

A SERIES

OF

TRACTS

ON THE

DOCTRINES, ORDER, AND POLITY

OF THE

✓
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

EMBRACING

SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

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TO AN OLD PERSON WHO HAS NO HOPE IN CHRIST.

MY AGED FRIEND:—Your life thus far has passed rapidly away. You felt surprise, when you heard others speak of you as old. Perhaps even now you easily forget that you are no longer young. “Gray hairs are here and there upon Ephraim, yet he knoweth it not.” It seemed hard for Samson to forget the feats of former days. Even when shorn of his strength, he attempted new exploits. There is a vanity in some old persons which leads them to ape the young. Let every one act as best becomes his age. Paul says: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” It is a pitiable sight to see old and young trying to take each other’s places. If you have passed middle life, admit the fact into your serious thoughts.

The Bible requires reverence for the aged. “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head.” I approach you with the greatest respect. “I have a message from God unto thee.” I wish to deliver it meekly, honestly, and solemnly. I beg you to hear it. I will use neither many nor vain words.

I hope you believe the great truths of the Bible. If you doubt any of them, I beseech you to give yourself to prayer, and to the word of God itself, that you may know the truth, and be persuaded of it. An honest desire to know the truth, shown by prayer and searching the Scriptures, God will bless. He can teach you

as no other can. Cry mightily to him Wisdom comes “*from above.*”

No doubt you have sometimes said, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.” But do not your actions show that, while you would die the death of the righteous, you are not leading his life? Remember, you have a soul. To save it is “the one thing needful.” He, who is poor, sick, and despised, may save his soul, and so be happy for ever. He who is rich, strong, and full of all earthly good, may lose his soul, and so be eternally undone. Because it is immortal, the soul is of priceless value. Many have undervalued it. None ever thought it worth more than it is. God alone can know its full value. No man can pay a ransom for it, for its redemption is precious. To save it, God gave his dear Son. To save it, Jesus wept, and bled, and died. To save it, the Holy Spirit calls you to repentance.

If you are not a true Christian, *your soul is now in a lost condition.* So the Bible teaches: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die;” “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;” “He that believeth not, shall be damned;” “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are LOST.” So righteous is God, and so holy is his law, that many an aged person has felt the power of a fiery condemnation in his conscience, before he left this world. William, the Conqueror of England, was a great king, warrior, and statesman. In his last days, he wept, he groaned, he confessed, but no comfort came. He said: “Laden with many and grievous sins, I tremble; and being ready to be taken soon into the terrible examination of God, I am ignorant what I should do. I can by no means number the evils I

have done these sixty years, for which I am now constrained, without stay, to render an account to the just "Judge." Many a monarch has died in anguish of soul. Neither greatness, nor obscurity can shield a guilty soul from the terrors of the Almighty. The aged, impenitent pauper has groaned away his dying breath in dismay on his bed of straw. Through life men often feel that they are not at peace with God, and dying they confess it. Death is commonly, though not always, an honest hour. Some hold out false signals even then, though not free from fears and terrors. At that trying moment, who would not prefer hope to fear, and peace to dismay? Yet without a change of heart, and a pardon of all our sins, we cannot be saved. We "are by nature the children of wrath," so that "he, that believeth not, is condemned already." If you, my aged friend, have not fled to Christ, you are condemned, you are lost.

But, although your soul is lost, *it is not lost beyond recovery*. Blessed be God for that. "There is mercy with God, that he may be feared:" "With him is plenteous redemption:" "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?" I take up the words and repeat the question, Why will you die? Why will you not be saved? Will you not be saved? I trust you will. I pray you may. I know that by divine grace you can. The door of mercy is yet open, open to you. Though you have sinned long, and much, and grievously, against God, yet he says: "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." For many years you thought it was time

enough yet. Possibly this day your soul is taken in some such snare. Stop and think, I pray you. Perhaps in an hour God may say: "Thy soul is required of thee." If he should, would you not be undone for ever? You know that men commonly die as they live; that a life of sin is the forerunner of endless misery; that dying regrets are a poor substitute for a life of holiness; and that a death-bed repentance is little to be trusted. No wise man will leave to his last hours the proper work of life.

But perhaps you think it is now too late to turn to God. Through hardness of heart, you may not be in terrible despair. But the practical persuasion of your mind may be that God has no mercy for you, and that you have sinned too long to be forgiven. If so, let me plead with you to give up this delusion. No where has God drawn up more terrible charges against sinners than in the first chapter of Isaiah, yet he concludes his address to these guilty men (and through them he speaks to you) thus: "Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Could words better suit your case? and they are uttered in sincerity and truth. They are the words of God. He never mocks any of his creatures.

We have in the Bible an account of the conversion of an old and very great sinner. Manasseh, the son of pious Hezekiah, was early instructed in the true religion. When he became king, he restored idolatry, which was the highest kind of offence. He insulted God to his face by defiling the temple. He formed a league with Satan, and used enchantments and witch-

craft, sins punishable with death by the fundamental law of his kingdom. He sacrificed his own children to devils. He was one of the worst of murderers. "He shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." He was obstinate and refractory under reproof. He made the nation follow his wicked practices. He seemed to be mad upon his idols and iniquities. His sin was aggravated by the example and instruction of his good father to the contrary, by his high station, by his malice and wantonness, by his stubbornness and by his long continuance in it. He ascended the throne at twelve years of age, and he lived to the age of sixty-seven. Yet when he was sixty-two years old, that is, when he had for fifty years together defiled his soul, corrupted his people, and insulted God by enormous crimes, he was brought to repentance, pardoned and saved. "Old or young sinners, great or small sinners, are not to be beaten off from Christ, but encouraged to repentance and faith; for who knows but the bowels of mercy may yearn at last upon one that hath all along rejected it?" God has vast treasures of rich mercy, in store even for old and hardened sinners, who will "cease to do evil, and learn to do well."

Even in our own day, how many aged persons have been brought to repentance! Every old minister, who has been very useful, can tell of the wondrous displays of the grace of God to such. Mr. H. was a man of good family. He was well educated, but a proud scorner. He avoided the house, the worship, and the people of God. He was profane and mingled with such. He was often intoxicated with strong drink. Yet at the age of seventy-two God's Spirit arrested

him and brought him to cry for mercy. He lived for more than two years after his change, and gave the best evidence he could in that time that he was indeed a new man.

N. D. went through nearly all the war of American Independence with honour as a soldier, but not without injury to his morals. He was honest and truthful, but for more than fifty years of his life he seldom visited a church, and he was intemperate. God was not in all his thoughts, till he was eighty-nine years old. Then he began with diligence and prayer to read the Scriptures. He went to the house of God. He sought private instruction also. After a season of great spiritual distress he was brought to settled peace of mind. I have heard his pastor say that he never saw a more lively Christian. He lived more than eighteen months after this change, and was eminently devout, humble and happy to the last. He learned to sing several hymns. Never shall I forget his appearance and voice as he sang,

“Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”

“That suits me, that suits me exactly!” he often said.

My aged friend, do you seek further assurances that there is mercy even for you, if you will turn to God? Here they are: “Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” “The bruised reed he

will not break, the smoking flax he will not quench." "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Say not, "It is too late." Call upon God in earnest prayer, ask others to pray for you and with you. Confess your sins to God. If you have injured men, repair the injury as far as possible. "Seek the Lord, while he may be found." Come to Christ as you are, a poor, lost, helpless, guilty, polluted sinner, and He will save you. "He is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him." But if you refuse another hour, it may be too late. This may be the last call you will ever have. Any moment you may drop into hell. Will you, will you, O will you be saved?

When nailed to the tree,
 Christ answered the prayer
 Of one, who, like me,
 Was nigh to despair;
 He did not upbraid him
 With all he had done,
 But instantly made him
 A saint and a son.

The jailor, I read,
 A pardon received:
 And how was he freed?
 He only believed:
 His case mine resembled,
 Like me he was foul,
 Like me too he trembled,
 But faith made him whole.

Though Saul in his youth,
 To madness enraged,
 Against the Lord's truth
 And people engaged;

Yet Jesus, the Saviour,
Whom long he reviled
Received him to favour,
And made him a child.

A foe to all good,
In wickedness skilled,
Manasseh with blood
Jerusalem filled ;
In evil long hardened
The Lord he defied ;
Yet he too was pardoned,
When mercy ! he cried.

The death that Christ died
The blood that he spilt,
To sinners applied,
Discharge from all guilt :
This great Intercessor
Can give, if he please,
The vilest transgressor,
Immediate release.