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THE PRINCIPLES OF OUR FAITH
IN THE
WORK OF FOREIGN MISSIONS.



The Principles of our Faith in the Work of Foreign Missions.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church,

BY ITS APPOINTMENT, IN THE

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BY THE

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SERMON.

"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."—JOHN xviii. 37.

STANDING where I now stand, and following those whom I now follow, I shall not attempt any thing more than to give utterance to such thoughts as I am sure will meet a ready response in your own hearts—to plain and simple truths, which, as Presbyterians, we all know, and believe, and love, as elementary and fundamental principles in the kingdom of our God and Saviour.

Let us remember, however, that the simplest, the most familiar, the most elementary truths, on all subjects, are the most important and the most profitable.

It is necessary, too, continually to revert to first principles; for there is a fatal proclivity in men to grow weary of them, to wander from them, and to leave them out of sight. They cannot, therefore, be too often insisted on and repeated in our hearing.

That portion of the Church of Christ which fulfils its highest functions in this General Assembly, testifies its faith in the matter of foreign missions by an annual sermon on this special theme. Evidently this can with no propriety be done, if the work of foreign missions does not appertain to the primary and most essential office of the Church. It is for no secondary and subordinate concern to occupy the time, and waste the energies of the last and highest court of Jesus Christ here upon earth. That which is distinguished by your solemn and formal consideration must vindicate its right as belonging to the very subject-matter of your duty, and to the very highest responsibilities of an ecclesiastical assembly. It behoves us, therefore, perpetually to remind ourselves, and to declare unto others, what our faith is in this respect, and what we acknowledge to perceive and feel to be the work we have to do.

Suffer me, therefore, to present in the simplest manner I can, what I

suppose to be the principles of our faith, involved in the work of foreign missions—the principles which justify the attention which it receives in the counsels of the assembled Church.

1. First, then, we believe in *the Election of Grace*. It is a part of our faith, in which we rejoice and are exceeding glad, that God has chosen out of the world a part of the human family, and given them in covenant to the Lord Jesus Christ, to be redeemed by His blood, sanctified by His Word and Spirit, and glorified by His grace in joy and blessedness forever.

We believe, furthermore, that these elect are to be found in all ages and generations, and among all the tribes and kindreds of the earth. This precious and instructive truth was repeatedly declared to the father of the faithful when it was revealed to him in words full of mystery, which might well have staggered any faith but his: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” The royal Psalmist spake of it when, moved by the Holy Ghost, he wrote the decree of the eternal Father for the glory of the eternal Son, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” The prophet Isaiah announced it again when it was given him to utter in the language of men the counsels of the Godhead, “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth.” And it was yet again revealed to the exile of Patmos, when his vision was opened to discern the secrets of eternity, and he testified, “I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb!”

The last of the prophets, in the concluding revelation of Holy Scripture, as if with the trumpet-tones of a great victory, proclaims this great, this sublime truth, that the elect of God shall be gathered from the four winds of heaven, from amongst all the nations of the whole world.

There is not one of them, therefore, over which the heart of the Church does not yearn and travail, as the birth-place for children of the Most High, and from which she does not by faith see gathering and coming together the sons and daughters of the Lord our God, who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and are to be called and sanctified by His word and Spirit, to swell the company, and shout the hallelujahs

of the glorified in heaven. How, then, can it be that the Church shall not embrace in its sympathies, and prayers, and efforts, every tribe and kindred of the human race! How can the heart of a Christian fail in its loving charities to compass every spot of earth where men are born, live and die; and where, therefore, may be found a part of the elect of God, unto whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom.

2. Another principle of our faith is that for the salvation of the elect of God, *the universal and indispensable means is THE TRUTH*, and therefore that the truth must be *preached to all nations*, that thereby the elect may be gathered, and brought home to glory.

This is our testimony, that the instrumental cause of a sinner's salvation is the Truth—the Truth of God as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The power, the effectual saving power, is the power of the Divine Spirit, “dividing to every man severally as He will”; and therefore the glory is His, and His only. But the means with and by which He saves is the Truth. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. As it is written, “We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And with what conclusive emphasis does the same apostle affirm the same truth to the Romans? “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

It is a truth unspeakably important and glorious that the kingdom of Christ in the hearts of men is founded in *conviction*, and by conviction it is to be extended, perpetuated, and made triumphant. To be a Christian is just this and no more, to know, believe, and obey the truth. This, therefore, necessitates teaching and instruction as indispensable to the continuance and spread of that kingdom in the earth.

The process of a sinner's salvation begins with the illumination of the mind. By the instrumentality of the Word, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, the light of truth and knowledge is conveyed to the darkened understanding. That light, supernatural and divine, breaks through

the mists of passion, prejudice and sin, and, pouring its rays in upon the soul, compels it to see, and know, and believe. Against the dictates of his own perverted reason, against flesh and sense, desire and lust, and pride, and the powers of hell, the sinner knows and believes. In and with this enlightening and convincing grace, he is born again by the power of the Holy Ghost, and becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. Hence the conversion of a sinner is constantly described in Scripture by terms which refer to this mental illumination. For example, it is spoken of as "opening the eyes—coming to a knowledge of the truth—being taught of God—having learned of the Father—to know God and Jesus Christ—being enlightened—having the eyes of the understanding opened." These and similar expressions are perpetually used as synonymous with the new birth, or new creation of the soul. And the apostle describes the gracious operation in words of wonder when he says, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The efficient power is the power of God. The instrument and means is the truth.

And as in the beginning, so in the continuance and perfection of Christian experience, a knowledge and belief of the truth is the indispensable means. No advance or improvement can be made in the life of God, except as it is accompanied by increasing knowledge. The gracious and lively actings of Faith grow and strengthen only from the understanding spiritually apprehending more and more of the truth. Love, the consummate grace and glory of religion, in every act, and in every increase, must be preceded by the perception and belief of some truth to inflame its ardors.

It is true that a mere intellectual knowledge and conviction of doctrine may outrun the experimental and actual godliness of the soul, and even exist without it. But what we affirm is, that experience cannot possibly outgrow knowledge, obedience never exceed conviction—a proposition which only needs to be understood to be accepted. Hence our Saviour prayed for His disciples, "Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word is truth." Hence, also, one apostle exhorts us to desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby; and another affirms that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Hence the constant appellation of religion in the Scriptures as light, knowledge, understanding and wisdom; and the constant description of the sinner as blind, ignorant and foolish. And herein is the glory of

true religion, that it is no delusion of the reason, but its illumination ; no illusive trick upon the fancy, no blind impulse of superstition, but the enlightening of the soul, an apprehension of the truth, the certainty of reason and understanding taught of God. Its disciples "know the truth," and "the truth has made them free."

It is of the very substance of our faith that one of the offices which Christ executes as our Redeemer, is that of a *Prophet*, revealing to us, "by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation." And He accomplishes the functions of His Priestly and Kingly offices in the souls of His people, by means of His prophetic office. If, therefore, this office is not fulfilled in the hearts of men, salvation is impossible. Accordingly we testify that "they, who, having never heard the Gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in Him, cannot be saved."

The pestilent heresies which have plagued the Church have ever flourished by the perversion of some Gospel truth. Such has always been the device of the devil. And so that monstrous error, which, asserting itself to be by pre-eminence enlightened and rational, denies all the offices of Christ but the prophetic, deceives and destroys men by affirming and building itself upon a part of the truth. For it is true, fundamentally true, that Christ is the Great Teacher of the world, and that He saves the world by instructing and enlightening it. This, though not *all* the truth, is a most important and precious part of it. Our Saviour's own testimony was, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." The beloved disciple declared that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," not grace alone, but "*grace and truth*;" neither one without the other; but both one and the other, "*grace and truth*."

It is of our faith, then, that our Lord God gathers His elect into His kingdom, and prepares them for their final glory—not by the wisdom and power of man—not by the rites and ceremonies of the Church—not by some mystic charm of priestly incantations—but by His own great power and mercy, by means of the truth, and with wisdom and understanding. There are those who profess to believe that men are made Christians, and saved in the kingdom of heaven, by I know not what means of superstition, ignorance and folly. But it is our simple and precious faith that men become Christians, and enter into eternal life, only by a knowledge and belief of the truth under the effectual working of the grace and power of God. Therefore they must have the Gospel, or they are lost and damned, inevitably and eternally.

3. A third principle of our faith is, that, as the Election of Grace are to be found among all the tribes and kindreds of men, and as the Truth is the indispensable means whereby they are to be saved, and God's purpose accomplished, so *He has instituted and ordained the Church, chiefly and pre-eminently with this design and for this work, namely, to preserve and proclaim the Truth throughout all the world.*

The minds of men have been grievously deceived and deluded as to the nature, design and functions of the Church. They have been led to regard it as appointed for some mystical and incomprehensible purpose, and endued with some mysterious, and, as it were, magical powers, and to look upon its ministers as invested with some superhuman virtue, whereby they convey to men the grace of salvation. Our faith, however, in this respect, is exceedingly simple. We believe the Church to be an institution of divine origin and authority, whose function and office, primarily and chiefly, it is to preserve, proclaim, and propagate the Truth. She is constituted by her divine Lord and Master, the depository, the witness, and the herald of the Truth, for the salvation of His elect, and for the condemnation of the unbelieving. Her ministers are not priests, but witnesses and teachers, called and sent, not to operate on the souls of men by the magical charm of rites and ceremonies, but "by manifestation of the truth to commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God:" to persuade, convince, convert and save men, not by sacerdotal mummeries and manipulations, but by the Word of God preached "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Her sacraments, solemn and holy and precious as they are, are not mystic charms by which the grace of God is communicated to blind and passive recipients, but "signs and seals" of the Truth to those who understand and believe it. Whatever else pertains to the Church is incidental and subsidiary to this, that she may the better fulfil her one great work to communicate the Truth of God to men for their salvation. This was the very sum and substance of her commission, given by her Lord and Saviour. This was its nature and extent: "Go ye into all the world, and *preach the Gospel* to every creature." "Go ye therefore and teach all nations—teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." It is, therefore, the end of her existence and office in the world to teach the doctrines of the Gospel, and to spread them abroad among all men as the only instrument and means of salvation.

Let us therefore distinctly note this our faith as to the intent and design, the office and duty, the one great purpose and business of the

Church of Jesus Christ—the one for which she exists, in which, if she fail, she is as good as dead and extinct. It is a truth immensely important and instructive. The Church must understand what is her work in this apostate world before she can well and wisely attempt to perform it. When she does understand it, and believe in God, she will also do it. The powers of earth and hell shall not stay her zeal and her resolution. That work has this simple, this sublime import, to proclaim through all the earth the Gospel of the grace of God as the truth of salvation. She is engaged in a war of opinions, charged to subdue the world to the faith of the Bible. The stupendous conflict to which she is called is the conflict of truth with error, of knowledge against ignorance, of right reason against the blinded and perverted reason of fallen and sinful men. The world is the wretched victim of ignorance, imposture and falsehood. It is wrong in its faith, theories and opinions, no less than in its life and practice; wrong in the very foundation and first principles of its creed; wrong in what it believes about God, about itself, about the soul, about eternity. Its errors are fundamental and fatal; and it is the business and duty of the Church to set it right; by the light and power of the truth, attended with the agency of the Holy Ghost, to shed on the benighted souls of men the beams of divine knowledge, that they may see, and know, and believe, and believing, be saved. This is her holy and momentous work—the service she is called to render to man, the glory she is destined to bring to God. For this she lives, and moves, and has her being.

If now, according to the principles which I have unworthily attempted to affirm, the elect of God are among all the kindreds and tribes of the human race, if they are to be saved by the instrumentality of the truth, and if the Church is ordained and established of God, first and chiefly for the purpose and with the duty of proclaiming that truth for their salvation, then it follows:

1st. That *there is an end to the argument for Foreign Missions*. It is complete and unquestionable. We can have no further debate as to the duty of the Church to preach the truth to all the nations of the earth, and not to rest until every people and every living man has heard and known the glad tidings of the Gospel. And when occupied with this duty, the Church is legitimately and rightfully occupied with that which belongs to her first and highest function and office, and this General Assembly can give it no place of prominence and importance which it does not deserve and demand from the supreme council of that Church upon earth.

In so far as the Church fulfils her trust to make known the truth to

all men, in so far she fulfils the very end and object of her being and existence, and no further. In so far as she fails in this trust, she is apostate and dead, has denied her Lord, "is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned."

2d. In the second place, it follows that this Church in particular—*this Old School Presbyterian Church*—of all the Christians in the world, *ought to be the foremost, the most zealous, and the most abounding in the work of Foreign Missions.*

It is not pride or presumption humbly and charitably to assert our faith. We believe that the truth of God, in its purest and most perfect form, has been given us to apprehend and adopt. For this reason we are Presbyterians. We do not boast of it. We do not presume upon it. We ascribe it to the grace of God, who divideth to every one severally as He will. But this grace brings with it and imposes on us an exceeding obligation, a preëminent responsibility. If it is so indeed, then ought we to possess and exhibit the purest and most perfect form of that godliness which the truth begets and produces. We ought to be the first and most fruitful in all zealous and holy effort to propagate the truth throughout all the world. We owe it to our Lord and Master, and to all the nations of the earth, more than any, more than all, unceasingly, faithfully, everywhere, to testify to the truth, which it has been given us to know and believe. And failing in this, we convict and condemn ourselves of treachery to our great Lord and Saviour, and of cruelty to the souls of our fellow-men.

Holding the faith we do, we must believe that the Presbyterian Church is called to the special mission of preserving and proclaiming in the earth *the pure unadulterated truth of God*, against the prevalent and pernicious errors, and the numerous and mighty powers at work to corrupt and destroy it; to maintain and declare it complete and perfect; to deliver to the world her humble and faithful testimony to *a pure Gospel*, without addition or diminution, according as it has been given to her, for the honor and glory of her God and Saviour, and for the salvation of His elect from among all nations. And if she fail in this, being dead, let her be buried, buried deep in guilt and dishonor; and for a warning to them that shall come after, erect over her tomb a monument to her shame, and inscribe upon it such a memorial as becomes those who have been put in trust with the highest and most sacred honour and duty, and have proved recreant and faithless before God and man.

3d. The principles which we have considered further teach us *the*

necessity of a clear, profound, and thorough conviction of the truth which we profess to believe, in the light and by the power of the Holy Ghost. Without this, we may have our spasmodic, artificial, temporary spells of activity; but without it, most assuredly, we can have no steady, permanent, persevering, and successful continuance in zealous labour to extend the knowledge of the truth. No man, no church can preach with success and power a truth which they do not profoundly believe. We need a faith which illuminates the soul, masters all its powers, and to its deepest, most profound depths, reigns and triumphs; a faith to which doctrines are facts, opinions living realities, and convictions awful verity; a faith so clear, so living and real, that the soul, seeming to stand in the very presence of the truth it believes, becomes intolerant of error, burns with the fire of faith, and, in the intensity of its convictions, must speak or die; such a faith as the world, stealing the name of charity from the Gospel, and, as it always does, corrupting and perverting what it steals, will condemn and reproach as ultraism, bigotry, and fanaticism. But by whatever ill names it may be called, it is the only effective and successful working power in the soul. No other has ever accomplished anything in the world. Men may condemn and vilify it, but they fear it, they quail before its presence, they fall victims to its power.

This was the secret of Paul's indomitable zeal and wonderful success. The truth was as a fire in his bones. It was this in the Reformers which hurled them, as if in fury and despair, on the gates of hell, all garrisoned as they were with frowning death and munitions of mortal terror. It was this made the Puritans the fearful, awful men they were, that wonderful generation, who seemed to be, not men like us, but the incarnation of faith, the believing spirit in human form, at whose voice kings and armies fled away, and beneath whose tread the world trembled and was afraid. And while we remember that charity is greater than faith and knowledge, let us not forget that it is above them, not to destroy, but to maintain and preserve them. That is a spurious and a fatal charity which yields up one jot or tittle of the truth. It is indeed said, in an utterance such as never sprang from the soul of man, that "*God is love.*" But before that, in words equally sublime, it is written that "*God is light.*" And there is no true and real love but that which kindles and burns in the light. In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void; there was no order, life, or beauty, until God said in His majesty, "Let there be light," and light was. And it is not otherwise now in the new creation.

Suffer me to say therefore, according to the measure of wisdom given

me, that this is what we need as a Church, and as individuals—a *revival of Faith*—of faith in the Truth which we profess to believe and teach; faith positive, profound and convincing, aggressive and missionary, which shall be as a fire within our hearts, burning with an intense desire that all men may know, and believe, and obey the same precious truth. And what we need in order to this, is ourselves to see and know and understand the Truth in the light and by the power of the Holy Ghost. The world has had much to say, and alas! with truth, in reproach of a dead orthodoxy. Indeed, without life there is majesty and power in it; and in presence of its inanimate form the weaker creeds of errorists stand in awe and terror, as around the lifeless body of a lion the meaner beasts of the forest creep afraid. But “a living dog is better than a dead lion.” And our faith to be of any value, and to possess any power, must be quickened into life by the Holy Ghost. It must stand, “not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.” We must not only believe, but “having the Spirit of faith believe, and therefore speak.”

4th. Furthermore and finally, it follows that *Foreign Missions must be successful*. This consequence flows from our principles by a manifold deduction. The election of grace secures it beyond all uncertainty. It is written, “all that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing.”

The question of the success of missions is indeed simply the question of the truth of the Gospel. It is nothing more nor less. To doubt the one, is to doubt the other. If the Gospel is true, it will and must prevail and triumph. God has affirmed and promised it. His honor and glory are pledged to the issue. If the Lord be God—if Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, He must reign. He reigns by and through the Truth. The Truth therefore must win the victory and subdue the hearts of men to itself.

Every lie is and must be, in and of its own nature, weak and mortal. It has no real, positive, substantial being and existence, no actual subsistence in fact. It has no strength, and no vitality, but in the faith of its deluded followers. And when they die it dies with them. Truth on the other hand is in and of itself immortal and imperishable. It does not depend on the faith of blind and dying disciples. It is none the less true, imperishable and eternal, whether men believe it or not. Though all men should deny and reject it, it is still *the Truth*, everliving and indestructible. It everlastingly asserts itself in the facts wherein it subsists.

And when all falsehood shall perish at last with its wretched victims, by reason of its own weakness, the Truth will reign with its votaries in eternal strength. This is its sublime, its unutterably glorious prerogative. And to doubt of its ultimate triumph is simply to doubt if it is Truth.

Let it be remarked, by the way, that to question the utility and success of Foreign Missions is ineffably absurd in view of the fact that all true religion now existent in the world is the fruit and effect of Foreign Missions. For the faith and hopes which we ourselves cherish as Christians, we are indebted to missionaries of the Cross who preached the glad tidings of the Gospel to our heathen forefathers. This is equally true of every other Christian Church and people in the world. And to doubt the success of Foreign Missions is to condemn and despise all that has been accomplished by the Church of Christ in the ages and generations past.

It is true that we may often seem to have cause for fear and doubt. Our efforts may suffer occasional embarrassment. The conversion of the world may be less rapid than we fondly hoped. Some portions of the great work for a time may be thwarted, or destroyed. The heralds of the Truth may sometimes fall by heathen violence before their work is well begun. But these are events to exercise our faith and patience, to awaken our fortitude, and stimulate our strength—not to discourage hope, paralyse effort, or relax diligence. Let us not for a moment doubt the ultimate triumph and prevalence of the Truth. The kingdom of our Lord and Saviour is staked upon the issue, and against all the machinations of men and devils, yea, by and through them, He will glorify himself. A little while ago a throb of anguish smote through the heart of the Church when the intelligence came that a number of our most beloved and useful missionaries, with their gentle wives and tender babes, had fallen in a bloody and cruel death by the hand of savage violence. Eyes unused to tears wept, and thousands of hearts in the bosoms of strong men bled, at the tidings of that bitter story. It was the most sorrowful dispensation that has fallen to our Church in this day and time. But precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints! The cry of martyred blood ascends to heaven. It enters the ears of the Lord of Hosts. And it has sealed as His own the land on which it was shed, and it consecrated it for the future conquest of our God and Saviour. On the very spot where it was spilt He will erect His throne, and reign in great power and glory. The wrath of man shall praise Him. And the fury, the fires, and the slaughter of India shall but exalt and extend the victories of the Truth.

Many calamities and great sorrows may indeed be yet in store for the world and for the Church. The vials of wrath, prepared of God, are probably not yet all exhausted. Fearful convulsions, the strifes of hellish passions, the shock and the fury of contending nations, may shake and desolate the earth yet again and again. But in the midst of all these, and by the very means of them, the Truth shall hold its victorious way to the predestined triumph. That which shall fall and perish by them are the lies and errors which curse the world. And if our eyes were opened to understand the mysteries of our own day we should doubtless see that the cause of our God, and of His Truth is moving forward with amazing rapidity. The day is coming, it is coming, oh my brethren, when the shout of nation shall be answered by the shout of nation, and from every land, and from among all people the loud concert shall be heard encircling the whole earth, singing with one heart and one voice "Allelulia! The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

"Oh long expected day, begin!

Dawn on this world of woe and sin!"

Come Lord Jesus, oh come quickly! And let all the people say,
AMEN!



