

ORIGINAL SERMONS;

BY

Presbyterian Ministers,

IN

THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY.

Now, I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same things, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

PAUL.

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of those ministers who have sacrificed their consciences on the altar of popular applause, and departed from the instructions of Jehovah, to avoid the displeasure, or to secure the favor of their hearers—then their garments will be found stained and polluted with the blood of souls, and they, with all the unhappy men they have deluded and betrayed, must perish in their sins together. That tremendous scene is full before me, and in anticipation of meeting you there, I cannot but fear and tremble both for you and for my own soul. By its dreadful solemnities, let us be warned, then, to take heed how we speak, and how we hear. For “we must all *appear* before the judgment seat of Christ;” and though I would speak to you with the tongue of men and of angels, and though you should listen to my messages with rapturous delight, yet if we should be found at last destitute of faith, hope, and charity, with hypocrites and unbelievers, we should perish from the presence of the Lord *eternally*.

SERMON XIII.

BY THE REVEREND JOHN MATTHEWS, D. D.

UNITY OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.

“And HE (Christ) is the head of the body, the *Church*.”—COL. i. 18.

ALL systems consist of parts, more or less numerous, connected together, and contributing, in subserviency to each other, in promoting one ultimate design. Of such systems we never can form correct ideas unless

all these parts are taken into view. But more especially would our ideas be imperfect, if the part omitted should be of vital importance, should be one on which all the others depend for their action and efficiency. All descriptions of the human body would be deficient, if the head was left out of view. This is not only a part of the system, but it is a vital part; that one on which all the others depend for life and motion. Each limb, muscle, and organ may be accurately described, and their appropriate functions pointed out; but if severed from the head, these functions in a moment will cease, and they will become lifeless, inactive masses. If the communication between the head and any other member should be interrupted, that member is deprived of activity, and remains useless, until this communication is restored. From this animal system, is derived a beautiful and instructing illustration of the Church, which is a community or system, organized by infinite wisdom, embracing a number of members, connected together by indissoluble bonds, in perfect subserviency and harmony, each contributing to one grand result, the manifestation of the divine glory. By the church, the manifold wisdom, the power, the goodness, the mercy, the long suffering of God are made known; and thus by the Church will his glory, even the *exceeding riches* of his glory be displayed. God, who organized this system, who created this body, has also given to it a Head, on which the whole body with all its members is dependent for LIFE and efficiency, for UNION and harmony, for DIRECTION and safety, for HONOR and happiness. Christ Jesus, the Head of the Church, will, through that divine aid which we need, and which we implore, be the subject of our present consideration.

1. Christ, as head of the Church, is the source of vitality, the author, the giver of life to every member, and thus to the whole body collectively. Such is the head to the human body. The functions of other parts, the heart and the lungs, for instance, are essential to life; but it is rather as channels of communication, than as sources of vitality. They may remain perfectly entire, without the slightest injury, and yet if separated from the head their functions will instantly cease, and the principle of life in the body will be extinct. The smallest and the remotest part is as regularly supplied with nourishment from the head, as those which are more important and more nearly connected with the fountain of life. In like manner, spiritual life, emanating from Christ, the living head, pervades the whole body, quickening into animation and action every member, however obscure and unimportant such member may be in the estimation of the world.

There are two senses in which we are dead, in both of which Christ is emphatically *our life*. On account of our guilt, and in proportion to it, we are under the condemnation of the law; we have been weighed in the balance, and have been found wanting; sentence of death is pronounced upon us by the *Judge of all the earth*. Like the man who is condemned to suffer death for violating the laws of the state, the moment when this sentence is passed, is dead in the view of the law; he sustains no other relation to civil society than that of a condemned criminal. His animal existence may be prolonged for a few days, but he no longer enjoys the rights and privileges of a citizen; in a civil sense he is now dead. We, by nature, sustain to the moral Governor of the world no other relation than that of

condemned rebels; we have forfeited all the rights and privileges which belong to faithful and obedient subjects. Our natural life may, for a time, be preserved; but the *favor of God which is life* is lost; the sentence of death is solemnly pronounced upon us. Nor is it possible, by any sacrifices which we can offer, by any exertions we can make, to avert the stroke of justice to which we are exposed; to change our state of condemnation into a state of favour with God. Nothing but the pardon of all our sins can shield us from this deserved punishment, and restore us to the blessings enjoyed by the faithful subjects of the moral community. All the repentance which we can feel; all the reformation which we can accomplish; all the services which we can render, will never diminish the amount, nor change the nature of the guilt we have already contracted. For want of correct evangelical motives, while making these efforts, we are adding to this guilt. In this sense, Christ is pre-eminently our life. By his sufferings and death, he has made an atonement for sin, which procures pardon for all who believe in him. Mathematical demonstration is not more clear or convincing to the mind, than is the proof from the Bible that we are pardoned through his death, and restored to the divine favor through his righteousness, "imputed to us and received by faith alone." The Church, which is his body, *he hath purchased with his own blood. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Ye were redeemed, with the precious blood of Christ. Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood,* is the language of Heaven, where nothing but truth is spoken. It is literally true that *Christ died for our sins. Hence, we have redemption through his blood,*

even the forgiveness of sins; and God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. We are not only pardoned, but also reconciled to God by the death of his Son. Justification includes not only the remission of our guilt, but also acceptance to the favor of God. For this purpose, he is made unto us, righteousness; and we are made the righteousness of God in him; that is, in him we obtain that righteousness which God requires in order to our acceptance. Our state is thus changed; we pass from death unto life. Our relation to God is changed from that of condemned criminals, to that of friends, and even of children, sharing in all the kindest affection of our Father. In Christ Jesus, we are restored to the society of Heaven, to all the rights and privileges of those who enjoy the favour of God.

There is another sense in which we are dead, and in which Christ is our life. We are, by nature, insensible to the claims both of the divine law and the gospel. The tenants of the grave are insensible to the interests and the active pursuits of life; the wealth, the honor, the pleasure of this world, no longer make any impression on them. So are we insensible to the real interests of eternity, to the intrinsic importance of spiritual things. *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;* but it awakens no salutary, no practical fear. The goodness, the pardoning mercy of God is proclaimed; but no gratitude, no love is excited. The joys and glories of heaven are set before us; but not an effort is made to secure them. Promises, *exceeding great and precious promises,* are made; but no confidence is reposed in them. Our case, though in some respects it bears a striking resemblance to those who sleep in the grave, yet in others is widely

different. They make no opposition to the active pursuits of life; nor does any blame attach to them on account of their insensibility. Not so, however, with us: we have eyes, but we see not, ears, but we hear not; hearts, but we perceive not. We have, indeed, all the intellectual faculties and moral powers which belong to rational beings; but they are devoted to the world; they are employed against God and his government. Instead of love, the heart is influenced by enmity against God; instead of repentance, there is hardness of heart; instead of faith, by which the Saviour is received, there is unbelief, by which, with all his blessings, he is rejected. We possess, indeed, all the natural faculties which God demands in his service; but we are without the moral power, we have not the disposition, the desire to employ them in his service. This want of disposition, instead of furnishing the shadow of excuse for our unbelief and impenitence, is the very essence of sin, the demonstration of our guilt.

Here, then, is work for Omnipotence itself. Here is not only insensibility to be quickened, but here is opposition, here is enmity to be destroyed. The art and the maxims of men may change, in some degree, the outward appearances, but they never can reach the seat of the disease; there it will remain, and there it will operate, after all that created wisdom and power can do. That power which can start the pulse of spiritual life within us must reach and control the very origin of thought, must change our very motives. Our case would be hopeless if our restoration depended on the skill and the efforts of created agents. Thanks be to God, however, there is a vital energy in Christ, which sends the tide of divine animation through every

one that is united to him by faith. When this world came into existence; when light sprang out of darkness; it was not at the request, but at the command of the Creator: so, at the command of the Head of the church, light and life pervade what was but just now a scene of darkness and of death. The soul, even when dead in sin, by the Spirit and the word of Christ, is quickened into life. It has new views of divine truth; its affections are placed on new and spiritual objects; and the whole man is animated by the vital principle of faith, and governed by the motive of love to God. *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*; or, there is a new creation. New views, new thoughts, new affections, and new motives have changed the whole character, and clearly indicate a connexion with the Prince of Life.

By bestowing the gift of eternal life on each individual member, it is bestowed on the whole body collectively. The whole church is redeemed from the curse of the law, and restored to the favor of God, and to the community of heaven. The whole church is animated and controlled by the principle of spiritual life from Christ, the glorious and exalted Head. This life may be communicated through different channels, be preserved and increased by various means; but still it flows from the same inexhaustible fulness in Christ. He has given *pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of his body*; the different members may be highly useful in comforting and strengthening each other, *according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love*. These pastors and teachers, however, and these members, are but the servants of Jesus

Christ, qualified and placed in the church for this purpose. The ordinances of public worship, of reading the scriptures, of prayer, of the holy Sabbath, are eminently useful in animating and purifying the church; yet these are but means appointed by infinite wisdom; all their invigorating effects are from him who *giveth the increase*.

2. Christ, as head of the church, is the great bond of union; all the members are united to him, and in him, to each other. This is obviously the fact in the human body. All the members, varying as they do, in their functions, their location and their importance, are united to the head, by joints and bands, so as to make one body. From the head the principle of vitality is sent to the remotest extremities, and in consequence of this union, sensations of pleasure and of pain are sent from every part to the head; and thus the members sympathise with each other. "As the human body is formed by the union of all the members to each other under the head, and by the fitness of each member for its own office and place in the body; so the church is formed by the union of its members under Christ the head."

This is a spiritual union, of mind to mind, of heart to heart, without the loss of personality, or individual agency. It consists chiefly in faith, in affections, in spirit, in design: those who are alike in these respects are united to Christ, and in him, to each other.

No truth is more clearly taught in the Bible than that faith is the great bond of union between Christ and his people. By this faith they *hold*, or as it may be rendered, *firmly hold the head*. As the branch is united to the vine, so are all true believers to the

divine Saviour. By this faith, which consists in the knowledge and belief of his truth, *Christ dwells in their hearts*. By this faith, believers are not only united to Christ, but also to each other. There is but *one faith*. This is the faith in which Abel worshipped and died; in which Abraham, hoping against hope, obeyed God; in which Moses *endured, seeing him who is invisible*; which animated the heart of David and Isaiah; in which the publican prayed, and was justified; in which Paul labored and suffered; in which the martyrs bore testimony to the truth, and glorified God in their death. In this faith every member of the church, at this day, is living, and walking, and warring against the flesh and the powers of darkness. This faith imparts to all who cherish it the same views of sin, of the character of God and the Saviour, of the nature and necessity of holiness, of the law and service of God, of the happiness and glories of heaven. In all ages the Mediator, whether made known through the types of bleeding victims offered in sacrifice, or through the clearer revelations of the gospel, is the great object of this faith, the ground of confidence to the church universal. In all believers the effects of this faith are the same, purifying the heart, working by love, overcoming the world, giving peace, and not unfrequently joy and triumph in death. This is one of the strongest bonds by which the members of Christ's body are knit and compacted together. They all think alike concerning the great and fundamental doctrines of the Christian system. They may differ, as they frequently do, on minor points; they may differ widely on subjects having no connexion with religious belief; but respecting those

doctrines which are essential to spiritual life, they are of the *same mind*, and that is the *mind of Christ*.

This faith, which is the *work of God*, produces in the heart those devout affections which characterize the members of the church, and which unite them to their living head, and to each other. By love they are sweetly and powerfully drawn to the Saviour, and transformed into his image. They love him on account of his glorious character, because he has died for them, reconciled them to God by his death, ever liveth to make intercession for them, and will come again to receive them to himself. Nor does he withhold from them the strongest proof, the most encouraging assurances, of his love to them. His love, indeed, has this peculiarity, that it is an *everlasting love*, and therefore it *passeth knowledge*. His whole life was a manifestation of this love; but more especially the sorrows of Gethsemane, and the agonies of the cross. Numerous assurances are given in his word: *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.* If, at the close of our conflict, we are *more than conquerors*, it will be *through him that loved us*. There is not, within the widest range of human conception, a more joyous and sublime union than that of love, sincere and mutual love; and such is the union between Christ and every member of his body.

This love unites the different members to each other. *Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.* All the disciples of Christ bear more or less resemblance to him; it is this image which we

love, wherever it is impressed. The exercise of this devout affection is at once our duty and our privilege. *See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.* This love gives us the same interest in our common Lord, in the prosperity and extension of his kingdom. It prompts us cheerfully to bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ. *If one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it; if one suffer, all suffer with it.* This love furnishes a key to unlock the secrets of other hearts. If it warms our bosom, we know the views of goodness and mercy, what recollection of past kindness filled the mind of the Psalmist, when he commenced one of the songs of Zion with this declaration: *I love the Lord, because he heard my voice and my supplication.* We know what were the thoughts and feelings of Peter's heart, when, interrogated the third time by his Saviour, he replied, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.* This is that *charity which is the bond of perfectness, which never faileth*, which unites us to our common Head, and to all his friends on earth and in heaven.

Evangelical repentance is another affection common to all the members of Christ's body. In this we cannot be said to resemble the Saviour; because he *who did no sin* cannot repent of it; yet, when for our sins we are *made sorry after a godly manner*, we thereby express our approbation of his will, and are thus united to him by this approbation, and this conformity to his will. So far as we are truly penitent, we think alike respecting

the nature and consequence of sin. If he has not wept for his own, he has wept for the sins of others with more unfeigned grief than we do for our own. Repentance is his gift, the reception of which gives us an important relation to the Giver. These feelings of contrition mark the commencement of our return to God, and therefore he rejoices over us, as sheep which were lost, now found and restored to the fold. This joy is a proof of the deep interest he feels in our safety and happiness; and of course that, even by repentance, we are united to him. While on earth, he felt a much more cordial and intimate connexion with the penitent, weeping for their sins, than with the self-righteous, who conceived that they needed no repentance: *and he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.*

This repentance, in its origin, its nature, and its effects, is the same in all the redeemed of the Lord. The moral vileness of sin is the cause of this sorrow; it is sincere, as that of one mourning for a first born, an only child; it is practical, reforming the heart and the life. When we perceive that others feel as we do, on the same subjects, we are thus far united with them. Our own experience is the best explanation of their thoughts and their feelings. When we hear the language of the royal penitent, *I acknowledge my transgressions; my sin is ever before me;* or of the publican, smiting on his breast, *God be merciful to me a sinner;* their words and their feelings are our own; we acknowledge them as brethren. We may not understand the language of the Hottentot, the Brahmin, the Sandwich Islander: but if told that their hearts are melting with sorrow for sin, then, by the aid of another language,

common to all true penitents, we understand their thoughts, we enter into their feelings, and thus perceive that we are one with them.

Such is also the nature of hope, another concomitant of faith and feature of the Christian character, by which all true believers are united to their Head. He is the foundation, the author, and the object of this hope. In every heart where the *hope of glory* is cherished, there is Christ; for *the Lord Jesus Christ is our hope*. There is *one*, and but *one hope of our calling*. Worldly distinctions may separate us widely from each other; but this hope, presenting the same objects to view, placing us in the same relation to Christ, brings us together on the same ground. The wealthy, the honorable, the learned, find that these distinctions avail them nothing in obtaining this balm of life, in securing this *anchor of the soul*. The poorest tenant of the cottage finds that his indigence and obscurity present no barrier to his obtaining this soother of human woe, this inheritance of the saints. *The poor hath hope*, as well as the rich. The hope of the publican, returning to his house justified, embraced every object, every degree of blessedness and glory, which the hope of David, on the throne of Israel, could embrace. The monarch may wear his purple on earth; but in heaven, if equal in holiness, the publican's robe will be as white as his.

By the spirit which they cherish all the members of the church are united to their Head, and to each other. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit; and if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." This is a spirit of zeal, of prayer, of humility, of meekness, of forbearance, of peace, of forgiveness, of bro-

therly kindness. This spirit distinguished our divine Master while on earth, and in every age, in a greater or less degree, characterizes the children of God. These dispositions naturally and strongly associate us with others who cherish them, and who live under their influence. Those who fail, when proper occasions occur, to exercise this spirit, prove themselves unworthy of their relation to Christ, and sever at least one of the bands by which the members of his body are united. Those who go farther, and yield to the spirit of the world, of pride, of irritation and resentment, renounce their connexion with the Saviour, disgrace and afflict his church with their "wrath, strife, and variance," which are "works of the flesh."

All Christians are connected with the Redeemer and with each other by their design. Every man has a paramount object in view, which he labors to promote and attain. The members of the church have their object; the glory of God. From the moment they join this spiritual community, a new design exerts a controlling influence over the exercise of their mind, and over the pursuits of life. Constrained by the love of Christ, they "live no longer to themselves, but to him who died for them." It is the supreme desire of their hearts that while they live they may "live unto the Lord;" that when they die, they may "die unto the Lord;" and that "whether they live or die, they may be the Lord's." Heaven itself can present to their faith and their hope nothing more desirable than as "vessels of mercy," prepared for the purpose, they may "show forth the riches of his glory," through an endless duration. This grand design lived and operated in the

heart of Jesus: to promote the glory of God, he labored and suffered, and died. It is, therefore, an interesting bond of union between him and his members.

Such is the body of Christ; and such are the bands by which it is united to the Head; by which all the members, of every age, of every region, are compacted and knit together into one spiritual community. The same faith, affections, spirit, and design pervade, animate, and combine the whole family. However diversified they may be in wealth, in station, in worldly circumstances, they are "all one," and but "one in Christ." These members sympathize with each other; because they belong to the same body, are parts of the same whole. When Elijah wept in solitude over the disasters of the church, we sympathize with him; because it was the sore afflictions of our own body which caused his grief. When the missionaries, laboring in heathen lands, rejoice in the success of the gospel, we rejoice with them; for this is the increase of our own body. We rejoice in the sure anticipations of that millennial day when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of Christ, when the church shall have no other limits than those of the habitable globe. Thousands of its members are now *working*, and thousands more will soon begin to *work, effectually*, we hope, through the "quickeningspirit," to "make this increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Such ought to be the church, united in peace, in harmony, in zeal, in Christian affection: but what do we sometimes witness? The body of Christ divided; the hand denying that the foot is of the body; the eye denying that the ear is connected with the head;

brother armed against brother with suspicion as cold as death, with jealousy and envy more cruel than the grave! Of this mournful and afflictive state of the church, we will only say, "an enemy hath done this!" This is not the work of the Prince of Peace; these are not the "fruits of the Spirit." From this painful scene let us, with joyous hope, look forward to that day when the "Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them who do iniquity;" when the church shall be a "glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

3. Christ, as Head, is the supreme Ruler of his church. In the animal economy, the head is considered as the seat of intelligence, by which all designs are formed for the government and protection of the body; so the church is indebted to Christ for her government and protection. He possesses every qualification for this high and important office. "All power in heaven and in earth" is given unto him. His wisdom, his knowledge, his goodness, his justice, his truth, are infinite. "Him," therefore, "God hath highly exalted; given him to be Head over all things for his body the church." That his government may be complete and universal, "angels and authorities, and powers, are made subject unto him." All the heavenly hosts are his "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

This government is particular, as well as general, extending to each individual, as well as to the church collectively. To be general, it must be particular. "The body is not one member, but many;" so the church has no existence, but as it is made up of indi-

vidual members. Each member is, therefore, a special object of attention, sharing in the wisdom, power, and goodness of the great Governor. The offices and stations in the church are appointed and filled according to his pleasure. One is called to preach the word, another to hear; one to rule, another to obey. Those events and circumstances which distinguish the life of one from that of another are all prescribed by infinite wisdom, and all with a special reference to the spiritual interest of the individual, and of the whole body. If one is elevated to stations of civil authority, it is that he may "rule in the fear of God." If wealth is entrusted to another, it is that he may "deal his bread to the hungry," that he may employ this wealth in promoting the Redeemer's kingdom. If any are afflicted, assailed with divers temptations, it is that "patience may have her perfect work," that they may recommend the religion of Jesus by the meek submission with which they suffer, that their faith may be tried and strengthened, and thus be found unto praise at the appearing of Christ. Each individual shares in the watchfulness and kind protection of the great shepherd of the flock. He sees all the stratagems, all the devices of Satan and of wicked men; these he restrains and controls with such wisdom and power, that not even the weakest of the flock shall perish. Job had his trials, severe and successive trials; but the "Lord was very pitiful," and he was sustained and delivered out of them all. Peter was sifted; but before this sifting commenced the Lord had prayed that his faith might not fail. Paul felt the buffetings from a messenger of Satan; from which he thrice prayed for deliverance. His prayer was answered, not by actual

deliverance, but by the kind promise of support; "my grace is sufficient for thee." This promise has done much greater good than immediate relief from these buffetings would have done: it not only sustained the apostle, but it has sustained thousands in every subsequent age, and will, to the end of time, be a refuge to the tempted. He in whom believers confide, is able and determined to succor those who are tempted, to protect, defend, and save them with an *everlasting salvation*.

Although, in every age, and under every form of administration, the church is one, yet for the sake of public and social worship, this one universal church consists of a great number of separate individual churches, embracing a greater or less number of members. Towards each of these, as we learn from the seven Asiatic churches, a special providence is employed. One, in answer to prayer, flourishes, abundantly blessed with the *increase of God*; another, as a reproof and punishment for coldness and negligence, is left to barrenness and declension. One is assailed with *fiery trials*; another is shielded from these trials. This guidance of the great Head embraces especially the pastors of the churches. The Lord may be provoked to remove that candlestick, whose light has been neglected. One is called to "preach the gospel to those who are at Rome, to the splendid, the populous, and wealthy city; another is sent to the mountains, to seek and bring to the fold the lost sheep. One is left for half a century to guide, instruct, and comfort the same people; another is sent *far away*, to proclaim salvation to those who are sitting in darkness. He who reigns supreme in heaven and in earth says to one, "go, and

he goeth, to another come, and he cometh, and to his servant do this, and he doeth it."

There are designs of infinite wisdom and goodness, requiring successive ages for their accomplishment, having a special reference to the advancement and protection of the church universal. Abraham was called to be a stranger in a strange land. His posterity were sent into Egypt that they might be redeemed with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, that the whole earth might be filled with the glory of God. The Chaldean empire was overthrown, that Israel, released from captivity, might "return and come to Zion with songs." What "overturning, overturning, overturning" of the nations took place, kingdom succeeding kingdom, the diadem of empire passing from head to head, to prepare the world for the advent of Messiah, whose right it is to reign. When the first preachers of the gospel received their commission, the world, by successive changes, was in that state most favorable to success. The spirit of persecution was soon raised against them; but the divine wisdom and power are clearly manifested in making this opposition "fall out rather to the furtherance of the gospel," than to impede its progress. Satan, when he "put it into the heart of Judas to betray his Master; the rulers of the Jews, when they obtained from Pilate the sentence of death, did not intend to advance, but to crush the cause of Christianity; yet such was the result of their designs. The cross is the pillar, the very fountain of life to the church. Could they have prevented the crucifixion, they would have extinguished the light of the world. At a subsequent day, while the church was yet confined to Jerusalem, these rulers excited a

great persecution against it. Stephen, indeed, is "carried out to his burial;" the other members, "except the apostles, were scattered abroad." But although compelled to leave Jerusalem, they carried in their hearts the love of the Redeemer, and a zeal to promote his cause. Therefore they "went every where preaching the word." The enemies of the church may partially succeed; but their success shall recoil upon themselves by advancing the cause which they intend to impede and destroy. "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

Such is the government which *Jehovah-Jesus* is exercising for the increase and protection of his church. It is wise, and good, and powerful. It embraces all events from the greatest to the least; all of which have a connexion, either direct or remote, with the interests of the church, or of its individual members. Those events which are too limited in their results to change the state of nations, may have an important influence on the state of particular churches; and those too limited to have this influence may yet have an important effect in diversifying the life of individuals. In one age, from very small beginnings may commence a series of events which, through revolving centuries, may ripen into measures of safety and extension to the church, at some future and far distant period. The present state of the church, in our beloved country, through an unbroken series of events, may be traced back to the hour when Columbus sailed in search of a new world. The changes now in progress, or now commencing, among the nations of the earth, may have an intimate connexion with the universal diffusion of the gospel, with the millennial prosperity of the Re-

deemer's kingdom. Many of the intermediate links in this chain of causes and effects may appear, in human view, to have little or no connexion with the church; they may be wholly of a political nature; they may even wear an aspect unfriendly to the cause of Christ; yet under the mighty control of him who is "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working," they shall become instrumental in promoting the empire of truth. Those who live, during these intervening periods, while the design is yet advancing to maturity, cannot, of course, comprehend the meaning of passing events, or even conjecture what the Lord intends to bring out of them. To understand the wisdom and goodness of these progressive measures, some knowledge of the end which they are intended to accomplish, is indispensably necessary. Those who are connected with the church on earth when "the decree shall bring forth," when the design shall issue in its appropriate results, may, with pious admiration, perceive the wisdom of this long series of events. Or there may be designs so vast and comprehensive as to require the close or nearly the close of the mediatorial kingdom for their full completion; which cannot, of course, be understood until they are viewed in the clearer light of eternity. All this is strictly true respecting each individual member of the church; there is a series of events peculiar and adapted to each one. His present safety and progress in the divine life, may, through the Spirit, be the result of measures which commenced years ago, even before he was born. Events now passing, or now commencing, may have a connexion with his peace and comfort in future years. Changes which very deeply affect him now may be to preserve him

from temptations, from the designs of his enemies, of which he has not the least suspicion, and which never will be known to him in this life. But they are clearly seen and frustrated by his Saviour, through these very changes. He cannot therefore understand the design of these changes, unless he know those trials from which they shield him.

Indeed, in a government, the whole plan of which is drawn by infinite wisdom, and existed in the divine mind from all eternity, commencing at the creation, embracing all nations, marking out the path, with all its events, of each individual member of the church, extending through all ages, even to the last moment of time; in such a government there might be many dispensations, too vast and complicated, too dark and mysterious, to be comprehended, in this life, by our limited minds. This ought not, however, to disturb our peace, or to shake our confidence in the wisdom and rectitude of Him who guides and defends his church. With animating hope, let us wait till the *kingdom shall be delivered up to the Father*; then, if the knowledge of these dispensations will afford us greater degrees of love and joy, if it will raise our songs even one note higher, it will, if not instantaneously, yet gradually, be unfolded to our view. Then, with profound and heavenly admiration, we will say; *He hath done all things well!* He has brought the church, with all her members, in safety through every trial, and presented her, a glorious church, unto God, that *God may be all in all*.

4. Christ, as Head, is the Honor of the church, of all the members of his body. Such is evidently the case with the human body; the head is its most distinguished and honorable part. The crown, the badge of

royalty, is therefore worn on the head. Indignities offered to this part, are offered to the whole body; If the head is honored, so all the members are honored with it. So Christ is the honor and glory of the church.

The truth of this proposition will not appear to those who judge according to the maxims and customs of this world. In their estimation, Jesus Christ is *lightly esteemed*; he is *despised* as reproachful. A connexion with him, and a resemblance to him, confer no honor in their opinion. Wealth and power, in their view, are the chief sources of honor; to which some add splendid talents, and rich attainments in human science. The honor of Jesus did not consist in these worldly distinctions. His life was spent without the enjoyments procured by wealth; *he had not where to lay his head*. He possessed no power in political arrangements; nor did he seek an alliance with those who were invested with civil authority. His honor consisted in the supreme excellency of his moral character; in meekness, humility, gentleness, kindness, forbearance, forgiveness, and mercy; in love to God, and zeal to promote his glory. These moral qualities, these unobtrusive excellencies, carried out in all his intercourse with men, into every action of his life, were the transcendant honors and dignity of *the Son of God*.

This is the honor which Christ confers on every member of his body; not the honor which *cometh from men*, but the *honor which is from God*. He may not bestow on them the wealth or the power of this world; may not distinguish them with splendid talents and human science: or if these should be granted, they are not the marks of his peculiar favour, by which *all men shall know that they are his disciples*. But he calls them, by

his grace, to repentance, unites them to himself by faith, breathes into them his own spirit, imprints on their hearts his own image. This repentance, this faith, this spirit, this image, is their honor, the seal of God, the mark by which they shall be distinguished when *God shall make up his jewels*. By a blind and misjudging world they may be despised; but when the angels shall be sent to the north and to the south, to the east and to the west, these, and these only shall be selected as the favourites of heaven. When the world, with all its distinctions shall *pass away with a great noise*, then shall they *shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*. Their own minds, their utmost stretch of thought may labor in vain to comprehend their future exaltation; that high and heavenly eminence to which they shall be raised. *They know not what they shall be; but they know that when Christ shall appear, they shall be like him; for they shall see him as he is*. Even their bodies shall partake in this honor. At the voice of the arch-angel, from the grave they shall come forth *spiritual, incorruptible, immortal bodies, fashioned like unto his glorious body*. Then, when the whole universe shall be assembled, they shall occupy the station of honor; they shall be placed on the *right hand* of the Judge. God the Father will honor them; they shall *enter into the joy of their Lord*; they shall receive a *crown of life*; they shall be with the Saviour, *beholding his glory*, and as they behold, shall be more and more transformed into the same image, *from glory to glory*; they shall sit with him on his throne; they shall be *kings and priests unto God*, and *reign with him for ever and ever*.

A few reflections, from the subject, will now claim our attention.

1. How powerfully calculated is this view of the subject to quench forever all inordinate desire for the honors and distinctions of this world. The moment is at hand when they shall vanish into perfect insignificance before the sublime glories of eternity. The day will come when earthly crowns and all the wealth of this world, wrapped in the flames of the conflagration, shall pass away; and those who set their hearts on them shall be destitute, disgraced, ruined; and shall call, and yet call in vain, to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb." Then shall come forth millions from the vale of obscurity, from indigence, from reproach, to riches in the heavens that shall never fade, to joys that are eternal. The distinctions of this world have their place and their value; but surely it is death, it is folly, to take them as the portion of the soul. Therefore, "be not envious at the foolish, when you see the prosperity of the wicked;" think of the slippery places on which they stand; think of their end; see them "brought into desolation as in a moment; utterly consumed with terrors. Be patient, therefore, brethren, establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. And when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." If you should be reproached for the name of Christ, because you belong to his body, and breathe his spirit, be neither dismayed nor afraid; rejoice in it as a proof that the "spirit of glory resteth upon you." Think of the purposes you are now preparing to answer; disgrace not your high calling, by setting your affections on things on the earth." Even now show forth the praises of him who calls you

to these celestial honors by "seeking those things which are above," where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.

2. We infer from this subject the perfect safety of the church; which necessarily implies the safety of all her members.* For we repeat, the church has no existence, but as it is composed of individual members. That human body is not perfect which has lost part of its members, though they were the very smallest. The church has had and still has her enemies. Satan has laid his snares, has employed his devices, has shot forth his fiery darts; the whole power of the Roman empire has been exerted in bloody persecution; infidels have marshalled their hosts, and tried the force of ridicule, of sophistry, of philosophy, falsely so called; false friends, hypocritical professors have betrayed her interests, and threatened her with ruin: but still she lives, and increases, and triumphs. She has had her seasons of affliction, of despondency, and gloom; but has never been forgotten nor forsaken by her Saviour. At one time when idolatry had nearly extinguished her light in Judea, Josiah was raised up, and restored the worship of the true God. At another, Cyrus, although he "knew not the Lord," was made instrumental in building up the walls of Zion, and filling her courts with the voice of thanksgiving and praise. At a still later period, Luther and Calvin, with their coadjutors, checked and rolled back that torrent which threatened to sweep her into the vortex of ruin. These enemies, whether they be many or few fallen spirits or men, avowed infidels or professed friends, are all subject to his control who "loves the church." He says to them,

* The invisible church, composed of real believers.—ED.

as to the waves of the great deep, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed. There is not a movement, not a revolution among the nations, that is not, either immediately or remotely, rendered subservient to the interests of his cause. Even the "wrath of man," bursting forth in war and bloodshed, "shall praise him," by opening a wider door for the spread of the gospel. The Lord from on high does not merely approve the struggles which the church is making for her own safety and extension; his own omnipotent arm is actively and constantly employed, aiding and directing these struggles. "The kings of the earth may set themselves in opposition; the rulers may take counsel together; the heathen may rage;" the prince of darkness may lead them on to the conflict: but he that "sitteth in the heaven shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." The spirit of life breathed into the church shall never be extinguished; the bands by which she is united to Christ shall never be severed. Her members may be removed by death; but others shall fill their places. They may have their buffetings, their siftings; but not one of them shall be lost. They may be *cast down*; but not one of them shall be *destroyed*. With all her members, the church, therefore, is **SAFE**. She will soon be the "church triumphant;" will soon come "to the heavenly Mount Zion, with songs, and everlasting joy upon her head."

3. How zealous and how diligent should every member of the church be in working out his own salvation, and in promoting the great interest of the body of Christ. In the human body every part has its peculiar function, and its appropriate end to accom-

plish. There is not a useless limb, muscle, gland, or fibre in the whole system. If one part becomes inactive or irregular in its functions, other parts connected with it, and dependent on it, necessarily become disordered, and fail in their object. From the derangement and failure of one single organ, disease may pervade the whole body; and unless that organ can be restored to a healthy state, death must be the consequence. But when every part is regular in its action, then the whole system enjoys perfect health, and is adapted to vigorous and useful efforts. Such is the body of Christ. The members are so connected and dependent on each other, that the criminal negligence and irregularities of one will affect others within the sphere of his influence; and thus the injury may extend from one to another, till whole sections of the church are affected by it. One member of a church, distinguished by his wealth, his station, or his talents, and especially the pastor, always distinguished by the high and sacred office which he fills, may, by his worldly spirit, unguarded, unchristian example, paralyze the whole church, this church may affect others; and these again others, still more remote from the source of this wide-spreading evil; until the whole, or nearly the whole church universal, becomes disordered and lifeless.* All this may not take place in a day or a year; the contaminating plague may extend and increase for ages, before it reaches these mournful results. Yet such is the tendency of every unchristian spirit and example. The influence of one single member, in its baleful effects, may extend widely around him, and descend to unborn generations. Who can tell with

* The visible church, mixed with nominal professors.—Ed.

whom, or at what time, the lukewarmness in the Laodicean church commenced? Who can tell with whom or at what time that state of things commenced, against which Luther raised his voice? Let every servant "watch and pray," lest he should have the dreadful distinction of giving rise to a similar train of consequences.

On the other hand, when every member is faithful and zealous in the discharge of all religious duties, then will the whole body enjoy that spiritual health and vigor which tend greatly to the increase of itself. One single member, by keeping with diligence his own heart, by regulating agreeably to the word of God his own life, by embracing every opportunity of doing good, by breathing around him the spirit of faith, of love, and of zeal, may provoke others to love and to good works; and these again others; until large sections of the church shall feel a more animating pulse of divine life. One faithful, devoted servant of the Lord may exert a quickening influence on thousands, on millions, whom he will never meet, till he meets them at the right hand of the judge. Nor is there a single member excluded from the high privilege, or exempted from the solemn duty of enlarging the body, and promoting the kingdom of Christ. There are few, indeed, who cannot contribute of the substance which God has given, if it were but *two mites*, to the advancement of this cause; all can furnish the influence of a Christian spirit and a consistent example; all can offer the humble and importunate prayer of faith. The church must live; the church must increase; the church must embrace the whole world. But this increase depends, through the blessing of God, on the zealous

efforts of her own members. It is but the probability of success, in secular pursuits, which prompts the world to active exertions from year to year, and from age to age. How much more powerful is the motive derived from absolute certainty of success? Who, then, can be idle in the vineyard of the Lord, when so much remains to be done; when nearly the whole world is one extensive Macedonia, from which is breaking forth the loud and affecting cry, "Come over and help us!" Yes, come over, and come quickly, and help us! What member of the church, bought with a Saviour's blood, viewing by faith the joys and glories of eternity, can forget, and if he remembers, can avoid feeling the life-giving impulse of the sentence, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." May every member of the church, through the help of God, resolve to be that servant!

4. Finally, we infer the great importance of being united to the church; not only in name, but in reality; not merely by profession, but by faith, by love, and by the spirit of Christ. The Redeemer wants not disciples to say, *Lord, Lord*, to honor him with their lips, while they quench his Spirit, and disobey his voice. Those, and those only will be acknowledged who give him their hearts, and obey his will. All such he has pledged himself to protect and save. But every perfection of his character, every principle of his government, every threatening of his word, proclaims destruction, deep and eternal destruction to all who are not united to him. If he is omnipotent to save, so is he also to destroy. If none are able to pluck the sheep

out of his hand, neither are any able to shield the finally impenitent from the stroke of his justice. It is not more certain that *glory, honor, and peace* await the one, than that *indignation and wrath, tribulation, and anguish* await the other. If those who believe in his name and obey his voice shall "inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world;" so surely shall those who close their life in unbelief and impenitence "depart accursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." It is in vain to ask, and more especially by way of excuse for the most criminal indifference, "May we not be saved without becoming members of the church?" It is impossible to be saved without being united to Christ; and those who are united to him are members of his body, which is the church: nor can this union exist but by faith. The judge has, therefore, kindly given us, for our consideration and profit, his decision on the subject; *He that believeth not shall be condemned.* How dangerous, then, is the state of thousands who *make light* of these things, who "neglect this great salvation," who "turn away from him who speaketh from heaven!" They may divert their attention with the pursuits and amusements of life; they may chase the wealth, the honor, the pleasure of this world; but *the wrath of God abideth on them.* Let all such hear the *glad tidings* that *Christ came into the world to save sinners*; of whom, if they are even the chief, yet they need not despair; if they will believe in his name, they *shall be saved.* And let every child of God, lifting up clean hands and a pure heart, pour forth the earnest and persevering prayer to the great Head of the

church, that he would gird on his sword, and ride forth *conquering and to conquer*, transforming his enemies into friends, thousand after thousand, million after million, until the *kingdoms of this-world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*.

SERMON XIV.

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER M'FARLANE, A. M.

REDEMPTION.

In whom we have redemption through his blood. EPH. i. 7.

THE doctrine of redemption through the sacrifice and intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ is of fundamental importance in the Christian religion; and consequently it has the highest claims upon our attention and regard. The conduct of *all* who, in any degree, make it a subject of inquiry, shows their sense of its importance: no part of revealed truth is cherished and defended with more anxious solicitude by its friends; none is pursued with more inveterate hostility by its enemies.

In those countries where Christianity has made but little advancement, men are not at the pains, to any considerable extent, of corrupting its doctrines, or perverting its precepts: in most instances, the whole is rejected without concern and without examination. It