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SERMON

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MARK XVI, 15.—“And he said unto them, go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

The preaching of the gospel is the ordinary means, which a wise and merciful God has been pleased to appoint, for the conversion of men to himself. “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Rom. x. 14, 17. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God.” 1 Cor. i. 18. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” “And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” 1 PETER, i, 23, 25.

The result here connected with the means, is not effected by any inherent power of truth, but by the gracious and supernatural influence of the Holy Ghost. In the conversion of men, God exerts his power, through the instrumentality which he has ordained.

This instrumentality is wisely adapted to the nature of man, as a rational, intelligent, and moral creature.

There is in the church a standing order of men, called the ministry of reconciliation, whose office it is to preach this gospel, and administer its appropriate and appointed ordinances.

The text is the commission, granted by the Head of the Church, under which they act. This is the evidence of their authority, derived immediately from himself.” “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” John xx, 21.

The command to preach the gospel was not confined to those to whom it was immediately given, but extends to all whom He, from time to time, calls to the work, by his Spirit and Providence.

It was physically impossible for the first preachers of the gospel to cover the whole field embraced in the commission. And the encouraging promise connected with the commission as recorded by Matthew, shows the command as extending to the end of time. “Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Math. xxviii, 20. Those therefore who are called to the work of the ministry, both internally and externally, and regularly set apart by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, are authorised, by this commission, to preach the gospel. The field of labour is the world. The gospel must be preached to the ends of the earth. And if it be the duty of ministers to go to the heathen, it is the duty of the church to send them: for “how shall they preach, except they be sent?” Rom. x, 15. The Presbyterian Church in this country, has been criminally and shamefully negligent of this solemn duty. But we hail the establishment of the “Western Foreign Missionary Society,” as the dawning of a brighter day upon our Zion. The question has been asked, and may with propriety be asked again, may not this guilty slumbering over a positive command, be one among other reasons, why God has permitted this church to be overrun and distracted with heresy and faction? The text presents two points demand-

ing our serious attention. 1. What is it that the ministers of Christ are commissioned to preach? 2. To whom are they commissioned to preach?

1. What does our commission authorize us to preach? "Go ye into all the world and PREACH THE GOSPEL." The word "gospel" signifies "good news," "glad tidings." It is the history of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. It is the revelation of God's merciful purpose towards sinners, and of the wonderful plan of redemption, together with the doctrines and precepts which our Lord delivered, for the edification and government of his church.

The word "gospel" is sometimes used for narration, as "the gospel of Mark." Being a revelation of grace to sinners it is sometimes used for the doctrines of grace, as in Romans, xi, 28.

It is called "the gospel of God." Rom. i, 1, because it is a wise and gracious constitution of God the Father, for the recovery of ruined man.

It is called "the gospel of the grace of God" Acts xx, 24, because it proceeds from the grace of God, as the moving cause of the salvation which it publishes; because it portrays and makes manifest the distinguishing grace of its author; and because it is itself the means of imparting grace to those who receive it in the love of it, and submit their hearts and lives to its influence and control. It is called "the gospel of Christ" Rom. i, 16, because Christ is both the author and the subject matter of that revelation. It is called "the gospel of salvation" Eph. i, 13, because it is the publication and the offer and the means of salvation to men.

What then are the doctrines of the gospel, which, by our commission, we are authorized to preach?

Whatever was Adam's condition by the fall, he being the public representative, and federal head of his posterity, is the condition of the race. By breaking the covenant under which he was placed, he became obnoxious to the penalty annexed to the prohibition which he violated. He incurred the displeasure of God, and was condemned to suffer the punishment, with which he had threatened the transgression of his law. When God withdrew his favour, he likewise withdrew his spirit from Adam, and immediately on such withdrawal, spiritual death ensued. When animal life is withdrawn from the human body it corrupts. Death is but the cessation of life.

When spiritual life, was forfeited, and withdrawn from Adam he became by that act, spiritually dead, and consequently corrupt. The loss of the image of God, which consisted in righteousness and true holiness, is not alone descriptive of Adam's state. Being a moral creature, he must possess a moral character, and therefore was not only destitute of holiness, but averse to it, and positively inclined to all evil.* He became not only destitute of love to God, but positively inimical to him. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." The posterity of Adam all came into the world in the same deplorable and lapsed state, guilty, depraved and miserable. They come into the world under a broken covenant, to which, by representation, they were a party. Hence the guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed to each one of the fallen race: and each one therefore, is born in a state of condemnation. The supposed injustice of such a procedure on the part of the Divine government, has been argued against the truth of it. But this is reasoning *apriori*, on grounds that are manifestly untenable. Because our finite minds cannot comprehend the ways of God, nor discover their consistency with his attributes, it by no means follows that they are therefore not the ways of God. The first point to be settled is, whether the scriptures in the obvious meaning of their language, teach the doctrine in question, if so, the responsibility of reconciling it with other known truths, rests not upon us, but where it can be sustained, on the author of the scriptures. It will be remarked that nearly the whole argument against the doctrine of imputation, is based upon its supposed injustice, rather than upon a fair examination of the scriptures which are said to teach it. Thus the controversy is shifted from its legitimate field, between interpreters of the bible, to a position, where their divine author is made a party. There we are content to leave the disputants, fully persuaded that God will successfully vindicate his own character and conduct.

As the race come into the world in a

* Destitution can never be descriptive of moral character. A stone is destitute of holiness, and if the moral character of an infant consists in its destitution of holiness, then a stone is as much a moral being as an infant. And this indeed is maintained by some. But there is a difference between moral being and moral agency. Moral being is descriptive of a race, moral agency is a particular stage of development to which the moral being has arrived.

state of condemnation, so also, are they depraved. Depravity is hereditary, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh. Mankind are born with a positive inclination to sin.

The gospel is a revealed plan of salvation from the guilt and the pollution of sin. It is distinguished from all other systems of religion by the complete adaptation of its provisions, to the wants and necessities of the race. It is a finished work of infinite love, wisdom and power. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became incarnate, humbled himself, perfectly obeyed, and painfully suffered the will of his Father, even unto death. He became the substitute of the sinner and died in his stead, his sins being imputed to his surety. This substitution is not a substitution of the sufferings he endured, for those he would have endured, had he suffered the penalty of the law. This is a substitution but in name. The substitution which the gospel teaches, is a substitution of Christ for the sinner, and of his sufferings for those which the law demanded of the sinner. Not indeed that they were eternal, or accompanied by remorse for neither of these were essential to the penalty of the law except when a finite personal sinner endured it. Jesus Christ, because he was an infinite, divine and holy being, endured the real substantial penalty of the law, by a suffering limited as to duration, and unaccompanied by remorse. His death was strictly vicarious. And the righteousness which he wrought out by his obedience, both preceptive and penal, is graciously imputed to the believer, who receives it by faith, and who, by a fideucial recumbance, relies upon it for complete justification, including both pardon and acceptance. The doctrine of imputation including the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, of the believer's sins to Christ, and of his righteousness to the believer, is a doctrine plainly taught in the sacred scriptures. Whatever objections are raised against the *name*, the *thing* is taught in the bible; and is founded on a principle, which is acknowledged in the transaction of all business by delegation and representation, and indeed, to some extent, pervades all the ramifications of social intercourse.

The atonement of Christ is a real *bona fide* atonement, securing infallibly the salvation of those for whom it was made. It is not a solemn show or pantomime, exhibiting the justice of God, by the infliction of the severest torments upon a

being in no sense guilty nor obnoxious to punishment. Strange exhibition of *justice* this! The efficacy of the atonement results from its nature, not from its appointment merely, as a means of salvation. If the efficacy of suffering consisted merely in its sovereign appointment, why was not an inferior being appointed? The Arian and Socinian very consistently reply, that Christ is a being inferior to God. If the efficacy lies in the appointment why need he endure the penalty of the law. The Pelagian as consistently replies, he did not endure it. The nature of the atonement, determining as it does its efficiency, determines also its extent. In the language of Calvin, it is *sufficient* for all, *efficient* only for the elect.

The other branch of salvation as revealed in the gospel, relates to the work of the Holy Ghost. Corruption, including the dominion and pollution of sin, is removed by the Spirit of God, regenerating and sanctifying the soul; and thus preparing it for that state of future bliss to which justification graciously entitles it. For this wonderful charge or renovation, the sinner is dependent entirely on the influence of God's spirit. Helpless in himself, and unable to take one step in the way of holiness, he must be brought back to God, wholly by the sacred Spirit, or not at all.

In the view of these and kindred precious doctrines, the sinner must be faithfully warned of his danger, and instructed in his duty. The way and the means of salvation must be clearly pointed out to him. The obligation of immediate repentance, and the guilt of a moments delay, must be pressed upon his conscience.

Those who are elected to eternal life, and effectually called by the Holy Ghost, shall be kept through faith unto salvation, and thus persevere to the end. The promises and consolations of the gospel, should be dispersed to the flock of Christ, according to their necessities and circumstances. The indispensable requisition of good works, and a holy life, as the fruits of repentance and the evidence of faith, and the obedience of love, must be distinctly held up to the view of the people, and constantly impressed upon their hearts.

This is indeed but an imperfect summary of that gospel, which by our commission we are authorized and commanded to preach. Nor are we at liberty to hold back the truth; nor shun to declare

the whole counsel of God. An awful woe is denounced against the man who shall add to, or take from the words of the book of God. And "though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man: for I neither received it of man; neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Gall. i. 8, 12.

II. The second point presented in the text, is, to whom does our commission authorize us to preach this gospel?

This enquiry is briefly answered in the text. "Go ye into all the world, and preach my gospel to **EVERY CREATURE**." The duty here imposed on the Church, of sending this gospel to the heathen, is distinctly taught, and we can not be guiltless, so long as we neglect to discharge it. We are authorized to offer salvation, to all with whom we meet, and to enjoin upon them the duty of repentance and faith, without respect to persons. Hitherto the provision for salvation was confined, in its offer and publication, to the Jewish Church; but now that the partition wall has been broken down, we are required to preach the gospel to Jews and Gentiles, to bond and free. Objections indeed have been raised on the ground of a supposed inconsistency between the doctrines of the gospel, as set forth in this discourse, and a sincere offer of that gospel to all.

I. If the atonement be limited as to its design and application, how can it be honestly and in good faith, offered to every creature? This apparent difficulty has greatly perplexed some honest minds, who though inclined to the views above expressed, by the superior weight and character of the testimony in favour of their correctness, have nevertheless yielded to the influence of this seeing incongruity, and of the fancied dilemma from which they seek to escape, and have abandoned the truth as taught in the gospel, in order to base their universal offer of salvation, on the general and indefinite provision of it for all. The supposed difficulty now under consideration is by no means confined to the doctrine

of a limited atonement, but as really belongs to the doctrine of divine decrees.

There is indeed this difference: the difficulty in the latter case is removed one step farther back, but is still not out of sight, and can therefore be as readily discovered by an observing mind. The Arminian twits the believer in election with the very same question. If only a certain definite number is elected to salvation, with what consistency or sincerity can you offer that salvation to all? Let those who reject the doctrine of a definite atonement on this ground, satisfactorily answer the question of the Arminian, and he will have furnished us with an answer to his own. But no such difficulty really exists except in the imagination. We apprehend that the true ground of a general offer of the gospel is, by those who feel the difficulty, entirely lost sight of. The commission is the only legitimate ground of such an offer. To this we are to look, and not to the doctrines which we are authorized to preach. If there be an inconsistency, it is not between the doctrines and the offer, but between the commission and the doctrines. The same authority that commissions us to "preach the gospel to **EVERY CREATURE**," also commissions us to preach the doctrine of a limited atonement. The difficulty arises from the limited comprehension of a finite mind. I preach the gospel to "every creature" under the sound of my voice, not in the view of any particular doctrines, but in the view of my commission, and because I am commanded so to do. The preaching of the gospel to all is to be regarded as the *means* which God employs to save those for whom Christ died.

2. But let us notice the Arminian objection, which rests on the same foundation. He supposes that the doctrine of election furnishes the sinner with an unanswerable excuse. Let the following dialogue both illustrate and obviate the difficulty.

Minister.—God commands you to repent of sin, and believe the gospel of his son.

Sinner.—If I am elected to be saved I will be saved, let me do what I will; and if I am not elected, I shall be damned, let me do what I can.

Minister.—Hold! I will convict you of insincerity and dishonesty in making this excuse for not seeking God. Do you believe in the doctrine of election?

Sinner.—No! I believe it to be a damnable doctrine.

Minister.—Then if it be false, it can afford you no excuse for neglect of the duty enjoined.

Sinner.—That is true, but the doctrine may be taught in the scriptures; what then? Am I not in that case excusable?

Minister.—No, for unless you believe the doctrine to be true, it cannot be the true reason why you refuse to seek God. But suppose you believe it to be divinely inspired, are you prepared to say that God has revealed a truth which furnishes sinners with a valid excuse for continuing in sin?

Sinner.—No, that were blasphemy, and contrary to the whole tenor of the bible, as well as to the character of God.

Minister.—What then has become of your excuse? Believe the doctrine of election or not, it affords you no valid excuse, according to your own showing.

Sinner.—To be candid, sir, I will say that I referred to the doctrine as a mere excuse, and as an expedient to quiet my conscience, and to stop your mouth.

Minister.—Then I have fulfilled my promise, and convicted you of insincerity in making the excuse. It is one which you would not dare to offer at the judgment seat of Christ. If the doctrine be not true, you dishonestly use it as a pretext, which you know to be unavailing. If it be true, it is an awful abuse of God's word, by throwing it in the face of God, when he commands you to repent. Wrest not the scripture thus to your own destruction.

The above conversation was once actually held by the writer, and resulted in the conviction of the sinner, that he was at least without this excuse.

Secret things belong unto God; and the doctrine of decrees, though a revealed truth, is not a rule of duty. The obligation of every sinner, with or without reference to this doctrine, is immediately to repent and believe in Jesus Christ with faith unfeigned.

3. Here we are met with the last objection which we shall notice.

If the sinner be unable to repent and believe, as is taught in this discourse, with what justice can he be commanded to repent and believe? The sinner's inability flows from sin, and is itself sinful. A man's sinfulness cannot take away God's right to command him. The law of God is immutable. The state and condition of the sinner is not so. The law cannot change with the changes in a man's condition. Man becomes unable to obey through his own sinfulness; the

law remains unaltered.

It is said that to command sinners to do what it is known they are unable to do, is both unjust and incongruous.

In time of war the state commands every man, above a certain age, to shoulder his musket, and repair to the field of battle. One thus ordered, voluntarily maims himself, and becomes unable to perform duty. The claim of the law is not on that account waived, but the penalty is enforced. No one complains of injustice here. Yet the fountain of all justice is impeached because of a similar procedure. It is said that [this doctrine represents God as calling on the tombs to give up their deposit. Christ and his apostles *did* command dead bodies to arise. And they *did* arise! How unmeaning and incongruous such a command! But the fact is undeniable. The controversy then is with God, not with those who interpret his word. Nay, but O man! who art thou that repliest against God.

When the inability of a sinner is compared to that of a dead body, it is not meant that it is the same in kind, but in reality and degree. It is said that sinners are furnished by this doctrine with an adequate excuse. Let us try this excuse by the touchstone of truth, and it will be found as those already examined. What sinner, who thus excuses himself, really does all that we acknowledge he can do, to save his soul? Not one. Until he has done all he can, with what sincerity can he excuse himself, on the score of inability? Whatever the sinner may say, he knows that he is insincere, and his conscience convicts him of dishonesty in offering such an excuse. I will listen to no such excuse, till he has done what he can. Then I will meet him on another ground: which is that no sinner is ever convinced of his inability until he is brought, by the Spirit of God, in that state of mind, in which he will not offer it as an excuse. When truly acquainted with his helplessness, he is the least disposed to make it an excuse. Instead of deriving ease of conscience from that conviction, like Peter in the waves, he will cry "Lord save or I perish." Until thus convinced, he belies his conscience when he pleads his inability. Until such conviction, he believes he is able to repent, and therefore defers it to a more convenient season. So far from persuading sinners that they are able to repent, I aim to convince them of their utter helplessness, and until I succeed in this, I

have but little hope of their salvation. It may be laid down as an axiom, that no sinner is truly convicted of his inability, so long as he continues to plead it as an excuse. Until a sinner is convinced of his entire helplessness, it is an unwillingness to come to Christ that keeps him at a distance; hence Christ said "Ye will not come unto me," &c. This was the very obstacle of which they were conscious. The practical difficulty in the case of a sinner is a want of will. But when made willing in the day of God's power, and in essaying to believe, he becomes sensible of his inability and cries mightily to God for help. But will he then plead it as an excuse? Never.

A sinner's inability therefore is a doctrine which I conceive to be perfectly consistent with a general and indiscriminate offer of the gospel, on its prescribed terms.

The truth is that sinners would seldom or never frame such excuses, if they were not put into their mouths by those who oppose the doctrines which are supposed to furnish them. These excuses for sinners are intended as arguments against the doctrine. How many souls have been thus ruined, let those answer who have administered the poison.

When ever we are engaged in building up the cause of God, we are prone to use untempered mortar. Because our finite minds cannot always connect the end with the very simple means which God is pleased to employ, we are apt to distrust their appropriateness, and to substitute those which our own wisdom may suggest. We sometimes lose sight of the fact, that the efficiency is not in the means, but in Him who has been pleased to ordain them; and loosing sight of this, we trust in an arm of flesh, and forget that it is by the foolishness of preaching that God is pleased to convert men. Let us preach the gospel in the exercise of a strong faith, in God, and with a more confident reliance upon his power and faithfulness. Let us diligently perform that part of the great work which has been committed to our hands, and trust in God for the full accomplishment of his own gracious purposes.

Upon sinners let us constantly press the obligation of immediate repentance. Let us keep before their minds their duty and their danger. They are in the hands of an angry God, who expostulates while he threatens, and woos while he warns. Let us declare to them the whole coun-

sel of God, and seek to move them by every scriptural consideration.

And while we thus teach, exhort and persuade, let us remember that Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.

To Him, then, let our waiting, supplicating eyes be directed, for that efficiency and blessing, which alone can crown our labours with success. Then and not till then, may we hope to see the work of the Lord prospering in our hands. May the Lord give us all wisdom and grace from on high, that at last we may be welcomed as good and faithful servants. Amen!

A VISIT TO THE BALTIMORE CATHEDRAL.

Most strangers who visit Baltimore, are conducted to the Cathedral as one of our principal shows. It is a large gray stone edifice in the shape of a cross—built in rather an antique style, and situated on the highest elevation perhaps in the city. It was built in great part by funds raised by lottery; a mode of gambling so little disapproved of by the Papal Ecclesiastics of Maryland, that Priest McLroy of Frederick had influence enough to get the last legislature of this state, to grant him a Lottery to aid in the erection of the Cathedral in that city, at the very moment, that the same body were wisely and diligently occupied in labours to suppress lottery gambling entirely in this commonwealth. The foreign friends of "our catholic brethren"—are supposed to have furnished the remaining funds in chief part; as they have also, many of the decorations of the building. Upon the whole it is a very fine edifice; spacious and imposing; durable and noble. We rejoice to look forward with confident hope to the day, when it will be purged of all its present fooleries,—and cleansed of its present occupants; and when the pure word of life will have free course there, in the labours and instructions of the true followers of the Lamb.

Visitors usually enter the building at the west door; that is, at the part of the building representing the lower end of the cross. Here is a spacious outer entrance; then a narrow passage across the building—then doors fronting the outer entrance, which open into the high and capacious church itself. On the side of two of the doors, stand two marble vases on pedestals, containing water mixed with salt and oil, called holy water, and