

BV.
4222
.563

Doctrinal Preaching.

AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PORTER RHETORICAL SOCIETY,

IN THE

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, ANDOVER,

SEPTEMBER 11, 1832.

BY THOMAS H. SKINNER.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

BOSTON:
PRINTED BY PEIRCE & PARKER,
No. 9, Cornhill,
1832.

BV
4222
.S63

Gift
Tappan Presb. Ass.
1-30-1932

ADDRESS.

It was of that same benevolence in which the entire scheme and method of our salvation originated, to make preaching the chief means of converting and sanctifying men. If God, having given the world a plain record of his will, had left each one dependent on his own private perusal of that record for all the advantage he was to derive from it, how slowly would the business of saving men have proceeded? All unlettered persons must have perished through ignorance; and the rest of mankind, with few exceptions, would doubtless have given the sacred writing too little attention, to gain even the most general knowledge of its character. The fact is unquestionable, that what knowledge of the Scriptures actually exists among men, is almost exclusively the direct or indirect result of preaching. Had there been no preaching, where should we find readers of the word? A few might have procured a Bible as a curiosity, and a few by reading it might have become wise unto salvation, but the mass of men would scarcely have known of the existence of such a volume.—Faith cometh by hearing, not often by reading. It hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

It is needless to continue inquiry when the will of God is known. We have heard the high decree, that it is by preaching that God will save men. This is decisive. It is ours now not to speculate about the expediency of the measure, but to fall in with it, as we do with those other ordinances of God which appoint the means of our temporal well-being. To the question, how is the soul to be saved, the world to be converted, the compendious answer is—an answer from the mouth of God—by preaching. Those who believe that it is God's purpose that the world be converted, and who would discharge their obligations in bringing about that result, will give heed to this divine announce-

ment, and do what in them lies toward having the Gospel preached to every creature under heaven.

The assertion may strike some as bold, but only infidelity will question it, that of all the works going on among men, none is so important as that of preaching. Is the blood of Christ more precious than corruptible things, as silver and gold? Is the soul more valuable than the body? Are the joys and sorrows of eternity of more importance than those of a moment? If preaching be the necessary means of saving men, the answer to these questions will discover whether it is unduly magnifying the office of preaching, to give it precedence above all earthly occupations.

It is desirable that a business on which so much depends should be well understood and well discharged. Perhaps no questions deserve more to be considered, at this day, than, *What is the best way of preaching; and, how are ministers to learn that way?* On what subjects is light more needed, or should it be more diligently sought?

The perfection of preaching comprehends several things. It demands a peculiar style of discourse. It requires, in the preacher, a heart pervaded by very peculiar feelings—filled with unearthly sympathies and purposes. It needs a manner of utterance and elocution, deserving scarcely less attention than any other part of the business. Of the things now specified, proficiency in which let no one hope to attain without a special anointing of the Holy Spirit, we do not venture to treat. We shall endeavor in these remarks to illustrate a single topic, **THE INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER OF SOUND, EVANGELICAL PREACHING.**

The general strain of pulpit discourse should, we think, be, what we know not how better to express by a single epithet, than by the term *doctrinal*;—a term which, as used in this discourse, we are not willing to let pass unexplained.

Whoever has studied the character of the preaching most common throughout Christendom, must be aware, that what the people stately hear from their ministers is, for the most part, the polished, uninstructional, inefficient essay; or the affectionate, pointless exhortation; or the impassioned harangue; or what is perhaps more ordinary than either, some common-place, desultory, extemporal address. We shall be understood as intending to disapprove of these kinds of discourse, by affirming that preaching should be doctrinal; but a full view of our meaning may not yet be taken.

For further explanation we would remark, that there is a difference between things and the science or philosophy of things ; and a man may be very familiar with the former, and know almost nothing of the latter. You may know music, so as to distinguish tunes and sound the notes in proper time and order, and yet know little of the laws of harmony, or the principles of musical combination. A man may know that the mixture of certain substances will be followed by certain remarkable changes in their respective properties, and yet be no scientific chemist. All the world knows that the heavenly bodies are in motion, and perform regular revolutions, but it is comparatively a few who understand the laws of motion, and can discern the causes of the phenomena of the heavens. In the department of language, thousands speak their mother tongue who know little of its grammar, and less of the philosophy of language. Nor is it otherwise in the department of morals : mankind generally know what is good and bad in conduct ; yet few have studied the laws of volition and action, and to the remoter springs and principles of moral agency, their thoughts have never attempted to penetrate. The instances of religious experience too, are known and exemplified by many who have very limited and ill-digested knowledge of those primary facts which are the foundations and objective causes of gracious affection ; and there are many who float upon the surface of Christian doctrine, but have never dived far beneath it, and of those pure fountains whence the waters of the river of life are supplied, their knowledge is exceedingly scant and defective.

Now that knowledge which these Christians want—the knowledge which they may acquire by penetrating beyond the mere surface of things in religion, in connexion with that knowledge of these things which they do possess—is what we mean by doctrinal knowledge ; and that preaching which imparts such knowledge is, according to our understanding of the phrase, doctrinal preaching. Preaching, we mean, which searches out and reveals, the doctrine or reason of things, and hence we have used the term *doctrinal* as best suited to define it.

Doctrinal preaching, in this view, requires no distinction to be made in Christianity, between its *doctrines* and its *duties* ; but defines a certain way of handling whatever is chosen as the theme of discourse, whether it be called doctrine, duty, or by any other name. Whether duty or doctrine, it may be handled in several ways ; of the essay, or the harangue, or the extemporal

commonplace address ; or in our doctrinal method. Though it be a doctrine, the discourse may be declamatory and loose ; and though it be a duty, the discourse may be elaborately didactic and doctrinal, unfolding the principles and foundations of the subject in the most clear, coherent, and instructive manner.

Understanding the phrase as it has now been explained, we undertake to set forth the claims of doctrinal preaching, as that sort of discourse which should be generally delivered from the pulpit.

I. The honor of the Gospel demands it. The prejudice against doctrinal preaching, so common amongst professed Christians, is too congenial, if we mistake not, with the spirit of infidelity. It appears to countenance the insidious scorner, who, behind a veil of seeming veneration for our religion, hides his unfriendly purpose ; saying with a leer, Christianity is too sacred a thing to be reasoned about, and rests not upon reason, but faith, and is to be received, not understandingly, but implicitly ; not upon conviction, but upon trust.* Should any blasphemy sooner awaken the Christian's indignant resistance ? If the religion of Christ be not defensible by sober reasoning, it is not capable of being successfully defended. If it be not founded in reason, it is not founded in truth ; and if not founded in truth, it is the greatest of impostures, and Christians are, of all men, the most to be pitied or despised. But if our religion be founded in truth and reason, then may it safely challenge rational investigation, and not fear the penetration and strength of the mightiest understanding. "God created understanding proportional to truth as the eye to the thing visible." Let truth then be luminously presented to the understanding, and they twain will be instantly joined to each other, and become as one. And so it proved in the experience of the first preachers. By manifestation of the truth, they commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Knowing they had nothing but truth, and truth precious as the honor of God and man's immortality, to declare, and that what they had to declare they were able to declare justly, they were as free to speak before the princes of wisdom as before the untaught vulgar. They did not, indeed, always withdraw the wicked from their evil ways ; but if they could hold dispassionate argument with them, they could gain their understand-

* "Our most holy religion is founded on *faith*, not on reason ; and it is a sure method of exposing it, to put it to such a trial as it is by no means fitted to endure." *Hume's Essay on Miracles.*

ing, and so commend themselves to their conscience, and make judges and kings tremble in their presence. Christianity is the same now that it ever has been. Amidst the endless diversities of opinion, the controversies and strifes, which prevail in the world, the substantial Gospel is still as pure as the skies whence it came ; nor is it less distinct, or less intelligible, than it was at first. If it could be understood then, it can be understood now : if it could be defended then, it can be defended now : and if it was then omnipotent over the mind of man, it is so at present. Let the preachers of it be just, in their statements and reasonings in respect to it, and they have nothing to fear from the understanding and wit of man.

There are things in Christianity, as there also are in nature, above human reason, and which that reason of itself would never have discovered ; but that does not empower human reason to discard those things, unless a mere sparkle of intellect has become transcendent above the great Source of Wisdom whence it sprang.

It is, then, the greatest indignity to our divine religion, for its preachers and disciples to decry reason as unfriendly to it, or to discourse of it in a way which implies that its affinity with reason is not perfect. Its worst enemies could do it no greater wrong. What should we more desire than that a religion which is the perfection of reason, should be subjected to reason's severest tests ? What more should we ask of an adversary, in order to his confutation, than that he open the eyes and ears of his understanding ? What ill consequence were to be apprehended ? If the spirit of sect, or some cunning deceiver hath associated with the Gospel, dogmas which are not true, these dogmas would be detected and condemned, but every word of the Gospel would be found to be pure, as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times.

II. The intellectual being which God has given us cannot be satisfied or suited with preaching which is not doctrinal. The rational nature of man inclines him, even in infancy, to inquire after the causes and principles of things ; and who has not felt a spring of genuine delight in his breast, when, after patient attention, he has learnt the philosophy, or rationale, of any matter ? The natural inquisitiveness of man for causes and theories, shows itself in nothing more than in religion ; and when we are preaching, great managing will be necessary to keep down altogether this propensity among the people. Unless superstition, and the

delusion that we are infallible, reign over the congregation with absolute power, we shall hardly be able to hinder some minds from feeling unsatisfied for want of proofs, or contemptuous at our efforts to keep difficulties out of view. Surely it were worthier of the great cause which we advocate, to be fearless of the utmost exposure, and place our subjects high, in view of all observers, and, by manly argumentation, repel whatever would tend to obscure the evidence of their truth. This is the way, too, to meet the demands of that rational understanding, which, as really as the Gospel, God has given to man, and which, no more than the Gospel, have we a right to despise.

It must be confessed, that the state of the human understanding, subjected as it is to the sway of sloth and sensuality, in the bulk of men, is such that doctrinal discourse, greatly elaborated, would not, in most places, be very interesting or popular, especially at first. But it is the design of the Gospel to free the understanding of man from the servitude and stupidity into which sin has cast it: and it is well suited to answer that purpose: and if justice be done to it in its presentations from the pulpit, that purpose will be answered; the human understanding will respond to the appeals of the Gospel; the law of Christ and the law of mind will be found to harmonize with each other; intellectual energy will be awakened; intellectual pleasure will be felt; and doctrinal preaching, having accomplished so much, must now go on unto perfection, or the popular understanding may go before the preacher, become unsatisfied, and begin to pine away because its wants are not supplied.

III. This suggests another remark. No other kind of discourse than that which we recommend, truly instructs and edifies mankind. As the body is nourished only by the due reception of its appropriate food, so the growth of the mind, in knowledge and strength, demands sound instruction, the mind's proper food. Now, discourse is instructive, whatever be its subject, only so far as it is doctrinal; that is, as it explains and elucidates the principles and theory of things. What instruction would he give concerning astronomy, for instance, who should only recount the number of the planets and constellations, and tell you of the phenomena which relate to them. You would learn some facts, perhaps, but you must know their meaning; in other words, their causes and connexions, before you could justly be said to be instructed. Instruction, if we may so speak, is the knowledge of science, not the knowledge of mere facts and events. In the

moral, as in the physical world, this holds equally true. He who speaks to you of moral conduct or experience, but does not refer it to its true principles, its objective causes, tells you, perhaps, what all men know, and what all men approve or disapprove, but what instruction does he impart to you? If a man should preach to you, your lifetime, in the commonplace strain of the essay or exhortation, how little would he add to your substantial edification? What energy would he infuse into your mind; what spring, what enlargement, what aspiring of thought and affection would his preachments produce?—An instructive lecturer in physics is one who skillfully unfolds the principles and connexions of things, and this is the true definition of an instructive preacher. Such a preacher will be constantly occupied in searching for the foundations of truth, and these foundations he will expose in his discourses; which if he do, his preaching will be of the kind which we denominate doctrinal.

If then the end of preaching involves, in any considerable measure, the instruction of the human mind, ministers must addict themselves to doctrinal expositions; and with Paul, reason as well as persuade and exhort; and show themselves masters at analysis and classification.

IV. It is only by doctrinal discourse that error can be confuted. It is not to be forgotten, that all the ten thousand forms of error stand marshalled against that Gospel which ministers are set to defend. When we come to the people with the testimony of God, we do not find them, either entirely ignorant of our message, or entirely indifferent in respect to it. To a great extent, their minds are crowded with old opinions, the offspring of selfishness, nursed by custom and tradition. Besides, many false prophets have gone out into the world; and every heresy has its shrewd and subtle advocates; and though sound doctrine be for the most part odious to the multitude, their ears are wide open and itching for heretical novelties. Now we only ask, will pleasant, smooth essays of morality, or a continued round of commonplace exhortation, or any loose, customary strain whatever, have any avail in favor of the Gospel against such adversaries? It is not pertinent to reply that nothing will be available but the influence of the Spirit; for the Spirit uses means in promoting truth; and he does not use means which are unsuitable, but such, and only such, as are adapted to the end, and have a tendency to accomplish it. Any reliance on the Spirit is presumptuous and criminal, which supposes he will dispense with his own appointed

means of operation ; and we therefore repeat the demand, what tendency is there in common place preaching to subvert the strongholds of error ? Error is supported by doctrinal discourse. Heretics and gainsayers are great pretenders to penetration ; and are ever theorizing, and making a great show of reasons and philosophy and logic ; and should Christ's ministers think that easy exhortations and essays will prevail against that mode of assailing the truth ? By no means. The aberrations of a false philosophy can be, in no other way corrected, than by the inculcation of the true. The ordinary result of the process of abstraction and system-making is the propagation among the people of settled principles of belief and thought ; and these principles, true or false, are never inoperative ; and if false, they are fruitful of evil, beyond the reach of imagination ; a thousand instances of actual crime being, often as nothing, compared to the prevalence of one false opinion. Now these are not things to be got rid of by rhapsodical preaching. They must be patiently searched out, and solidly confuted, and meekly displaced by the establishment of true positions and principles in their stead. Such is the task to which preachers of the word should address themselves. Personal debate with the ministers of unrighteousness they should not hold ; but skill to detect fallacies, ability to manifest the foundations of truth amidst the perplexities and ambiguities of false reasoning, they are bound to exercise ; and to learning and penetration on the side of error, must they oppose sounder learning and deeper penetration on the side of truth.

V. If ministers do not addict themselves to doctrinal preaching, their discourses must soon become stale, and the intellectual character of their ministry weak and contemptible. Superficial discourse on experience may please for once, twice, or thrice ; but it becomes one of the most insipid of things, by constant repetition : and superficial discourse on morality, or faith, may charm for a little season by the beauty of its sentences, and the pleasant voice and gesture with which it is pronounced. But smooth composition will not long supply the lack of patient thought ; nor will the constant pressure of the pulpit's demands consist with great efforts at fine and tasteful periods. If men have not acquired the habit of patient and protracted thinking, they will become but dull preachers in the course of a few years. But forbid us to be doctrinal in the common strain of our preaching, and what encouragement should we have to exert our minds in the work of the ministry ? What should we employ our thought

about ? To dole out common-places, saying little or nothing from the beginning to the end of the year, except what was said the year before, and what the people have known, since they knew their catechisms and primers ; requires no exertion of intellect ; nor can the minister be much less leisurely and spiritless in making, than the people in hearing such discourse. Indeed, what man is condemned to a more undesirable drudgery, than he who is obliged to make three or four public discourses a week, and is yet restrained from what we understand by doctrinal investigation ? Were it not better to be doomed to the anvil or the mine, than to such travail as that ? In such circumstances is it probable that the mind will grow ? No more than that the body would thrive in a dungeon and loaded with chains. It will wither and pine away into pitiable decrepitude. Of this, how many sad verifications have we known in fact ? Men there have been in the ministry, (may there be no more such,) who, at their introduction, gave promise of considerable eminence ; but, yielding to popular prejudice, or to indolence of mind, they discontinued serious thought ; persuading themselves that desultory performances would suffice for the plain people ; and by what miserable leanness and infirmity were their after ministrations marked ?

These things ought not so to be. It is incumbent upon ministers to improve in preaching—to let their profiting, in this business, appear unto all ; and Scripture tells them how this is to be done. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee”—“Meditate upon these things”—“Give thyself wholly to them”—“Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine”—“Continue in them”—counsel which supposes that the character of preaching is such as we are commending ;—that it is to employ and exhaust all the high powers of beings made in the image of God, and who, in this business, are to be workers together with God. Let preachers be restrained from doctrinal investigations, and the most perfect use of their intellect in preaching, and whom would they resemble less, or serve less, than their Maker ; or who can but foresee that not their profiting, but their declining will ensue ?

VI. But we have a stronger reason for resisting the prevailing prejudice against doctrinal preaching. It is, that no other kind of preaching is likely to be attended permanently by much evangelical fruit. This remark would, in some places, be deemed more than questionable, but the evidence of its truth overweighs every thing which can be alleged against it.

In the first place, it is only doctrinal preaching that will keep the people's attention awake. The excitement produced by essays, rhapsodies, and declamations is always transient; the means having in themselves no tendency to perpetuate it. It cannot but be vain to attempt, by such means, to meet the deep exigences of intellectual natures, to ask them to be satisfied with nothing better than the song of one who has a pleasant voice, while they are capable of the blessedness of knowing even as they are known. Facts invariably confirm this remark. In what congregation, which does not hear and will not endure doctrinal discourses does a lively attention to religion permanently exist? But of what avail is any preaching, if the people are indifferent to it; and what can keep them attentive but something which gives exercise to their thoughts and instructs their understandings?

Again—Of all gracious affection and action, sound doctrine is ever more the objective cause. By the laws of mind, moral feeling cannot exist without an object in the mind's view to which it corresponds. It is impossible for a man to act or feel intelligently, without something in his thoughts. All men understand this; and hence it is a thing unknown for one to undertake to actuate the mind of his fellow, but by presenting considerations adapted to produce the desired result. Who tries to convince a person without urging reasons; or to alarm him without stating causes of alarm; or to please him without specifying grounds of pleasure? In religion, no more than in any other department of intelligent agency, is it by rant, or authoritative denunciations and demands, or any such like uninstructional methods that the powers and affections of the human mind can be wrought into just emotion. How vainly then are ministers occupied, in endeavoring to affect their hearers truly and graciously, by any other than doctrinal discourse? The impression to be produced being the counterpart of some doctrine; they might as well think to see without a thing visible, or to produce an effect without its appropriate cause, as to expect the impression without inculcating the doctrine.

We do not forget that nothing can be done effectually, without the aid of the Holy Spirit; that even Paul's preaching would have been without success, had it been unattended by a special influence from on high. We have advanced nothing inconsistent with this grand truth; unless the mode of the Spirit's agency be inconsistent with the laws of the human mind and the nature of things. But what care does Scripture use to teach us that such

is not the way of the Holy Spirit's working—that men are begotten again by the word of truth ; are freed from sin, and sanctified through the knowledge of the same word, which, therefore, is called most appropriately, the Sword of the Spirit. It is by bringing the soul and the Gospel into fair contact and conjunction, that the Spirit achieves the renovation of the soul. The soul he disengages from the things which bind it down to sense and stupidity, and the truth he makes manifest before the soul's intellectual eye ; and the impressions made upon the soul are the exact counterparts of doctrines adapted to produce them ; whence the Apostle's manner of describing the result of the Spirit's agency :—" Ye have obeyed from the heart, that form of doctrine into which ye were delivered."

Let the appeal now be made to observation. Let facts settle the question. True experimental and practical religion are, according to facts, the attendants, not of the declamatory or essay strain of preaching ; but of that preaching which discerns the foundations of things and rightly divides the word of truth, to the people. It is notorious, that wherever the Gospel hath free and glorious course, and the lives of men abound with its fruits, and " holiness to the Lord" marks in any good measure, their civil, literary, and other institutions, there the ministers of Christ are scribes well instructed unto the kingdom of God, and the doctrinal way of preaching stands in high esteem. No land, for instance, stands higher than New England for purity of morals and zeal for the Gospel ; no land is more indebted for its moral character, to the influence of preaching ; and New England, from the first, has been famous above all parts of the world, for preachers given to a doctrinal, some say metaphysical sort of discourse. It is, on the other hand, equally notorious, that where this way of preaching is disrelished, and the other kinds are encouraged, the sphere of practical religion is limited ; its standard low ; and the things which remain are almost ready to die.

VII. We have, finally, still greater witness to the excellency of this mode of preaching. **THE BIBLE IS IN FAVOR OF IT.** The Bible favors it by its own example. Its announcements, indeed, coming directly from the mouth of God, come as oracles, having inherent proofs of infallibility, and so demanding prompt entrance into every human mind. But even the Bible, that divine preacher, the very voice of God speaking in human ears, recognizing man as a rational creature, condescends to explain

to him the reasonableness of its revelations. Where, throughout the whole inspired volume, does God discover an unwillingness to have his word subjected to the tests of reason? Does he not expressly call us to try it by reason; telling us to judge what he says; wishing us to show ourselves wise; asking us whether his ways be not equal, his statutes right, his doctrines true; and blaming us for nothing more than our indiscrimination and reluctance in searching into his communications? What deep argumentations did Christ hold with the Jews, whether pharisees, sadducees, lawyers, elders, or priests; and how, by unanswerable argument, and in this way exclusively, did he always prevail. How admirably did Peter reason on the day of Pentecost, and Stephen before his martyrdom, and Paul in his discourses to Felix and Agrippa, and the philosophers of Athens? It was not left to a Paley to prove the being and perfections of God, on the principle, that design infers a designer. Paul, on Mars Hill, availing himself of no apostolical prerogative, proceeded, on that principle of natural theology, while thus he reasoned with his dignified auditory, "Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." And let the world produce, if it can, specimens of sounder or deeper reasoning than we find in the epistles of this last named organ of inspiration, especially, those to the Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, and Hebrews. We have in these divine writings, something very different from essays on morality, and loose exhortations and rhapsodies of experience. We have not, it is true, that formal statement and division of subjects, which uninspired books contain; but such examples of clear, coherent, convincing argumentation, cannot be produced out of all the volumes in the world.

Thus it is that the Bible preaches, and whoever preaches erroneously this is a preacher which it were profane to censure. If ministers would adopt the best and safest model, they surely know where to find it; and if as private Christians we should conform ourselves to the spotless pattern of our Saviour's piety, why, since Divinity has also exercised the office of preaching, should we not as preachers aim at as close a correspondence as possible to that unerring specimen?

But ministers are taught to be doctrinal in their strain of preaching, not only by the example, but by several positive precepts of inspiration—"A bishop, says Paul, must be apt to teach—able by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and convince the gainsayers—use

sound speech which cannot be condemned, that he who is of the contrary part, may be ashamed ;—and in short, must study to approve himself unto God, a workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”—Without comment, we leave all men to judge whether any one can answer to this description of an evangelical minister, without addicting himself to the doctrinal way of preaching.

If we do not mistake, the foregoing reasons are sufficient to the end for which they have been urged, and should prevail against all objections : yet we are aware that strong objections are supposed to exist ; and as we would leave no vestige of support to the hurtful prejudice against doctrinal preaching, we beg your attention to a brief examination of these objections.

1. Some deem this way of preaching objectionable, as favoring an exercise of reason, in religion, which implies its superiority to religion, and its having authority, to judge, disown and reject it. But if religion be true, and be attended with adequate evidences of its truth, the human mind in the exercise of reason, must fall before it, and yield to it, the unreserved subjection of its energies. Reason is needful to the reception of truth, must indeed be employed in order to its reception, and cannot but receive it, if employed aright, and its attendant proofs be sufficient. To restrain the exercise of reason out of deference to religion, is to keep man and religion forever asunder. Let any one try to conceive, how religion is to exert any influence upon man, without making its appeals to his reason, and he will at once discover the absurdity of the attempt. If in making these appeals, religion seems to submit itself to reason ; be it so ; what is it but infinite intelligence, stooping to recover a ruined creature, in the only way in which it can be done ; and to receive in return, that creature's adoring self-devotement and praise ?

Some not willing to be classed among those who would invest religion with compulsory power, and not willing also to trust it wholly to itself ; to its own sun-bright, self-evidencing effulgence, to establish its free and peaceful empire among men ; have allowed reason to converse with it within certain limits, and under certain restraints. Reason's province, say they, is to satisfy itself, first, as to the testimonials of the divine origin of the gospel ; and then to submit, implicitly, to its decisions ; knowing now, that there is no danger of being imposed upon by religion, and that there is danger of mis-judgment, in the free exercise of reason.

But are we to assume that the decisions of a divine revelation may contradict those of right reason, and still be bound to submit to the former, and reject the latter? This most plainly, were to dishonor God and hopelessly to expose his cause, to the assaults of infidelity. But no; The decisions of right reason, and of the God of reason, must be coincident; and if contradiction does result in our rational processes, we have perverted reason, either, in endeavoring to ascertain the import of revelation; or, in the judgment we have formed of the truth of that import. Here then we see, not that reason should be abjured, but what it has to do. It must retrace its steps, and discover, and correct its mistakes. The jealousy then of those who to honor revelation would degrade the office of reason, results from mistaking the perversions of reason for its legitimate use. It may be an ingenuous but it is a preposterous jealousy. Revelation can no more dispense with reason, after its genuineness has been ascertained, than before. Reason cannot be dispensed with at all; revelation without it, were of none effect. The human mind is never, and cannot be, passive, in the reception of truth. It must exercise itself; reason must be active, and must be convinced; truth must commend itself, through the understanding, to the conscience, before it can win the consent and love of the heart. A man may know that the Bible is a divine book, and suppose that he has ascertained its import; but if he sees in that import, a clear contradiction of right reason,—something must be done,—it can have no lodgement in his mind, as a principle of life and practice. Truth may, indeed, relate to subjects beyond the comprehension of the human mind: of such high subjects reason is not competent to judge; but though the subjects may not be fully understood, the truth relating to them, as far as it is knowable, may be expressed in intelligible propositions; and must be so expressed, and being so expressed must be considered in the exercise of reason, and to the mind's eye must appear to be true, before they can enter and influence the heart.

It is the pretension of some who have devoted themselves almost exclusively to the business of interpreting Scripture, that their's is the province of certainty and safety, intending a slant stroke upon the philosophical systematizing theologian. But do these interpreters suppose that after they have shown the true sense of the text, they have finished the work of reasoning, and that the divine, or the preacher, has only to take up the result of their exegetical labor, and retail it out to the people without further elucidation, or argument? Will the preacher do his duty if he

does not reason about it still ; and summon up all the reasoning powers of his hearers, also, to its investigation, and to an intelligent decision on its claims to their practical regard ? The mere announcement, indeed, of the unquestioned meaning of the Bible to him who admits the divinity of that book, is decisive. It has the authority of God. Even as to him, however, it may be not only useful, but indispensable to its practical results, to prove it, independently of its divine authority ; for where the evidence of truth is multiplied, the probability of its reception, is increased. But of what avail were it to an infidel, that an announcement is scriptural, while he denies that Scripture is divine ? To succeed with such a man, we must reason with him, either on the grounds of external evidence, and so overcome his disbelief ; or, accomplish the same end, by convincing him of the truth of Scripture, independently of divine testimony. The latter ordinarily is the readiest mode ; since men disown the Bible, not because they can invalidate the external proofs of its divinity ; but because they deny, or doubt, the truth of the things contained in that book. In respect to the mass of human minds, this seems to be the only available mode ; the historical argument for revelation, being too long for their patience, or too deep for their comprehension. They must be convinced, if convinced at all, mainly by the clear and indubitable perception of the truths of Scripture, as *truths*—truths which the wisdom of the world did not discover ; truths on which man's high destiny, as a being made in the image of God, depends ; and truths, contained originally, in no book but that which claims the authority of man's maker ; who we may well suppose, would not have failed, in this matter, to provide suitably for his dependant and helpless creatures. And is it not in fact, this perception of the intrinsic truths of Scripture statements, along with their known momentous bearing on the great end of our being ; the undeniable futility of the highest human effort to discover them after an experiment of four thousand years ; and the acknowledged character of God and his relations to his creatures—is it not in this very way, that mankind for the most part, are convinced effectually, that their Creator has given them these sure counsels of his wisdom and his love ? Who then is to say, or what wit or virtue, were there in saying, where the process of reasoning, in respect to the ascertained import of Scripture, shall be arrested ?

Besides do not these interpreters forget to what extent they themselves employ reason in doing their appropriate work ? Do

they begin, do they prosecute, do they finish, their philological examinations, without the intermeddling of philosophy, the primordial philosophy, at least, of common sense? Do they not always give us results, to which philosophy quite as much as philology, assisted them in arriving? Must it not be so from the nature of the case? Are not words the signs of things? Of what significance then, are words, when the things are unknown? And what can an interpreter hope to accomplish by attempting to explain words, without the aid of philosophy, or to a mind in utter ignorance of things? How, for example, could he, by any explanation of terms descriptive of colors, convey the idea of color to a man born blind? It is absurd then, for philology to declare war against philosophy. We see, indeed, the stamp of philosophy on the very first principles and maxims of philology,—that figurative language is not to be construed literally, but according to the known nature of the thing, to which it relates; that language concerning a subject above the reach of human reason, as the Trinity, for example, should be so understood, as not to involve an impossibility or absurdity; that no scripture is rightly explained, when an absurdity is drawn out of it: these are fundamental principles of interpretation for which philology is indebted not to itself, nor to Scripture, but to that common sense, which belongs to rational beings, as such, and which is the essence and strength of true philosophy. Philology then, most certainly, cannot proceed a step, independently of reason. And now if truth taken out of Scripture, be not safe in the hands of a reasoning Theologue, is Scripture itself safe in the hands of a reasoning Interpreter? It is truly debatable, which is the greater reasoner of the two. But if it were not, the less surely would have no cause to glory over the greater. There is no sin, and no danger in rightly employing our rational powers, either in the interpretation of Scripture, or in the inculcation of Scripture truth, when ascertained. Reason should have free course through the whole empire of religion; length, breadth, depth, and height: it should not be hindered but expedited; we should wish to give it wings; we should wish it to be as swift and as free in its movements, as the heart ought to be in loving God, and the feet in running the way of his commandments. It is not the exercise of reason which is to be guarded against, but those perversions of reason which spring from pride, the spirit of sect, preconceived opinions and depraved inclinations and habits. These are what we should resist. To resist the exercise of reason because of its liability to perversion, is to hinder

the progress of religion itself, and to decide that it is better there should be no religion on the earth, than to use the necessary means of its promotion, from which, through human depravity, incidental evil may arise.—The course of religion in this world, is necessarily adventurous.—The only means by which it can be advanced are such as may be abused. But since it is on the whole best that the cause of God and religion be not abandoned, the means of maintaining it, that is, the free exercise of reason, must be employed, notwithstanding the incidental evils which may thence arise. The object of jealous vigilance and meek resistance, should be those evils; but if by our utmost care, they cannot be entirely precluded, let not our resentment be inflamed against reason; but by earnest prayer, patient labor, and the exercise of a resigned, self-denied spirit, let us wait upon the Lord to bring good out of evil and make the wrath of man praise him.

2. The view which we have taken of the office of preaching may appear to some objectionable, as demanding such high qualifications in preachers, that this class of men must always be much too small, to meet the necessities of a perishing world. But are not these qualifications identically those which the nature of the work to be done, and Scripture, obviously require? And may not a smaller number of preachers of the right order, be more useful on the whole, than a large number with incompetent abilities? Is it not matter of Church-History, that of ministers, one has, not seldom, been worth a hundred or a thousand? Besides, it is censure, not of our views on this subject, but of the arrangements of God, to allege that he has required work to be done when a sufficient number of workmen competent to the task, cannot be, any how, procured. Before an objection of this kind is raised, trial should be made. Has the Church enlisted her utmost strength, and while prudently and patiently employing that strength for the attainment of the end, kept the cry ascending night and day to the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest? If he shall call for a company of laborers as great and as good as are needed, would they not come?

It may be that the just impression is not taken as to the nature of the requisite talents for preaching. It should be inferred from what we have said, that a preacher should be a sound minded man, and should know how to use his faculties in the inculcation

and defence of the gospel ; and is this an untenable principle? A higher standard than this we have not raised ; a higher is not needed. This surely is not so high, but that the Church should refuse to acknowledge any man as a regular preacher, who falls much below it. Preachers of this description, confiding in the grace of God, and anointed by his Spirit, may go fearlessly to their work. Let them take heed that what they undertake to defend, is the simple gospel, and give themselves wholly to their work ; and they will find the business of preaching, to prosper in their hands. The task of difficulty is to sustain the cause of error, or of truth adulterated and obscured by the intermixture of error. Simple truth, divested of the clothing and encumbrances of false philosophy, and plainly presented to the mind, wins its own way, carrying its best evidence in its own bright essence, and having countenance and confirmation from all nature. He who sets out nothing but genuine, unadulterated truth, in his preaching, will find almost all things freely offering to assist his honest and hearty endeavors to illustrate and enforce it. Arguments will be plenteous ; and besides arguments, similitudes and analogies will spontaneously present themselves, to give it a charm and a grace, by which the minds of the people will be at once convinced and delighted. The first and grand concern of preachers is to be sure, that what they undertake to discourse about, is genuine gospel ; and in order to get this assurance, not gigantic strength of intellect, so much as a delicate simplicity of spirit, like the simple life of a new-born babe, is the best prerequisite. Now this is a quality which no Christians should want, and in which preachers surely should excel.

Let preachers then be sound and simple minded men, and acquire a just and skilful use of their powers ; and then if they will give themselves up wholly and absolutely to their business, they may go forth into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, and, with the Apostle, raise the triumphant demand, *where is the wise, where is the scribe, where is the disputer of this world ?*

3. It is objected that the essential articles of Christian doctrine are plain and few, and that since these are sufficient for salvation the work of the ministry need not be so arduous ; at least there is no necessity for laying such a burden on ministers, as our laborious way of preaching, requires them to bear. But what though we should grant that the chief topics of preaching are few ? Since

the business of preaching must be all the while going on, the discourses on those topics must be many; and they should always be instructive and edifying; and to diminish subjects of discourse, when discourse itself is not abated, is the way not to lessen but to augment labor. Besides, it does not follow that because the fundamentals of Christianity are few, ministers need not extend their researches beyond those few fundamentals. Are the people never to learn any thing more than the alphabet of their religion? They are required to grow in grace, at least; but who sees not the absurdity of expecting them to grow in grace without growing in knowledge? Affection must needs stagnate and decrease if thought be not exercised, and the sphere of intellectual light enlarged. And if Christians should have no concern to know any thing of the gospel beyond what the dying thief understood, why has the entire volume of inspiration been put into their hands with an injunction to be searching into it all their days? And why are they urged to leave the *principles* of the doctrine of Christ, and go on unto perfection? And why were some so pungently reprehended by the Apostle, because, when for the time they ought to have been teachers, they had need to be still taught, which were the first principles of the oracles of God, and were become such as had need of milk and not of strong meat; being no more than babes in grace, after so long a season of rich privilege? But if it is the duty of Christians to advance in divine knowledge, it surely is not permitted to ministers to be going backward, or standing still, in their preaching. They should gladly take the lead of their people, and conduct them on, as speedily as possible, from stage to stage, through the whole field of inspired wisdom; and leave nothing unexplored, of all that God has brought to the view of mortals by the gracious communications of his Spirit.

4. It is often objected that doctrinal discussions want the animation and warmth which should always pervade speeches spoken to the public. It is not denied that they may and sometimes do want these important qualities: but our first answer is, Better are discussions without these qualities than common-place discourse which gives no instruction, and neither wants nor awakes attention.—We answer again, that discussions are often pronounced inanimate, not because they are really so, but because the low spiritual state of the people, disinclines them to such sober discourse. A people who have been trained by doctrinal preaching to think,

and search into the depths of divine things, will take the liveliest pleasure in discussions, which, to congregations not so trained, would be almost insupportably, tedious. Thirdly, we answer, that if doctrinal discussions are arid and cold, this commonly arises not from necessity, or the nature of such discourse, but from some fault in the preacher. A man may be animated in argument as well as exhortation. There is eloquence in thought as well as eloquence in manner, and the former is the nobler sort of eloquence. But the doctrinal preacher should not disdain the eloquence of manner. Why should not he as much as any other man, seek out the most acceptable words, and throw his thoughts into an ornate as well as orderly method, and dress them out in the richest beauties of imagination, and pronounce them with all the graces and power of the most perfect elocution. Say not that these things misbecome the simplicity of the Evangelical preacher, since the Bible itself, delivers the sacred truths of inspiration, with an eloquence of manner which shames the best profane specimens in the world. Paul does indeed discard *the enticing words of man's wisdom*; but let his own discourses before Agrippa and the Athenian Areopagites, and his farewell to the Ephesian Elders, and his descant upon the resurrection—let these matchless pieces show, that by the enticing words of man's wisdom, Paul did not mean eloquent and powerful and well ordered discourse.—Indeed, such are the themes of the Gospel, that distinct and vivid thought concerning them, cannot but prompt to eloquent utterance. What subjects are so adapted to excite a speaker's animation—to rouse from their lowest depths all the energies and passions of his being—to task to the uttermost all his resources of expression—in a word, to inbreed within him, all the elements and the ethereal life of eloquence? Who could be cold while speaking with just intellection, of “the transformation of apostate man from earthly to divine;”—of the sacrifice of the Son of God; or of the love in the Father and the Son, which that sacrifice discovered; or of the resurrection of the dead; or of the great day of judgment; or of the woes and the glories of eternity? To discourse on such subjects tamely, is proof of any thing rather than lucid perceptions and enlarged views in the speaker.

5. It is objected to doctrinal preaching, that it disturbs and perplexes the people, even some of the people of God. To which, we reply. If the perplexity complained of be produced by good

doctrinal preaching, it is but an ill omen of the spiritual state of the complainers. If people are made sorry by lucid and lively exhibitions of divine truth, they have too much cause for sorrow ; and if they can obtain comfort only by turning their eyes away from such exhibitions, their comfort is little worth, and of short continuance. They carry the elements of misery in their own breasts, and these elements will not be kept from kindling into a flame, though they should never open their ears to the voice of a sound doctrinal preacher.

But for a further answer, we would suggest whether people who are troubled with doctrinal points, may not owe their trouble, in some degree, to their not having been used to hear good doctrinal preaching. As the bodily frame could not endure strong meat, if it had hitherto received no other food than adulterated milk, so if the food given to the spiritual man, be always mere elementary truths, not unmixed perhaps with traditionary errors, what wonder that he cannot comfortably digest the more heavenly principles of Christian doctrine ?

But whatever be the cause of perplexity under doctrinal preaching, it is clear that if the preaching be right, the perplexity is not groundless, and the ground of it should if possible be removed. But what hope is there of removing it, while the doctrine which alone can discover it is kept out of view ? Keep that doctrine back, and the difficulty must remain, and sooner or later will be felt in its full power.

6. It is finally much objected to this kind of preaching that it genders doubtful disputations and strifes of words among the plain people, who are little benefitted by such jangling. We do not deny that there is a strain of preaching, called doctrinal, which has a tendency to produce, and has produced these disagreeable results ; but they are not the legitimate results of sound doctrinal preaching, which has no affinity with the spirit of strife, and is as charitable and mild as it is pointed and discriminating. Men of perverse minds, would indeed murmur and dispute, under the best possible mode of setting forth the truth, but neither the truth, nor its advocates, should bear the blame of their perverseness. The tendency of that preaching which exhibits sound doctrine clearly and vividly, instead of favoring angry disputation among the people, favors their happy establishment in the truth. We appeal to observation to confirm this remark. The full manifestation of truth, has ever been God's chosen way, to convince, lib-

erate, and unite, the minds of men. This was the Apostolic way. It was the way adopted by Luther and his coadjutors in reformation. It was the way of Edwards, and of the most successful ministers of more modern days. There were, as doubtless there will be, many to gainsay and contend; but here were heretics and vain janglings in the time of the great Apostle; and if they did not hinder him from preaching in a strain eminently doctrinal, neither should they be deemed a sufficient reason against that way of preaching now.

And now we know not that there remains any other considerable objection to that kind of discourse, in which, we think all ministers of the Gospel, should address mankind from the pulpit. We subjoin two or three concluding remarks.—

(1.) The business of preaching should be the preacher's great business. No man that warreth, and much more, no man who acquits himself well, as a preacher of the Gospel, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life. If any work in which man was ever occupied, demands his whole mind, it is the work of a stated preacher of God's word. Of all employments of men or angels, it is the last, in which success may be hoped for, by desultory self-indulgent habits. And yet there is no employment, success in which, is comparatively of any importance. All the great things of earth, compared with what depends on the manner in which preaching is performed, are deserving of no mention, nor thought. Kingdoms rise and fall; worlds pass away but human minds hold on their course,

“When thine O Nature ends;”

and whether their course shall be endlessly continued, in woe or bliss, may be depending more than all things else, upon the character of the preaching which they attend on, from Sabbath to Sabbath.—What manner of men should preachers of the Gospel be? How can any thing pertaining to their own temporal state turn away their attention one moment from their appropriate calling as heralds of salvation to perishing men? What should they have to do with any thing which might hinder their profiting in the great business of that calling? How should they study and meditate and pray, and use every fit means for keeping their hearts and minds in the holiest frame, that their preaching may be such as God will delight to bless, and souls be saved in

hearing? Can ministers, except when like Paul they must work with their own hands or want their necessary food—except in these circumstances—can they be justified in giving themselves to any business but prayer and the ministry of the word? The work of a minister is honorable and pleasant, but it is also laborious and important enough to absorb the whole time and the whole strength, even of an angel. Let no man hope ever to preach well, without great pains both in meditation and prayer. To leave the ministry pure from the blood of men, is what never was, never will, never can, be done, without entire self-consecration to the appropriate business of that high calling.

(2.) Men will not rush hastily upon the work of the ministry who have just views of the nature of that work. Two inducements to a premature commencement have prevailed with preachers; over eagerness to be settled in life, and impatience to be engaged in winning souls. To name the first is to pronounce its reprobation; the second should be more tenderly considered, but cannot be approved. He who winneth souls is wise, and there are methods of winning them which may be employed by Converts of a day old, and all Christians should be constantly using all proper methods of saving as many souls from death, as possible; but he who enters upon the business of a regular preacher of the word, should consider the nature of that business, and his fitness for it; and should also inquire, whether he is called to it, of the Lord: for it is not mere concern that men be saved, but ability and faithfulness in preaching, and the divine blessing, which will make a preacher actually instrumental in saving them. ‘Am I, both as to talents and grace, prepared in some good measure for this great work? and will God be with me in performing it?’ These are the questions which it behoves him to ponder well, who thinks to become a preacher of the everlasting Gospel. Preachers are greatly needed. Hundreds of millions of men have never heard the Gospel. But the case was the same when the Son of God was in his long retirement at Nazareth, and during the three years’ course of preparation, which the anointed Apostles passed through, before they went forth as messengers of God’s grace to the nations. Preachers are needed to save a lost world; but *what* are they who are needed? Not men; but men of a peculiar spirit, and of a certain order of gifts. Others are not what are wanted. Others will not serve in their stead. There is a demand for statesmen, and men present themselves who

scarcely know what political economy means. Is the demand met? Are not statesmen needed still.

(3.) The chief object of pursuit, in the work of preparation for the sacred office, is to learn how to preach. This should be the end of all reading, all study, all applications of the mind and heart. To preach well, what attainment so great, so excellent, within a mortal's reach? What attainment beyond, we had almost said, beside this, should a candidate for the ministry seek much to make? What to such a man should be all languages, sciences, arts, accomplishments, except as subservient to this great purpose? To PREACH, to exert that instrumentality by which the ruined souls of men may be recovered from the power of sin and raised to fellowship with God, who that undertakes this work, or is preparing to undertake it, should care for aught else but to do it in the best manner?

In pursuing this object all possible exertions should be made on the part of candidates; and the Church should lend them every possible facility and assistance: but they should remember, that after all, they will come short of the end, unless they abide under divine illuminations, and come forth from their studies and their prayers, full of faith, and with the Spirit of the Lord God resting upon them. Men may be fitted in some sort, for the high places of the state, merely by nature and mental discipline, but it is only in deep communion with God and by an unction from the Holy One, that ability to preach well, can be acquired, or preachers be kept from prostituting their gifts, to the low and criminal purposes of a worldly ambition or covetousness.

These remarks are submitted, with the expectation, that they will be heard by one portion of the Assembly, as specially designed for their consideration. Besides a company of laborers now bearing the heat and burden of the harvest-field of Christ, there are here present before God, a goodly collection, who have deemed themselves called by the Holy Ghost to a participation in the toils of that field, and are preparing to go forth to those painful toils, in cheerful obedience to the heavenly intimation. These brethren may learn from the nature of that work in which they propose to spend their lives, somewhat of the Spirit which it becomes them to possess. They may see, that men who enter into the ministry, and are not wholly absorbed in the pursuits of that sacred calling, are out of their proper place; and may prove a

curse, rather than a blessing to the Church :—that before the Church raises her rejoicing voice at the prospect of an accession to her ministers, she should inquire, not merely what is the number, but also what is the character, of these new candidates.

Brethren you should lay this to heart, and muse long and deeply upon it. What think ye ; is it an unlikely thing which we suppose ? that peradventure one Brainerd in this school of the prophets, were, as to prospective usefulness in the Church, more precious in the sight of God than all the rest, we say not of this school only, but of all the kindred schools of our land ? If this be no improbability what searchings of heart should be now going on throughout the whole Church, but especially in the ministry and in those who design to belong to it ? For what is it that would make a single Brainerd among you worth hundreds of his fellows ? Not superiority of understanding, or superiority of gifts ; but *a heart as to the work of saving men, more like the heart of THE HOLY JESUS.*

This, brethren, above all things is what is wanted to make able preachers, a deep and affectionate knowledge of Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death. To know languages and logic and philosophy and controversies, especially to ministers in certain situations, is of high importance, but the secret of Paul's amazing power and success in the ministry, in connection with his learning and rare gifts, was this, that he counted all things but loss for the sake of gaining the most perfect sort of acquaintance with the character, sufferings, death and resurrection, of his blessed Saviour and Lord. Any minister with a competence of talents, pursuing the same means of cultivating sympathy with Christ, which were used by Paul, might if life were continued, attain to an eminency in preaching, beyond almost any thing known in this age. And why should not all ministers and all candidates for the ministry, esteem union and intimacy with Christ, as highly as did Paul ?

Brethren, as we would entreat you, never seek to be called of men, *Rabbi, Rabbi*, so we cannot forbear to give you a caution against calling any man on earth, *Father* ; or, being in your aims and preparations for your work as well as in your subsequent methods of carrying it on, *the servants of men.* Reverence for worthies ancient or modern, is a virtue which will ever be found associated with true humility, and is specially beautiful and lovely in youth ; but since the standard of ministerial excellence is heav-

en-high, above the point of attainment generally reached by ministers of any age, it were regarding man's shortcomings more than God's requirements, to depress yourselves down below that point, or to fear rising above it, out of reverence for human worthies. There must and will be improvement in the ministry. Who that considers, that the world is to be converted by means of preaching, can avoid this conclusion, unless he forgets after what manner the business of preaching is now managed throughout the Church? Immense changes, truly, are to be looked for, and none it would seem greater than in the character of preaching.

We desire not, dear brethren, that any of you should be smitten with zeal for innovation. To hold ancient opinions and usages in wanton disrespect; to deviate rashly from paths trodden by the great and the good of past generations, is proof of every thing more than Christian modesty, or self-knowledge, or true knowledge of any sort. But why should not every one of you be, we do not say Brainerd, in spirit, but more than a Brainerd, since even he, was immeasurably below Christ, the just model of all preachers. Why should we be obliged to search among the dead; why be referred to the days of Baxter, or of Paul, or of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, for instances of high spirituality among the anointed servants of God? Were the advantages for holy living ever greater than they are now? Did holy light ever shine with greater brightness or abundance? Did the voice of Providence, the necessities of the world, the character of the age, the honor of Christ; ever more urgently demand such a mode of life in the Christian ministry? It is holy living in the ministry, raised to the height of apostolical example, which is to restore the apostolic way of preaching. When a ministry shall be seen who shall pray and meditate and LIVE like Apostles, then will be also seen a ministry who shall preach like Apostles. Such a ministry, we doubt not, will arise, and arise at no distant day. The period of the world's conversion is drawing nigh; and signs of improvement in the ministry are already seen. Never was the preaching in this land, so good, for the most part, as at present. And never were the results of preaching so great. Prepare yourselves, brethren, for an advancing state of the Church; and begin from this day such a manner of life, that by your life and your preaching, you may be eminently instrumental, of filling the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.