

THE
PREBYTERIAN PREACHER.

VOL. II. PITTSBURGH, JANUARY, 1834. No. 8.

SERMON XXII.*

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**THE SINNER'S INABILITY INEXCUSABLE, YET
DIVINE INFLUENCE NECESSARY.**

JOHN 6:44. *No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.*

THERE is no doctrine to which mankind have a stronger and more inveterate aversion than that of the divine sovereignty:—that God should have a right to dispose of all events, and yet look upon the creature to be infinitely to blame, and chargeable with rebellion against God, and the ruin of his own soul. Sinful mortals would condescend to allow that God should dispose of events, if he would always, as they do, set up their interest, ease and happiness as his last end; and would act nothing beyond their inspection, and without their approbation. But when his wisdom goes a whit beyond their moon-light reason, and he projects any thing beyond their ken, he is to be arraigned at its bar. Nay, human reason, without any new creating power exerted, would condescend to receive laws from God as their sovereign, upon condition that he would admit them to be of his council, and that they should judge every command, and its penal sanction, whether it were holy, just and good, or not; that is, if he would lay aside his holy law, which is founded upon his infinite perfections, and take the depraved will of the rebellious creature as his rule.

From this unwillingness to submit to the divine sovereignty, and disposition to set up ourselves, as our last end, and to judge of the divine perfections by our own depraved taste, has arisen all those unreasonable quarrels against God's dispensations in all ages since our dreadful apostacy from God.

*The venerable author of this discourse has deceased, since this sermon was received for publication.

SERMON XXIII.

BY S. C. JENNINGS,
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THE EXCUSES OF SCEPTICS FOR REJECTING THE GOSPEL.

LUKE 14:18. *I pray thee have me excused.*

It will be recollected by the reader of the parables of our Lord, that the words of the text were used by two individuals, as the conclusion of their apologies for not coming to the "great supper" to which they were invited: which supper, parabolically, exhibits the provisions and blessings of the gospel.

As it is not possible, to notice the endless variety of excuses made by different classes of persons, for not embracing the christian religion "in spirit and in truth," I will only give a *summary* answer to some of those which are founded in *scepticism*.

1. Says the modern Atheist, *I do not believe that any religion is necessary for mankind, "I pray thee have me excused from receiving the offers of the gospel."*

To such an one I answer: 1st. The belief of a great Creator is absolutely necessary to account for the almost infinite variety of productions existing on the earth, evidently, the result of the *design* of a Being, uniting in his character, wisdom, power, goodness, &c. Every effort to account, rationally and consistently, for the existence of things without such a self-existent *first cause*, has failed. 2d. The belief of such a Being is necessary to elevate the faculties of man, in the contemplation of a perfect standard of moral excellence. 3d. Belief in the existence of a Being endued with power, and possessing a determination to punish transgression, is necessary to suppress the "vanity, ferocity, and unbridled sensuality," of men. 4th. A want of belief in the existence of a "Holy, Lord God," to whom men are accountable, leads not only to the *neglect* of all virtuous principles, but it *saps* the foundation of all morality.

The result of the effort to abolish *all religion* in France, fully justifies the preceding statements. Yea, the *lives* of modern Atheists adds to their confirmation. Facts, in some cases, would seem to justify the opinion, that the religion of some of the ancient heathen was better than *no religion*. The introduction of the Atheism of the Epicurus, into Rome, was followed by proscription, bloodshed, and an awful state of things, (as its direct offspring,) from which the republic could never fully recover—an *example of warning to the American republic*.

2. The modern freethinker says, *I esteem all systems of religion*

equally good for those who believe them, and "I pray thee have me excused" from giving an exclusive preference to the religion of Jesus Christ.

I ask him seriously to consider the following things: 1st. That that can only be a true religion which represents God as a being of *infinite perfection*. 2d. The limited nature of man's moral faculties, as well as the past history of the world, show, that he needs to be taught the *proper mode* of worshipping God. 3d. We need a religion which will inform us how we are to escape punishment for those sins which conscience accuses, and which the light of nature condemns. 4th. We need a religion which will make us happy, collectively and individually. 5th. We need a religion which will explain the causes of calamity, disease, and death. 6th. We need a religion which will give a consistent and correct account of the destination of the soul after death. That these *first* and important truths in religion are not found in the Koran of Mohammed, in any pagan, or every *nominally* christian system of religion, is evident to all who are acquainted with them. That they are only found taught in the Bible is equally evident, to those who have given it an impartial and sincere perusal. Any reflecting man, who abandons the sacred volume will find himself in distressing perplexity and in gloomy uncertainty on vitally important inquiries. The *latter end* of many sceptics who have been forced to think, in the prospect of death, fully confirms this declaration.

Farther, the *benefits* offered in the gospel of Christ are worthy to be offered by a Creator to his creatures. They excel the benefits of all other systems in the following particulars. They are adapted to persons of *every* description—they are chiefly spiritual in their nature, while those of the heathen are "earthly, sensual, devilish"—they are not only vastly greater in this life, than any benefits offered by any other system, but surpass all others, inasmuch as they are holy, glorious and **ETERNAL**. Other religions both corrupt the mind of the worshipper and degrade the supposed deity, while that of the gospel purifies the hearts, and reforms the lives of men; yet exalts the true God. Other religions bear the mark of human invention, while that of the Bible is worthy of God, its author.

In justification of this statement, I appeal, by way of comparison, to the *state* of the world. I direct the attention of the candid freethinker to the *facts* narrated by every accredited historian and traveler of ancient and modern times, respecting those portions of the world which are without the influence of the *true* gospel. I solemnly ask him to pause and consider them, before he gives himself to a destructive indifference about the invitations of the only Savior of sinners. I ask him to recollect that the adoption of the sentiment, "that all religions are equally good," and that it is a matter of indifference which he embraces, provided he is *sincere*, destroys all distinction between truth and error. It is to say, that there are not certain first truths, the belief of which is immutably essential to the welfare of every human being. It is to say, that all the abominable, cruel, and murderous rites of the heathen are just as good for them, as the benevolent and sacred precepts of Christ are for those who believe in him.

3. But a *third* person says, "I pray thee have me excused" from receiving instruction or benefit from the gospel. My *reason* and *conscience* are sufficient guides, and *repentance* is the only atonement necessary for errors.

The professed followers of human reason do not *know*, or will not *acknowledge*, that the most of the light which they possess was received, either directly or indirectly, from the word of God. For some truths which they profess to believe, and some things which they acknowledge as duties could never be learned by the exercise of mere reason, or from the dictates of conscience. This has been *fairly* evinced, by the fruitless efforts of the most learned and able men of former times, who had not the revelation of the sacred scriptures. But do not many of these worshippers of reason strip God of *some* of his moral attributes? Do they not refuse to worship God, which is to deny this obvious truth, if there is a God, he should be worshipped? Have not some of them doubted of the immortality of the soul, and felt willing to lead men back into the uncertainty of the dark ages? Do not the *lives*, and generally the *deaths* of these men, make a sad commentary on their plan of being governed by reason and conscience; which, when illuminated by the "Sun of Righteousness," may *help* to ascertain truth and duty, but when left to themselves are blind guides leading to destruction, rather than to eternal life? Has it not been found that *almost* every rejecter of the Bible leads, either secretly or openly, a dissolute life, and that reason and conscience are not sufficient safeguards? Much less are they able to guide in every intricate path of duty, or to solve the most solemn and interesting inquiries.

Repentance for crime, in human governments, does not make an atonement for it, nor certainly secure forgiveness. Neither will a mere selfish repentance be followed by acceptance with God, where the divine Redeemer, who has satisfied the divine law and made it honorable, and consistent for God to forgive, is not embraced by *true* faith. Few men forgive their fellow men their debts, simply because they are sorry they have contracted them. Much less will the great Lawgiver forgive actual transgression of his laws without a satisfaction being rendered. He will maintain the rights of his government, confirm his truth, glorify his justice, and condemn every one to the prison of hell, who does not accept of Jesus as his surety. "For there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved."

4. A *fourth* person says, "I pray thee have me excused" from following Christ; I have a *right to refuse or choose what I will in matters of religion*.

Knowest thou, O vain man, that in God we "live and move and have our being?" Before you can divest yourself of obligation to *believe* what he has taught, and to *obey* when he commands, you must become *independent* of your Creator and Preserver. You must show yourself in no *need* of a Redeemer, or else your guilt will be increased by a rejection of the salvation extended in the gospel. For thus saith the Judge of the "quick and the dead:" "*This is the condemnation*, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil."

5. A *fifth* apologist says, I am willing to acknowledge Christ and to receive his benefits, and to follow his example, but "I pray thee have me excused" from doing it, to the *same extent* as is declared necessary by some.

Such an one wishes to be considered a *liberal christian*, and others to be so charitable as to consider him such, not without some fundamental *errors* in doctrine, and *immoralities* in practice. But we ask the liberalist, do you find your liberality taught in the gospel? Does it renounce its essential doctrines or its just requirements, for any who may not wish to believe the *one*, or obey the *other*? The offers of salvation are freely made to all, but not on their *own* terms. If you say the particular doctrines are of no consequence; I answer, that any, and every particular *part*, is to the *whole* system of divine grace, what any particular part of an edifice is to the whole building. In either case, if you take away a corner stone, the whole will be in danger of being worse than useless. Christianity, received as a *whole*, is calculated to produce the most salutary effect on the hearts and lives of men, and to give unspeakable comfort to the soul. But if it is mixed up with error of a dangerous nature, its efficacy may be rendered unavailing. The most wholesome food may be counteracted by a small portion of poison. A belief of the truth is essential to participate in the blessings of the gospel. Truth is of importance in every science. Much more so, in that religion which is the only well-founded hope of a sinner. Says the apostle, Gal. 1:9, "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed." There are, then, certain *doctrines* to be believed—certain *duties* to be performed, without which there is no salvation by the gospel. They are all included in a saving faith in Christ as he offers himself in his word, and a true repentance for sin. For the neglect of which duties, you cannot be *excused a single hour*, by that "God (who) was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on by the world, received up into glory."

Yea, by the authority of this glorified Redeemer, he is hereby offered to the *immediate* and *full* acceptance of sinners of *every* description. None can be *excused*, since he is *sued* to all. For,

"He is a path, if any be misled,
 He is a robe, if any naked be;
 If any chance to hunger, he is bread;
 If any be a bondman, he is free,
 If any be but weak, how strong is he!
 To dead men, life he is, to sick men health,
 To blind men sight, and to the needy, wealth."