long prayers, will only bring down more awful vengeance upon your devoted heads. *God bates robbery and injustice,* he abhors dishonesty, *even for burnt-offerings.* The covetous and extortionate are shut out of heaven, and the unjust and dishonest of every complexion shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Consider the sweet, the blessed, and perfect example of Jesus, the mighty Lord and Saviour of

the world. Behold him submitting to virtuous honesty—rendering to all their dues—tribute to whom tribute was due—custom to whom custom—fear to whom fear ; and universal love and benevolence to all mankind. He rendered tribute to Cæsar, subjected himself in all duty to his earthly parents, loved his brethren, and practised, in all things, the most unstained honesty and perfect righteousness.

The great design and tendency of the gospel is to inspire us with an inviolable attachment to piety, morality and the most exalted honesty. Does not the grace of God, which hath appeared unto all men, teach us to deny all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil world ? Can they pretend to be Christians—to be followers of the pure and holy Jesus, and form expectations of the celestial rewards, who live in deceit and insincerity, and practise injustice and dishonesty ? Dishonest men are a blemish to Christianity, and a disgrace to our holy religion.

Now from the considerations and motives laid before us, let us all be exhorted, my dear brethren, to be persons of integrity, uprightness, and strict justice. Let us be honest men—let us keep consciences void of offence towards God and man—let us have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are love-*

ly, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Persons are often censured in our churches for drunkenness, fornication, &c. but who is ever censured for dishonesty, a crime of a deeper dye? Men may be guilty of a thousand things which are not fair and upright, and no notice taken of them.—Yea, they may deceive their neighbor—impose upon him—prove false to their word—break their promises—withhold his dues, and not only pass uncensured, but be charitably deemed by many as pretty good Christians, though none will trust them as strictly honest. Let us abhor all mean, low and double dealings: Keep yourselves far removed from such evil practices. Attend to honorable industry; be diligent in your callings and occupations, but make not haste to be rich. Let us be careful to keep our children employed, and our youth to business. I would be far from debarring youth from just and rational recreations. But there is a wide difference between proper recreations, and sauntering, mischievous idleness.—Remember, industry prevents much vice; is a security to good morals, and the hand-maid of religion.

Let us beware of avarice in ourselves, and guard all under our care, whether children, apprentices or others from evil company—from luxury, pride and extravagance as far as in our power. What fills our goals, but laziness, folly, an aversion from

work, extravagance, prodigality and drunken bargains? The truly unfortunate, the frugal and industrious, who arise not above their business, and yet by adverse providences are carried to those apartments of calamity, are very few. What causes the massy chains to clank in our gloomy dungeons, but horrid dishonesty?—I forbear the pursuit of the rising awful ideas.—Where can I find a pause in this exuberant theme?—I must break off, though to finish the subject is impossible. Indulge me to leave it in the sententious counsel of the prophet. And Oh! that it might be indelibly written as with the point of a diamond upon each of your hearts! *Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.*

May this counsel form our character, and evidence our hopes of glory. Amen.

