

THE

807

# **PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER,**

OR ORIGINAL SERMONS BY LIVING MINISTERS IN THE PRES-  
BYTERIAN CHURCH,

ON

THE IMPORTANT DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY,

PRESENTED IN A CLEAR AND COMPREHENSIVE MANNER, FOR THE IN-  
STRUCTION OF THE PRESENT AGE, AND IN DEFENCE  
OF THE TRUTH.

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The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.—PSALMS.

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EDITED BY REV. S. C. JENNINGS.

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VOLUME I.



PITTSBURGH:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY D. AND M. MACLEAN.

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1833.

**Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1832, by D. & M. MACLEAN, in  
the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Western District of Pennsylvania.**

Received 1574.8  
v1  
1832-33

ANDOVER-HARVARD  
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY,  
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

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THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

No. 1.

PITTSBURGH, JUNE, 1832.

Vol. I.

**SERMON I.**

BY SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.  
OF PRINCETON, NEW-JERSEY.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF GOSPEL TRUTH.**

JOHN 17:17. *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*

THE great end of the religion of Jesus Christ is to deliver fallen men from sin, and from all its consequences. In other words, it is to deliver them from guilt, depravity and misery; to restore them to the image and favor of God; and to make them perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of him to all eternity. And, truly, the most precious benefit that can be conferred on a rational creature who has departed from God, is to "turn him away from his iniquities;" to bring him back to the likeness and fellowship of infinite Excellence; and to unite him to the holy and happy society over which He who "came to seek and to save that which was lost," presides as the Captain of salvation, as the covenant Head of all who are purchased by his atoning blood, and sanctified by his blessed Spirit. Hence the unspeakable importance of the Redeemer's prayer in our text,—  
"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

The original meaning of the word here rendered "sanctify," is to "separate, or set apart" to a particular purpose. Thus we are commanded to "sanctify the Sabbath;" that is, to dedicate it to God; to set it apart from the other days of the week, for sacred employments. Thus, also, the vessels, and other furniture of the tabernacle and temple are said to have been "sanctified." Not that they were made intrinsically holy; but they were set apart to the service of God. This kind of sanctification, however, is only external. There is another sense in which the term is employed, of far more importance; viz. to express real, internal devotedness or conformity to God. To be sanctified, in this sense, is to be restored to God's moral image; in other words, to be delivered from the power, and the pollution of sin, and to be "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light."

Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. He opens the eyes of the blinded and alienated sinner. He "takes away the hard and stony heart, and gives an heart of flesh." This work is begun in regeneration. Then a new and holy disposition is imparted to the soul. Then the current of the affections is changed. Then in him who was "dead in trespasses and sins," a new and spiritual life is begun. He has new views, desires, pursuits, and enjoyments. And this benign work is always carried on by the same divine Power which begins it. "Being confident," says the apostle, "of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it," or finish it, "until the day of Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit enables the happy subject of his grace more and more to "die unto sin and live unto righteousness;" to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts;" and to become more and more like his blessed Master, until, at length, when released from his earthly tabernacle, he shall be presented "a perfect man in Christ Jesus; without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, before the presence of his glory with exceeding great joy."

This most precious work of sanctification, we learn from our text, and from many other parts of Scripture, is effected by the instrumentality of the TRUTH. "Sanctify them through thy truth." The great Author of this work, indeed, is able to sanctify a depraved creature without employing any means whatever for the purpose. But this is not his ordinary method. He works by means. He is not, it is true, *confined* to them. But He commonly employs them for accomplishing his purposes in the world of grace, as well as of nature. As the Holy Spirit is the appointed Agent, in the economy of grace, for effecting the work before us; so he has an appointed or fixed instrumentality for the purpose, and that is REVEALED TRUTH. By "truth," we are to understand conformity to fact or reality; that which is opposed to falsehood:—in other words, it is the correct exhibition of the great facts and principles which are contained in the revelation of God for guiding our faith and practice. "Thy word," says the Saviour, "is truth." Every thing revealed in the word of God, relating either to doctrine, order or duty, belongs to that truth which infinite Wisdom has been pleased to impart for the instruction and sanctification of his people. For though all truth is not equally important; yet it is all really valuable:—and in proportion to the degree in which it is understood, embraced, and obeyed, will be its benign influence, both on individual Christians, and on the Church in her collective capacity.

The doctrine of our text, then, appears to be, that GOSPEL TRUTH IS THE GRAND MEANS WHICH GOD EMPLOYS FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF SINFUL MEN.

To illustrate and establish this position is the design of the present discourse. But before we proceed to the direct discussion of the subject, it may not be improper to interpose a word of caution on two or three important points. And,

*First:* We are not to suppose that *Truth is able of itself to produce the sanctifying effect of which we speak.* This blessed effect is produced, our text tells us, *through the truth*—that is, by *means of it*—the instrumental cause; not by its own inherent power as a primary agent. The truth, or the word of God, is the “sword of the Spirit.” The power which wields it is Divine. Without that divine energy, it would be as inert and powerless as any other word. Though it were held forth with all the logical force, and with all the touching eloquence that ever attended an angel’s address, still never would it slay a single corruption, or penetrate effectually to the seat of moral sensibility and action, in a single soul, were it not borne home to the heart, and savingly applied by the almighty Spirit of God. We may say of this, as well as of every other saving influence on the soul of man—“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.”

A *second* caution, to be ever borne in mind, when contemplating this subject, is, that the Holy Spirit, in applying the truth to the understanding, the conscience, and the heart of the sinner, *does it in a manner fully consistent with his liberty and responsibility as a moral agent.* No violence is done to any faculty. The truth is so exhibited, and the intellectual and active powers of the soul, so benignly influenced and wrought upon, that the happy subject of this influence is not forced against his will, but “made willing” to receive and obey the truth in the love of it. He is not wrought upon, as a workman operates upon a piece of inanimate matter; or as an officer of justice drags a reluctant criminal, contrary to his inclination, to a place of confinement. But by an almighty and sovereign moral influence, addressed to him as a rational creature; an influence immediately impressed on the soul; an influence by which he is made to see the reasonableness and excellence of divine things, and to give up his pride, prejudices and rebellion;—he cheerfully and cordially chooses the right way, and yields himself to the service of God, “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” It has been sometimes asserted, indeed, that man is *active* in his own regeneration. This doctrine is either founded on a *quibble*, or it is a *gross heresy*. If it be intended to say, that the power of God in the regeneration of a sinner is exerted, not upon inert matter, but upon an active being;—that the moment he is made alive by the power of the Holy Ghost, he begins to act spiritually and voluntarily; that in the instant of his vivification, he becomes active in holy affection and choice;—it is, doubtless, true; and there is nothing to complain of, but a vague expression, and a needless controversy about words. But if it be intended to convey the idea that the sinner *originates* as well as *exercises* his first holy choice; that the *principle* of obedience, or the cordial *disposition* to obey, which is prior, in the order of nature, to all holy acts, and from which they spring,—is the product of his own activity;—in a word, that in the production of that state of

the soul from which holy exercises flow, the sinner is not *acted upon*; but *acts*;—then the consequence is obvious. The sinner is the author of his own life. He is regenerated by himself, and not by the Holy Spirit. And, of course, the whole Bible doctrine of *divine influence*, as the only source of sanctification, is virtually abandoned.

The *third* and last preliminary remark which I beg may be kept in view, is, that the *manner* in which the Holy Spirit applies the truth to the soul, and by means of it renews and sanctifies the man, is unknown to us. I mean that what may be called the *philosophy* of this happy effect, is beyond our comprehension. "The wind bloweth," said our Divine Master, "where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." If we cannot unfold the philosophy of nutrition by food received into the animal body; much less can we understand how that Spirit who made every faculty, and sustains them every moment in exercise, can reach and immediately act upon them, without impairing their liberty; can enlighten, control and purify them, by the instrumentality of his own truth, and thus transform them into his own image. Of the *essence of things*, or of the *real nature of causation*, in any case, or on any subject, we know nothing. Surely, then, it is no wonder that we cannot explain the *nature and process* of that divine causation by which the spiritually dead are "made alive to God." Our inability, however, to explain the process by which this blessed effect is produced, ought by no means to shake our belief in the fact, that it is by means of the truth that the sanctification of the soul is commenced and carried on. This, it is hoped, will be made to appear by adverting to the following considerations.

I. By attending to THE STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN MIND. The character of every man is determined by the character of his mind. As it is the soul that may be said, emphatically, to constitute the man; so the state of the soul is decided by the principles and affections which govern it. A man's "principles" are his real impressions or convictions concerning moral and religious truth, or, in other words, concerning facts and duty. His principles are the basis of his conduct. No man is *better* than his principles; it is well if he be *as good*. Indeed, strictly speaking, it is impossible that any man should be better than his principles. This would be to suppose that a man, in pursuing a course of conduct, may deviate from his own deliberate and conscientious persuasion of what is right, and be commendable for doing so; that is, may be more worthy of praise, as a moral being, for going counter to his sincere convictions, than if he had acted in conformity with them. This is impossible. Nay, it is the highest absurdity. If a man's principles be wrong; that is, if his habitual belief or convictions concerning truth and duty be erroneous; he must, of necessity, act erroneously. He cannot but

sin, whether he act in conformity with his principles, or in opposition to them. If he follow them, he is, of course, wrong, for he follows a false guide. On the other hand, if he act contrary to his deliberate and conscientious convictions, he no less certainly acts wrong; nay, perhaps, still more criminally; because he directly contravenes the dictate of conscience. Thus *Paul*, before his conversion, "verily thought within himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." His conscience was honest, in the popular sense of that term; but it was blinded and erroneous. And, of course, as long as it continued such, he could not but sin, whether he obeyed or resisted its dictates.

Can any thing place in a stronger light the importance of our receiving and obeying truth, and nothing but the truth, in reference to the great questions of faith and practice, than the considerations which have been stated? If the human mind is so constituted that no false opinion, no corrupt principle, can be adopted, without a corresponding practical mischief, and a mischief proportioned to the importance and the moral bearing of the principle in question;—then, surely, it behooves every one who values his own temporal or eternal well-being, to give all diligence to know and receive the truth; to "seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures." The infatuation and the injury of daily swallowing poison, are not more unquestionable, than the infatuation and the injury of imbibing corrupt sentiments; of embracing as truth doctrinal and practical error. To the precise extent of their influence, they must, of necessity, prevent the very springs of action, and lead the mind away from God, from duty, and, consequently, from happiness. And, unhappily, in this case, the more sincere the individual, the greater his danger. That is, the more unfeigned and deep his belief of the error supposed, the more powerful and mischievous will be its influence on his mind, and the more extensive and permanent the evil to which it will be likely to lead. But further,

II. The essential importance of truth, as a means of sanctification, is also rendered manifest by considering THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION. What is true religion, but conformity to the will of God? And what is the will of God, but truth,—the essence of truth? In this view of the subject, were we to define genuine sanctification, we might say, it essentially consists in knowledge of the truth, in love of the truth, and in walking according to the truth. In other words, it consists in having just apprehensions of things, temporal and spiritual; in cherishing right affections and desires toward them; and in acting out these affections and desires in the temper and life. God himself is truth. His word, our text tells us, is truth; and it must be so; for it is a transcript of his own most holy character. To know and love the word of God, then, is to know and love the truth; and, of course, is to know and love God himself. The word of God,

therefore, that which daily exhibits to the believer the great objects of his love, joy and confidence, is, of consequence, the aliment on which he lives. It is the "meat and drink" by which he is nourished and sustained. The more he contemplates the truth of God, with an humble and teachable spirit, the more he grows in grace, that is, in sanctification. The more his faith is confirmed; his repentance increased; his hope strengthened; his love enkindled; his confidence in God established; and his whole soul brought into a blessed conformity to the divine image. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

If such be the nature of true religion;—if it essentially consist in affections, desires, and conduct conformed to the will of God, which is his word, his truth; then it is self-evident, that no real sanctification can be either begun or carried on in any heart, but by bringing the mind in contact with truth, and into subjection to its power. Without this, we might just as well expect to "gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." To sanctify men, is, as we have seen, to excite in them just apprehensions, desires and affections toward those great realities which ought to be supremely regarded by rational beings. Of course, the more we believe in the reality and glory of these great objects; the more we love them, and seek them; the more we may be said to receive and obey the truth;—the more the truth may be said to pervade, to influence, and to govern the mind. The entrance of the word of God into the heart, gives light, and life, and joy, and hope, and peace, and "brings the whole man into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Yes, the word of God, when applied by the Holy Spirit, has a mighty sanctifying power. It enlightens the understanding; it awakens the conscience; it softens the heart; it "cleanses from all filthiness of flesh and spirit." And how does it become instrumental in accomplishing all this? It sets before the mind the most excellent and glorious *objects*. It presents the strongest *motives* for the attainment of holiness. It furnishes the most effectual *encouragements* to seek holiness. It offers the plainest and only effectual *directions* for the culture of holiness. And it is accompanied with "power from on high," impressing it upon the mind, and giving it, if I may so speak, an effectual lodgment and a holy energy there. This **POWER FROM ON HIGH** is that which imparts to it all its enlightening, purifying, and healing influence. And yet, from the very nature of true religion, while it is certain that nothing truly sanctifying will occur until this divine power is applied; it is, at the same time, equally certain that the application of truth to the mind in some manner, ordinary or extraordinary, is no less indispensable.

III. Again; the importance of knowing and receiving divine truth is placed in the strongest light BY THE EXPRESS DECLARATIONS OF SCRIPTURE. All those passages of the word of God which represent true religion under the beautiful and appropriate figure of "walking in the truth," and of "walking with God," who is the great source and model of all truth; may be considered as indirectly, but most emphatically, teaching the doctrine of our text. But the sacred oracles abound with declarations on this subject still more direct, pointed and solemn;—declarations which proclaim, at once, the value of truth, the necessity of its being known and received, and the fatal consequences of turning away from it. The following specimen of the manner in which the inspired writers express themselves on the subject, surely marks the deep importance of that which they inculcate. "Hold fast," says one apostle, "the form of sound words which thou hast received." "Contend earnestly," says another apostle, "for the faith once delivered to the saints." "Whosoever," says a third apostle, "abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." And again, "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed; for he that biddeth him God-speed is a partaker of his evil deeds." And in the same strain it is pronounced,—“if any man come unto you, and bring any other gospel than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” And again,—“Hold fast the faithful word, that you may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” Nay, departure from "sound doctrine," is every where represented as the seed of all corruption. "In the latter times," we are told, "some SHALL DEPART FROM THE FAITH, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." And again, "As there were false prophets among the people (the Jews;) so there shall be false teachers among you (Christians,) who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom THE WAY OF TRUTH SHALL BE EVIL SPOKEN OF." And, to crown all, the account given in prophecy of the great Romish apostacy is in the following language: "Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; BECAUSE THEY RECEIVED NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who BELIEVED NOT THE TRUTH, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

To the same effect are all those passages of scripture which represent "repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," as essential to salvation; which proclaim, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but that he who believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but that the wrath of God abideth on him;" which declare that "other

foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ;" and which exhort the impenitent and unbelieving to "flee from the wrath to come," to "lay hold of eternal life," and having accepted of proffered mercy, to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Now, what are all the exercises of mind here described and enjoined, but so many enlightened and practical views of the radical truths of religion? What is *Repentance*, but a holy sorrow for sin, founded on a spiritual perception of those doctrines concerning God, his character, his law, and the plan of mercy which his word proclaims? What is *Faith*, but believing, with cordial love and confidence, those great truths which the scriptures reveal, especially those which relate to the person, glory, and work of the Divine Redeemer? And what are all the other graces of the Spirit, which his word represents as indispensable to salvation, but so many exercises in all of which the soul lays hold of truth, follows truth, obeys truth, and enjoys the consolations of truth? Hence it is that the scriptures every where represent bringing the knowledge of the gospel, in some way, to men, as absolutely necessary to their conversion and salvation. "How shall they believe in him of whom their have not heard?" Hence it is, also, that when the impenitent are converted, they are said to "come to the knowledge of the truth;" to be "born again by the word of truth;" to be "made free by the truth;" and to "obey the truth;" by all which expressions we are plainly taught, that truth, or, which is the same thing, Christian doctrine, is the grand instrument, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, by which spiritual life is begun, carried on, and completed in every subject of redeeming grace.

IV. Once more; the great importance of knowing and receiving gospel truth, is manifest from the undoubted fact, that **WHENEVER THE FUNDAMENTAL AND PECULIAR DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL HAVE BEEN EITHER WITHHELD OR OPPOSED, THE INTERESTS OF VITAL PIETY AND HOLY LIVING HAVE ALWAYS, IN A CORRESPONDING DEGREE, DECLINED.** Not only does the Bible represent all departures from the faith, as evil, and, if they be essential, as destructive of Christian character and hope; but all ecclesiastical history serves at once to illustrate and confirm the melancholy representation. When we open the apostolical epistles to the churches of *Corinth*, *Galatia*, and the *Hebrews*, we shall find, by carefully attending to the strain of address, that many of the members of those churches, had listened to the persuasions of false teachers, and had materially departed from "the faith once delivered to the saints;" and that they had no less degenerated in zeal and practical godliness. Some of the errors which they had embraced, are specifically stated; and the pictures given of their practical influence, are indeed melancholy! In the second and third centuries, when the ministers of religion began to swerve from the simple and genuine doctrines of the gospel, the benign influence of their ministry, and all the most



precious interests of vital piety, and of holy living began, in the very same proportion, to decline. When *Augustine* arose, toward the close of the fourth century, the doctrines of the gospel had been very imperfectly preached for nearly two hundred years. Of course, he found both orthodoxy and piety, at a very low ebb. He and his pious coadjutors, grieved at the degeneracy of the Church, consecrated their whole strength to the great cause of gospel truth. They opposed, with unwearied zeal, the Pelagian and Semi-pelagian errors of the day; and did more to refute heresy, and to extend and establish sound doctrine, than had been done by any since the apostolic age. The consequence of this revival of orthodoxy, was the immediate revival of vital piety, and of gospel purity; the blessings of which, on a large part of the church, were precious and lasting. In several subsequent periods, whenever there was a revival of the knowledge and preaching of sound doctrine, good morals and practical godliness never failed to be revived in a corresponding degree. In the days of *Godeschalvus*; of *Claudius of Turin*; of the *Waldenses*; of *Wickliffe*; and of *Huss* and *Jerome*, it was manifest that practical piety rose or sunk, just as sound or erroneous doctrines bore sway. The same great fact was most impressively exemplified at the period of the Reformation. When the great doctrines of the gospel, which had been so long withheld or perverted by the corrupters of the church, began to be proclaimed by the Reformers, in something of their scriptural simplicity, pure and undefiled religion began immediately to spring forth, from this living seed, in the same proportion. And, on the contrary, when, toward the close of the sixteenth century, and during the seventeenth, orthodoxy declined in all the Protestant churches, and in some of them to a deplorable degree; there was a corresponding depression, in every one of them, of zeal, and of all the great interests of practical religion. Of these churches, the history of few is more melancholy and more solemnly instructive, than that of the *Huguenots* of *France*. For more than three quarters of a century after their emancipation from the thralldom of *Popery*, they were among the most pure and flourishing churches in the Protestant world. And, as long as their pious pastors continued to be sound in doctrine; faithful in adhering to their excellent Confession of Faith; and indefatigable in instructing their children and youth, and all classes of the people in gospel truth, in private as well as in public;—notwithstanding all the frowns and persecution of a hostile government, they prospered, multiplied, and were comparatively happy. But no sooner did orthodoxy decline in those churches; no sooner did *Cameron*, *Amyraut*, and other divines of talents, learning, and influence, begin to verge towards Semi-pelagian opinions, than an immediate and sensible decay ensued in piety, in zeal, and in pure morals. Indeed it seemed as if, from the time that the infection of these errors became in a considerable *dégré* extended, their peace was interrupted; their unity broken;

and their comfortable standing with the civil government destroyed;—until, on their whole state, was written—“Ichabod, the glory is departed!” And, to the present day, their glory has never been restored. As they went on to sink lower and lower in error, they became also more and more depressed in every thing that constitutes the true excellence and happiness of a church.

No less instructive on this subject is the history of the churches of *Geneva* and *England*. As long as simple gospel truth continued to be preached, and generally received in those churches, the effect was uniformly benign. “The word of God had free course and was glorified.” Sinners were convinced and converted; saints were edified and comforted; and the churches “walked together in the fear of the Lord, and in the consolations of the Holy Ghost.” But just in proportion as doctrinal error, gained ground among them, every thing good declined. Discord, strife, division, and moral desolation became more and more prevalent, and held a gloomy reign, until evangelical truth was again revived. But why should we dwell, in detail, on particular cases? The fact is, the principle of which we speak is universal in its application. Never, it may be safely asserted, did an exception occur. The prevalence of doctrinal error, and the decline of practical religion, have always gone hand in hand. And there is another fact, equally remarkable and instructive. When false doctrines have begun to appear in any church, the course has too commonly been from one degree of heterodoxy to another, until the lowest point of depression was reached. And this, however the fact may be explained, is more peculiarly apt to be the case, when those who once professed to stand upon orthodox ground, suffer themselves to be enticed into error. Those who were *originally bred* in some moderate doctrinal error, often remain, during their whole lives, at the same position. But when men apostatize from a scriptural creed, they, with deplorable frequency, have been found to continue in the downward course, until they reached the bottom of the declining plane. A late excellent and judicious writer never penned a more plain and melancholy truth, than when he said—“The progress is easy and almost unavoidable, from controversial opposition to personal election, to the explaining away of original sin, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, justification by faith alone, and even of the atonement and deity of Jesus Christ.”\* All history attests the truth of this humiliating and alarming statement.

If ever, therefore, the Presbyterian church shall begin to be infected with Semi-pelagian and Arminian errors; her case will be far more threatening, and the probable result far more deplorable, than those of churches which have, from the beginning, uniformly occupied Arminian ground. The individuals who may take the lead in such defection, will probably continue to the end of

\* Dr. Scott's preface to his translation of the *Acts of the Synod of Dort*.

life, to rank *themselves* with evangelical men; nay, they may, possibly, affect *peculiar* zeal and fidelity, and claim to be, *pre-eminently*, the "friends of Revivals:" but both the title and the claim will, eventually, be found equally delusive. Their immediate successors, will, probably, throw off the mask, and fulfil, perhaps, the worst predictions of the faithful watchmen on the walls of Zion. The principle is by no means obscure, which renders it as natural in theory, as it is certain in fact, that apostates are ever apt to sink to a lower point in doctrinal and moral degeneracy, than those who never held a high place in the scale of profession.

From the foregoing discussion a variety of important inferences may be deduced.

1. The first is, that DOCTRINAL PREACHING IS OF EXCEEDING GREAT IMPORTANCE IN PROMOTING THE INTERESTS OF TRUE RELIGION. There is, I am aware, in the minds of very many professing Christians, a strong prejudice against dwelling much on doctrine in the pulpit, as being, almost necessarily, dry and unprofitable; nay, as being adapted to repress rather than excite pious affection. This is a delusion as irrational as it is deplorable. It cannot be denied, indeed, that doctrinal preaching may be, and has been conducted, sometimes in such a dry, speculative, and spiritless manner; and, at other times, so much in the spirit of angry controversy, as to prevent all sanctifying influence. But this *abuse* is no argument against its *use*. If men are regenerated and sanctified by the truth;—if "the priest's lips ought ever to keep knowledge;"—if it be the duty of every preacher to "feed the people with knowledge and with understanding;"—and if none are so likely to be brought either to a saving acquaintance with the truth, or more thoroughly and affectionately under the power of truth, as those who have it constantly exhibited to them in a clear, discriminating and powerful manner;—then, surely, that minister of the gospel whose sermons do not contain a large portion of doctrinal and practical truth, clearly defined, adequately defended, rightly divided, and faithfully applied,—applied not merely to the understanding, but also to the conscience and the heart—is chargeable with essential deficiency in his official work. He may, possibly, be instrumental in producing temporary feeling, and even strong excitement; but not, without a miracle, in extensively promoting intelligent and solid piety. Men become Christians, as you have heard, by receiving, loving and obeying the great and precious doctrines of Christianity. Can it require evidence, then, to prove that gospel hearers are never so likely to become enlightened and genuine Christians, as when these doctrines are distinctly, strongly and solemnly presented to their view; and that believers are never so likely to be built up in faith and holiness, as when that which is the daily food of the spiritual life, is most plentifully set before them? All reasoning, and all experience go to

establish the position, that that minister who does not habitually *instruct*, as well as *exhort* his hearers, cannot be, long together, to the same people, or to any people, a weighty, powerful, and edifying preacher.

2. If the foregoing representation be correct, then THE DILIGENT STUDY OF GOSPEL TRUTH IS INCUMBENT ON EVERY CHRISTIAN, AND IS A DUTY OF GREAT PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE. It is truly humiliating to think how great and general is the neglect of this duty! Among those who bear the Christian name, how small is the number of those who are able to "give a satisfactory answer to any one who asketh a reason of the hope that is in them!" But I fear the number of those who have taken any intelligent pains to study the faith and order of Christ's house,—who, in any good measure understand the nature, genius and essential doctrines of his religion; who would be able, even in a private circle, to defend the doctrines which they profess to hold against the most common-place caviller; or to instruct and counsel an anxious inquirer,—is smaller—far smaller still! But does not every professing Christian owe to himself, to the Church, and to his God, to be able and ready to do all this? Does not his own growth in grace depend on his growth in knowledge? Can he have any security that he will not be "carried about by every wind of doctrine;" that he will not become the prey of every plausible pretender or errorist who "passes along, unless he be "grounded and settled in the faith?" Can he instruct his children and dependents in gospel truth, when he does not understand it himself? Can he "hold fast the form of sound words," which the church has received, and "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," if he have no enlightened acquaintance with the great doctrines which he is to "hold fast," and for which he is bound to "contend?" To attempt a formal proof that all this is impossible, would be to insult the understanding of the reader. How shall we account, then, for the melancholy fact, that, when every Christian is bound by so many solemn considerations to be established in the faith, and to grow daily in scriptural knowledge, so many who bear the Christian name, content themselves with continuing all their lives "babes" in knowledge, and, of course, wholly unqualified for some of the most important duties of the spiritual life, as well as grievously defective in one of the most important requisites to their own edification and comfort?

3. If the doctrine of our text be correct, then NO ERROR CAN BE INNOCENT; and especially no error relating to the great system of salvation by grace. If it be by the instrumentality of truth alone that the great work of sanctification is begun and carried on; it certainly requires no formal demonstration to satisfy any reasonable man, that falsehood can benefit no one; but that its effect, so far as it is embraced and acted on, can be mischievous

only. It is not contended, indeed, that all errors are alike mischievous. There are, doubtless, fundamental truths, and others of minor importance. But all truth is precious. The innocence of error,—nay, the *entire* innocence of *any* error,—is one of the dreams of infidelity, and is a sentiment which ought to be abhorred by every Christian. Sanctification may, and no doubt, actually does co-exist with some error. But, in such cases, men are sanctified *in spite* of their errors, in virtue of the truth, and only in proportion to the truth which they embrace. We cannot, it is true, undertake to pronounce *how much* knowledge of sound doctrine is necessary to salvation; or *how much error* is sufficient to destroy the soul. But we know from the nature of the case, and especially from the word of God, that *all error*, like *poison*, is mischievous, and, of course, ought to be avoided. I know not how large a quantity of a given deleterious drug might be necessary, in a particular case, to take away life. Probably more would be necessary in some cases than in others. But of one thing there can be no doubt; that it is madness to sport with poison; and that the less we take of it the better. As nothing but nutritious food can support the animal body; so nothing but Zion's provision, which is truth, can be the means of either commencing or sustaining "the life of God in the soul of man."

4. In the light of this subject we may see THE DUTY AND IMPORTANCE OF CONSTANT CARE ON THE PART OF THE CHURCH TO MAINTAIN THE PURITY OF GOSPEL TRUTH. One great end for which the church was instituted, was that she might be, at once, a depository and a witness of the truth in the midst of an ungodly world. It is, therefore, incumbent upon her, from age to age, to resist all the encroachments of error; to bear a decided and faithful testimony in favor of all the peculiar and most precious doctrines of the gospel; and to maintain in their simplicity, all the institutions of Christ. When the Church fails of doing this:—when she allows important doctrines to be denied and opposed by those within her pale, and especially by her teachers and rulers:—when she knowingly and deliberately permits the truth and order entrusted to her keeping, to be trampled upon by those who are subject to her control, without bearing testimony against offenders, by the exercise of discipline;—she forgets her duty as a "witness for God;" she is grossly unfaithful to her trust; and must expect the frowns and the heavy judgments of the King of Zion. The New Testament abounds with both precepts and threatenings which import all this. If it be asked, how the church can fulfil the duty thus solemnly enjoined? The answer is,—by publishing, from time to time, as exigencies may demand, her testimony to the truth, in the form of Creeds and Confessions; by requiring her members, and especially her leaders and guides, to "witness a good confession," when they enter on the enjoyment of their privileges; by admonishing, or otherwise censuring, those who depart in any material degree from the "form of sound words" which

she is pledged to sustain; and by excluding from her communion those who become radically and incorrigibly erroneous. In this way the apostolic church bore a firm testimony in favor of the truth, and "contended earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." This duty is, no doubt, always a self-denying and arduous one; and is sometimes rendered peculiarly self-denying and painful by the multiplied arts to which the corrupters of the truth are wont to recur, for the purpose of escaping merited discipline. Sometimes they plead, that they differ very little, if at all, from the orthodox faith, and, if any, chiefly in words. They conceal, cover up, and equivocate; and make it extremely difficult to ascertain what they really do believe. At other times, they insist, that their solemn subscription to an orthodox creed, was intended by them to mean no more than that they adopted it, "as far as they considered it as agreeing with the scriptures;" as if the worst heretic on earth might not, in this sense, subscribe to any creed that ever was framed; and thus, by a *solemn perjury*, defeat the acknowledged design of the whole transaction! Such are some of the base and criminal arts by which those who "depart from the faith," render it difficult to exercise upon them the discipline which they merit; and, of course, increase the arduousness of the church's duty. Still her duty remains: nor can she acquit herself to her Master in heaven without faithfully discharging it.

5. This subject affords a safe criterion for deciding on the character of genuine revivals of religion. By a genuine revival of religion is, of course, meant a revival in which "pure and undefiled religion" is truly promoted and extended. Now, whether that which claims to be such a revival be really such or not, may be brought to a very obvious, fair and decisive test. Is it produced by a blessing on the *Truth*, plainly and faithfully preached? And do its professed subjects manifest a general and cordial love of gospel truth? Are their views of the character of God, of his law, of sin, of Christ, of the ground of acceptance, and of Christian hope, such as, in the main, harmonize with the Bible doctrine in reference to these great subjects? If so, we may hail the work with joy, and bid God-speed to those who are instrumental in commencing and giving it direction. If not, it is a spurious excitement, adapted to bring genuine revivals into disrepute, and to send a blast instead of a blessing on the church of God, and, of course, the more extended and powerful, the more to be deplored.

It is no uncommon or difficult thing to work upon the animal feelings of assembled multitudes, by stirring addresses, by music, by a great variety of instrumentalities in which the Truth has no presentment or share. Those who are aware what a fearfully and wonderfully made machinery human nature is, and especially how susceptible of strong and diversified impression are the nerves and sympathies of that nature, will be at no loss about *facts* of the kind referred to, however the *philosophy* of those facts may sometimes

perplex them. Who does not know, that the far-famed fanatical Unitarians, who call themselves "Chrystians," have their "revivals" of a strongly marked character; their "anxious seats;" and all the most imposing and exciting means that have ever been adopted for making a popular impression? Nay, one of the most active and popular leaders of that sect, boasted, that he had drawn at least fifty persons to "anxious seats" merely by the influence of his own singing, which was, indeed, remarkably touching and powerful. It is, surely, unnecessary to remark, that such revivals are a disgrace to the name; that they are the fruit of animal excitement only; and that every enlightened friend of the Redeemer's kingdom must mourn over their character and tendency.

It is not mere *excitement* then, in which the animal feelings are roused and agitated, and in which the mere principles of nature are addressed, and called into powerful action, that constitutes a genuine and desirable revival of religion. For, as there can be no real religion in any individual heart, without the reception and love of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel; so we must estimate the real character of every religious excitement which claims to be a revival, by the degree in which pure gospel truth is recognized, embraced and obeyed. If the subjects of it appear to be moved by distinct views of truth, addressed to the conscience and the heart; if, in giving an account of their anxiety, their hopes, and their peace, they manifest that their apprehensions of the Saviour, and their grounds of confidence are those which the scriptures authorize; and if they plainly bring forth the fruits of holy living;—we *must* denominate such a revival a work of God, thank him for it, and rejoice in it as a rich blessing.

6. Finally; the doctrine of our text places in the strongest light THE SIN AND DANGER OF THOSE WHO HOLD THE TRUTH IN MERE HEARTLESS FORMALITY, OR IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. The great end of all truth is *sanctification*. If it fail of producing this effect, it may render inexcusable, and may finally condemn; but cannot savingly benefit. Though a man had all knowledge, and all orthodoxy; though he were skilful in the word of truth, and "valiant for the truth," against all gainsayers; still if he did not love it, and obey it, and live under its power, what would it profit? Beloved Reader! look well to this matter! You may become by study an able theologian, and even a champion for sound doctrine; and yet, after all, may "know nothing," on the subject of religion, "as you ought to know." You may have none of that spiritual knowledge of God, of the Saviour, and of yourself, which is "life eternal." And if you die thus, it were "better for you that you had never been born." While you seek sound doctrinal knowledge, then, with unceasing diligence; rest not satisfied with mere speculation. Remember that a scriptural creed is not piety. Many a man, we have reason to believe, with a head full of orthodox opinions, while his heart was

unreconciled to God, has sunk to perdition. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them. He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." Again I say, then, be not satisfied with speculative orthodoxy. If you possess nothing more, your knowledge will but sink you to a lower hell. Your light will be your condemnation. Let your study of the truth be ever accompanied with humble, fervent prayer for that teaching of the Holy Spirit, who alone can render it effectual to your eternal benefit. And, O that every one who reads this page, may be so taught of God, as that the word of truth may be a "savour of life unto life, and not of death unto death" to his immortal spirit! Amen!



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# PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.

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No. 2.

PITTSBURGH, JULY, 1832.

VOL. I.

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## SERMON II.

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BY E. P. SWIFT,  
OF PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA.

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### THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

Exodus 33: 18. *And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.*

THE great system of the material universe incontestably refutes every surmise of the eternity of its past existence. It so eloquently attests, in the constant activity of inert matter, and the harmony and order of inanimate things, the traces of design, and the existence of a designing mind, and so loudly proclaims, in all its operations, in the organs, senses and instincts of living beings, and the intellectual faculties and active powers and moral affections of man, the being and the constant presence of that pure and mighty SPIRIT, from which all must have proceeded,—that an argument in proof of your own existence would seem more necessary, than one intended to establish his. He that can look without and within, and witness the fullness of a wise and designing power, in innumerable forms of contrivance and adaptation, and yet see not the hand, and recognize not the presence of this greatest and noblest of BEINGS, is one whom the first laws of human belief do not bind, and whom, of course, no possible reasoning could convince.

The same *voice* that so distinctly announces the fact of the divine existence, as distinctly asserts His own single, independent, undervived, and absolute perfection; and reason concurs with revelation in declaring the certainty of his moral administration over the universe, and the actual responsibility of all other intelligences to HIM, who for his own glory made, and sustains, and governs all. Without regarding it as expedient to present at this time even an outline of the argument, in proof of the divine existence, it seems proper, prior to a distinct consideration of the several attributes of

God,\* to endeavor to impress upon the mind, a proper sense of the transcendent **IMPORTANCE OF JUST AND CORRECT VIEWS OF HIS GLORIOUS CHARACTER**, as most vitally connected with every department of theological knowledge and practical religion. If to the earnest and prayerful study of God's true character, our every power of thought and reasoning and devotion is summoned, from a belief of its necessity to the eternal good of the soul, it is not less so from the greatness and grandeur of the object of our investigation. If we contemplate *his essential pre-eminence* in the universe, as that first, underived, eternal, immutable, all-wise, all-powerful, every where present Being, most simple, and most pure in his nature, and illimitable and all-sufficient in his attributes, who is the cause of all things, and the final disposer of all creatures and events;—as the Maker and sustainer of all mental as well as material existences, with all their varied properties, capacities, and susceptibilities; as the Fountain of all intelligence and of all moral distinctions, and as boundless and incomprehensible in the perfection of his felicity, his goodness and his moral rectitude, as he is in the immensity of his presence, and the glory of his power:—Or, if we contemplate *his infinite superiority, in relation to all other beings and things*, as the source of all knowledge in dependent minds, by its direct communication, or the provision of the means of it in the forms and examples of things presented to them in his works; as the Author of all the magnificence, and beauty, and happiness, which fill the universe;—as the great Lawgiver to matter and mind, the supreme Legislator of all worlds, and the perfect pattern of all goodness; as the Author of that religion whose actual and moral pre-eminence has in all ages and in every land proclaimed the source of its emanation, and of that system of redemption, which has been the astonishment of angels and the deepest mystery of love to men: And if we contemplate him not only as *the source* of life, and light, and truth and love, but the *grand object of hope or fear, of delightful attraction or of miserable aversion* to all created minds; as the Being, to know and serve and enjoy whom will constitute throughout eternity the life and immortality of heaven,—we cannot but feel, that to acquire just, and true, and adequate ideas of HIM, must be the most reasonable of all requisitions, the most imperious of all duties, and for time and eternity the noblest of all pursuits. As the being and perfections of God most fitly form the first and most glorious chapter in all religious investigations, so correct impressions here are most vital, because they will go to influence men's opinions on every other subject of revelation. Misapprehensions of the *character of him* who reveals, will diffuse their effects over every part of the revelation. To mistake the true character

\* The Editor has expressed a desire, and, as far as possible, a determination, to follow something like a regular order, and a systematic arrangement, in the several topics of theology to be discussed in the *Presbyterian Preacher*, and this subject was taken in compliance with this plan.

of him who in the bible legislates, is but in fact to misinterpret its every law; and to want just views of the Deity, is to want a power to be duly moved by his heavenly promises, or awed by his fearful threatenings. Here is a centre in which all the various lines of truth do meet. Here is a fountain, whose pure or infected waters are diffused over all fields of sacred knowledge! A small mistake here, like a slight derangement at the heart, will carry forth its effects into the whole system of one's faith and duty. Perhaps it is not too much to say, that *every act of sin* in the universe, is to an omniscient mind, referable to the diminished impression on the mind of some one principle of moral truth, and that every such defection begins in an erroneous or impaired impression in respect to the character of God, just as the beauty and impressiveness of every principle of revelation, are rendered more luminous and sanctifying on holy minds, in proportion as they understand and have a felt impression of the character of Him from whom it came. As a matter of truth and duty, then, the acquisition of correct views of the character of God deservedly claims a priority to every other, as every man's ideas of *himself*, his *relation* to others, and the nature and importance of his salvation, as well as the force upon his mind of every subject of thought, or tie of moral obligation, contained in the bible, will derive an influence from this, which it can itself control in others.

The fact, that the *Gentile world*, with the benefits of tradition, the lamp of reason, and the light of nature, experienced an utter loss of all just ideas of God, and turned all "the truth" concerning him "into a lie," admonishes us not to rely upon the resources of reason and philosophy for this most precious acquisition. And when we see thousands enjoying the external light of revelation, having minds so perverted by sin and ignorance, as to think of him only as an object devoid of every thing lovely and endearing, and inspiring dread and aversion, it should arouse us to a sense of the dangers of neglect and inattention. Now the bible, we are assured, when attended by the Spirit, and when it meets with minds sincere, and pure, and bright enough to receive its spiritual and lucid impressions, can, by its simple statements, and its varied presentations of God's character to the mind, effect for him who applies all the resources of his intellect, and heart, and his experience, this most important communication.

Instead of resting in vain resolutions, or intellectual efforts, or outward means, should we not, (like Moses, when the trying duties of a most responsible station were likely to produce discouragement unless fresh and sanctifying views of the divine character were presented to his mind,) go often and earnestly to the throne of grace, and join all our researches to become truly wise and holy with the fervent petition, *I beseech thee, O Lord, shew me thy glory*. What we propose, at this time, is,

I. TO EXPLAIN THE NATURE AND ILLUSTRATE THE IMPORTANCE OF CORRECT APPREHENSIONS OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD; AND,

II. ADVERT TO SOME EXISTING SOURCES OF ERROR, MISTAKE, AND IMPERFECTION ON THIS SUBJECT.

*Correct views of the divine character*, are such as imply a harmony or agreement between those representations of what Jehovah is, and what he is not, which his revealed word contains, and which his works of creation, providence, and grace, serve to illustrate, and those ideas of him which exist in the mind. This harmony necessarily implies, (as truth when rightly apprehended and believed is in its own nature operative,) that, in point of fact, just impressions of God's character, are such, and such only, as do produce in the mind, in comparison to all other and less correct ones, the strongest convictions of the power, wisdom, purity, goodness, and justice of God; of the essential and incomprehensible excellence, and rectitude of his nature; such as produce the strongest emotions of admiration, gratitude, and love, in the heart; and, as an established consequence, such as are connected with the actual production of the highest degrees of inherent purity, practical holiness, and active benevolence. Without stopping to inquire how far just ideas of any of the divine perfections can exist as mere matters of theological science in unrenewed minds; or to inquire into the nature of that direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the powers of the soul, in consequence of which it possesses those right desires and affections that fit it to receive from the *Word of Life* just, and pure, and delightful apprehensions of the divine character, it is sufficient to say, that to the instrumentality of the word, and the efficiency of the Spirit, operating upon perceptive and rational beings, we refer the actual existence among men of all true and sanctified knowledge of God. When a heart before totally depraved, is prepared by the Spirit for the reception of spiritual and holy impressions, and is supernaturally illuminated to perceive the real glories of the divine character, as presented in his word and in his works, the invariable consequence of such perception will be, to make the mind itself most active in entertaining these bright and cheering manifestations of God, in being humbled in the comparison of its own darkness and impurity and nothingness with Him, and in yielding itself up to those varied impressions by which the Holy Spirit thus sanctifies the "inner man," and forms and moulds it into the divine likeness.

In thus making every act and instance of misbelief in respect to the divine character to be a crime, because it weakens the strength of grace, or augments the power of sin, and in tracing the existence in the mind of such apprehensions of God as are really though imperfectly just and true, to the sovereign act of the Spirit, and their gradual improvement to the concurrence of human with divine agency, we but give a rational and scriptural extent to man's moral respon-

sibility, and but a natural and necessary view of human dependence. That in every act of reasoning and judging of the character and will of God, a right state of the temper and affections of the heart should be imperiously demanded, and that the use of the sacred writings, and all the means of grace, should be attended with a felt conviction that God alone can make them quick and powerful, seem to be just that aspect of the subject which is fitted to put sinful men into the true paths of sacred knowledge, and to urge them forward in it with the most wakeful interest. In his "*lively Oracles*," Jehovah speaks in the language of mortals; and, that the essential elements of instruction contained in this unerring and venerated book may be easily apprehended, the unlearned inquirer is assured that the *obvious* meaning of the text, in every duly accredited version of the Holy Scriptures, is, for the most part, the real and true and only one: and therefore the most material thing to him is, that an honest and conscientious application of his mind should be joined with earnest prayer for the aids of the Holy Spirit. And how necessary to humble the pride of genius and of learning is it to assure the profoundest theological and biblical scholars, and the ablest minds, that to see and know the *true* character of God as unfolded in the scriptures, though it be one of the first and simplest of duties, is a thing which depends infinitely more upon an unbiassed and spiritual mind, and a felt dependence on the Spirit, than the best researches of learning or the most ingenious forms of philosophical reasoning? How otherwise can a conscientious feeling of responsibility for the due exercise of human reason, in searching the sacred scriptures after a just knowledge of the divine character, be secured? Its vast necessity may be shown by the mention of a few particulars. To the natural feelings of mankind, some of the attributes of God are more agreeable than others, and the *natural* less oppressive to human guilt and corruption than the *moral*. But how can man obtain a just idea of the character of God, if he does not give in his own mind just that degree of importance to *each* perfection which it receives in the bible, and if his mind does not recognize the fact that the divine word makes the glory of God pre-eminently to consist in the lustre and plenitude of his *moral* attributes; and in those very manifestations of holiness, which produce the greatest aversion to Him in sinful beings?

Human pride and carnal wisdom, are especially opposed to the acknowledgment of principles which are incomprehensible to reason; and yet to know the divine character at all, man must perceive in this book that the adorable mystery of a *Trinity in unity*, and now the further mystery of the hypostatical *union* of *Deity* and *humanity* in the person of Jehovah-Jesus, constitute prominent and indispensable facts in the mode of divine existence, not so much perhaps from the frequency with which these facts are directly recognized, as the dependence of almost every part of the bible upon them, and their inseparable connection with all the glories of grace and redemption, and all those operations of a quickening Spirit without which we bi-

ble is a dead letter, and the gospel powerless. He must also learn from the varied representations of this unerring volume, that there is such a union and oneness in the attributes of this most pure, indivisible, and almighty Being, that those which to an unenlightened mind would seem most opposite and contrary, are each necessary to the highest perfection of the other.

As the divine word makes known to us the Father of lights chiefly by facts actually developing his perfections, should he not thence learn that as the religion of men must be an active principle, the internal experience of its transforming power and the outward display of its controlling influence and its heavenly temper, claim a pre-eminence above a verbal acknowledgment of its principles, or an attention to its visible ordinances. And yet unless he feels that while he reads or listens, the eye of that Spirit is upon him, who is likely to use the *word* as the instrument of setting the true character of God before him, just in proportion as he is sincere and humble and prayerful, how can he be expected to look after the spirituality of truth, and honestly separate in his ideas of God whatever of human mutability, weakness, and imperfection, seem to be appropriated to him in those cases in which the bible, in adapting its language to human infirmity, applies to him those feelings of sorrow, of anger, &c., which in the same circumstances exist in the minds of men. The peculiar importance of right views of the character of God appears not only from the necessity, in all the pursuits of religion, of such a state of mind as it thus produces, but from every view of its connection with other things.

The *spirituality* and *efficacy* of men's attention to the public and private *duties* and *devotions* of religion, materially depend upon their ideas of the divine character. The solemnity and earnestness with which they read their bibles, hear the preached word, and examine their own hearts; and the measure of the disentanglement of their affections from the world; the extent of their active benevolence; their self-denial; and the degree of penitence, humility and fervor with which they draw near to God, will all have a direct relation to their views of *Him*.

The sovereign power of *conscience*, in enforcing the moral and relative duties of life, in sustaining inviolable truth, integrity, and justice between man and man, and subjecting the appetites and passions to the control of reason, depends upon this.

The *law of God* is but a verbal system of very practicable duties, a code entirely nugatory and powerless, as it respects the heart, until its meaning and its glory are unfolded to the eye of the astonished and despairing sinner, through the exhibition of the true character of Him who made it; and then the language of Job, and David, and Isaiah, of the prodigal and the publican, become the dispassionate words of truth and soberness.

Never do just impressions of *the glory of the gospel*: of the infinite love of God to man, in the gift of his Son; the incomprehensible love

of the eternal Son, in undertaking the work of redemption and appearing in this sinful, ruined, benighted world as a man of sorrows, and a victim of persecution, obloquy, and death; the long-suffering patience of that injured Father and insulted Sovereign, to sinful worms; or his untiring and unwearied goodness, as the bountiful Preserver of his creatures, exist in the minds of men, till a correct idea of Jehovah, his independence, his utter contrariety to all sin, and the nothingness of mortals to Him, arises to their view; and then the wonders of redeeming love, and the glory of the cross, seem but feebly foreshown in the fervent expressions of the evangelic prophet, and imperfectly apprehended by the ardent apostle. How can the soul be struck with a sense of the *sinfulness of sin*, and of *its own wickedness*, but as it rightly apprehends the true character of God; and what will determine the measure of the love and gratitude and trust of the saints, but their knowledge of what he really is? How is the mind of the Christian brought, amidst the chafing of disappointment and the sadness and gloom of deep affliction, to yield up all its choice sweetly to the will of God, and become calm and resigned and happy in him, but as, like Job, its "*eye seeth him*" as the steady friend of the soul, who in the act of thus refining in the fire those whom he loves, gives the sincerest token of his affection? Now just in proportion as men's ideas of God's character are wrong or defective, will the *effect* in all these and various other respects appear in a criminal deficiency, or in an utter and fatal delinquency. A presumptuous levity and irreverence will attend their devotions; a light and vain and self-conceited spirit will be brought to the act of communing with the word; a bold, and unsober and unawed use of the sacred writings; and a flippant and noisy and incautious development of new views and fanciful interpretations, will occur; or a cold, philosophical meaning be fastened upon the sacred page. A vain, ostentatious display of zeal, of impulses, and a morbid sensibility; or a cold, heartless, and superficial observance of the customary forms of religion, will proclaim the prevailing misapprehension of the character of the ever-blessed God. Morals will decline; professing Christians will come to their duties with reluctance; they will oppose sin with hesitation and irresolution; they will give with a reluctant, scanty hand, and pray with a cold, divided heart, making all their service a forced work, a matter of cold calculation; Or, under disproportionate and fallacious impressions respecting the divine character and will, they will unfold such inequalities and obliquities, such palpable neglects and such unequal impulses, as make the practical manifestations of Christianity no better than in the former case.

Under these fatal misapprehensions of God, the world of unconverted men, go on in error and transgression, ever sinking deeper in guilt and ruin. As they know not Him, his law and his gospel are alike misunderstood. One, as a victim of superstition, suffers deep remorse and mental anguish, for an imaginary sin, while no compunction is felt for a real one. Another hopes to compensate the

justice of heaven for one class of delinquencies, by the superabundance of a corresponding list of virtues. One, indulges in self-complacency and self-approbation, where there is no show of virtue or of goodness; and another, experiences no remorse amidst the darkest shades of moral delinquency.

Who can cast his eye over the very purest and loveliest portions of Messiah's empire on earth, and not recognize in a thousand forms of personal and social and relative duty; in the current maxims, and standards of society, and in men's practical expositions of what they conceive to be the mind of God, the mournful proofs of the tendency of the understanding and the heart of man to misapprehend the divine character?

With this solemn exhibition of the importance of the duty, and the difficulties and dangers with which it is connected, having the word of God and its appointed ordinances; and the assurance that if you lay your help on the arm of the Lord, the Spirit will descend and overshadow you, you are each placed, my hearers, under the injunction of becoming truly and savingly acquainted with the true character of the God of heaven. As the prospect of your conversion as sinners, and the measure of your growth in holiness as Christians, depend pre-eminently upon yielding up your souls to the pure and powerful manifestations of his character which shine around you; so in a matter of this eternal moment, the utmost sincerity and earnestness are immediately and at all times imperiously demanded. But can we possess no internal evidence that certain impressions, certain views of the divine character, are more just, more accordant with the bible than others? Doubtless we may; and, I observe,

1. That *correct ideas* of God are such as exist in the mind in its best and most spiritual frames,—such as seem most repugnant to sinful, carnal nature,—such as give the deepest permanent convictions of the worth and immensity of his love, and the fearfulness of his anger.

2. *Correct ideas* of God's character are such as impress the mind with the *deepest humility* and *sense of entire dependence* upon him; and therefore those views of human ability which seem to put the grace and salvation of God into the hands of men, instead of leaving guilty man in the hands of God, though they may appear to be more productive of effort in the sinner, are to be avoided as calculated to foster a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency.

3. Just views of the divine character are such as *awaken* in the *mind of man* the *most anxious solicitude and concern*, to do *immediately* whatever He requires, and to become what he demands; and therefore the accuracy of those views of the nature of the coincidence of human with divine agency, are to be suspected, which do not practically illustrate the results of truth; and the genuineness of that repentance and love to God, and joy in the Holy Ghost is to be doubted, which is not actually followed by a corresponding sanctification of the heart and life.



4. Scriptural impressions of the character of the blessed God, are such as leave on the minds of redeemed sinners, the *most soul-humbling ideas* of the *evil of sin*; and, therefore, those apprehensions of God which associate ideas of simple pity, rather than of blame, in his feelings towards sinners, and those views of human nature which make its impotency, an excuse for sin, or for the neglect of an immediate compliance with duty, cannot be accordant with a true knowledge of him.

5. Correct views of the glorious character of God, are such as are productive of the *purest specimens of Christian character*. The various attributes of Christian piety, receive at different times and in different ages, places, and ranks of life, so different a degree of prominence, that what the visible church may regard at one period as the best test of holiness, will become at another of little account. When activity and effort, and the works of public benevolence and charity assume a prominence in society, less stress will be usually laid upon advancement in Christian knowledge; and when this becomes ascendant, the former and the department of private meditation and the varied forms of Christian experience, will be likely to be neglected. Thus the visible fruits of holiness are likely to fluctuate, as different manifestations of this principle are more earnestly and frequently insisted on; and what is here affirmed is, that *just views of the character of God constitute* the surest antidote to these inequalities, because they tend directly to hold up the necessity of an exemplification of the entire character of the follower of Christ. To glorify God by a close, and searching, and meditative communion with him in private, and the conscientious and daily exercise of repentance, faith, and love; by a firm resistance of all the temptations and allurements of the world, and an open, decisive, conscientious exhibition of evangelical principle, in all the walks of public and social life; by the acquisition of all the accessible treasures of Christian knowledge; and an acquaintance with intricacies of religious experience: and by an active and exemplary participation in all the works of faith and labors of charity and love, to which the Redeemer's people are called, will constitute but a general outline of what will be regarded as incumbent, and necessary, and indispensable, by him who possesses just and vivid impressions of the divine character.

To possess true and sanctifying, and refreshing views of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as these views are unfolded in the bible, and often manifested to the heart of the humble disciple, are necessary to the production of the sweetest peace of conscience, and the liveliest joy in the Holy Ghost, and the most substantial increase of grace. These pure and holy conceptions of God, must enter, my fellow-sinner, your light and unsubdued mind, or you are lost forever! These spiritual and saving convictions—these sin-destroying, heart-purifying, and soul-humbling discoveries of the divine character, you must have, fellow-christians by profession, or your hope is vain, and your faith is dead. O, do you suita-

bly feel this when you enter your closets; when you visit the sanctuary; when you try your principles, your graces, and your life, by heaven's unerring rule? The difficulties attending the attainment and the lively preservation in the mind of such views of the divine character are not small. That we may be suitably convinced of this, let us,

II. Proceed to a brief consideration of some of the most obvious sources of danger and error on this subject.

1. Inadequate conceptions of the glorious character of God, must ever be attributable to finite beings; but erroneous and improper ones belong only to *sinning* intelligences. In the former case, as knowledge, purity, and affection, may have no limit but that which exists in the capacity of a dependent being; so this inadequacy may be productive of no evil, and give no wrong coloring to any other principle of revealed truth; but as the latter implies a criminal delinquency, so the effects are certainly injurious. All that concerns us here, is to endeavor to trace to their legitimate causes, those ideas of God which are in their own nature erroneous and criminal. There may exist temporary and accidental misapprehensions of the divine character in the minds of believers which are to be referred to physical rather than moral causes: and the *chief* distinction between renewed and unrenewed minds in their views of the divine character, is that the former are defective, the latter positively erroneous.

2. Man's native aversion to God, his total corruption, and the ascendancy in him of sense over reason, sin over holiness, and the creature over the Creator, sufficiently explain the reason why all just ideas of God are exiled from his mind; as the immersion of his affections in temporal things; his dislike to so pure and spiritual an object of thought and affection; and his consequent inattention to it, explain the reason why obscure and perverted ideas of that ever-present, ever-living, ever-bountiful and most glorious Being, whom he is required to know, and serve, and enjoy, as the perfection of all created good, are suffered to continue with him amidst the most solemn warnings, and the most earnest, and tender, and thrilling remonstrances to the contrary.

But where this inattention is not constant and entire, and where human reason is not directly employed to disprove the fact of his existence and his absolute perfection, these fatal misapprehensions often arise from attempting to derive the true knowledge of God *from other sources than divine revelation, and to the exclusion of it*. The innumerable absurdities and follies into which heathen philosophers and polished nations, in common with barbarous tribes, have fallen, where revelation has not been enjoyed, or its pure light has been forsaken, seem to be insufficient to convince modern infidels, and rational philosophizing Christians, that to the benighted eye and the depraved heart of man, the volume of nature and of providence can give no just and sufficiently practical impressions of God; and hence, through the direct and indirect influence

upon society of vain speculations, the pride of philosophy, and the efforts of boasted reason, every man meets with many barriers in his way to the acquisition of those simple, and scriptural ideas of God, which the world in its wisdom does not know. The less sincere and inquisitive, though perhaps called Christians, have, consequently, few purely scriptural apprehensions of the divine character.

3. *Vice, and passion, and self-indulgence* darken the understanding, and deaden the moral faculty. It is not more certain that a diseased eye will impair the vision, or intoxication derange the exercise of sense and reason, than that immoral conduct, the indulgence of those appetites and passions which have a tendency to bring the soul under the dominion of the senses; that loose and vain thoughts and imaginations will obscure the true lustre of Jehovah's countenance, and impair the ability, as well as enfeeble the desire, to associate the mind with spiritual contemplations. Our Saviour touched a principle of philosophical truth, not less than of moral order, when he said, that the only way to know the truth, was to do the will of God. A neglect of the laws of moral virtue, and mental discipline, is not only wrong, then, as implying like intoxication and violation of the law, but as it exposes the immortal soul, to all the dangers of an utter deprivation of saving grace and everlasting life, as the other does the body to fatal injury. Of that most potent and purifying knowledge of the divine character, which has often subdued the hardest heart, and reformed the most wicked life, and sanctified the highest powers of intellect, how many of the wise and the learned among us never have known and never will know any thing, simply because the established range of their thoughts, amidst the extended pursuits of politics and legislation, of commerce and of science, are as truly, though not as perversely, remote from the sacred fountain of true knowledge, as the walks of the sceptic or the open transgressor.

4. Another source of the misapprehension of God's character, among professedly religious people, is to be found in their *inattention to, and ignorance of, the divine law*. The ignorance to which we here refer, is not of a kind to be obviated by a frequent exhibition of its terrors, or a terrific display of its penal sanctions, nor a dry and cumbrous exposition of its principles; but by a deep, and close, and practical unfolding of all its requisitions and its attributes, in the light, and life, and glory which it assumes in the bible. Many deluded men have thought to *protect* the lustre of the divine character, by touching lightly on this sublime and searching exhibition of his attributes; as if it were not the grandest manifestation of moral excellence. Others have thought it necessary to set forth the gospel, as an abatement of its rigors, and the promulgation of a less elevated standard of righteousness. But the obvious, the ruinous reaction, of every such expedient, upon the moral character of Jehovah, loudly proclaims the illegitimacy of its origin. Without a thorough apprehension of the holiness of God, as shedding forth its

vital energy in the law, conviction is impossible. Sinners will regard its terrors, when uttered by man, as at best, but well-meant exaggerations, and its Author as a pliant kind-hearted Parent, if they do not understand this immutable standard of right and wrong. Its towering and uncompromising demands need often to be so brought to his view, as to make the *Christian tremble*; that Christ may be endeared to his heart, his whole soul humbled and purified, that in sweeter tones the accents of the *cross* may whisper peace. And the sinner, what other resource is left for him, but at length to be smitten and subdued by the voice of God, speaking through its earnest and awful denunciations? If, then, my beloved friends, you would not miss forever the gate of heaven, take heed that you enter, painful as it may be, into all the disclosures and teachings of that code, to know which is rightly to apprehend the character of God.

Again. Wrong ideas of Jehovah's character are not unfrequently imbibed through the *improper use of scriptural allusions and the application of analogical reasonings*. God rests the glory of his character on the sufficiency and integrity of the bible. This book, without a single particle of human imperfection throughout the entire range of its discoveries of him, comes, with all the inspirations of truth and eternal beauty, to form in man a character for purity, meekness and benevolence, of, to him, a new and unknown kind. But it must employ language which he can understand; and, to do this, it must savor of the times, the mind and the heart of him who "wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost." To catch resemblances and allusions, applied only where and to the extent in which they would convey unerring truth, and draw them out in a thousand shapes, and make these the bases of doctrinal and practical principles, is to darken and disgrace the character of God.

Some have attempted to illustrate the divine character, by saying that it was eminently a *parental* one. Now there are some respects in which such a reference may most justly and beautifully hold; but who does not perceive, that if in its main features such an illustration is carried out as the parental character is, exemplified in its best earthly specimens, and if this is made the basis of telling what he would or would not do towards his erring children, that the most injurious impressions will be made? The same remark applies to all similar analogies: and as there is no being like God, no relations like those which we sustain to him, and he to us, so we should resist every train of thought or reasoning which tends to liken him, in our permanent impressions of his character, to any other being whatever; remembering that as the heavens are high above the earth, so is he above all his works.

5. The moral attributes of God may be obscured by erroneous views of the *character and offices of Christ*, and the *nature of the gospel*. In the gospel, the moral character of Jehovah is unfolded in its clearest manifestations: and the *incarnation* is every where represented as such a "dwelling of all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"

in the person of the Mediator, as would give new discoveries of Deity to angels as well as men. In a visible exemplification of its spotless perfection, and a direct recognition of its immutable authority, how was the law and its great Author to be glorified by the life and walk of a divine Redeemer? In the sacrifice of the cross, how was *justice* to acquire a radiance brighter than it could receive in the perdition of a thousand worlds? And the *love* of God, how in the exhibitions of a grace and mercy which can find no sins too great to be forgiven, no offenders too mean to be noticed, and no blessings too precious to be freely given for Christ's sake? Faithfulness, wisdom, and truth, also, how were they to be illustrated in a thousand forms by means of that blessed gospel which is the revelation of the manifold wisdom of God? Every misapprehension of the work and reign of the divine Redeemer, of the nature of the Christian sacrifice, and the essential glory of the gospel, must of course, tend to darken and pervert this grandest exhibition of the divine character.

Again. The true character of God may be obscured through an attempt to account for such things as he has not thought proper to *explain*, and *and make the deep things of God accordant with human feelings*. Thus, to reconcile the existence of moral evil with the wisdom and goodness of God, some have denied his ability to prevent it without the destruction of the freedom of moral agency; while others, regarding its existence as a necessary evil to the attainment of the greatest good, have referred it to the direct agency of God himself. Some have attempted to limit the range of the *divine prescience*, to obviate the supposed difficulties of believing in his absolute foreknowledge of all sin as well as holiness; and others, under the idea of making the full and actual ability of every moral subject co-extensive with the divine requisition, have denied the *justice* of any other principle in the divine administration. At one time, his wisest and best exertions are represented as having failed through the perverseness of his creatures, and at another his own choice and determination to have been dependent upon the contingent actions and choices of sinful men. But we need not enlarge: these illustrations are sufficient to show you how wisdom above what is written,—how reason, proposing to illuminate the bible, on this highest and most fearful of all subjects, may obscure the divine glory, at least to the minds of plain unlettered Christians; and perplex and bewilder those whom an humble faith in testimony of God's word, should enable to use their best energies in far safer and holier efforts.

Once more. The true character of God may be entirely misapprehended, through a *mistaken idea of his attributes, and the elevation of one at the expense of others*. Thus the dominion of God over us, is often founded not so much in his right over us as a Ruler, and his propriety in us as a Creator, as in his goodness and mercy towards us, and our dependence upon him. Thus his title to our love and veneration, is made to consist more in his goodness and benevolence, than in his purity and his justice. To augment the riches of his

grace, some have denied the necessity of practical holiness in believers, and maintained that they could do nothing to displease him; while others, to magnify his goodness, have represented it as requiring the final destruction of sin, throughout the universe, and the universal restoration of all to purity and happiness. It is sufficient to say, however, that the Antinomian in the one case, and the Universalist in the other, diminish our impressions of the *purity* and *justice* of God, without at all exalting our views of his grace and goodness. The surest, and indeed the only certain antidote to these things, is, for the sober-minded Christian to study, with lively joy and spiritual affection, the beautiful and solemn presentments of the word of God, on these subjects, as they disclose, in perfect harmony and affectionate sisterhood, and perpetual co-existence, all his adorable attributes. We may add, also, that in all those public and private duties with which ideas of the divine Being are closely associated, confusion, tumult, artifice, and disorder should be avoided; and in our thoughts and representations of Him, nothing should be admitted inconsistent with that dignity, and solemnity, and profound reverence which becometh his presence forever. A misapprehension in respect to *him* should be dreaded more than any earthly misfortune; and a new and juster perception of his moral glory, should be prized above gold and silver, or the richest treasures of human learning. When the soul rises to this pursuit under the luminous and life-inspiring guidance of the Holy Spirit, freeing herself from the clogs of sin, from every bias, every vain dependence, and every sinister intention, she starts on the track of her eternal destiny, and hastens to ensure her preparation for the exalted sphere which awaits her.

To the *best means of overcoming these and various other obstructions*, and of making the surest and most efficacious advances in the true knowledge of God, we might also, did time permit, direct your attention. Such a sketch, in proportion as it was correct, would have an important reference to the following propositions, already developed, viz.:

1. As verbal representations of the divine character, presented to a mind in which there is no taste for, but a natural aversion to, moral excellence, cannot impart to it, of themselves, any morally correct and operative apprehensions of God whatever; so, an important radical *change of heart* must occur, before even the most luminous and scriptural views of God can so exist within, as to turn the sinner from the evil of his ways, and induce him to choose God as the portion of his soul.

2. Inasmuch as the Holy Spirit does, in the progressive sanctification of believers, employ no other instrumentality but that of truth; and, as he may be expected, under ordinary circumstances, to bless those views of the divine character which are most scriptural, in preference to others; it follows, that your growth in holiness, if Christians, and your conversion, if impenitent sinners, are most intimately and solemnly connected with the care and fidelity with which you

resist all difficulties and temptations, and the earnestness and prayer with which you now habitually set yourselves to that noblest pursuit in which saints and angels are forever to be engaged.

3. As the feeblest powers, and the smallest intellectual attainments may, through the sovereign grace of the Holy Spirit, be competent to the possession of saving apprehensions of God, and as our advancement in just views of his character is uniformly more impeded by a wrong state and temper of mind, than intellectual defects and aberrations, which last indeed proceed from that source; so, the first and highest concern of every one of us, should be, that our souls may be replenished with the gifts of the Spirit, and that we may be induced to bring the aids of a holy, self-denied life, a devout and spiritual mind; a meek, docile, and humble spirit, and a true thirsting of soul after God, to private duties and public ordinances, and all those Sabbath and sacramental exercises, through which Jehovah is wont to make known himself to his people.

YE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST! who profess to have known HIM, and to have entered into covenant with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—on you, the duty of *following* on to know the Lord, lays its most solemn claim. If you have possessed these precious and transforming views of the blessed God, has not your own experience taught you, that as defection and heresy always begin in the affections; and wrong affections first pervert the judgment, and then pollute the life; so a slight omission, a wave of passion, a sinful word or thought, a covetous, vain, or ambitious desire, is often enough to abate that fervor with which you cherish them, and the impressiveness which has distinguished them? The bible shows you how much his servants have been distinguished for their desire to enjoy just, and cheering, and soothing manifestations of his presence; and your evidence of piety must consist in the possession of a similar disposition. A life of watchfulness, and meditation, and prayer, united with singleness of aim, dependence on Christ, and persevering endeavor, can alone afford you the prospect of such advances as shall lighten the sorrows and surmount the temptations of this life, and, when you enter the darksome vale of Jordan, give you to sing the song of the conquering Christian.

To those who are NOT NUMBERED AMONG THE FRIENDS OF GOD, let me also affectionately appeal. Men and brethren, what that measure of knowledge of the divine character is, which accompanies fallen angels and finally impenitent men to the regions of everlasting despair, and in view of which “they believe and tremble;” or what augmentation of it the ceaseless growth of their wickedness and their misery may imply, we pretend not to know; but, it is enough to say, that it never subdues their enmity, softens their hardness, quells the fury of their passions, or turns back their guilty eyes, to behold, with filial love and grateful pleasure, that adorable and lovely Being, whose essential excellence would there seem but to increase the aversion and the misery of his rebel creatures. Doubtless they will know enough of him to feel, in tenfold measure, what

the conscience of every sinner now enforces upon him, that they *ought to obey and love him*, and that the resistance of this most reasonable claim, is the real source of all their interminable anguish. To that gloomy world, where every tender, grateful, affectionate thought of the blessed God, has given place to enmity and dread, and where sin and unbridled passion have kindled up their quenchless fires, will you, beloved hearer, bend your steadfast way? Does not every step towards it betray such incorrect, unkind, ungrateful ideas of God, as you have *no right* to cherish? Angelic throngs, with untiring rapture, fill his pure abode with the swelling chorus, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, IS THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS, because they see and know him as he is. Redeemed sinners on earth, at those favored hours, when, enabling them to see that they are hid in the cleft of Zion's Rock, He passes by and gives them to see the glory of his character, are melted into grief, and bathed in tears, that they have honored and loved him so little, and long for the hour of their ascension to his right hand. And, if you look at this lower world, do not all its animate and inanimate objects, as they smile amidst the silent serenity and cloudless brilliance of the summer morn of the Sabbath, seem to rejoice in Him? Or if you lift your eyes to the wide expanse of the heavens, where unnumbered worlds, in their varied revolutions, pour their brilliant radiance around the throne of God, and proclaim their subjection to his will, do you not *see his works attest* it right that the heavens should declare his glory, and all creation give a grateful expression of his presence and his power? And what right have you to be ignorant or insensible of those *moral glories* in the God-head which call forth still deeper emotions? The volume of creation and of providence is before you; and you are lost in the wonders of power, and goodness, and love, which each bright page unfolds! The volume of inspiration is in your hand; and it reveals a Saviour whose humiliation and sufferings for us were enough to make angels weep—whose compassion and love would seem sufficient to draw tears from the scoffer's eye, and melt into penitence the murderer's heart. You have the testimony of the clearest evidence, also, that while the bible is thus lifting the veil of uncertainty from every attribute of God, and while the cross is uttering its most thrilling appeals to your sense of duty, you stand yourself on the brink of eternity, to enter which, without having caught a sanctifying vision of God's true character, is to have closed life's harvest season unsaved, and shrouded the eye in everlasting night.

Thus furnished for the work of knowing God, consider well, that while we speak there visits this assembly a Spirit, who if not resisted by you, will now begin those developments of *transcendent excellence* which it will require an eternity fully to make known! Need we then earnestly entreat you *now* to awake from every delusive slumber,—*to-day* to lift your thoughts and your affections to this great and glorious Being, saying, in the language of the text, "I BESEECH THEE, SHEW ME THY GLORY!"



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

No. 3.

PITTSBURGH, AUGUST, 1832.

Vol. I.

**SERMON III.**

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**THE UNION OF TRUTH AND LOVE IN THE MINISTRY.**

2 COR. 6:4—6,7. *But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God,....by love unfeigned, by the word of truth.*

THE slow progress of truth, and the limited extent of the Redeemer's kingdom amongst men, is afflictive to those who consider the importance of this truth, and the blessings of this kingdom. Why is this the case? It is now about eighteen hundred years since the risen Saviour gave the command and the commission to the Apostles, and through them to their successors in office, "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.*" From that day to the present, there has been, and there still is, an order of men, by profession and solemn vows to God, devoted to the exclusive purpose of spreading the gospel through the world. And yet, at this day, not more than *two eighths* of the whole human family are nominally Christian. The nature of the case does not admit of perfect accuracy in the calculation; but it is supposed to be near the truth, that six hundred millions of our race are, at this day, without the gospel. Of those who are nominally Christian, probably not more than *one in ten* is truly pious, and living under the influence of the gospel. The question returns, with heart-thrilling interest, why is this the case? Why are these hundreds of millions without the gospel? Why are these hundreds of thousands, in lands called Christian, without the spirit of vital piety? What have the ministers of Christ been doing for the last seventeen centuries? To them especially, the gospel has been committed in trust; on them has been devolved the high and fearful responsibility of advancing the Redeemer's kingdom: have they been faithful to this trust? have

they labored and suffered, as they ought to have done, in the cause of their Master? If they have, why is the world in this state? Had the apostles lived and labored till this day, would the same state of things have existed? Would Paul, himself alone, have done no more, in seventeen centuries, than has been done?

Some years before the close of the first century, the faith of the Romans was spoken of *throughout the whole world*. The gospel was known in all the world, as it was to the Colossians, and was bringing forth fruit, as it was with them. Even then, the gospel was *preached to every creature which is under heaven*. Admit that the whole world means no more than the Roman empire; yet that empire included nearly, if not all, the nations at that time known to the Romans and the Jews. Admit, also, that only a part of these nations had received the gospel; still we see the great and rapid progress which truth had made within the first half century. True, the apostles had the power of working miracles; yet those miracles were only intended to confirm the truth, and gain it admission to the conscience; but they compelled no man to believe. Men were *born again* then, as they are now, by the Spirit and word of God. This truth has been the same in all subsequent ages, that it was then; its influence and its effects on the mind have also been the same. The gospel which they preached was the very same, in all its details, which their successors in office have been permitted and required to preach. The faithful record of these miracles has, in all ages, accompanied the gospel as evidence of its truth. Nor has the opposition to the gospel been greater at any time, than it was in their day. The same Spirit who *gave the increase* to their labors, is promised to the earnest prayer of all who ask for his aid. We ask again, therefore, had the apostles been permitted to labor for seventeen centuries, would there have been 600,000,000 of the human family, or even a single nation on earth, ignorant of the gospel? Would Paul, dressed in the splendors of royal magnificence, have rolled over the pavement in his coach; would he have enjoyed the elegancies of the wealthy and populous city, when he knew that there was a nation on earth, however remote, who were without the gospel? No! he would have encountered the perils of the deep, and of the wilderness; though bonds and afflictions had awaited him in every place, yet none of these things would have moved him from his purpose. If pious friends had entreated him, with tears, to spare his life, he would not have been persuaded. *What mean ye, would have been his reply, to weep and break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.* He would have stood before kings and made them tremble; before the most learned philosophers and preached Christ crucified. He would have called from their retirement a Titus, a Timothy; would have infused his own spirit into hundreds of others and sent them into the field as his co-workers. Organizing a church, and ordaining elders in one city, he would have hastened to another, and another;

until every city, and town, and village, and neighborhood on earth had been visited and blessed with the gospel.

But it has not pleased the Head of the church to spare this devoted man. Why then, has not the same progress of truth resulted from the labor of others, his successors in office? They have had the same gospel to preach, the promise of the same Spirit to aid them, which he had. The very same motives to labor and to suffer in the cause of Christ, and which *stirred his spirit within him*, have been constantly presented to their mind. And yet, why is it that there are 600,000,000 of our race without the gospel? and why have so many millions, in Christian lands, under the ministry of the gospel, died without hope?

But let us not attempt to excuse ourselves by finding fault with others. Have the ministers of modern times, and of the present day, been as faithful as they ought to have been? And more especially, have the ministers of the gospel now addressed, labored and suffered as much in the cause of Christ, as they might have done? If Paul had occupied the same field in which we have been placed, and for the same time, would not that field have exhibited fruits of more ardent zeal, of more entire devotedness, of more judicious labor, than it now does? Are we not constrained to say, from the honest, though painful conviction of our heart, it would! Why, beloved brethren, is this the case? Make, if you please, all proper allowance for his superior talents; yet why has not our ministry been more successful? But one of two answers can be given;—either we must resolve it into the sovereignty of God; or we must charge it to our own unskilfulness and negligence. Can we feel satisfied in ascribing it to the sovereignty of God? We would cherish the deepest conviction of the truth, that, whoever may plant or water, *it is God who giveth the increase*; and that whatever good we may have been instrumental in doing, the glory is due to God alone, and not to us. And had we depended more entirely on divine assistance, and prayed more earnestly for it, our ministry would have been more successful. Still we cannot think that this is the answer we should give to the question. A moment's reflection will convince us, that we did not derive our motives from this sovereignty; we did not labor because we knew certainly that God would give the increase; nor did we labor with less diligence, because we knew that he would not give it. As other reasons, therefore, than those derived from this sovereignty, influenced our conduct, so other reasons ought to be assigned for the result of that conduct. It is certain that we shall not be judged, at the last day, by the sovereignty, but by the law, or the word of God. We ought, then, to judge ourselves now by the same rule, by which we shall finally be tried. The designs of God, which are unknown to us, are for the regulation of his own conduct, not of ours. Let it be remembered also, that it is to the *planting* and *watering* of his ministers that

God giveth the increase. Unless, therefore, we have been faithful, we had no reason to expect this increase. This answer, then, ought not to satisfy our conscience, because it is not the right one. There is no escaping the conclusion, therefore, that this want of success is chargeable to ourselves: we have not studied, and prayed, and preached, and labored as we ought to have done. The review of our past ministry, presenting so many deficiencies for which we can find no excuse, may be very painful; but on this very account, like the bitterness of some valuable medicine, it may be highly useful. It will lead us to inquire into the reasons of these deficiencies, of this want of success; and by what means our ministry can be rendered more useful in future.

In pursuing this inquiry we may, with great advantage, refer to the example and the writings of Paul. What was it that rendered his ministry, through the blessing of God, so eminently successful? It was the union of TRUTH and LOVE: truth was the weapon, and love was the power by which it was wielded. This weapon, thus wielded, was *mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds*. This is the information given us in the passage from which the text is taken. *In all things*, in all the trials through which the Providence of God, and the duties of our office may lead us,—*approving ourselves as the ministers of God,—by love unfeigned, by the word of truth*. His mind was filled with truth, his heart with love. The importance of truth and love to the success of gospel ministry, through the blessing of the Spirit, will be the subject of a few remarks.

I. Without attempting the discussion of truth in the abstract, it is sufficient for our purpose to state, that THE WORD OF GOD, contained in the Old and New Testaments, is that system of truth, which it is indispensable for the Christian minister distinctly to understand, carefully to treasure up in his mind, and faithfully to preach. *The word of Christ should dwell in him; should have its home in his understanding and his heart; should be his constant companion, his most intimate friend; not in detached parts, or in scanty portions, but richly, in all its extent, in all its harmony, and in all its details; richly, in all wisdom; that he may bring forth out of his treasure things new and old; that he may have something ready and appropriate for all characters, occasions, and purposes.* That he may be qualified thus rightly to divide the word of truth, will require much prayerful reading, study, and meditation. If he declines this application of mind, he can never be an able minister of the New Testament, neither of the *letter*, nor of the *spirit*.

The importance of this truth, in a preacher of the gospel, is very obvious. Paul approved, or, as some render the word, established himself by the word of truth. We suppose this means in the sight both of God and man. That he valued the approbation

of God above all things, is evident from his life and his writings. One of his directions to Timothy is this: *study to shew thyself approved unto God.* Nothing but truth, he well knew, could secure this approbation; for he is *a God of truth.* But he also means that he approved himself to men. The same truth which receives the approbation of God, is the only means the faithful preacher will ever employ to gain the approbation of men. Thus he writes in another part of this epistle,—*But we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty; not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience, in the sight of God.* He would employ no secret efforts, which could not bear the light; would not profess one thing, and really intend another; would not preach the gospel with the view of accomplishing some unholy and selfish purpose! But his determination was, to manifest the truth, plainly and fully; with this to rise or to fall; to receive no approbation of men, with the sacrifice of truth. If he commended himself to the conscience of men, it should be in the sight of God, his omniscient Judge.

From this and other passages, we infer, that there is a powerful tendency in truth, when plainly and faithfully stated, to reach and control the conscience of men; and to extort from them, secretly at least, their approbation. Wicked men, who will not obey the gospel, who are determined to live in sin, bear witness to this fact. Such men *hate the light:* but why hate it, unless they know, from experience, that, if admitted, it will rouse and disturb their conscience, and destroy their pleasure in sin? Such men *will not come to the light,* but shun it as they do an enemy: but why shun it, unless experience has taught them how painful are its just and solemn reproofs? These men also *resist the truth,* as they do a thief about to break into their house to rob them of their goods: but why this resistance, unless they believe that, if admitted, it will rob them of their peace, and *torment them before the time?* If the word of God is so far *corrupted* as to become *another gospel,* if error is so blended with truth as to give another aspect to the system, they neither hate, nor shun, nor resist the preaching of this system. These opinions, though called the gospel, are found to be harmless, giving no disturbance to the conscience, allowing them to cherish, at the same time, the love of sin, and the hope of final escape.

This testimony is given by men who have lived an abandoned and wicked life, and have at length been brought to believe and obey the gospel. In the honest sincerity of their hearts, they have told us that all their utmost efforts were not sufficient to prevent the truth from entering and disturbing their consciences; that they have often acted the most hypocritical part, assuming the appearance of gaiety and mirth, while painful remorse was corroding their peace within. Col. Gardner is a striking, and well known instance of this very thing. From his testimony, and

that of many others, there is reason to believe, that there are as real hypocrites among professed infidels and wicked men, as there are among professed Christians.

The same tendency of truth is taught in the Letter to Titus, where Paul directs him to employ *sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.* We suppose that Titus was neither required nor expected to accomplish, or even to attempt what was impossible. If it was possible then, so it is now, to preach the truth in such a manner that it cannot be condemned; that the hearers, though of the contrary part, can find no evil thing to say of it. We suppose Paul speaks of the tendency of truth, and of its general, though not universal, effect; for we find that the Jews, at Antioch, *spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming,* yet this loud and fierce opposition is proof that they felt and dreaded the power of truth; for men do not thus oppose what they believe to be harmless. If there be exceptions, they rather confirm than destroy the general rule. If the truth is fully, and plainly, and affectionately preached, accompanied with suitable illustrations and proofs, it will be exceedingly difficult to condemn it.

Again; the importance of truth appears from this; that it is employed, by the divine Spirit in changing and purifying the heart of man. That church to which we belong, teaches her children to believe that, "the Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially, the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation." This is sound philosophy, because it is sound scriptural theology. It ascribes the great work in the heart of man, from the first quickening touch, to the most sublime triumphs of faith and hope, to the Holy Spirit, as the agent, and to the word of truth as the instrument. The sinner is begotten, made to feel his guilt and danger, by *the word of truth*; he is *born again by the word of God*; he is *sanctified through the truth*. It is by the *holy scriptures* that the *man of God is made wise unto salvation*, is thoroughly furnished *unto all good works*. All the motives which regulate his life, are derived from the word. Every genuine impression, every spiritual affection, every purpose of his heart, is the effect of truth on the mind.

That the truth may produce its complete effect, it should be preached in such a manner as will be most happily calculated to gain it admittance. For this reason, order and connection are very important. Even truth may be delivered in a manner so confused and promiscuous, as to render its reception less easy, and far less useful, if received. If the ideas belonging to two subjects, say, the wisdom of God, and the duty of prayer, were given alternately, one belonging to the first, and then one belonging to the second subject, though each might contain the

truth, yet this truth could not be so useful, as if each train of ideas was given separately, and in connection with its own subject. The preacher who would employ the truth with the happiest effect, must be careful to deliver it in such an order and connection, as that one thought may prepare the way for the next, and impart to it additional power on the mind. If his own conceptions are clear and connected, his honest efforts to convey similar views to others will scarcely fail; but if his own ideas are confused and obscure, he is but poorly qualified for the duties of his office. The trumpet may be loud, but if it *give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?*

Truth may be obscured, of course its reception and its usefulness in some degree prevented, by the style in which it is delivered. The language is sometimes too colloquial, approaching to vulgarity; the illustrations and figures are too low to suit the dignity of truth. There are some who seem to think that ordination to the ministry, is a license to violate the plainest rules of grammar, the principles of good taste, perhaps to torture the delicacy of their hearers with impunity. Is it too much to expect of those whose profession is *speaking*, that they should use a correct and reputable style, especially when they speak in the name of God? No coarseness or incorrectness of language, it is true, can divest the truth of its intrinsic importance and dignity, in the estimation of those who are acquainted with it; but it is the object of the preacher to introduce it to those who are unacquainted with it. To these, the truth will, in some degree, be identified with the dress in which it is presented. If you clothe a man of the most grave and dignified character in the garments of a clown or a harlequin, and introduce him to strangers, their impression of his character will not accord with his real merit, but will be modified by the dress in which he is introduced. Those friends who are intimately acquainted with him, will esteem and love him not the less on this account; and they will be sure to feel a mixture of grief and displeasure at the burlesque you have put on their friend. The real beauty and excellency of truth cannot be changed by the uncouth dress in which it is sometimes presented; its friends who know its value, will love and embrace it, though thus shamefully caricatured. But its reception and its influence with those who are ignorant, and who really need instruction, will, in some degree, be prevented by the repulsive dress in which they form their acquaintance with it. *We speak as unto wise men; judge ye what we say.*

Others fall into the opposite extreme, by attempting to recommend themselves by what they consider exhibitions of learning. Sometimes these attempts consist in the frequent use of long and learned terms, the intervening spaces containing words which are mere expletives, sometimes expressing sense, and sometimes not. This is concealing the gospel under the cloke of their own vanity. However such may be pleased with themselves, the

pious and well informed, can feel nothing but grief and disappointment, when compelled to hear such empty, and often disgusting rant, under the name of preaching Christ and him crucified. It is wonderful how minds impressed, and subdued, and humbled with the gospel, can trifle in this manner; trifle, too, in the presence of God, and with the salvation of immortal souls. There are others, whose preaching is good sense and evangelical sentiments; but there is such a profusion of shining ornaments as to suggest, in the mind of the hearers, the idea of art employed for the sake of these ornaments. The gospel, indeed, is preached; but the hearers will find it difficult to banish the thought, that it is partly, if not chiefly, for the sake of an opportunity of presenting these elegancies of style; that the gospel is used merely as the canvass on which these splendid figures are to be drawn and exhibited. These embellishments are so numerous as to give character to the sermon; and it is called beautiful, elegant, and by some even eloquent. Multitudes, who reject the gospel, will be highly pleased with these decorations; this pleasure may be mistaken for religious feeling, and thus contribute to their self-delusion and their final perdition. If the truly humble and pious will draw aside this drapery, will remove this painting, they may find the gospel which will cheer the heart. If this drapery has to be drawn aside, then, is it not a hinderance to the gospel? to say the least, is it not useless?

We can think of nothing better for those ministers of the cross who may be inclined to pursue this manner, than for them to sit at the feet of Jesus, and hear his words. He too was a preacher of the gospel, and as such has left an example worthy of the closest imitation. He knew perfectly the mind of man, and in what dress to present the truth, so as to render it most efficient. His style is simple and perspicuous, and yet dignified; full, and yet not redundant; brief and comprehensive, and yet not obscure. He employs a variety of figures; but they are like so many suns, shedding light on the truth which he taught. Not a word, not a phrase, not a trope is used merely for the sake of ornament. Every sentence is well adapted to answer the purpose of the speaker; and for this reason he is truly eloquent. In proof of this, the tears of the humble penitent, the bitter opposition of his enemies, may be adduced.

The truth may be obscured by the method of reasoning sometimes employed. The reasoning is perfectly correct, and the conclusion irresistible; but on account of its length it is too abstruse, and requires too much mental effort, to be easily comprehended. It, therefore, fails to enlighten the mind, or approve itself to the conscience. Preaching, indeed, requires reasoning, close and powerful reasoning; but such only should be employed as will render the truth more intelligible, of course, more forcible than it would otherwise be. Let it be powerful as the light-



ning's stroke, but clear as the sunbeam. Such was the reasoning employed by our Saviour;—short, clear, and conclusive.

II. But the spirit with which the truth is delivered is of essential importance to give it its full effect on the conscience; and this is the spirit of love; of *love unfeigned*. No style, no manner will commend the truth or the preacher to every man's conscience, without love; sincere, ardent, constraining love; love which manifests itself by its own appropriate effects; love to God, to the Saviour, and to men. Nothing can supply the place of this holy ardor of soul. The style may be elegant, the manner may be graceful, genius and learning may exhaust their stores; but without love, all will be cold and lifeless; without it, there can be no genuine pulpit eloquence. Nothing else will bear the Christian minister through *honor and dishonor*, through *evil report and good report*, through all the nameless toils and anxieties and sacrifices of his office.

The voice of inspiration has clearly decided, that if we love God, it will lead us to obey his will. *He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. If a man love me, he will keep my sayings. This is the love of God that we keep his commandments.* We have decided, beloved brethren in the ministry, after much inquiry, much deliberation and prayer, that it was the will of God concerning us, that we should preach the gospel. This decision has been affirmed by those who were in the ministry before us, by the laying on of their hands. This is true of all whom the Head of the church has called to the sacred office.

We see, then, that this love will give a direction, different from that of other Christians, to the inquiries and labors of a minister. Both have to *work out their own salvation*; but in addition to this, the minister is bound, by preaching the gospel and administering its ordinances, to use his utmost efforts to secure the salvation of others. This is the will of God: which is peculiar to him, which love unfeigned will lead him to obey. Hence, his first inquiry will be that of Paul;—*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* What must I do, and what must I suffer to promote the salvation of perishing sinners? Love unfeigned will lead him to pursue this inquiry till he is fully satisfied; for it is not a blind instinct that urges him on to a course of action for which he can assign no reason; it is the holy fervor of an intelligent mind, under the influence of motives, acting with design, having a specific object to accomplish. It is not enough that he be actively employed; he must be satisfied that his efforts will meet the approbation of God; of course, that they are according to his will. With this view he will turn his attention to all those sources from whence information can be obtained. With deep interest he will consider the example of Christ, who *taught as never man taught*. How did he comfort and cheer the humble, the weeping penitent; how did he direct the anxious inquirer, instruct the ignorant, and

give warning and reproof to the hardened and impenitent; how did he invite to the fountain of mercy; how did he pass sentence on those who proved incorrigible? How did he feel and how did he act when the air was rent with hosannas to the son of David; and how, when the same air resounded with the cry of crucify him? To every Christian the information derived from this source will be highly useful; to the minister of the gospel it will be of more value than half the wealth of the globe. It flows directly from the fountain of truth, from the *Head of the church*, from the *Apostle and high priest of our profession*. For the same purpose he will turn to the example of Paul, of whose ministry more is given than of any of the other apostles. If the perfect purity and wisdom of the Saviour should be supposed to place his example above the attainment of men, here is the example of one *subject to like passions with himself*, who has, by nature, the same wicked and deceitful heart, depending on the same mercy, influenced by the same motives, invested with the same office, accountable to the same Judge with himself. Two lessons, particularly useful, may be learned from this example; first, the use that ought to be made of learning and talents, both of which Paul possessed in no common degree. He could have used the words which *man's wisdom teacheth*; have discussed the philosophical speculations of that age; have employed the eloquence then so much admired; and thus have gained the unhallowed applause of men. But he determined to know nothing, and to preach nothing but Christ and him crucified. It might be foolishness to the Greek; but on this course he staked his reputation as a man of learning and talents. The only use, then, which he made of his acquirements and abilities was, to explain the gospel and render it intelligible to the weakest capacity; to bring the truth to bear fully and powerfully on the conscience and the life. Such is the use which all, who are willing to learn from this example, will make of their learning and their talents. The second lesson is; a wise and careful adaptation of the truth to the character and condition of men. He reasoned with the Jews out of the scriptures, which they professed to believe; and with the Pharisees and Sadducees, according to the peculiar opinions of these two sects, into which the Jews were divided. When he addresses the great mass of the gentiles, who were devoted to the senseless rites of idolatry, he labors to convince them that the objects of their worship were *dumb idols*, without wisdom or power to help them; that they were the *workmanship of men's hands*, of course, *no gods*. When he meets the philosophers in Mars-hill, his address is different from both the former instances: he reasons with them from the altars at which they performed their devotion, and from their own poets. In this sense *he became all things to all men, that he might, by all means, save some*. He knew that the truth would not be received unless it was understood; and that it would most proba-

ly be understood, if derived from principles acknowledged by those to whom it was presented.

The minister of the gospel, at this day, who would *make full proof of his ministry*, must imitate this example; he must try *all means* in his power. There is the same necessity now, as in the days of the Apostle, for rightly dividing the word of truth, and giving each his portion. It will not excuse him to say, that he will preach the truth, regardless of the prejudices, the errors and the ignorance of men. His object is to save them from this state of mind by the most judicious exhibitions of truth which he can employ. He is to deal with men as he finds them, not as they ought to be. Besides, it is not the sacrifice of truth, but the skilful adaptation of it to the minds of men, as they are, that is required. Paul, though made all things to all men, yet did not sacrifice a particle of truth; he was *under the law to Christ*. Whether he preached to the Jew or the Greek, his object and his *prayer to God* was always the same, that *they might be saved*. That preacher of the gospel, therefore, who desires to be useful, will be amply rewarded for the most persevering attention he can pay to this instructive example.

We most earnestly insist, that supreme and ardent love to God and the Saviour will lead the zealous herald of the cross to pursue this course. His first desire will be, to please God. He will be deeply convinced that without the divine blessing, his ministry will not be useful; and that this blessing need not be expected, unless his labors are according to the will of God. He can learn his will, only from the precepts and examples, contained in the holy scriptures, relating to the ministry. He will, therefore, *search the scriptures; for love rejoiceth in the truth*. If there is one manner of delivering the truth, better calculated than another, to render it successful, he will endeavor to make that his own. He will not be as *one who beateth the air*; his efforts will be directed to a specific object. He will endeavor to render his short and uncertain ministry as useful as possible.

This unfeigned love to God will coexist with sincere love to all men, and, of course will lead the faithful minister to desire and labor to promote their salvation. It will exert a most happy influence on his own mind, sustaining him under those trials and preserving him from the danger of those temptations, which are peculiar to his office. He may be tempted to spare the rich and those who are esteemed great in this world, supposing their influence and their approbation too valuable to be lost; and may fear that this would be the result of faithful and honest reproof. But if he loves their souls, this love will not permit him to *consult with flesh and blood*; it will overcome his timidity and give him boldness in the discharge of his duty. His fidelity may commend itself to their conscience, though it wounds their pride. If by this fidelity he should incur their displeasure, he will secure the approbation of God, and of his own conscience. He may be tempted

to neglect the poor. But if he loves their souls, this love will draw him to their humble abode not less frequently nor less cheerfully, than to the more wealthy. He will enjoy it as a privilege to instruct them, to guide and cheer them on their way to heaven. Though poor in this world, they may be *rich in faith, and be heirs of the kingdom*. By faith, he can see them, on the morning of the resurrection, clothed in their white robes, acknowledged as friends by the Judge, and entering into the joy of their Lord. He will not then be ashamed to be their companion; nor regret to have aided them in preparing for this elevation and glory.

Every one who labors faithfully in the ministry will meet with much to try his patience. Some whom it is his desire and his duty to instruct, will be found *dull of hearing*; some are stupidly ignorant and insensible; some warped with prejudice; some are carried away with error; some are daringly wicked. Having honestly endeavored, again and again, to convey truth to the mind without success, he may become impatient, and be tempted to relinquish the task of instruction as entirely hopeless. But if he loves them *with a pure heart fervently*, this love will suppress this feeling of impatience. To give them up as hopeless, is to give them up to perdition. His love and compassion for their souls will not permit him to do this. *Love beareth all things*, for it is *not easily provoked*. His compassion is excited by a deep conviction of their great and imminent danger. Those things which try his patience, are proof to him that this danger is increasing every day. He will, therefore, persevere in his efforts. If one attempt fails, with greater earnestness, with deeper compassion, and, if possible, with greater wisdom, he will make another. Hope of success will animate these renewed efforts; for *love hopeth all things*. He will not give up as hopeless those whom God is preserving in his providence, with whom he is waiting *with much long-suffering and patience*. His provocations are nothing compared with those continually offered to God, who yet gives them time for repentance.

Even in the pulpit, a variety of events may try the spirit of the preacher. Some wantonly and shamelessly intrude themselves after the worship has commenced, and disturb the devotion of the whole assembly. Some, by their idle and indecent gazing, tell him plainly that not a word is understood or regarded. Some give decent attention from year to year, but remain unmoved as the rock. Some turn their pews into couches, and doze when they ought to pray. To resist these trials is not so easy as some, who are unacquainted with them, may suppose. He is but an *earthen vessel*, to whom the gospel is committed in trust. Some degree of impatience and irritation may be excited; and if the occasion, in his opinion, justifies reproof, this may be given with an asperity of temper and of language which cannot be concealed. This exhibition of unholy displeasure will operate differently on different classes of hearers. By some it will be turned into reproach; by others, into an excuse for their neglect; while the pious

will view it with the mingled emotions of compassion and sorrow;—compassion for the man who gives this public display of his own weakness;—sorrow, that the cause of Christ should be thus wounded *in the house of his friends*; wounded, too, by the man whose duty it is to give lessons of meekness, gentleness, and forbearance. *The heart*, by nature, is *deceitful above all things*. A degree of pride, that strong and prominent feature of the *old man*, may exist in his heart, so latent, and so disguised, that he is unwilling to acknowledge, even secretly to himself, that he is under its influence; and yet such may be the fact. He may think his labors too important to be lost, his preaching too good, too well calculated to be useful, to be thus neglected. He may feel a degree of resentment,—holy resentment, he will call it, or a laudable zeal for the cause of Christ; and yet there may be such a spicing of harshness, such a want of tenderness in his language and his manner, as clearly to indicate that all this warmth of feeling has an unholy origin. He may sincerely desire to see them under the pains of conviction, the sorrows of repentance, not only as connected with their own salvation, but also as a gratification to his wounded feelings, as an atonement for the neglect with which they have so long treated his ministry. If he permits such feelings to exist, he cannot easily conceal them. He may declare that his warmth is the warmth of love to their souls; but the impression of his hearers will be produced, not by his declarations, but by these symptoms of unhallowed excitement. Those who most need instruction, are often the most ready to notice the least improper feeling or language in him who would instruct them. For such improprieties in themselves, they can find abundant excuses, while they can find none for him who would teach them the fear of God. Truth thus presented, will not be received; of course, his usefulness must be limited.

The threatenings of God are sometimes repeated with a sternness of manner which by no means accords with the subject. No part of a minister's duty requires more tenderness, or is more powerfully calculated to excite the deepest compassion, than that of passing sentence of death,—of eternal death, on his hearers; and yet this is sometimes done with a vehemence which accords much better with the feeling of anger and revenge, than of love and compassion. Few judges, in the civil court, can pass sentence of death on their fellow men, without some degree of tender emotion. This vehemence in a preacher of the gospel will not, by the hearers, be mistaken for zeal, an essential part of which is love; but will be referred to such motives as they cannot approve; their hearts will, therefore, be closed instead of opened to the reception of truth.

Love, fervent, unfeigned love to the souls of men, is the only safety from the tendency of these trials. This, however, will effectually secure the heart in which it exists from all these forbidden emotions. This we are taught in the positive words of

inspiration. *Love beareth all things; that is, all provocations to any kind of unholy feeling.* It requires no effort, and is no proof of love, for the mind to remain unmoved, when there is nothing to excite evil passions; but when provocations are presented, then it is that love exerts its heavenly and controlling influence, preserving the mind composed and free from all criminal excitement. *Love is not easily provoked; or, as Macknight renders it, "love is not exasperated;"* not in any degree, or by any provocations. It is much easier to prevent the very first risings of evil passion, than to suppress it, after it has risen. This is the manner, and this the time, when love exerts its control: before the motive, derived from the provocation, has affected the mind in the least degree, love presents much more powerful motives in favor of meekness and forbearance. Love preoccupies the thoughts, leading them off from the cause of irritation, and thus secures the dominion of the heart. Nor will it produce these happy effects for a month or a year only; for *love suffereth long.* The objects on which it is placed, and the causes by which it is excited are the same at all times. If it preserves the minister of Jesus in safety through the trials of one day, one month, one year, it will through the next; for it is not weakened, but rather strengthened, by these trials. But this is not all; *love is kind, and seeketh not her own interest only.* Towards those for whose salvation he labors, it is active benevolence, it is real kindness and compassion. He is willing to do any thing and to suffer any thing to promote their spiritual interest. They may remain insensible under his ministry, may speak evil of him, may become his enemies; but he will not be overcome by these provocations, but will labor to overcome their evil dispositions and their wicked hearts by greater kindness.

But love unfeigned will commend him as a preacher of the word for another reason: it will purify the heart from moral defilement. The love of God and the love of sin, cannot reign in the heart at the same time. It is in this way that faith purifies the heart and regulates the life. *Faith worketh, that is, produces its effects, by love;* by exciting this affection, the love of sin, and indeed all sinful passions, are weakened, cast out from the throne of the heart, and finally destroyed. *The love of God thus shed abroad in his heart,* every sermon he preaches, every visit he makes, every word he speaks, every action of his life, will be seen to flow from kindness. He will enjoin on them no duties in the discharge of which he does not live, warn them against no sin which he does not avoid, prohibit them from no pleasures from which he does not himself abstain. He will *show himself a pattern of good works; an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.* *Giving no offence in any thing, even his enemies will have no evil thing to say of him.* If, however, he should not escape the reproach of ungodly men, he will cast over their sins the mantle of love, and the less he is loved, the more abundantly he will love them.

With well-doing he will put to silence the *ignorance of foolish men.*

Now, *the word of God*, in itself, is *quick and powerful*. This is testified by those who hate and resist it; by the painful convictions of the awakened; and by the piety of those who receive it. No man rejects a doctrine which he believes and acknowledges to be true; for this would involve an absurdity with which he does not wish to be chargeable. The truth, indeed, is often rejected; not, however, as truth, but as error. The tendency of love, of meekness, of humility, of kindness, is to conciliate, to attract, to assimilate. Even the bitterest enemy, who can be brought to feel and acknowledge that he has received an act of kindness, will find, through the influence of this kindness, the hatred and malice of his heart yielding and softening, and feelings of approbation and friendship rising in their place. Kindness, indeed, is often resented, but, to justify this resentment, the action or the treatment is ascribed to other motives than those of kindness. When, therefore, the word of truth, which possesses an intrinsic energy to enlighten the mind and control the conscience, is plainly preached, in all its bearings, connection, and harmony, by one whose life is pure, with the earnest and affectionate spirit of love; it will be exceedingly difficult to reject the truth when thus presented; to divest the truth of its own appropriate character, and ascribe to it the properties of error; to call that malevolence, which is genuine kindness.

## REMARKS.

1. The fact that wicked men, who are determined to live in sin, do hate, and shun, and resist the truth, offers an important lesson to the Christian minister; one which he should not fail to improve. It teaches him that though these men may follow their sinful passions, yet truth exerts an important influence on their conscience; an influence which it requires their utmost art to conceal, and which, like the hand-writing on the wall, often causes them to tremble in the midst of their loudest mirth, and their licentious revellings. Let him wield this weapon faithfully, and it will commend itself, and him who preaches it, to the conscience. These men dread the voice of conscience, when roused by the light, as they do the grasp of death or the voice of God. He may receive their bitter reviling; yet even this will prove that conscience is on the side of truth, and gives a reluctant testimony in its favor.

2. From this view of the subject, the Christian teacher may clearly perceive, that if he would be a co-worker with God, in the salvation of sinners, he must *preach the word*, adapted by suitable illustrations, as far as possible, to their capacities. He must prove it to be the word of God, and press it upon their conscience with an earnestness that will take no denial. If he would

banish that ignorance which darkens the minds of multitudes, it can be done by the light of truth alone. If he would eradicate those errors and delusions, which lead so many thousands to ruin, truth alone can accomplish the object. If he would save his hearers from the degrading influence of superstition, from the fitful and feverish starts of wild fanaticism, truth is the best, the most effectual remedy for these evils. If he would build up the people of God in their most holy faith, excite in them a spirit of active benevolence, he must shed the light of truth into their hearts.

3. With what prayerful diligence should the minister of Jesus cultivate the spirit of love! This cannot be called up by a simple act of volition. To excite this devout affection, he must think, with intense application, of the goodness of God in sending his own Son, to be the propitiation for sin; of the condescension and kindness of Christ in dying for sinners; of the souls of men, exposed to perdition, and yet invited to become heirs of glory. Without the constraining influence of love, his work will be but an irksome task, performed with reluctance, and only from a regard to his own character, and to escape the reproach of his own conscience. He is the beating heart in the church. He should circulate around him the pure doctrines of the cross, qualified with the healthful spirit of love. This spirit, through the blessing of God, will be diffused among his beloved people; the cause of Christ will flourish under his ministry; his duty will be his privilege; his work, the pleasure of his life.

4. The hearers of the gospel have a deep interest in this subject. For your sake the office of the ministry was instituted; for your sake he who fills it, devotes himself to the duties and trials peculiar to this office. You will be the joy or the grief of his soul. If you are the zealous and active disciples of Christ, you will be his glory and his joy; but if you remain impenitent, you burden his soul with sorrow. Could you follow him, at the close of public service, to his closet, and witness the anguish of his heart, and hear his desponding complaints to God, you must feel compassion for him. By obeying the gospel, you will change this anguish into joy, these complaints into grateful praises. If you persevere in rejecting the Saviour, you bring upon yourselves *swift destruction*; your repentance will not only rejoice the heart of your pastor, but will give joy in heaven, and will secure your own eternal salvation.



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

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No. 4.      PITTSBURGH, SEPTEMBER, 1832.      Vol. I.

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**SERMON IV.**

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**BONDAGE OF SIN---FREEDOM BY THE GOSPEL.**

JOHN 8: 30—36. *As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

SLAVERY, in all its forms, excites in the breast of every individual on whom it is imposed, a feeling of spontaneous and indignant resentment. So abhorrent is the idea of bondage, that men often turn away their eyes from the chains which confine them, and flatter themselves that they are free, when in fact they are suffering the most absolute and debasing slavery. Too proud to admit their degraded condition, they repel with indignation the suggestion, that they are not freemen.

Such was the condition, and such were the feelings of the Jews to whom our Lord said, that if they had believed his doctrines and obeyed his commands, they should know the truth, and the truth should make them free. Although previously disposed to think favorably of our Lord's claims as the promised Messiah, the Jews, on intimation of their bondage, indignantly replied—"We are Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, ye shall be made free?" They forgot that their fathers

were bondsmen in Egypt, and subjected to the most severe and ignominious drudgery. They forgot that their nation was carried captive to Babylon, their cities pillaged, and their country left seventy years desolate. They forgot, that at the very time when they were boasting of their freedom, the sceptre had departed from Judah, and that they were paying tribute to the Roman Emperor. Above all, they forgot the moral and spiritual bondage in which, as individuals, they were involved; alienated from God, the slaves of their unholy appetites and passions; their souls as truly in bondage as were the bodies of their forefathers, when under the lash of Egyptian taskmasters.

In no age and in no country, were any people, so likely as we are, to form erroneous opinions respecting their condition as freemen. As American citizens, we can say, with a much greater semblance of truth than did the descendants of Abraham,—“We are in bondage to no man.” We enjoy a higher degree of national freedom than any people on the face of the globe. In its origin, our government approaches nearer to a social compact, voluntarily formed by the people with a view to promote their mutual benefit, than that of any other nation. Under the protection of our admirable national and state constitutions, every citizen has secured a just and appropriate influence in creating and in administering the laws by which he is governed. Too remote and too powerful to apprehend danger from any external foe, we scorn the idea of foreign invasion and foreign oppression. The eulogies which we hear on the anniversaries of our national independence, and the sentiments uttered around the festive board, and echoed from our schools and legislative halls, are calculated to foster and confirm the belief that nothing is wanting to the consummation of our personal and national freedom. So pleasing is the reflection, and in many respects so favorable is our condition, that, were a messenger from heaven to announce, that something is wanting to our real and permanent freedom, he would probably receive as little credence as did our Lord, when he intimated to the Jews that they were in bondage. Nevertheless, the same bondage exists among us, and the same causes are in operation, which destroyed the national independence and the spiritual liberty of the descendants of Abraham. “Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin.”

Real personal freedom cannot exist where sin is predominant; and national liberty and independence will sooner or later vanish, when corruption and vice pervade the great body of the community. This is the *first* great leading truth taught us in the portion of sacred scripture before us.

The *second* is, that the prevalence of the principles and spirit of the gospel, is the only effectual means of acquiring and preserving personal and national freedom. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.”

The general proposition which we design to establish and illustrate, is, *That a state of sin is a state of bondage; and that the only means of acquiring and preserving personal and national freedom, is the prevalence of the principles and spirit of the gospel.*

### I. OF PERSONAL FREEDOM.

We commence with remarking, that, as moral agents, men are necessarily accountable to that Almighty Being who gave them existence. It is utterly impossible that any finite being can, with impunity, resist the claims which God has upon him, arising from the constitution of his nature, and from the right of the Creator to impose laws calculated to secure his own honor and the happiness of his moral subjects. To freedom from an obligation to obey laws imposed by an infinitely wise and good and all-powerful Being, man cannot attain. His very nature makes him subject to law; and before he can free himself from its authority, he must divest himself of his intellectual and moral powers, and become as incapable of virtue and vice as the brutes. He must also withdraw himself from the dominion and government of the Almighty, and live and act independent of the power which gave him existence.

Men may sin, that is, they may transgress the laws which God has prescribed for the regulation of their conduct: because the possibility of transgressing, as well as of obeying a law, is essential to the idea of an accountable agent. But sin cannot be committed with impunity. Whoever transgresses a law, necessarily incurs its penalty. That all men have sinned, is a fact too positively asserted in the sacred scriptures, and too plainly evinced in the history of the world, to admit of a moment's doubt. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Every sinner is under sentence of condemnation in the sight of God, bound to suffer the penalty of the law which he has transgressed. He is therefore a slave, in consequence of his crimes. Having forfeited his freedom, he is under bonds stronger than those which confine the slave in his galley, or the malefactor in his dungeon. Eternal and immutable justice has pronounced him guilty, and responsible for the forfeiture which he has incurred. Although he may walk at large, and feel no shackles imposed by human hands, he is really a prisoner on whom sentence is passed. The great God needs no chains or prison-house, in order to confine those who have rebelled against his authority. They cannot hide themselves from his view, or escape beyond the reach of his hand. The ministers of his justice can as easily seize the prince in his palace, as the peasant in his cottage. The general at the head of a victorious army, is as easily arrested and brought before the supreme tribunal, as the criminal bound with chains and secured in the recesses of the strongest prison. And can any one, who is thus guilty and condemned, actually in the hands of a holy and a just God, liable at any moment to suffer the full penalty of the law which

he has broken, be considered as free, as having a claim to the immunities of an obedient and faithful subject? The condition of a slave, compelled to toil and sweat at the pleasure of a task-master, or of a prisoner immured in a dungeon, built by human hands, is free and happy, compared with that of the sinner under the displeasure of a holy and a just God.

In reference to this state, in which every impenitent sinner is found, our Lord has said, "if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." Free from the sentence of condemnation; free from the claims of divine justice; free from the pains of the second death; restored to all the immunities and privileges of the sons of God. This is a glorious and inestimable freedom, infinitely superior in value to the immunities conferred by the most powerful states or kingdoms of this world.

To bestow this freedom, is the peculiar prerogative of the Son of God. Long before his advent it was predicted that he should "proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." And when he was on earth we find him exercising the high prerogative of forgiving sin, saying to the miserable and guilty son or daughter, "thy sins are forgiven thee," and proving by incontestible miracles that he had power to do so.

And let it be distinctly remembered, that it is not by an act of absolute sovereignty; it is not at the expense of justice, that the Son of God opens the prison doors and lets the captive go free. He did not declare the law, which condemned the sinner, to be unjust or even severe. He came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law; not to invalidate but to secure the rights of the divine government, while he proclaims mercy and forgiveness to the penitent.

The Lord Jesus Christ assumed our nature, so that he might be in a condition to obey the divine law, as well as to suffer its penalty; and thus to redeem from the curse of the law those who believe in his name. "He was wounded," says the scriptures, "for our transgressions: he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." "He suffered the just for the unjust: He bore our sins in his own body on the tree." So that we have "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin."

The plain import of these passages of sacred scripture, as well as of many others, is that Jesus Christ voluntarily stood in the place of his people; bore the curse of the law, and in consequence of the satisfaction which he made to divine justice, he is authorized to release from condemnation and everlasting death, those who believe in his name. "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, you shall be free indeed:" free from the curse of the law—free from final condemnation.

To participate in this freedom, faith in Jesus Christ is so indispensably necessary, that all who do not believe in his name are in a state of condemnation. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already."

2. There is another important sense in which sinners are in bondage. We mean, *the bondage arising from the dominion of sin*; from the prevalence of the vilest and most corrupt principles of human nature, over the noblest and purest powers of the soul.

It is true, there is nothing involuntary or compulsive in this servitude. If there were, our condition would excite commiseration rather than deserve blame. There is such a thing as voluntary slavery; the application of high and noble powers to mean and servile purposes; the subjection of high and commanding faculties to those which are low and groveling; the employment of powers which fit man to glorify God and to promote the welfare of his fellows, in rebellion against his Maker, and in spreading corruption and crime and wretchedness among men.

Man is naturally dependent on God, and rightfully bound to submit to his authority, and to obey his laws: And the entire dedication of all the powers of the soul to the service of God is the most perfect freedom of which man is capable; because this is a reasonable service—a service calculated to bring all the powers of the soul into delightful and harmonious action—to raise man to his highest dignity, and to secure individual and general happiness.

When man throws off his allegiance to his Maker, he necessarily enrols himself under the standard of the prince of darkness, and becomes his willing and obedient slave, ready to follow his suggestions and to execute his purposes. In this case, there can be no neutrality. There are, and in the nature of things there can be, only two great parties in the moral world; the one for God, and the other against him; the one under the standard of light, and the other under that of darkness. The only question to be decided, is, which of these two masters shall be chosen. The refusal or neglect to obey God, is a virtual determination to take the side of the enemy.

It is often the pride and the boast of those who disclaim all pretensions to piety, that they are free and unshackled; not restrained by rigid and unbending rules; that they are at liberty to shape their course according to circumstances, and at all times to do whatever they may find most agreeable. But what is the amount of this boasted liberty? It is to disregard all those considerations which should influence a rational being, to set at nought the counsels of reason and the dictates of conscience and to follow the blind impulse of appetite and passion. It is liberty to close the eyes; so as not to perceive dangers, and to rush on blindfolded to destruction. As well might the idiot or maniac boast of his freedom; because he perceives not or regards not the motives which govern the actions of other men.

But it is not true, that those, who reject the authority of God and trample on his laws, act independently, and are free from foreign influence. Not unfrequently they are absolute slaves to the opinions of others; and that not generally of the wise and good, but of the foolish and profligate. While boasting of exemption from the unbending rules of moral conduct prescribed in the bible, they are subject to the capricious and absurd laws of fashion, and they are often under the necessity of acting in a manner inconsistent with their own ideas of propriety and duty. Taking their standard of excellence, not from the immutable laws of rectitude and truth, but from the opinions of others, they have no character which can be called their own. Borrowing their moral complexion from those with whom they are surrounded, they exhibit whatever color their associates are pleased to assign them.

For this reason, the young and inexperienced are so often led astray. If we see a young man frequenting the society of the profane and profligate, we may, with almost absolute certainty, predict his ruin. The moral and religious principles inculcated by his parents are gradually undermined by the suggestion that these principles are incompatible with the freedom to which every generous youth should aspire. Flattered with the thought of emancipation from parental authority, he yields himself to the guidance of his new instructors. And when he has once submitted to their control, they rule him with a power tenfold more absolute than that previously exerted by parental hands. They impose on him a code of laws, falsely called *the laws of honor*, more capricious, more absurd, and more despotic than the laws of Draco. No longer is he at liberty to act according to his own judgment of what is right, but in obedience to the maxims adopted by his associates, he must, if they so direct, violate the most sacred laws of humanity and religion.

Why is it that a young man of moderate fortune runs into such extravagance in dress and style of living as involves him in debt, injures his best friends, and perhaps drives him to fraudulent practices in order to answer the demands of importunate creditors? Why, at the risk of acquiring invincible and ruinous habits, does he force himself to taste the intoxicating cup, for which he has no relish? Why does he stake his fortune at the gaming table? Why does he hazard his life or aim to shed his brother's blood, for an offence not worthy, in the estimation of a wise man, of the least notice? Why in these, and in many other ways of a similar character, are many, styled noble and generous spirits, led bound and blindfolded to their own destruction? It is, because they are slaves to the opinions of others. Not convinced by arguments addressed to their reason, or induced by motives of feeling their sense of duty, but led by a blind and abject submission to an absurd and often ridiculous custom, they sacrifice their present and eternal interests, rather than make a single effort to emancipate themselves from their bondage. And never-

theless, these are the high-minded and daring spirits, who deem it degrading to acknowledge subjection to the Majesty of heaven!

Again, others are so under the dominion of their passions, that they cannot be considered as freemen. Pride, ambition, avarice, sensuality, each has its votaries, who bow before a favorite altar with profound and untiring adoration. So common and notorious is this fact, the usual and expressive manner of speaking of such men is, that they are the slaves of ambition, of avarice, of sensuality. They are so absorbed in one overpowering feeling, that no motives except such as touch their favorite passion can excite them to action. Look at the miser, toiling day and night, denying himself the ordinary comforts of life, deaf to every call of humanity, and callous to every benevolent and generous emotion, enduring a drudgery as severe, and feeling a solicitude far greater, than the slave who performs his daily task, and once a week receives his measured allowance of the coarsest food. Look at the drunkard, destroying his health, wasting his property, beggaring his family, hastening with rapid steps to a premature grave, regardless of every motive except the cravings of his depraved appetite. If there be any case in which a man is under a physical necessity to go on to perdition, contrary to his best purposes and strongest resolutions, it is that of the confirmed, habitual drunkard. He sees the consequences of his conduct. He knows the issue. He feels the poverty, the disease, the disgrace, the wretchedness, which surround him, and the dismal pit before him is not concealed from his view. He resolves and re-resolves to reform, and again and again he is drawn, by his inextinguishable and maddening thirst, to the fatal cup. What folly! what madness! to approach the verge of that awful precipice down which the descent, when once commenced, is inevitably certain! The drunkard is a slave, whose emancipation is hardly possible. But to establish our position, we need not select extreme cases. In whatever heart sin is predominant, the man is a slave. His nature is debased, his noble faculties perverted, and all his powers laid under bondage. The ethereal spirit, which like the eagle should soar towards heaven, breathe the pure atmosphere of the upper regions, and from the commanding elevation, contemplate the glories of creation, is drawn and bound down to earth, by gross and sensual attractions. And the most deplorable circumstance, in this degraded condition is, that the bondage is voluntary. The slave loves his chains, sings and dances, and imagines himself to be free, while the fetters which confine him are sinking deeper and deeper,—gradually paralyzing the powers of moral action, and producing stupor and spiritual death.

And to what power shall we look for deliverance from this bondage? The means so long and so extensively used in superstitious ages, have had no tendency to release the soul from spiritual bondage. The lacerations and various severities inflicted on the body, have left the heart estranged from God, and under the dominion of sin.

Mere intellectual culture, the advancement of science and the arts, the improvements in civil government, have no necessary connection with the emancipation of the soul from sin. The polish of civilization may remove or conceal the grossness of vice, but it leaves the radical principles and the moral character of the individual essentially the same. Of this truth, no other proof is necessary than the fact, that many men of highly cultivated intellect are pre-eminently corrupt in their moral habits, and destitute of the least semblance of piety.

Our only hope of deliverance from the dominion, as well as from the guilt of sin, is in the Lord Jesus Christ. The great end of his mission from heaven to earth, was "to destroy the works of the devil;" not merely to save from the punishment which sin deserved, but to save from sin itself; to deliver men from spiritual thralldom, and to bring them into the liberty of the sons of God.

This blessed and glorious emancipation, the Son of God accomplishes in two ways. First, by motives addressed to the understanding and the heart; and secondly, by the operations of the Holy Spirit.

We assert an unquestionable truth, when we say that the motives to piety and holiness, contained in the holy scriptures, are stronger and more efficacious than are to be found elsewhere. Before the coming of Christ, the belief of a future state existed in many nations: yet the apostle does not exaggerate, when he says that Jesus Christ "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." An occasional star had cast a feeble glimmering on the world enveloped in general darkness: now the rising Sun poured his bright effulgence on the astonished nations. Conjecture was exchanged for demonstration, doubt for certainty.

A future state of happiness or misery, according to the character of each individual, is not the only truth presented in the gospel with a clearness which commands the assent of the understanding, and awakens the sleeping energies of the conscience. The perfections of God, his justice, his purity, his love, his mercy, are displayed in such a manner as to bring God very near to us; especially when viewed in connection with our relation to him as accountable agents, and above all, as sinners who have incurred his displeasure. The turpitude and malignity, as well as the guilt of sin, are exhibited in the wonderful sacrifice required for its expiation, and in the awful destiny of those who die impenitent.



The power of motive contained in the bible is evinced by the effect which its truths have on the heart and conscience. It is the means employed to awaken men to a sense of their guilt, and to excite them to seek deliverance from the dominion of sin. The power of the gospel is also proved by the fact, that where it is not known, there barrenness, and desolation, and death, universally prevail; and on the other hand, wherever a few spots of verdure appear in the wide moral waste extending over our globe, there this sacred stream flows. "Sanctify them," said our Lord, "through thy truth; thy word is truth." And ever since this prayer was uttered, a purifying influence has attended the reading and the hearing of the sacred scriptures.

Secondly, Jesus Christ gives freedom from the dominion of sin by the special operations of the Holy Spirit, which attend the exhibition of his truth. The word of God is called the sword of the Spirit; because it is the instrument employed in the conviction and conversion of sinners, and in the sanctification of believers. This blessed influence usually attends the truths of the gospel: and the proud and rebellious sinner is humbled and made "willing in a day of God's power:" willing to renounce his sins; willing to submit to the authority of God; willing to be saved by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

In subduing the rebellious to the obedience of the truth, no violence is offered to the free and regular operations of the soul. The regenerated man acts freely in the view of motives. Indeed he may now, with more propriety than ever, be called a free agent, because he acts under the guidance of reason and conscience—powers which ought to rule; and he keeps in subjection his appetites and passions, which were heretofore predominant.

Thus those whom the Son of God makes free, are free indeed: free from the curse of the divine law, free from the dominion of sin, restored to the liberty of the sons of God. This is a glorious freedom, of which all the powers of earth and hell cannot deprive the believer. Men may enslave the body, may load it with chains, confine it in prison, bind it to the stake; but the soul is still free. The curse of God does not rest upon it. Sin has no dominion over its renewed and disenthralled powers.

II. We said, also, *that the prevalence of the principles and spirit of the gospel, is the only certain means of securing and perpetuating NATIONAL FREEDOM.* Our remarks on this part of the subject, must necessarily be brief.

It is a truth, established by the experience of all nations, and of all ages, that an unenlightened and corrupt people cannot enjoy freedom; because they are destitute of the intelligence and virtue necessary to understand and maintain their rights. Igno-

rance and vice can be ruled only by the strong hand of despotism. When an uneducated and vicious people attempt to exercise the high functions of self-government, anarchy and violence, the insecurity of property and life, are the inevitable consequences. Hence the unsuccessful attempts that have recently been made to establish free governments in the southern portions of our Continent, and in various parts of Europe. After a few mighty and successful efforts to throw off the yoke of their oppressors, they have turned their arms against each other, and oceans of human blood have flowed in the contest, who should rule and who should obey. It is honorable to the intelligence and virtue of the people of the United States, that they succeeded in establishing their independence; and that they have maintained free institutions more than half a century. But whether this shall be our condition for half a century to come, will depend, we venture to affirm, on the prevalence of the genuine principles of the gospel, more than on any other cause.

It may be doubted, whether the general diffusion of knowledge unconnected with moral and religious principle, would have any tendency to perpetuate the liberties of a nation. Were all educated, a greater number of aspirants to office would be created; and in the general contest for power, the public good would be sacrificed to local interests, and to the ambitious views of party leaders.

It is, then, in vain to depend on the general intelligence of the people alone, as an effectual barrier against the violence of anarchy and the encroachments of arbitrary power. Intelligence must be connected with moral principle to be of any avail. Pure morals, at least among the great body of the people, cannot exist without the sanctions of religion. We say, cannot exist because such has been the fact in the experience of all nations.

We need not attempt to prove, that Christianity has claims superior to every other religion; and that it exercises a more benign and beneficial influence than any other on the character and happiness of men in this life. We speak of the pure and unadulterated principles of the gospel, derived from the oracles of truth, and not handed out, by oral communication, in such portions and with such additions as may suit the avarice of priests and the ambition of tyrants. Experience justifies us in affirming, that wherever the sacred scriptures have been freely circulated and generally read, men have performed the various duties arising from their social relations, with more fidelity than in any other circumstances.

If the tendency of the gospel be, as we have shown in the preceding part of this discourse, to purify the heart, to restrain from vice, and to present the most powerful motives to virtuous

actions, it must, from the very nature of things, exert a salutary influence on the order of civil society. If parents and the heads of families be pious, they will endeavor to bring up their children and others under their care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And each individual, whatever be his station, will exert a salutary influence on those with whom he associates. In this silent and imperceptible manner, crimes will be prevented, and the charities of social life cherished much more effectually, than by the authority of the civil magistrate, or by the bayonets of hired soldiery.

It is freely admitted, that men must be intelligent in order to appreciate and preserve the blessings of freedom. And what more efficacious means than the bible can be devised to promote general education, and to diffuse intelligence among all classes of the community? The weekly addresses from the pulpit, and the catechetical instructions given to the young, are calculated to awaken the attention, and to create a desire of knowledge on subjects not immediately connected with religion. The oldest and most efficient colleges and universities in Europe, and in the United States, had their origin in a desire to prepare young men to preach the gospel. What would have been the condition of our country, if our pious forefathers had waited until statesmen, from mere secular motives, had founded and endowed institutions of learning? What has been and what is the prevailing inducement, in our country, to establish and maintain common schools? The farmer can plough his grounds and feed his cattle without consulting his almanac, and the mechanic can handle his tools and acquire wealth without a knowledge of arithmetic; but the Christian cannot consent that his children should grow up without being able to read the bible. What prompted the benevolent and noble effort to establish and maintain Sunday schools in every part of our country? Would the desire to make the rising generation more competent to manage their secular concerns, induce so many thousands of both sexes to devote one day in seven to the instruction of the ignorant? In these self-denying and gratuitous labors, the enlightened statesman will see the brightest presage of the perfection and permanence of our free institutions; yet it is certain, that, in these benevolent labors, the love of country is not the primary and chief motive.

It is true, there are men, loud in their professions of patriotism, who imagine they see, in these efforts to instruct the rising generation, a scheme to subvert the liberties of their country. Wonderful discovery! To see that to teach a child to read and to know that he is an accountable agent, is the way to make him a slave! To teach him to learn his duty immediately from

the bible, is the way to make him the dupe of crafty and avaricious priests! The withholding of the sacred scriptures from the hands of the people, was the cause of that dark and dismal night which enveloped Europe during the period appropriately styled *the dark ages*. As soon as the bible was brought out of the cloisters, where it had been locked up in an unknown language, like the sun rising in his glory, it dispelled the darkness which enveloped the nations. They saw the chains with which they were bound, and they resolved to be free. I could as easily believe that the rising of the sun will enshroud the world in darkness, as that a knowledge of the truths of the bible can prepare men to be slaves. Despots may dread to see this heavenly light breaking in on their dark dominions. Demagogues, who hope to rise to power on the ignorance of the people, may raise the cry of priestcraft, when they see the bible every where circulated, and all classes of the community taught to read it. But the enlightened and honest statesman, who studies no concealment of his actions, will rejoice in every judicious and well directed effort to send gospel truth to every part of our extended territory; and he will hail the efforts of Bible Societies and Sunday Schools as the brightest hope of his country's freedom.

The republics that were before us, have fallen: and what is there in our condition to lead us to hope that our existence as a free people will be of longer duration? The representative principle which we have introduced, and in which we differ from the ancient republics, will not justify our hopes. All the advantage which we derive from this principle, is, that it enables us to extend a popular government over a larger territory.

On looking around for some ground on which to found the delightful hope, that our free institutions shall exist ages and ages to come, I candidly confess that I see none except this: we have a purer and more benign religion; and we have the means of instructing the people both by the pulpit and by the press. By these means, that instruction which is more important than any other, may be given—instruction which purifies the heart, as well as enlightens the understanding—which creates and cherishes moral principle—and which nerves the soul to resist the seductions of vice. “Happy is that people, that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”

We close with two inferences: 1. If the gospel has a salutary effect on civil society, then it is the duty and interest of all who love their country, to use their influence in maintaining and extending the principles and spirit of the gospel. At this time, we do not urge the most powerful motive that can be offered; a regard to the eternal well-being of our fellow men. We present

only a subordinate consideration,—the welfare of our country—the preservation of our free institutions. We call on all who feel an interest in the future destiny of their country, to maintain and extend the purifying spirit of the gospel—a means more efficacious than any other to check the corruption of morals, which always precedes the departure of national freedom.

And here we solemnly disclaim any intention of recommending an alliance between church and state. From the light of history, from the testimony of experience, we verily believe, that were such a union to take place, it would be the greatest curse that could fall on our country and on the church of God. We do not ask our legislators to enact laws in favor of any one christian sect; we do not even ask that they should maintain, by legislative enactments, Christianity itself without distinction of parties: all we ask of our rulers, as such, is that they preserve to us the rights of conscience—that they do not disfranchise us, because we are Christians—that they do not compel us to renounce our privileges as citizens or to violate the most positive and sacred precepts of our religion.

But in his unofficial capacity, we ask every citizen to use his influence in favor of the religion of the bible, as the only efficacious means of instructing the people, of purifying the public morals, and of perpetuating the blessings of a free government.

We want the example of all classes of the community, and we would that this example should proceed not merely from motives of worldly policy, but from the feelings of genuine piety. And believe me, there is a spirit and energy in an example which proceeds from the heart, tenfold greater than in the cold exterior of a life regulated by considerations of worldly policy. And in this case why should you act hypocritically? If religion be good for others, it will not injure you. Do not, we beseech you, poison the minds and corrupt the morals of others, by profane conversation and licentious example. The mischief resulting from such an influence frequently far overbalances distinguished public services.

For the reasons which we have stated, we recommend to all, especially to the young, to take an active and efficient part in every judicious plan to promote useful knowledge, and to improve private and public morals. The man who shall cause good and efficient schools to be established in his neighborhood, or who shall arrest the progress of a single vice, such, for example, as intemperance, will, we firmly believe, confer a greater benefit on his country than if he had repelled the invasion of a foreign foe. For, why may we not as well be conquered and subjugated by a foreign enemy, as corrupted and prostrated and ruined by one within our own bosom? For be assured, that the freedom and

well-being of a country cannot long survive the prostration of private and public morals. Let every individual think himself at liberty to do whatever the laws of the land permit him to do with impunity, or whatever he thinks he can do without detection, and there will be an end to the security of property, and reputation, and life.

To diffuse useful knowledge among the great body of the people, and to invigorate the tone of public morals, no means more effectual can be devised, than the prevalence of the principles and spirit of the gospel. Make a man a good Christian, and you make him a good citizen.

We do not undervalue the wisdom of statesmen in providing fortifications and an efficient navy, as means of defense against external enemies—in opening channels of easy communication, so as to connect distant parts of the country together by bonds of common interest. But these and similar measures do not guard against internal foes. They leave uncontrolled an enemy from which we have reason to apprehend the greatest danger. We want something which shall operate on man's moral constitution; which shall appeal to his sense of duty, as well as to his temporal interest; which shall point him to an invisible witness, and to an impartial Judge of his conduct. The bible is the only instrument which possesses this power.

Take a survey of our extensive territory, and behold the moral desolations, the ignorance and vice which prevail, especially in places destitute of the regular ministrations of the gospel,—and you will see much to alarm the fears of the patriot, who knows that the permanence of our free government ultimately rests on the intelligence and virtue of the people. You will see thousands of families without schools, destitute of moral and religious instruction, and incapable of reading the bible recently offered to them. And are these the freemen who are to elect our legislators and virtually enact our laws? And how are the calamities, which must follow the prevalence of ignorance and sin, to be averted? We answer, by diffusing useful knowledge; by patronizing Sunday schools; by distributing the bible and religious tracts; by sending the gospel to every part of our extensive territory.

2. But the most important duty inculcated by our subject, and designedly mentioned last on account of its importance, is the attainment of that personal freedom, which the Lord Jesus Christ only can give.

We have shown, that man, from the constitution of his nature as a rational and accountable agent, cannot be free from an obligation to obey a law. He must have some rule by which

to govern his actions, or he must renounce his rational character, and, like an idiot or a madman, act without reason and without motive.

The will of God, manifested in his works, and more clearly and fully expressed in the holy scriptures, is the only infallible rule of duty. Every individual, whose moral powers are not so perverted that he confounds all distinctions of right and wrong, must be convinced that he has transgressed this law. And without supposing the reader worse than others, such, we say, is your condition. You are a sinner: and unless you have availed yourself of the gracious provision which God has made for the forgiveness of sin, you are under sentence of condemnation, by a power from which you cannot escape. With the claims of a holy and just God resting upon you unanswered, you cannot, in the full import of the expression, be said to be a freeman. The most pure and innocent among men has contracted a moral debt, which a life of spotless innocence and active usefulness cannot cancel. If at any time your conscience be awakened to feel the weight of your guilt, you will be able to appreciate the preciousness of a truth which you have often heard, and of which, perhaps, you have never felt the value, viz. that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;"—that by his obedience and death he made so complete a satisfaction for sin, that there is now no condemnation to them who believe in his name and obey his commands. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ gives deliverance from the curse of the divine law, and restores those who are penitent to the immunities and privileges of the sons of God. "You shall be free indeed." Free in the highest and noblest sense of the term: citizens not merely of a free and powerful state, enjoying its protection, and having a right to participate in its honors; but citizens of heaven, destined to possess all its joys and all its glories.

But let it be remembered, that according to the wise constitution which God has established, no one is free from the guilt, who is not also free from the dominion, of sin; or, in other words, no one is justified in the sight of God, who is not also sanctified. For "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." The Son of God did not come into the world to proclaim an universal amnesty to rebels remaining opposed to the divine government: He came to "save his people from their sins."

An opinion unhappily prevails with too many, that religion is an irksome drudgery; that it will deprive them of their liberty, and confine them within a space so contracted that their elastic powers can have no room to expand. Banish from your mind this erroneous opinion. Be assured it is false. The words of our Lord and Master are true—"My yoke is easy and my

burden is light." Every individual emancipated from the bondage of sin, has found this declaration to be strictly true. And if this deliverance from sin were perfect, Christians might enjoy on earth the blessedness of heaven. That moral renovation, which Jesus Christ effects by his word and spirit, is the restoration of the soul, so far as it is accomplished, to perfect freedom in volition and action. If a man invariably acted wisely; if he never suffered his appetites and passions to lead him astray; if he always followed the dictates of reason and conscience,—would you call it bondage? Or, rather, is not this the only real freedom? Now this is the precise state to which the religion of Jesus Christ aims to bring us. Listen not, then, to the suggestions of those, who promise you freedom in casting off the yoke of Jesus Christ. Their freedom is the perversion of reason; the suppression of conscience; the elevation of the sensual and malignant passions, and consequently, the degradation of the whole moral man. Be assured, that real moral freedom consists in obeying the dictates of reason and conscience, enlightened and guided by the word of God. Beware of permitting any of your appetites and passions to obtain the mastery over you. They will bind you with cords not easily broken, and they will scourge you with a lash as pungent and as fatal as the sting of the scorpion.

If you would escape the most degrading bondage, and aspire to the citizenship of heaven, make the sacred scriptures the rule of your conduct; read them attentively, imploring the aid of the Holy Spirit, through whose agency only you can be made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

No. 5.

PITTSBURGH, OCTOBER, 1832.

VOL. I.

**SERMON V.**

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**THE TRINITARIAN AND UNITARIAN DOCTRINES  
CONCERNING JESUS CHRIST.**

ROMANS 9: 5. *Of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*

WE have in this passage of scripture, a most direct and explicit testimony to the truth of what may be called the trinitarian view of the person of Jesus Christ. It ascribes to him a perfect manhood and a true deity. Under the one aspect, it contemplates him as proceeding from a human parentage, and clothed with all the attributes of human nature; under the other, it regards him as the supreme God, to whom, and to whom alone, all honor and worship are due.

The passage itself is one which all criticism is constrained to acknowledge genuine. It can bear only one interpretation that is strictly grammatical. That interpretation, too, is the only one that harmonizes with the context, or falls in with the requirements of logical propriety. The testimony, then, is decisive.

Still, the doctrine is rejected by many. It is in its nature high and strange; and it stands closely related to other religious views, with which multitudes in every age have been offended. It has been represented, accordingly, to be incredible and contradictory to reason. Infidels have maintained, that it is of such a character in this respect as absolutely to overthrow the pretensions of christianity itself to be from God. Others, professing the christian faith, have, with the same sort of feeling toward this doctrine, expelled it utterly from their creed. According to them, it is as unscriptural as it is incomprehensible and absurd; and they undertake, accordingly, to put such an interpretation upon the bible, as may, in their apprehension, relieve it entirely from the reproach of its enemies on this ground. Every effort has been made, and still is made, to overthrow the credit which this

ancient article of faith has found in the church. Hence it has been found necessary in every age, to vindicate it from objection and abuse, and to maintain by argument its claims to be received and acknowledged as a part of the faith originally delivered to the saints. It is proposed to do so, briefly, in this sermon. The argument, of course, is too extensive for a full view; but some of its general principles may be glanced at, so as to aid at least and direct the serious inquirer in investigating the truth.

The plan I propose to pursue, is, to attempt, in the first place, the removal of some obstructions, which are found frequently lying in the way of all direct argument on this subject, and hindering the proper force of evidence in men's minds. The argument itself will then be presented, by a general statement of what I conceive to be the testimony of the scriptures about the person of Jesus Christ, and a notice of several considerations which conspire to show that the true and proper sense of it has not been mistaken.

I. I AM TO ATTEMPT THE REMOVAL OF SOME OBSTRUCTIONS, BY WHICH THE FORCE OF EVIDENCE IS FREQUENTLY HINDERED ON THIS SUBJECT. These obstructions lie chiefly in wrong views of the doctrine in question, or in an inadequate sense of its importance. In attempting to remove them, then, it is necessary, in the first place, to have the doctrine itself fairly stated.

According to the trinitarian belief, there is but one God, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being and in all his attributes. In this divine Unity there exists, at the same time, the distinction of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as three subjects or persons; and these three have equally, and in common with one another, the nature and perfections of supreme divinity. In the great work of accomplishing man's redemption, the second person of this blessed Trinity condescended to clothe himself with the human nature, for the purpose of making a suitable expiation for sin. This was done in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and comprehended in himself the two distinct natures of God and man. By this union he was qualified to stand as a Mediator between the parties, and eventually accomplished by his death the reconciliation which was needed for a lost world.

1. Now I remark, *that no contradiction to reason is offered by the view just given.* It has been frequently affirmed, indeed, that the trinitarian view labors under this objection. Those who embrace it have been represented as holding notions directly contradictory to each other, and putting terms together that involve a gross absurdity. They are charged with the offence of outraging reason and common sense, by maintaining that three may be one and one may be three. But charges of this kind proceed upon a wrong apprehension of the doctrine itself. It is not to be credited, indeed, that it could have gained the approbation and belief of so many wise men of every age, if it were really so grossly repug-

nant to reason as some have represented it to be. Names are not sufficient, I admit, to establish the truth of the doctrine itself; but they ought at least to shield it from the imputation of being absurd and monstrous; and when an article of faith stands forth to view, like this, as a part of the creed of almost the whole christian world, sanctioned by the learning and piety of every age and nation, it stands entitled, certainly, to some reverence and respect.

The doctrine of the Trinity, properly contemplated, involves no contradiction. If it were affirmed in that doctrine, that God is one and three *in the same sense*, something would be affirmed contrary to reason. But this is not affirmed. On the contrary, it is expressly stated, that God is three in a way that leaves the unity of his nature untouched. We confess ourselves unable to understand *how* God is three and *how* he is one. We give credit to the *fact* merely, as that fact is revealed, without attempting to comprehend the *mode* in which it exists. We admit our entire ignorance of the manner of the Divine subsistence. We employ the term "person," in speaking of God as three, but we do not suppose that this, or any other term we might use, can at all express the thing itself concerning which it is used. How should it be imagined that any analogies within the range of our experience, so limited and so low, should be sufficient to give us any notion of the mode in which the eternal God subsists? We confess, that what we hold as a fact on this subject is *above* reason. But, on that very account, we maintain that no man has a right to charge us with holding what is *contrary* to reason. This charge proceeds upon the supposition that we undertake to define the mode of the Divine subsistence; a thing which we solemnly disclaim.

As to the other branch of the trinitarian doctrine concerning the person of Christ, it is admitted to be in like manner mysterious, incomprehensible, and *above* reason; but most certainly it cannot be said, with any propriety, to be at war with reason. It offers no violence to any of the laws of thought. When we say, that Jesus Christ was "God manifest in the flesh," we do not pretend to understand *how* a union of the two natures could take place. We simply assert a *fact*; and we deny that the statement of the thing as a fact is repugnant to reason. There can be no room for such a charge, so long as the manner of Divine subsistence is not understood; and whenever the charge is made, it involves an arrogant pretension on the part of those who make it, of having this knowledge. How should they affirm what can be, or what cannot be, in the manner of God's subsistence, except by reason of their having had a full understanding of his nature?

2. Again I observe, *that the mysterious and incomprehensible character of the facts believed in this case constitutes no sufficient objection to the trinitarian faith.* If we reject this doctrine just because we cannot fully comprehend the manner of the facts it

teaches, I ask where we shall find a fact, presented to us with any sort of evidence whatever, which on the same principle we are not bound to hold incredible? Is not all nature a mystery in this sense—a deep and unfathomable secret, hidden from the penetration of the most profoundly wise? Facts may be ascertained; but the secret nature of things, and the mode of their existence—*what* they are in themselves, and *how* they are—are absolutely incomprehensible. What are the most complete of human sciences but histories of *facts* ascertained on their own proper evidence? When science has accomplished her utmost research, she has not instructed us what is the interior nature of the smallest atom of matter. Every blade of grass that springs forth from the earth is as full of mystery in this respect to the mind of the philosopher, minutely acquainted with all the laws of vegetable life, as it is to the eye of the child that rests only on its outward form and color. And when we ascend from the contemplation of *matter* to the contemplation of *mind*, is our ignorance less complete? What know we of the secret nature of our own souls? We watch their operations as they take place under our daily consciousness, and the results of these observations we arrange into a system of science, and call it philosophy. But after all, what have we learned of the nature of the soul itself, or of the manner of its subsistence? And, then, when we stretch our thoughts to the Infinite God—the Great First Cause, in which Life resides as in its original fountain, independent, underived, and eternally active—what can we know? There is not a single attribute of his nature which we can fully understand. The most universally acknowledged facts in relation to his existence are wrapped in impenetrable mystery to our thoughts, as soon as we come to ask *how* they can be. God, we say, is an omnipresent being—he exists fully, in all the perfections of his nature, in all places at the same moment. The fact is certain; it lies at the foundation of the whole doctrine of the divine existence. And yet who can explain or conceive the manner of that fact? Is it less incomprehensible than the doctrine of the Trinity itself? Is it less mysterious to affirm, that God exists undiffused and undivided in every point of space, than to say that there is in his nature the distinction of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, possessing equally and in common with one another, the attributes of supreme divinity? Is it less mysterious to affirm, that the Infinite One can be present with all his illimitable fulness in any particular place, than it is to say with believers in the trinitarian doctrine, that he might come into union with the finite nature of man, and in this way make himself manifest in human flesh? All these things are alike incomprehensible; and why may they not be equally true?

But the doctrine in question is not merely incomprehensible; it is new, and strange, and unsupported by any analogies drawn from the range of our past knowledge. I admit the fact, and ask, Shall we reject it on this account? If so, then must we reject all reve-

lation, and hold it impossible for God to reveal to men any truth entirely new. A revelation is no revelation at all unless it make known new truths, and such as must of necessity for that very reason appear strange. And why should it be imagined, that facts may not have place beyond the sphere of human observation, to which nothing can be found analogous within that sphere; or that such facts may not be made known to men, if God see proper to reveal them? Have we a right to restrain truth to the boundaries of our own experience? Especially, when a revelation undertakes to give men information concerning God himself, is it to be thought strange that it should declare facts entirely new and unimaginable before? Mystery, in this sense of the term, must characterize as a matter of course all true revelation.

3. It must appear from the statement of the case, *that the question proposed for consideration is of fundamental importance.* Many opposers of the trinitarian doctrine have affirmed, that the question between themselves and us does not enter so essentially into the constitution of christianity itself as to involve our final salvation in its decision. Error, they tell us, on whichever side it may lie, ought not to be looked upon as ruinous to the soul, and should not be regarded as excluding those who hold it from the christian church. It may be true, indeed, that according to that view of the divine character and government, which is generally held by Unitarians, the trinitarian belief, if wrong, would not issue in everlasting death, and might be considered, therefore, a comparatively safe error; but still it cannot be denied, that it would be a very monstrous error, and extremely offensive to God, as being nothing less than idolatry itself; and every serious man, accordingly, should feel it a matter of deep concern not to be mistaken in a case of so much consequence. But if we reverse the supposition, and imagine the trinitarian view to be the true one, it is manifest that the error of those who reject it, is an error which shuts them at once out of all interest in the christian salvation. It is nothing less than the error of infidelity itself under the disguise of a christian name. It subverts the entire gospel of Christ, and substitutes in its place a scheme of religion utterly different. It ought not to be deemed strange, therefore, that Trinitarians refuse to embrace those who hold what they conceive to be such an error, as members of the christian family. They may honor them and love them as men; but how can it be required that they should own fellowship with them as christians? To do so, would imply, in the very act, an abandonment of the entire constitution of christianity itself, in their own minds.

When Unitarians tell us, that men's faith on this subject is not a matter of *vital* interest, they betray an entire misapprehension of the place which the trinitarian doctrine occupies in the system of religion to which it belongs. In that system, it is not a mere *opinion*—a speculative dogma, to be received, and treasured up

with other notions, in the intellect. It is in the highest degree *practical*, grounding itself in the deepest feelings of the heart, and incorporating itself with the very constitution of our moral nature. It pervades and animates religion, not so much in the *objective* form of it, when it is contemplated only as a science to be studied, as in its *subjective* form, when it lives, and puts forth its living power, in the soul of the christian himself. It is a doctrine to be apprehended by the heart, more than by the understanding—a thing of feeling, far more than of pure intellection. It may indeed be held only as a notion; and no doubt it is so held by many, whose characters and lives are never affected at all by what they call their faith. But the doctrine itself is not really apprehended in such cases. This takes place only when it begins to live in the soul itself; and then it can bear no separation from the religion which is there at work. The soul feels that it is *vital*, and that the absence of it would be spiritual death.

4. In accordance with the view of the matter just given, we hold, *that a temper of mind correspondent with the character of the interest involved in the investigation, is a primary requisite for coming to the knowledge of the truth.* In all moral and religious inquiries, in which as a matter of course the principles of evidence lie ultimately in the moral constitution of our nature, as much depends at all times upon the state of our feelings as upon the strength of our intellectual powers. As a man who is destitute of all proper sense of natural beauty or order, can never speculate with certainty or security on questions of mere taste, however wide and grand may be the range of argument they embrace; so neither may the man be trusted at all in speculations upon religious truth, who shows himself wanting in the sensibilities that lie at the foundation of all true religious character. It is enough to stamp damnation upon the whole argument of infidelity, that it has been conducted in every age, and in every country, with a manifest absence of every thing like a proper tone of moral feeling on the part of its friends. Voltaire, and Volney, and Gibbon, and Hume, and Paine—and they may stand fairly representative of the entire sect—had no seriousness upon their spirits, when they put themselves forth to try the merits of christianity. The soul of the men still lives and speaks in their works, and it is found wanting in every disposition, which became the unutterable interest of the subject, and the high solemnity of the office which they undertook when they stood up to set men right in their views of it. We look in vain for that soberness of mind, that subdued and reverential frame of spirit, that deep sense of the value of truth, that earnestness to be found in the way of God, that docility, and candor, and *prayerfulness*, which are befitting the magnitude of such an inquiry. They came up to the christian argument, in a spirit of levity, and pride, and profanity, and scorn; and is it any wonder, that they did not come under the force of its evidence? And is it to be

imagined, that men of this description are worthy to be trusted as spiritual guides? There is mockery in the very thought.\*

But if a right condition of soul be needed, for trying the general argument of christianity itself, it is no less necessary for every subsequent inquiry about the peculiar doctrines of christianity. The necessity lies, as already remarked, in the constitution of our nature, and cannot fail to be acknowledged wherever that constitution is rightly understood. It is affirmed also in the most solemn manner by the voice of inspiration. It is written—*The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.* And again—*The scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not; but knowledge is easy to him that understandeth.* And again—*Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein.* And again—*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* It is vain, then, to expect that much good will come of any inquiry on the particular subject we are now considering, if it be not accompanied and actuated by such a spirit. The subject we have seen to be of fundamental importance, and pre-eminently *practical* in its relations and bearings. It enters vitally into the very constitution of christianity itself, and stretches its interest throughout the entire range of all that is to be feared or hoped for by men, in that dread eternity to which they are going. Is the mind on such a subject unassured in its belief? Then what, I ask, should be the temper with which it addresses itself to the work of satisfying its doubts? Manifestly, there should be great seriousness, and a deep feeling of the importance of the question to be solved, and an anxious earnestness to be saved from mistake, and a fervent desire to be brought into subjection to the truth, and a childlike simplicity of intention in the pursuit of instruction, and an importunate looking up in prayer to the Father of Lights for that illumination which he has promised to bestow upon the lowly in heart. Without this frame of mind, all inquiry here will prove idle and unprofitable speculation. Should it even issue in a conviction according to truth, such a conviction would be comparatively unimportant, as contributing only a *notion* to the repository of the mind's knowledge, when it ought to have lodged a living, active *principle* in the moral framework of the soul itself. And should it issue in the adoption of the most destructive error, it would be only what might have been expected as the result of such an experiment—an experiment found disastrous in unnumbered instances before, to all light, and hope, and peace, in the unhappy souls who have embarked their faith upon it.

\* See this subject well touched in "The Evidences of Christianity," by DANIEL WILSON, of Islington in England. I take this opportunity to recommend that work to all who feel an interest in the great subject of which it treats. As a popular and practical argument for the truth of the christian revelation, I know of none better. No *honest* sceptic can read it, in my opinion, without profit; and the convictions of such as have already assented to the truth, cannot fail to be strengthened, or at least refreshed, by its pages.

5. The last remark I have to make under this head of my discourse, is, *that the manner in which the trinitarian doctrine is supposed to be taught in the scriptures, is in accordance with what we have stated to be its moral character, and cannot therefore seem an objection to it in the view of the candid.* It is sometimes said by those who oppose the doctrine, that in consideration of its being so strange, so high, and so important, it ought to be taught, if taught at all, in the most direct and formal manner, and so as to preclude all possibility of mistake about the meaning of the revelation; and because it is not taught just in this way, they hold themselves justified in believing that it is not taught at all. I might remark here on the presumption of men's undertaking to decide in their own wisdom, in this way, on the particular plan which God *ought* to pursue in giving his revelations, and then proceeding to make this preconceived opinion a standard of judgment for trying what he actually *has* revealed. I might show, in the light of all our experience of the ways of God, as displayed in the constitution and course of nature, how incompetent we are to pronounce beforehand upon the proper mode of proceeding for him to adopt in any case; and how it is our duty always to take things as they *are*, on their proper evidence, instead of being offended with them for not falling in exactly with our own imaginations.\* But I am not left in the present case to such a reply, however just and sufficient I believe it to be. A satisfactory reason for the course which God has taken in the revelation of the doctrine under consideration, is found, as we have intimated, in the character of the doctrine itself, and in the relation which it bears to the grand design which that revelation contemplates—the resuscitation of the soul of man to a holy and happy life.

The doctrine, as we have already seen, stands intimately connected with the interior life of christianity, as it dwells in a believer's heart. It is not important so much as a speculative truth, to be contemplated by the intellectual eye, as it is in the character of a practical and felt reality, to be brought into immediate contact with the experience of the soul itself. The whole worth and power of it to man as a sinner, lie in its being *felt* as a fact, in all its relations to his moral wants. To be apprehended aright, it must be first incorporated as it were with the very life of his spirit. Is it strange, then, that it should be exhibited in the scriptures in its practical, rather than in its speculative form—in its moral energies, and its bearings upon the life of christianity, rather than in its naked and abstract idea, as a thing of mere intellectual conception? We do not admit, in-

\* Those who wish to see this topic of argument ably handled, may consult BURLER'S *Analogy*—a book, that contains perhaps more wisdom than any book of its size that ever came from man—especially in the 3d and 6th chapters of the Second Part. The argument, as conducted by him, has regard to the general subject of christianity, as liable to objections in its evidence, and not falling in with men's notions of fitness conceived beforehand; but it applies in all its force to the present case.



need, that there is any want of clear and positive instruction in the scriptures on the subject. Their testimony, as we shall presently see, is unequivocal and full. We are ready, however, to allow, that this instruction is not communicated in the formal and didactic manner of the schools. It is not stated in abstract propositions. And this, we say, is just what, from the nature of the case, might be expected. Facts are exhibited, in their practical relation to the great reality of that life of God in the soul, which christianity aims to accomplish—the only relation, in which they can have interest or importance to a ruined world—the only relation, in which they can be apprehended or understood by the human mind.

And is not this the plan, allow me to ask, on which all the instructions of the bible are communicated? Is the bible wrought up like a system of doctrinal theology, in which truths are presented to the eye of the understanding in their abstract form, and in the relationship by which they are bound together as parts of one general science? Had it been so, it had been a comparatively powerless book. Its power lies pre-eminently in the practical form of its instructions. Truth is put forth in embodied action. Doctrines are exhibited in their living force. The science of Christianity is represented only as a great fact taking place in the experience of the soul. It lies in the bible, just as it lies in the regenerated heart; and it lies in both, just as the science of physiology lies in the human body, or as the science of natural philosophy lies in that world of material nature with whose substantial forms and living energies we are brought into contact from day to day.

II. I NOW PROCEED TO STATE AND ENFORCE THE DIRECT ARGUMENT, BY WHICH THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE IN REGARD TO THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST IS SUPPORTED. And here we are shut up entirely to the testimony of revelation. The only question is, What do the scriptures teach on this subject? My limits do not allow me to quote their testimony at large. I can only state it in general propositions, and refer to particular passages for the necessary proof. The passages referred to will be but a *selection* out of many witnessing to the same truth; but if seriously considered, they will be enough, and more than enough, to answer the purpose for which they are appealed to.

Jesus Christ is affirmed in the scriptures to have TWO NATURES. That he was possessed of a real human nature, is not disputed. A multitude of texts are continually dwelt upon by Unitarians themselves in proof of this point, and in support of their own doctrine; as if by proving Christ to have been a man, they could settle the question about his divinity. But the scriptures clearly attribute to him *another* nature, of a higher and more excellent kind. In proof of this, consult John in his Gospel, 1:14.18. 3:13. 6:33.38.46.50,51.62. 8:14.23. 16:28. 17:5. Aso, 1 Cor. 15:47—49. 1 Tim. 3:16. Rom. 1:3,4. Gal. 1:1.11,12.

Christ is affirmed to have existed BEFORE HIS APPEARANCE IN THE FLESH. This is asserted, or implied, in most of the passages already referred to. See besides, John 1:15. and 8:58.

ETERNITY is ascribed to him. John 1:1. 17:5. The phrases, *In the beginning*, and, *Before the world was*, are used to describe eternity, as may be seen by referring to Ps. 90:2. and John 17:24. In proof of Christ's eternity, see also Heb. 1:10—12. and Rev. 22:13. compared with Rev. 1:8.

The scriptures ascribe to Christ also, the attribute of OMNIPOTENCE, Phil. 3:21. The attribute of INDEPENDENCE, John 1:4. *In him was life*, as in its own fountain. Compare John 5:26. and 10:18. The attribute of OMNISCIENCE, Matt. 11:27. John 6:46. John 2:24,25. 6:64. Acts 1:24. 1 Cor. 4:5. Rev. 2:23. also John 21:17. The attribute of OMNIPRESENCE, Matt. 18:20. The attribute of IMMUTABILITY, Heb. 1:11,12. compared with Ps. 102:25—27.

The scriptures ascribe divine works to Christ. He is represented as the CREATOR and PRESERVER of the world, John 1:1—3.10. Col. 1:15—17. Heb. 1:3.10. He is represented as accomplishing REDEMPTION and SALVATION for men by himself—the Light of the world—the Fountain of life. This is the grand testimony that runs throughout the sacred volume. He is represented as administering the GOVERNMENT of the world. See Matt. 28:18. Acts 10:36. Rom. 14:9. Eph. 1:20—22. The last JUDGMENT, it is said, shall be conducted by him. He will raise the dead, and bring to light the secrets of all hearts, and award to the unnumbered millions of the human race the sentence of righteousness, by which the honor and truth of Jehovah himself are to be sustained in the sight of the universe. John 5:22,23,27—29. Acts 10:42. 17:31. Rom. 14:10. 2 Cor. 5:10. 2 Tim. 4:1. Matt. 25:31—46.\*

\* The argument for the divine character of Christ, drawn from the works which are ascribed to him, is one with which the enemies of the trinitarian doctrine have always been much perplexed; and the most desperate expedients have been resorted to, to get clear of its force. At one time, the difficulty was thought to be surmounted by resolving all into mere *delegation*. In performing these works, it was said, Christ is to be regarded as fulfilling a commission received from God, and as exercising extraordinary powers conferred upon him by God for the purpose. It was admitted, at the same time, that these powers were made really and truly to reside in him for the timebeing; so that his agency in accomplishing his works was altogether different from that of Moses, and other messengers of God, in the miracles which they wrought; for they only *announced* the fact that a miracle was about to take place, but employed no agency of their own for bringing it about, whereas the mighty works of Christ are constantly referred to his own immediate power. This was a theory, however, which could not long endure examination. That Christ, in his mediatorial character acted in the capacity of a Servant and with delegated authority, is a truth clearly taught in the Scriptures, and perfectly consistent with the view that is taken of his person by those who hold the doctrine of his divinity; but the notion of ability to accomplish divine works being conferred by delegation, is contrary to all reason. Delegation may bestow *title* and *right*; but it can communicate no *capacity*. It cannot *qualify* for the discharge of the functions of the office delegated. It supposes, in the very nature of the case, that the necessary qualifications are already possessed. In this case, moreover, the qualifications required are of such a kind that they are altogether unsusceptible of such a communication from one being to another as is here supposed. They must

The scriptures teach, that divine HONOR and WORSHIP properly belong to Christ. John 5:23. Phil. 2:10. Heb. 1:6. The apostles and primitive christians exhibited this worship in their example. Acts 1:24. 7:59,60. The word *God*, in the passage last referred to, is not in the original text, and ought not to have been introduced in the translation. Jesus Christ was the person on whom Stephen called. See also 2 Cor. 12:8,9. 1 Thess. 3:11—13. 2 Thess. 2:16,17. In fact, throughout the whole New-Testament, he is exhibited as the Great Object of the faith and hope and trust of his people. They are encouraged to place an unbounded reliance upon him, and to look to him for all blessings, temporal and spiritual.

Thus do the scriptures explicitly ascribe to Christ the proper *attributes*, and *works*, and *worship*, of the one ever-living and only true God. Need we be surprised, then, in finding the *names* of deity in like manner bestowed upon him? or hesitate to take the appellations thus given in their full and proper sense? *The Word*, it is written, *was God*. John 1:1. *My Lord, and my God!* was a profession of faith made by an apostle himself, and made without rebuke, John 10:28. He is styled, *God manifest in the flesh*, 1 Tim. 3:16. and again, *The true God, and eternal life*, 1 John 5:20. and in our text, *God over all, blessed forever*. See also, Isaiah 9:6. Matt. 1:22,23. Acts 20:28. Heb. 1:8. also Tit. 2:13. and 2 Pet. 1:1. Even the incommunicable name of the supreme God, JEHOVAH, is appropriated to him without qualification, as may be seen by comparing Luke 1:16,17. with Isa. 40:3. Mal.3:1. Mat.3:3. and John 3:28.; also, John 12:41. with Is. 6:1—10.; also, Heb. 1:10. with Ps.102. In all these passages of the Old Testament, it is the the name Jehovah which is translated LORD, and no other can be properly understood in the corresponding passages of the New.

from their nature be original and inherent in the being by whom they are possessed. The Creation of the world, the Government of the world, and the administration of the last general Judgment, are works that require for their accomplishment the attributes of *omniscience*, *omnipotence*, and *independence*. These attributes are in their nature as incommunicable as the essential glory of Jehovah himself. To suppose that God might confer any one of them upon a creature, is to suppose that all the attributes of divinity might be made to reside in a being of this kind—or that a mere creature is capable of being made God, in the highest sense of the term.

Pressed with this insupportable difficulty, the arian theory has never been found a sufficiently tenable position by the anti-trinitarian party. In modern times, accordingly, it has been in a great measure abandoned. We still hear something said about a delegation to the office of Judge in the great day, by which *capacity*, as well as *authority*, is to be lodged in the man Christ Jesus; though at the same time such a character is ascribed to the office itself, as it is to be exercised by him, and the functions belonging to it are so let down beneath the nature of the case and the plain representations of the Bible, that attributes far less than divine are supposed to be sufficient for the occasion. But a more summary mode of escaping the trinitarian argument is adopted, in regard to the works of creation, and providence ascribed in the scriptures to Christ. What is said in relation to these, they tell us, is all *figurative!* The creation of which he is the author, is only a *moral* creation, or the establishment of the christian religion. His dominion over the world consists only in the prevalence of Christianity among the nations. Even what is said about his judging all mankind, may mean only that they shall be judged by God himself according to the declarations of the gospel!!

It must be acknowledged by all, that these proofs of the divine character of Christ *seem* very full and convincing. An attempt to set them all aside, and to interpret away the whole testimony which they are supposed to involve, would appear too desperate to be thought of. That attempt, however, is actually made. It is maintained, that we attach a wrong meaning to the language of the sacred volume; and we are required to contest every inch of ground over the wide field of criticism and interpretation, in order to make good our argument. This has been done amply and triumphantly by men every way qualified for the task. There is no space at present for entering upon any controversy of that kind, in regard to a single text; nor do I think it at all important. I am content to submit the evidence presented, just as it is, direct and plain and broadly diversified and harmonious in all its parts, to the judgment of every serious and candid mind. I shall only add some considerations of a general character, which, in my opinion, conspire to show that the true and proper meaning of the scriptures on this subject is what it has been supposed to be in the trinitarian argument.

1. If it be not so, it cannot be denied, *that the scriptures are so constructed as to be most easily misunderstood, in a case of the very deepest interest to religion.* It is in vain to say, that they lend no apparent support to the trinitarian doctrine. Not only in one or two passages, or by a few incidental or ambiguous references, do they seem to countenance that doctrine; but they so express themselves, that it is continually forced into view, and the plain and simple reader can hardly fail to be carried away with the impression that they mean to hold it up as the very truth of God. It meets him under all different aspects, and is found incorporated, *to all appearance*, with the entire scheme of the gospel. And is it, after all, an error? How strange, that a revelation so much at war in its professions with the sin of idolatry, should yet be so constructed as to put men in danger of the most disastrous idolatry ever known in the world!

2. *What might have been apprehended in this case, has actually taken place.* Trinitarianism has been the general faith of the church in all ages. It has been attempted, indeed, to prove that it crept into the church after the apostolic times, and that the first christians did not embrace it. But, even on that supposition, how is the accomplishment of such a momentous change to be accounted for, without admitting that the sacred scriptures are so constructed as to encourage and sustain the dreadful heresy, that so soon and so universally obliterated every trace of the primitive creed? And shall we imagine, that God has left the christian world, to this day, to labor under a fundamenatal mistake in regard to the revelation which he condescended to make through the gospel, and to be given up to a wretched idolatry by the use of the gospel itself—with only the partial exceptions that stand out from the general desolation, like the oases, or green islets of the desert, where the power of Unitarianism has been felt?

3. *The theology in which the trinitarian doctrine is denied, has always shown itself unstable, and its tendency has always been downward, in a direction towards pure deism.* Arianism, which admits the pre-existence of Christ, and takes in its proper sense what is said of his attributes and works and worship, would seem to be at first view the natural form for that theology to assume. And that form it has assumed in ages past; but it has been constrained to throw it off, on account of the unmanageable difficulties

with which it was attended. Socinianism, though a vastly lower ground, has been found equally untenable. It has given place, accordingly, to Humanitarianism, in which Christ appears as a mere man, born of human parents in a natural manner, and bearing only a prophet's commission for the reformation of the world. This scheme again, as might be expected, betrays a constant tendency to get clear of its own difficulties, by discarding the idea of revelation altogether, and sinking into mere Rationalism or Infidelity. This is the consummation to which the Unitarianism of Germany has actually come; and from the depths of this horrible abyss of night, it is now heard proudly vaunting its own powers of *reason*, and rejoicing in its marvellous *light*.

4. *To sustain the pretensions of the unitarian creed, resort is had to expedients that tend to unsettle all the foundations of Christianity.* If it were in the bible, one would think it should need no great art to draw it thence. But it is truly astonishing what an array of criticism and ingenious interpretation has been put in requisition, for the purpose of making the scriptures speak on this subject, as it has been supposed they ought to speak. Daring liberties with the text—loose principles of exposition—crude notions about inspiration—irreverent views of sacred truth, have been the consequence. Unitarianism in this way puts all truth in danger. That this is its proper tendency, appears from all its history. In Germany we behold the tendency fairly acted out.

5. *In order to uphold Unitarianism, it is necessary not only to set aside the trinitarian view of the person of Christ, but also to reject the whole scheme of religion of which it is a part.* That view is intimately and essentially connected with other doctrines of great consequence, which, like itself, appear to be taught in the scriptures. It is not enough, therefore, to combat with this alone; the controversy must be extended over the whole field of theology, and the cause cannot be said to be gained, till every part of what is termed the *Evangelical system* is fairly disproved. This doctrine is a constituent part of that system, and cannot be taken away without overthrowing the whole. Whatever of testimony there is, then, in the bible to the truth of that system in any of its parts, it must be regarded as lending corroboration to this particular doctrine. Unitarianism, accordingly, is put upon the task of bringing in another gospel throughout.

6. *In doing this, great darkness, and confusion, and want of meaning, are introduced into the sacred volume.* The typical character of the old dispensation is in a great manner given up, and thus the connection between Judaism and Christianity is made to disappear. They are no longer parts of one grand scheme; and the strange constitution of the Jewish church is left an unexplained and inexplicable riddle. The prophecies of the Old Testament, too, lose a great part of their significancy, and become wrapped in darkness, or else shorn of strength. In the New Testament, a constant perplexity is made to hang around all that pertains to the character of Jesus Christ. The hypothesis adapts itself only to *some* representations that occur on this subject, while *others* are not met by it at all. It does not show itself adequate at all to a full comprehension of the different facts to be explained. It fails to bring them together in any harmonious and consistent scheme. Then a like unsatisfactoriness is found to characterize it, when it undertakes to explain the nature of Christ's mediatorial work, and the character of his salvation. The representations of scripture are not adequately met. Not only *language*, but *things* also, are made to appear without

meaning. The sacred writers are found expressing themselves continually in a way, that is either unmeaning altogether, or grossly inaccurate, or extravagant in the extreme.

7. *The unitarian scheme of religion does not adequately meet man's spiritual wants.* The bible professes to make known a salvation commensurate with the utmost necessities of our nature. It cannot be interpreted aright, therefore, unless regard be had to the correspondency thus established between its truth and these necessities. That truth will always prove itself, by a practical development of its power in the human soul. Now, Unitarianism, I affirm, has not power to relieve the spiritual wants of men, as they are delineated in the bible, and as they are felt by the awakened spirit itself. It cannot take away the conscience of guilt. It cannot bring the soul into any sensible contact with God. It cannot give it power to lean upon Him, to rejoice in Him, or to hold free and confiding fellowship with Him. It cannot rescue the soul from the power of earthly affections, or give it refuge from the cares and fears and sorrows of the present life; and it contains no resources equal to the exigencies of a dying bed. It turns the sinner over upon himself for righteousness, and light, and strength, and peace; and in so doing, leaves him destitute of all. Hence it has always happened, that conviction of sin and spiritual want has of itself been sufficient to convince such as have had it, of the vanity of this system of religion. Let a man wake to the knowledge of himself, and of his relations to God, and he will turn himself some other way for rest.

8. *Unitarianism is found wanting, when tried by its influence upon character.* The motives which it presents to men, for the purpose of engaging them to a holy life, are comparatively weak and inefficient. Its standard of righteousness itself is low. The views which it takes of sin and of the divine character, are not such as are suited to put the soul upon any very diligent effort after sanctification. That in which holiness especially consists, a right frame of heart toward God, is in a great measure lost sight of, and an attention to the social virtues is set forth as the chief part of religion. The tendency of the system is not certainly to promote humility, or self-denial, or spirituality, or zeal in the service of God, or heavenly-mindedness. And when we appeal to actual life, this defect is clearly seen. According to all history and observation, Unitarianism is not by any means so well adapted to produce a character of piety and devotion, as the system to which it stands opposed. When we look for piety as it has exhibited itself in such men as Augustine, and Luther, and Calvin, and Owen, and Baxter, and Howe, and Leighton, and Pascal, and Spener, and Francke, and Wesley, we must turn our eyes in a quite different direction to find it.

9. *Unitarianism is found to be, under every form, a lifeless and inefficient system.* The religion of the gospel is represented to be ever active and diffusive. When planted in the soul, it grows there and gathers power continually, working itself out into the whole life. It stretches itself abroad, also, in benevolent interest to all around, and seeks to subdue all things to itself, and to pervade them with its power. In this respect, it is like leaven hid in meal, which by its own nature cannot be at rest, but works and diffuses its power abroad, till the whole is leavened. I know of no more certain characteristic of true religion, as delineated in the word of God. But where do we find this vital energy lodged in the faith of Unitarians? It is notoriously inoperative and destitute of strength. We have just seen its want of efficacy in the formation of individual character. Its insufficiency for promoting the

growth of the church and the salvation of the world, is equally complete. What has it done in this way in ages past? What is it doing now? Where is its zeal for the conversion of men to God, its enlarged schemes of benevolence, its missionary enterprises? But why do I talk of these things, when even the vitality that is wanted for its own preservation is not found in the system? Its tendency is always to decay. It dies, even while it seems to live. The principle of continuance is not in it; much less, the elements of growth.\*

I shall conclude with urging upon all the high importance of their having a true understanding of the doctrine concerning Jesus Christ, so as to know the power of it in their own experience, and so as to make it live in their lives.

Is there truth in the revelation of the gospel? Is it a fact, that a movement so high and vast and mighty as that which it represents, has taken place on the part of Heaven for the restoration of this lost world to holiness and life? Is it a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that God has so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life? Has there been a real transaction, comprehending in itself all that is magnificent and stirring in the idea of Christianity? Is there something more than a notion, a dreamy speculation, wrapt up in the mighty theme of this religion? Then, surely, it is worthy of all the regard that can be given it by any of the children of men. It is meet that it should absorb all other interests. What are the largest interests of time—the cares of wealth, the pursuits of ambition, the politics of nations—in comparison with the world of glory that is here unfolded to view? One would think that there was power enough here to put all the mass of human society in motion. And it would be so if the truths involved in religion were at all apprehended as facts; but we have the most melancholy evidence in every direction that they are not so apprehended.

Be it deeply impressed upon every mind, that a mere assent of the understanding to any of the doctrines of christianity, is a matter of but small account. "The words which I speak unto you," said Christ on one occasion, "they are spirit, and they are life." No doctrine of the gospel can be said to be fairly apprehended, till it is made a thing of actual experience, directly or indirectly, in the history of the soul. Every doctrine has a bearing upon character and feeling and conduct, and must be understood *practically*, if ever it is understood at all. It is perfectly possible, therefore, and it is, alas, dreadfully common, for persons to embrace and hold the trinitarian view of the person of Christ, while yet the dark and dreary desolation of Unitarianism itself continues to reign throughout their spirits. The true doctrine is received, but not discerned. It dwells only as a dead notion in the mind, destitute of all the light, and power, and glory, that should attend it. It has not become incorporated at all with the life of the soul, nor developed as a fact in its experience. This is the case in every instance, where the truth is held without being productive of the great fruits of righteousness; where it

\* "The modern history—the fate, and the present actual condition of the doctrine, absurdly called Unitarianism, is quite enough to convince any man of sense that the sceptical argument is a mere sophism, even if he knew nothing of the merits of the question. And this edifying history, and spectacle, does in fact produce a proper effect upon the minds of men, and does actually seal the theological argument, as it ought. Is Unitarianism Christianity?—Read the story of its rise in modern times, of its progress, and decay, and look at the meagre phantom as now it haunts the dry places it has retired to!—is this pitiful shadow Christianity?"—SATURDAY EVENING.

puts forth no power to draw off the heart from this present world, and to quicken it in the way of holiness and eternal life. Let no one imagine, then, that he has any proper knowledge of Christ, if that knowledge be not such as takes hold upon the very foundations of his spiritual nature, and exerts a transforming influence upon his character and life. Such power there is in that knowledge when truly possessed. It delivers the soul from darkness and death, and enables it to overcome the world, and to take hold upon eternal life. "This is Eternal Life.... it is written.... that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Why should any be willing to cheat themselves here with notions and fancies for the great realities of religion? Why should the soul not enter into the experience of this great and glorious thing, instead of amusing itself with the mere shadows and unsubstantial forms of truth?

And as the doctrine we have been contemplating cannot be rightly apprehended, except by coming into contact with the interior life of the soul, so neither can it be properly defended against the objections and reproaches of its enemies, except by being lived out before them in its practical power. It is, after all, a comparatively small matter to maintain the cause of christianity, or of any of its doctrines, by argument addressed to the understanding in abstract form, however sufficient and convincing it may be in itself. It is when the truth is made to live in the lives of those who hold it, that it becomes clothed with its highest authority in the view of others. A single holy man or woman, in whom the power of christianity reigns with transforming and sanctifying influence from day to day—in whose spirit, and conversation, and walk, the great lessons of the gospel are exemplified, and its great doctrines exhibited in their practical operation—is a more persuasive argument of the truth of religion than the most labored defence of it that ever was drawn up with the pen. It is by this kind of exhibition, rather than by any other, that the truths of christianity have ever asserted their proper power in the world. They have sustained themselves in all ages amidst the errors, and prejudices, and corrupt passions of men, and perpetuated themselves in their original form from generation to generation, not so much because they have always had acute and powerful spirits engaged for their defence, as because they have been lodged in the souls of believers as a part of their own living experience, of which they had no power to divest themselves, and have stood out in their lives as facts, against which disputation could be of no avail. As this remark holds of the christian religion as a whole, so is it good also in regard to each characteristic doctrine belonging to it. There is such a thing as causing them to stand out as it were in a living and tangible form, and making the power of them a thing to be felt. Thus may the true doctrine concerning Christ be made manifest to the consciences of men around, with a more irresistible light than in any other way, when it has entered truly into the experience of the soul, and been felt in its adaptation to all the spiritual wants of the soul; when in this way it becomes incorporated with the believer's interior life, and from thence shows itself forth in the spirit which he breathes, and in the whole habit of his daily living, by the production of such fruits of peace, confidence, courage, zeal, disinterested benevolence, victory over the powers of the flesh and this present world, heavenly-mindedness, and joy in the Holy Ghost, as cannot fail to attest the mighty power of God in the faith out of which they grow. How this argument speaks from the character and life of Paul!



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

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No. 6.      PITTSBURGH, NOVEMBER, 1832.      Vol. I.

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**SERMON VI.**

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**THE WICKED ARE WITHOUT PEACE,**

ILLUSTRATED BY THE VIEWS AND STATE OF INFIDELS AND OTHERS.

ISAIAH 57:21. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

THE term WICKED is very comprehensive. It includes every one who has not made his peace with God on the plan of the Gospel,—or who has not been regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. And the most charitable view of our fellow men will on this ground compel us to acknowledge, that the wicked form a large majority of our species. The characters of the wicked are greatly diversified; some are openly moral, others are profligate;—some are the ornaments, others are the pests of society;—some are plunged into the grossest errors, others are right in speculation, and only wrong in the state of their hearts; but taken altogether, they form an immense multitude of people, and they all lie under this denunciation from Heaven, that they are strangers to peace. The assertion of the text is made in the most solemn manner. It has not the form, but it has all the solemnity of an oath. The Prophet not only felt himself as in the presence of God, when he wrote this assertion, but he introduces God himself as delivering it. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

My design is to illustrate the text, by the application of it to a variety of characters, and to shew that they **MUST BE STRANGERS TO PEACE.**

Peace, in the meaning of the text, is the privilege of the Christian;—the legacy which our Saviour left his disciples. It is the tranquil state of the soul, which is stayed on God, and which loves the law of God. This peace can arise from nothing but the truths of the scriptures, as applied by the teaching of the Divine Spirit. When the Spirit sanctifies the soul, and gives it a near view of the perfections of God, as revealed in the bible, and as seen in the face of Christ;—when the whole character of God is presented as near, and not as a God afar off;—and when the soul throws itself on the promises of the new covenant, then it is that it possesses that peace, which constitutes the inheritance of the Christian. This peace never can exist in an unregenerate heart. The first participation of it, in the young convert, fills him with the conviction, and brings him to the confession, that he never felt peace before;—that the ease and security of the sinner, had no resemblance to the peace of the Christian. As a Christian he now looks at the promises as his own;—the omnipotence of God is his guarantee forever, and the short afflictions which are permitted to mingle in his cup on earth, shall work out for him an eternal weight of glory.

To produce a real peace, man must have an assurance that things will be well with him forever. To be in comfort to-day would not do, if the scene might change to-morrow. Or, could he be assured of his prosperity during his life on earth, whilst an eternity of misery might await him beyond the grave, he must be a stranger to peace.

We shall first apply the proposition of the text to the mere *speculative believer*, whose heart has never been regenerated by divine grace. This man may possess the hope of divine favor, or he may not. If he possess a hope, it is one which is not supported by the bible, and which will not bear a scriptural investigation. If he read the scriptures, he will find that his faith, his prayers, his humility, his love of holiness, his desire after communion with God, and his conflicts with the evils of his heart, are not such as belong to the children of God, and of course that his hope is not built on a good foundation. If on the other hand, the speculative believer has no hope of his present acceptance with God, he must quiet his conscience by the promise of future repentance. But there are so many things to weaken the faith of that promise, that it cannot divest his mind of all uneasiness. Whatever period he may have fixed upon for his future repentance, death may come before that period arrives or the period may find him without any resolutions

for the fulfilment of his promise. He cannot but know that a similar procrastination has ruined thousands, and he is probably conscious to himself, that he has already passed some periods, which he had solemnly fixed upon, as the times of his becoming religious. In this case then the man has much which ought to disturb his peace.

But it is my intention to apply this subject principally to professed *unbelievers*. Much has been written and published to prove that the bible is the word of God, and of course, that the infidel is in a dangerous error. It is not my intention to enter into the general argument on this subject, but simply to maintain and enforce this truth, that the infidel must be a stranger to peace. This seems to be an appropriate remedy in his case. It was to unite peace with those enjoyments which the bible condemns, that he became an infidel, and could he be convinced, that the rejection of the bible will not calm his fears, and that infidelity, without producing peace, only leads him into greater danger, and removes him further from hope, on the supposition that the bible should prove true, it might make a salutary impression on his mind. At any rate, if the only object, for which he became an infidel is to be lost, and if the life of an infidel must be filled with perturbation as often as he thinks of the future, these considerations ought to deter a wise man from embracing the infidel creed. The great cause of secret dread to the infidel is, that he can have no assurance, that he will not find that very state of things in eternity, which the bible describes. He can have no assurance that there is no hell in eternity. An atheist, declaiming about chance making the world, and about the inconceivable power of chance, was greatly confounded by some one asking him, if such a chance as he described might not be able to make a hell. It is true the infidel may not have the same assurance of hell as if he believed the bible, yet when all hope from the bible is given up, the mere possibility, and much more, the probability, that that book may prove true, is a terrible thought. The sword suspended over the guest by a single hair, had no certainty of falling, but the consideration that if it should fall, death would be inevitable, was sufficient to destroy all his enjoyment. The sword suspended over the head of the infidel, threatens the death of the soul, and neither atheist nor deist can know that this sword will not fall.

The first class of infidels which I shall notice, consists of those who have rejected the bible without knowing by what evidence the bible is supported. They did not doubt the truth or oppose

the claims of Christianity, till they found that Christianity was opposed to their lives; and the best reason they can now give for their unbelief is, that they had heard of some great men who had rejected the bible as a system of priestcraft. It is evident at first view, that these men can have no pretensions to peace. Every thing with them is in the dark;—they know not whither they are going; they follow their leaders, and if their leaders are ruined, they will be ruined also. Besides they know not what induced their leaders to become unbelievers. It may have been prejudice, or the strictness of the bible in condemning their conduct. Here is certainly a bad security for things of infinite importance. If such men are without alarm, their security does not arise from their creed. It must arise from something else. Perhaps they are banishing all thought;—their days have been days of prosperity and health;—they are rejoicing in their youth, and the days of darkness they have never considered. Have they tried their principles on a sick bed? Have they found them sufficient for the hours of adversity;—for the approach of death and the coming of the Judge?

But perhaps it may be thought that there are no such infidels as I have described, and that such trifling, where the highest interests of man are concerned, is a folly too great for human nature. I hesitate not to say that there are many infidels who take their creeds on trust, and who have no better reason to silence the voice of conscience, and the misgivings of a dying hour, than that some philosophers have believed that religion was a dream. Some years ago, when professed infidelity was more common in this country than at present, I have no doubt that nine out of ten, or indeed ninety-nine out of an hundred of our infidels, were of this description. One of the most distinguished infidels who ever lived in our country, has given, as I think, sufficient proof in his writings lately published, that even he had taken his creed upon trust. When speaking on politics he was not the same man, as when he spoke on religion. In his religious discussions there is a crudeness, not to say a coarseness, and a want of all that plausibility which his pen spread over every other topic, which showed the man to be dealing in borrowed coin, and that he had not made himself familiar with his subject. But we have evidence to the same point in the numerous confessions of infidels who had never examined their creeds, and in the many cases of those, who, when at last brought to the examination, have renounced their creeds and professed Christianity.

But I believe it is not only true, that many infidels take their creed on trust, I also believe that such infidels are generally less liable to the alarms of conscience than any others. It is difficult, indeed to form an estimate of the hearts of those who are living under the power of sin. They pass through many scenes of anguish and bitterness under the mask of levity. They have a laughter in which the heart is sorrowful. If Col. Gardiner, was hailed by the whole circle of his acquaintance as a happy man, when he would willingly have exchanged conditions with a dog, we can easily believe, that there are at this time many deceitful appearances among the wicked;—many minds apparently tranquil, who are nevertheless like the troubled sea when its waters cannot rest. We only know the state of the wicked, when the intensity of misery becomes such as to take off all disguise, and force the sufferer, to disclose the anguish of his soul. Such disclosures seem to be most frequently made, by those infidels who are most employed in the investigation of the subjects, and who stand forth as the champions of the cause. Volney, Voltaire, Paine, and Gibbon are melancholy examples of the state of mind to which infidelity brings its votaries in the hour of danger or of death.

Hume is the boast of modern unbelievers. They tell us that he spent his last moments in diverting himself and his friends with jests and witticisms, about the river of death and his passage into the invisible world. But in this there is something so forced—so hypocritical, and so unnaturally profane, that the representation strikes me with as much horror, as perhaps any thing I have ever heard of a dying infidel. There is no creed which can transform death into an object of merriment or sport. If death were an eternal sleep, it would forever separate us from all the friends and things which we have known;—and this consideration alone would fill the mind with sobriety and tenderness. The man who, in any view, can make a jest of death, must be made of different stuff from the rest of men. Such a man, as an eloquent writer has expressed it, would be prepared to smile on Nineveh in ruins; to hail with delight the view of Lisbon destroyed by an earthquake; and to congratulate Pharaoh on his overthrow in the Red Sea. But there is something in this statement, so unnatural and improbable, as to force the conviction that it does not contain the whole truth, and the account of Hume's nurse is necessary to explain that of his biographer. The nurse tells us that when company was present he forced an appearance of levity and merriment, but

that when alone, he sunk into gloom and trembled till the bed shook under him.

The cause why reflecting infidels are most liable to the alarms of conscience, is, that infidelity is not founded in reason. It is founded in feeling or prejudice, and places its principal security in the banishment of all thought. We have much infidelity in the present day, and it is altogether supported by a kind of irreligious thoughtlessness. It lives in the corrupted and licentious passions of the heart, and is proof against all the arguments of the pulpit and the press; for as it was not reasoned up, it is not to be reasoned down. More than thirty years have passed since any infidel has dared to write a book, but yet infidelity dares to live. The last contest drove the deist so completely out of the field, that we fondly hoped, as the argument was at an end, so the cause of infidelity would sink into oblivion. In this hope we have been lamentably disappointed. Infidels still hold their creeds and cherish their vices by them, although they prove at every step, the truth of the prophet's declaration, that there is no peace to the wicked.

The principal cause why the infidel finds no peace, is, that his arguments are not calculated to lead the mind to any satisfactory conclusion. They are arguments calculated to disturb the peace of others, but not to confirm his own: they pull every thing down and build nothing up. If the infidel could prove all that he aims at proving, he should still be as far from heaven as when he set out. The infidel argument does not aim at proving, that the principal things contained in the bible are not true, *but only*, that we have not sufficient evidence to believe them.

There is, indeed, one set of unbelievers, who would place the controversy on grounds somewhat different, if we were obliged to attend to them. These are the men who assume to themselves wisdom sufficient to govern the universe, and to "rejudge the justice" of their Maker. They tell us what sin is, and how far God ought to punish it, and what severity of penalty is necessary to support the honor of a law, and of a government which maintains the order and happiness of more worlds than we have numbers to calculate. It is generally supposed, that if any thing we are acquainted with requires the full exercise of infinite wisdom, it is the adjustment of the moral government of the universe, as this is the great and delicate object which lies nearest the happiness of the whole moral creation. But when men tell us that they are wise enough to do all this, whilst their

acquaintance think them not wise enough to govern a State, or even a family, their pretensions are entitled to but little regard.

And as to the infidels of every other description, I repeat the assertion, that could they prove conclusively, all they attempt to prove, it would only show that we have not sufficient evidence to believe the bible, not that the substance of what is contained in the bible is untrue. Some of the substantial things contained in the bible are comprised in the following facts;—that God governs the world in righteousness;—that man has violated the divine law;—that there will be a judgment, and that there is a heaven and a hell,—and that the death and resurrection of our Saviour, furnishes the only hope of escaping the punishment of sin. Some of these facts are of such a nature, that, when once announced to the world, they take so firm a hold of the conscience that the impression can never be eradicated. These are also the principal facts of revelation which disturb the peace of a guilty world and induce men to become infidels. Now the question is, whether there is sufficient power in the infidel argument to secure the mind against the annoyance of these facts. Suppose for example, that Mr. Hume could prove that human testimony could not make a miracle credible,—would this prove that God was not righteous?—that sin was not dangerous?—or would it in fact prove that a miracle had not been performed? To say that we have not sufficient evidence to warrant the belief of a thing, is not saying that the thing itself is untrue. The circumstance that human testimony is too faithless to support the belief of a miracle, corroborates the fact that man is a sinner, but certainly does not prove that God will not punish sin.

If Mr. Hume could prove that human testimony could not establish the truth of our Saviour's resurrection, still the resurrection might be true notwithstanding this deficiency of human testimony. The truth is, there is but one way of getting clear of that array of facts which the bible presents, and that is by what is called proving the negative. If we would disprove the resurrection, we must bring our witnesses from the time and place of its supposed occurrence, and if we would disprove the existence of a heaven or a hell we must bring our witnesses from the other world.

The Jewish rulers at the time of the resurrection, seem to have attempted a more direct course than our modern infidels. They tried to prove by witnesses, who, however, were asleep at the time, that the disciples stole the body. This was not going

far enough; it only accounted for some appearances at the sepulchre, but did not contradict the report of his appearance afterwards alive. To have produced the crucified body would have proved the negative, and at once have overthrown the Christian system. And the fact that they did not, and could not do this, considering how much they had at stake, and how fully that circumstance would have refuted every thing the apostles could say, affords the strongest indirect evidence, that the resurrection was indeed true. Mr. Hume's argument from first to last, goes on the supposition that it is impossible for God to make a revelation to man. If this impossibility could be proved, the proof would be altogether impertinent, as it relates to the sinner's peace. That impossibility of a revelation would not prove that God did not hold the sinner accountable for all his conduct, and that he was not in danger of everlasting ruin. Such is the ground on which the infidel must be left after all his efforts to subvert the scriptures. Awful possibilities, and even probabilities stand around him, which he has no means of getting out of his way. He must obtain ease of mind, if he does obtain it, by not thinking on the subject of religion at all. And if a day must come which will force the subject upon him, he must bear the solemnities of that day as he can. Perhaps on his death bed, he may say with Gibbon, that the future is all impenetrable darkness,—or he may tremble and shake his bed like Hume,—or he may blaspheme and curse his associates and his day, like Voltaire. "In the morning he may say, would to God it were even, and in the evening, would to God it were morning,"—or he may wish, as an infidel once did, that he were already in hell that he might know the worst.

We have hitherto attended principally to the system of Mr. Hume, but the result is the same on the examination of every infidel system. Gibbon's argument consisted in the supposition of five secondary causes, which assisted the propagation of Christianity by natural means. These secondary causes were only calculated to disprove or weaken the force of that miracle which enabled twelve fishermen to spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. There can be no doubt that the manner of propagating Christianity, when fairly stated, contains an overwhelming argument for its truth. Yet if this one argument were weakened, or even entirely set aside, ten thousand other arguments remain, wholly independent of this, and abundantly sufficient of themselves to prove the truth of the religion. One is here disposed to wonder, that infidels should ever have thought of congratulation, or of taking comfort to themselves



from any thing that Gibbon has written. The infidel cause never appears weaker than in the contemplation of this case. What would it avail to set aside one argument for the bible, if ten thousand others were left? If a prisoner were bound by ten thousand independent chains, his breaking one, when he saw no possible way of breaking the rest, would be no great matter of triumph. But the case shows one mortifying truth, that is, that men do not reason in religion as they do about their temporal concerns. If our great enemy found it as difficult to cheat men out of their souls, as a villain would find it to cheat them out of a little property, the kingdom of darkness would not multiply subjects as it does.

The supposed *contradictions* of the bible, constitute the only remaining source of infidel argument. But could these contradictions be fairly made out, yet there might be so many suppositions to account for them, that they would afford no satisfactory conclusion to the unbeliever; as they might have arisen from innumerable circumstances connected with the transmission of the revelation to us. We have now before us the whole groundwork of the infidel cause, and if we except the allegations of those who presume to direct their Maker in forming his own government, it is evident that, if the infidel could maintain all his positions, could prove all he attempts to prove, his cause would still be desperate: he might still find the same state of things in eternity which the bible describes.

But justice to this subject requires us to say, that infidels have failed in proving what they attempted to prove, and they appear to be conscious of that failure. Infidels generally who have written on the subject, have given up the contest after the first blow. Some, indeed, have carried on a kind of skirmishing warfare, during the whole of their lives, but when any infidel has made a set attack, and has been fairly opposed, he has very seldom returned a second time to the field of combat. Gibbon and Paine never answered Watson. Hume said he at one time intended to answer Campbell, but afterwards laid aside that intention. Mr. Hume did not tell us why he declined answering, but I presume, every one acquainted with the controversy will easily discover his reason. Had Hume given a fair and logical answer, such as he knew the world expected from his talents, he would have shown that his principles unsettled all the grounds of human belief. Long before he could have invalidated the evidence of the New Testament, he must have destroyed the authority of all other history. He must also have destroyed all

reasoning from cause and effect, and reduced the world to general scepticism. Indeed nothing could have been more pleasing to the friends of religion, than to have seen an answer from either Hume or Gibbon to their opponents, and it is hard to conceive how any book could have done as much good to the cause of Christianity, as such answers from such men would have done. Suppose for a moment that Gibbon had replied to Watson. After all the facts were set right, and the misrepresentations cleared away, what would have become of five secondary causes? Or how would Mr. Hume, after Campbell's comments, have maintained his distinction between a contrary experience and a different experience, as in the case of the king of Siam?—a distinction of vital importance to his whole cause. Indeed the true reason why the infidel dislikes to come a second time to the contest, is, that the principal strength and plausibility of his book consists in the coloring of his facts. The Christian controversy, embracing a wide field of history, affords ample scope for such coloring, but when that coloring is brought to the proper test, the whole cause is exhausted.

It would illustrate the weakness of the infidel cause, could we give a history of the controversy, and of the arguments produced in opposition to Christianity, from our Saviour's time to the present day. The unbelieving Jews opposed Christianity, because they thought it would overturn the authority of Moses. Modern infidels can see that the Christian dispensation gives the best confirmation to that of Moses, and that the two dispensations must stand or fall together. For three hundred years after the resurrection of Christ, infidels never attempted to deny the miracles of the New Testament, but asserted that they had miracles also in favor of heathenism. No unbeliever would now think of supporting himself on that ground. The silversmith at Ephesus, charged Paul with preaching the doctrine, that those things which were made with hands were no gods. This proved a most popular argument, and threw the whole city into commotion. Such an argument would have little weight in a large city in the present day.

Such are the varying grounds on which our religion has been opposed;—and such the arguments on which infidels of former days ventured the salvation of their souls. The souls ventured on this ground are now lost forever, and the time will come, when the infidel arguments of the present day, will not be considered as a whit safer than those which have heretofore occasioned so much ruin. There is one circumstance which throws

more than suspicion on the whole infidel cause;—it is built on principles directly the reverse of those which govern human nature. The infidel tells us that a revelation is so wonderful, that human testimony cannot make it credible. History informs us that the whole heathen world lived under the belief, that God was making communications of his will every day, and that wise men were discovering those communications. It was this belief, and nothing else, which gave the soothsayer and the oracle, the power of stopping the march of armies, and controlling the affairs of the world. The infidel may say, this was a superstitious belief. I answer, it was the belief of human nature, and of that very human nature which they are now attempting to fortify against the threatenings of the word of God. This proneness to believe in communications from heaven, is a principle which the infidel cannot eradicate, even from his own bosom, and which, in spite of his pride, makes him tremble on the verge of the grave.

There is another class of mén, to whom the declaration of the text may be applied,—men who do not call themselves infidels, but whom we cannot consider as Christians, and who appear to be as remote from peace, as any errorists in the world. These are the UNITARIANS. The Unitarian appears to me to place himself on a more precarious ground, and in a situation more liable to disturbance, than even the infidel himself; for, after the bible is admitted to be the word of God, I think it more difficult to maintain the Unitarian hypothesis, with any thing like a common sense consistency, than to maintain any other error.

The Unitarian admits the bible to be a divine revelation. This at once excites expectation. A revelation supposes miracles;—miracles are a violation of the laws of nature,—and God would not disturb the order of the universe, to make a revelation to man, unless something very important was to be communicated. Curiosity, or even anxiety, is here worked up to the highest pitch;—man is about to receive an important communication from his Maker. But all this expectation is raised to be disappointed; for as soon as the Unitarian applies his rules of interpretation to the bible, it becomes a revelation which reveals nothing. I hesitate not to say, that those rules of interpretation which can expunge the divinity of our Saviour from the bible, can expunge from it any other truth. Let such rules of interpretation be once admitted, and we can give any meaning, or no meaning at all, to that book, or to any other book, just as it suits our pleasure. The orthodox have shown, with the fullest evi-

dence, that the Scriptures have given to our Saviour the name of God in its fullest and most awful sense, even in that sense in which it implies self-existence, and in which therefore it cannot be communicated to any creature. The Scriptures also give him all the attributes of God;—all the works of God, even the creation of the world, and the management of the last judgment; and also the worship of God. Now if we have any understanding of any thing, that being who has all the names,—all the attributes,—all the works,—and all the worship of God, must be God. We are supposed to have the knowledge of God, before we receive a revelation from him. But how do we get that knowledge? Paul tells us, it is from the works of creation;—he that built all things is God. But our Saviour made all things, therefore he is God. Now after what the bible has said in setting forth the divinity of Jesus Christ, if that divinity can be expunged from the bible, then any other truth can be expunged from the bible. Dr. Priestly says, that the New Testament, and the mission of our Saviour, were intended to reveal the resurrection of the body. I have no doubt the resurrection is plainly taught in the New Testament, and yet I have as little doubt, that Hymeneus and Philetus, when they denied the resurrection, could support themselves by as good arguments as the Unitarians can, in denying the divinity of our Saviour. Indeed, it would seem that the arguments and mode of reasoning in both cases were the same:—they consisted in resolving into a figure, every thing which they did not choose to understand in any other way.

But here is another difficult matter for the Unitarian to account for. They suppose that the notion of our Saviour's divinity, first arose from a blunder of the orthodox party, in understanding literally what they ought to have taken figuratively. But then the matter did not stop here; for by taking other things literally, which the Unitarians consider as figures, they have formed a whole system of doctrines, all the parts of which must stand or fall together. For the doctrines of the atonement, human depravity, regeneration, and in fact, the whole orthodox system, according to Unitarians, has come out in the same way, by understanding literally what ought to be considered as figures. And, what is certainly more wonderful than all the rest, is, that Dr. Priestly, and other Unitarians of high standing, have confessed, that this system, which arose from a continual tissue of blunders, has been found more efficient in promoting sound morals and genuine piety, than what they call the true doctrines of the Scriptures. Now this is certainly, too wonderful for belief. To promote good morals and piety, was certainly

the design of God, in giving a revelation. And can these men suppose, that the Divine Being would have failed of his design in some degree, had not the blundering of the orthodox made the system more effectual for the divine purpose than was originally intended? All this is deduced by fair inference from the Unitarian scheme; but to believe a scheme which authorizes such consequences is evidently a matter of some difficulty.

But perhaps it may be said that the infidel or Unitarian, in rejecting the entire Bible, or its leading doctrines, as not supported by sufficient evidence, is acting on the same principle on which we reject Mohammedanism. But the cases are materially different. We receive the bible as an authenticated revelation, which, as such, will set aside the pretensions of every religion supported by inferior evidence. And this, it appears to me, is the only mode of deciding the question of a divine revelation, consistently with the tranquillity of the human mind. That readiness with which mankind naturally receive supposed communications from the Deity, as manifested by the experience of the whole heathen world, must prove that God formed man for religious direction, and intended to give him a revelation. If infinite wisdom was concerned in the formation of man at first, that proneness on the part of man to receive a revelation, makes it more than probable that a true revelation is somewhere to be found. And as the evidence of the bible is incontestibly superior to that of any other system, we can then rely on the bible to silence the claims of every imposture, as well as to direct us to future happiness. And this I conceive to be the safest mode of deciding the question of a divine revelation. The Christian believes that if mankind would act on the plan of examining all the religions in the world, and choosing the best: the whole world would soon settle down upon the Christian faith. The infidel must believe, that if mankind should honestly examine all the religions in the world, they would as honestly reject them all. On this point, the suffrage of human nature is against the infidel; for all nations have chosen some religion, and all enlightened nations have chosen religions supposed to be founded on some form of divine revelation. And for my part, when I behold the avidity with which the most enlightened nations of the heathen world, received the pretended communications of oracles and diviners, I feel convinced that if man was not made to receive a revelation from his Maker, he was made to be the sport of superstition, and to live and die without peace.

But there is another difference between our rejection of Mohammedanism, and the infidel's rejection of the bible. Mohammed makes no important addition to what the light of nature teaches. On the other hand, the bible not only confirms all that is taught by the light of nature, but supplies those things in which the light of nature, as a religion for fallen man, is evidently deficient. The light of nature was the religion of man in a state of innocence: in a fallen state, man must have a revelation to teach him the certainty, and the manner of obtaining the pardon of sin. By rejecting the bible, therefore, the infidel rejects the only rational hope for a sinner, and throws himself into a state of darkness and fearful anticipation. The common notions of mankind respecting religion will still remain. The inevitable distinction between right and wrong, and that instinctive something which naturally arises in the human mind—takes hold of a moral government, and points man to a judgment to come, will give dreadful annoyance to a mind not supported by the hopes of the gospel.

How unavailing, then, for the infidel to prove, even if he could prove it, that we have not sufficient evidence to believe the bible. If we had not sufficient evidence for the bible, yet all would be dark without the Bible. If we had not sufficient evidence for the bible, still the worst things threatened in the bible, are also threatened by the light of nature, and the bible presents the only hope of escape. But the mere circumstance of insufficient evidence, is a bad cure for the stings of conscience, as many an infidel has found on a death-bed. Thousands of things are true of which man has no sufficient evidence. The most dreadful things are coming on the world every day, of which the world had no evidence until they did come. And suppose, for the sake of argument, that we had no sufficient evidence for the truth of the bible, yet the judgment, the heaven, the hell, the lake of fire, and the never-dying worm of the bible, might all be solemn truths. If an inhabitant of one of our large cities, at a distance from home, should hear a report that the pestilence which now alarms our country, had invaded the place of his residence, he might trace the report and find it destitute of evidence; but that would not remove his apprehensions; for notwithstanding that want of evidence, the pestilence might be in the neighborhood, and in the dwelling of his family.

But this pestilence itself refutes the infidel. It is a novel destroyer of the human race. It pays no respect to seasons or

climates;—its appearance, its symptoms, its causes, its mode of traveling through the world, and attacking human life, are all new, and human experience is as much against its existence, as against the existence of a miracle; and therefore, according to the highest infidel authority, we ought not, on human testimony, to believe in the existence of such a pestilence. A moment's reflection shows how inefficient such a reasoning would be in quieting the alarms of the public mind in the present case;—and when man is brought to his serious and honest hour, they will prove equally unavailing in quelling the fears of futurity. But I am tired of unraveling the fallacies, and exposing the sandy foundations on which men are resting their eternal interests,—“O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.”

I have brought forward these statements with the design, if possible, of presenting some antidote to infidelity, and of saving some of my fellow creatures from its fatal consequences. Much has been written in the form of direct argument, to prove the truth of the Scriptures. Indeed, if any thing has ever been proved, which depended on human testimony or historical evidence, the miracles and resurrection of our Saviour, and of course, the truth of the Christian religion, has been proved. One who has fully and honestly attended to the evidences on this subject, would as soon expect, that the existence of France as a nation, or of London as a city, should prove a dream, as that the Christian religion should prove a dream. But with all this evidence before the public mind, we have infidels, and the prospect of reclaiming them seems to be almost desperate. I have attempted a new course, and I humbly pray, that God may give it success. I have attempted to fix their attention on the plain fact, that infidelity is a stranger to peace, and that by their creeds they are destroying their own happiness. I have reminded them of this,—that the infidel, after all his devices, subterfuges, and sophisms, has no assurance that there is not a hell, and that he may not be in that hell to-morrow. What will the infidel plead against this statement of the case? Will he pretend to deny it? Will he say that he has an assurance that he will not be in hell to-morrow? Let him show us, if he can, from what part of his creed he derives this assurance. I say, for the sake of himself, and for the sake of thousands who are following the same career of darkness and ruin, let him show us, if he can, from what part of his creed he draws the assurance that he will not be in hell to-morrow. And if he can make no reply to this,

will he still attempt to persuade us that his soul is at peace? and will he persuade others to trust to the same broken reed? The mind of man can never rest upon such ground as this. The brute has no anticipations of the future, and therefore can be contented with its present good. But the soul of man dwells more in the future than in the present, and without some security for things to come it can have no peace,—and this want of peace is the greatest of positive evils,—worse than all the diseases of the body. “The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit, who can bear?” Amen.



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

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No. 7.      PITTSBURGH, DECEMBER, 1832.      Vol. I.

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**SERMON VII.**

—  
BY JAMES HOGE, D. D.,  
OF COLUMBUS, OHIO.  
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**THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE GIFT OF THE  
HOLY SPIRIT.**

JOHN 14:16,17. ....*He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth.*....

To fallen man a Saviour was necessary. Polluted with sin, burdened with guilt, exposed to wrath, he could not save himself. Dead in trespasses and sins he must have died the second death without remedy and without hope, if he had been left to his own resources. How dreadful his condition! Who could make atonement, or bear his punishment! A Saviour was revealed. God laid help on a Mighty One. Jesus, who is the Christ, the Son of God, became the Redeemer. Atonement was made, pardon was bought, life eternal was secured: now God may be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! Equally necessary was the agency of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to Heaven, for the purpose of applying redemption. If the offer of pardon had been made to the apostate descendents of fallen Adam, and peace with God had been proposed through the blood of Jesus Christ, and men had been cast on their own determination; not one would have accepted the propitiation: then it would have seemed that, so far as the salvation of sinners was contemplated, Christ had died in vain. Such was not the purpose of God: it was his fixed design that Jesus should "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied;" that men, through believing in his name, should "lay hold of the hope set before them;" that a "great multitude whom

no man can number," should say, standing before the throne,— "salvation to our God that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb." And to fulfil this design, the Holy Spirit was given. It is his appointed work to illuminate the dark mind, to renew the depraved heart, to sanctify the heirs of salvation, and lead them to glory. And for this great work his power is infinitely sufficient.

This deeply interesting view of the Divine Economy our Saviour repeatedly exhibited to the faith of his disciples, in that most instructive and consolatory discourse which he addressed to them, shortly before his death. He gives a special promise of the Holy Spirit, defines his office, and describes the purposes and results of his agency. "*He (the Father) shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever: even the Spirit of truth.*"

In the gift of the Spirit according to this promise, there is a glorious display of the wisdom and goodness of God. This will be clearly seen, if we consider attentively the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures concerning the CHARACTER, and the OPERATION of the Comforter—the Holy Spirit.

All our knowledge of the existence and nature and office of the Holy Spirit is derived from Revelation. Reason may afford some conclusions respecting the being and attributes of the Great First Cause of all existence, and of all excellence; but the sublime mysteries of the Trinity, including the nature and the office both of the Son and the Spirit; together with the whole scheme of salvation, in regard of the purposes of God, and the manner in which he accomplishes his purposes by the Gospel, cannot be discovered by her limited researches. To the Bible alone we must apply for instruction on this subject; and we should examine the sacred page with unfeigned humility, and unreserved submission to Divine teaching.

I. The character of the Holy Spirit, is fully described in the Holy Scriptures. The passages which speak of this great Agent in the work of renovation are much more numerous and explicit than a cursory reader of the Bible would suppose. In both the Old Testament and the New, and by various modes of representation, the glory of his nature and the rich grace of his influences are placed before our minds, and impressed on our hearts. All these passages cannot now be recited; it will indeed be sufficient for our purpose to embody and present to the inquirer after truth, a portion of that testimony which the Spirit of Truth bears concerning himself, in his own word.

In the Old Testament we read, "The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters. Gen. 1:2. The Spirit of God came on Balaam. Num. 24:2. The Spirit of God hath made me, the breath of the Almighty hath given me life. Job. 33:4. Take not the Spirit from me. Ps. 51:11. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence. Ps. 139:7. The Lord God, and his Spirit hath sent me. Isa. 48:16. The Spirit of the Lord God is on me. Isa. 61:1. Afterwards the Spirit took me up, and brought me in vision by the Spirit of God, into Chaldea. Ez. 11:24."

So likewise we read in the New Testament,—“Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. Matt. 1:20. At the baptism of Jesus, John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. Matt. 3:16. Whosoever shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him; neither in this world, nor in the world to come. Matt. 12:32. Whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. John 14:17. The Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. John 15:26. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:4. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. Acts 5:3,4. The Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them. Acts 13:2. Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers. Acts 20:28. Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the Prophet. Acts 28:25. The Lord (Jehovah) said...Go and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not. Isa. 6:9. Believers are born of the Spirit....born of God. John 1:13. 3:5,8. Now the God of peace, fill you with all joy and peace in believing; that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost. Rom. 15:13. Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God. Rom. 15:19. The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. 2:11. To one is given by the Spirit the word of Wisdom....But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. 1 Cor. 12:8,11. As it is now revealed to his holy prophets and apostles by the Spirit. Eph. 3:5. Christ also hath

once suffered for sins—being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. 1 Pet. 3:18. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches. Rev. 2:7. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. Rev. 22:17.”

Such is the language of the Holy Scriptures concerning the Spirit. I have quoted only some of the most definite passages which may be justly regarded as being appropriate to the subject; many more might be added: indeed, no person will be fully aware of the frequency and precision with which the inspired writers speak of the Holy Spirit, unless he shall have made the attempt to bring together in one view all that is said concerning Him. But let us now see to what distinct conclusions respecting the CHARACTER of the Holy Spirit, we shall be led by this ample testimony.

1. The testimony of the Bible concerning the Spirit is sufficient to convince every candid mind that He possesses *real existence*. Real existence is opposed to imaginary being—ideal representation—the creations of fancy. That the Holy Spirit *is*, that he possesses the attribute of substantial, essential being—that in regard of existence he is what he is represented to be, must be understood and believed by every one who receives, as divinely true, the word of God: must be *felt* by every one who cordially believes divine testimony. Poets have described the Graces, the Virtues, the Arts and Sciences, have endowed them with the attributes of existence, and clothed them with the honors of divinity, and then have sung the praises of these fancied gods in elevated and rapturous verse; but the Holy Ghost *is*—His being as no poetic creation. Priests, themselves involved in heathenish darkness, and practising on the ignorant and superstitious credulity of the besotted multitude, have invented many gods—the names of dead men, or the ideas of unreal beings, good or evil; have enshrined their inventions with gold or silver, or wood, or stone, and have proclaimed these “which be no gods” as the objects of their worship to the deluded nations: but the Holy Ghost *is*, His existence is no invention of priestcraft. Philosophizing heretics of the primitive Church gave the name of existence and the characters of agency to properties and principles and secondary causes, real or imaginary, in the heavens or in the air; by their systems of philosophical Christianity, they not only degraded the morality and perverted the doctrine of Christianity—undeifying the Son, discarding the Spirit, and dethroning in effect the Eternal Father—but they offered to the faith of their disciples an unreal God, and fictitious principles and powers as Aeons in which they might hope for salvation: but the Holy Ghost *is*, and his existence lies at the

basis of our hope of eternal life. Who that has attentively read and considered our limited quotations from the Book of God, can entertain a doubt? It is true that the proposition—the Holy Ghost is, has real existence—is no where directly affirmed, nor is an argument proposed and urged, in order to prove the truth. But neither is the existence of God directly affirmed, nor is a formal method of proving his existence at all instituted in the Bible; many of those great truths of religion which are called fundamental are merely assumed, or implied, or referred to as indubitable truths. So in this case; all that is said respecting the Holy Ghost takes for granted, and necessarily implies real being. On what other principle can we attach any meaning to these declarations:—"The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters.—The Spirit spake—the Spirit descended"? But I forbear; it may be thought that more than is necessary has been said respecting a self-evident truth; yet I fear that much of the unbelief and error that exist in the Church, and much of the declension of which we complain, may be partly owing to the defect of right perceptions and impressions of this truth. Let us believe and feel the power of the truth, *there is a Holy Ghost.*

2. The testimony of the Bible amply proves the *distinct personality* of the Holy Spirit. This means that he has distinct existence and attributes of being, *in himself*, in relation to all other beings. It does not mean, however, that he is distinct, divided, separate from God; for the word, person, or personality, is used in this case in a limited and restrained sense. Nothing is farther from our intention than to affirm that God the Father is one being, the Son another being, and the Spirit a third being. It is only meant—when we say that the Spirit is a distinct person, that he possesses proper personality—that he is in such a sense a person, that *he is*, perceives, determines, wills, acts—is addressed directly, and is spoken of—all with real propriety. It is not human, created personality that we ascribe to him; and we use such language not to explain the mode of his existence; but simply to affirm the truth that is revealed concerning his character, in opposition to those errors which either deny his existence, or degrade his nature. In this sense, then, it is affirmed that the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, is a distinct person, having in himself existence and all the attributes of existence and action. *How* he thus exists cannot be told. But of this truth we have the full proof before us.

Thus, in these and similar places, the Spirit is represented by the personal words I, and He. "The Holy Ghost said, separate *me*

Saul and Barnabas."—"The Spirit of Truth *He* shall testify of me." Now the theory which is advanced in opposition to the personality of the Holy Ghost supposes that by the names Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost, Comforter, Spirit, Spirit of God, Spirit of Truth, we are to understand an attribute or an operation of God. But will any figure of speech justify the use of such language as this—an attribute or an operation of God said, "separate me Saul and Barnabas,"—or, "shall testify of me"? Will such exposition of the Scriptures render them "profitable for doctrine" to plain unlettered men? Truly if the Bible is to be interpreted in this manner, it must have been written for "the learned," and the Romanists do not greatly err when they take it away from the common people.

Personal properties are ascribed to the Holy Ghost. He possesses "mind," "wisdom," "will," "power," "holiness," "goodness," "truth." He performs personal acts. He "speaks," "works," "determines," "gives," "moves," "makes," "divides," "descends," "testifies"—all as having mind, will, power as his own. In a word, personal relations and affections are affirmed concerning this Great Agent in the salvation of men. He is "sent by the Father," "by the Son," "proceedeth from the Father," "is present," or "is taken away." He is "blasphemed," "grieved," "quenched," treated with "despite."

Men do not use such terms and phrases concerning the properties and operations of any created visible being, a fellow man for instance; they would then be deemed unintelligible and absurd; shall we yet suppose that prophets and apostles have thus spoken concerning the infinite attributes, or the glorious operations of the uncreated Supreme God? Do they sometimes speak plainly, yet most sublimely, of the perfections and dispensations of Jehovah, in creation and providence; and at other times, and especially with regard to redemption, involve their doctrine in obscure, distorted, unnatural figure—"strange speech that is hard to be understood"? I cannot so believe. But this imputation must be made against the writers of the Scriptures, and we must deny the plain declarations of the word of God; or we must admit fully, and, without wavering, believe the distinct personality of the Holy Ghost.

3. The testimony of the Bible fully establishes the doctrine that the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, is verily God. That the Holy Spirit is God, has always been the belief of the Church of Christ since the days of the apostles; and this doctrine has been justly

accounted fundamental. If indeed we admit his real existence and distinct personality, it follows, as a necessary consequence, that we admit his supreme divinity. The belief that there is such a being, and that he is a creature, could find no support "in reason or in Scripture."—There is, however, direct evidence, that is worthy of the most minute and careful attention; a very brief view of this evidence must suffice in this place.

The Spirit is called by the name of God. In the Old Testament, the different words of the descriptive names, "the Spirit of the Lord God," or "the Spirit of God," are so placed as to warrant the inference that the name God, is applicable to the Spirit as well as to the Father. "The Holy Ghost spake by Esaias the prophet;" but the "Lord, (Jehovah) said to the prophet, Go and tell this people." Ananias had lied "unto the Holy Ghost," but it was "to God," that he had lied. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?" but Isaiah, from whom the interrogation is quoted, asks, "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord?" And we may add the affirmation of the apostle Paul,—“Now the Lord is that Spirit.” 2 Cor. 8:17. This is direct evidence that the Spirit is God. When we read that he is the "Eternal Spirit," that we "cannot go from the Spirit," that "the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God," that "mighty signs and wonders" were wrought by the "Holy Ghost," that he is the "Holy Spirit," and the "good Spirit," and the "Spirit of grace," and the "Spirit of truth," we are distinctly informed that all the perfections of Jehovah dwell in him. And, further, when it is affirmed that he "made" a man, "garnished the heavens," "wrought signs and wonders," "moved the holy men of God to speak," "quickeneth" the souls of men, shall "quicken their dead bodies," and "raised up Christ from the dead;" we are sure that the peculiar works of God were performed by him. Finally, the union of the Holy Ghost with the Father and the Son in the baptismal commission, and in the apostolic benediction, affords full proof that he is verily of the one Godhead. We have, therefore, in the scriptural exhibition of the character of the "Comforter," full and convincing evidence that he is a real, distinct person in the one God.

II. Having ascertained the character of the Holy Spirit, we next examine the testimony of the Scripture respecting his OPERATIONS as the Comforter and Spirit of Truth. It is perfectly obvious that to the Spirit a peculiar divine office is ascribed in the economy of redemption, and that he has an agency of essential importance in executing the purposes of God which are embraced in this economy. What is this agency—how does he perform it—

what are its results? These are important inquiries, and "to the law and to the testimony," let us apply for the answer.

The passages already cited afford much information on this topic; but there are many others that relate to it still more directly, and exhibit in clearer light the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's influence. Some of these shall now be placed together, without intervening remarks, that they may act with collected light on the eyes of the understanding. "The Lord said, my Spirit shall not always strive with man. Gen. 6:3. Uphold me with thy free Spirit. Ps. 51:12. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. Ezek. 36:27. Except a man be born....of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. John 3:5. It is the Spirit that quickeneth. John 6:63. The Spirit of Truth.... dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. John 14:17. The Comforter shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. John 14:26. He will reprove (convince) the world of sin, of righteousness....he will guide you into all truth. John 16:8, 13. The love of God is shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto you. Rom. 5:5. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities....maketh intercession for the saints. Rom. 8:14, 16, 26, 27. Ye are sanctified....by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. 6:11. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Eph. 4:30. The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. Eph. 5:9. He saved us by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Tit. 3:5. God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." 2 Thess. 2:13. Full and explicit is the doctrine of the Scriptures respecting the agency, as well as the character of the Holy Spirit. And a careful inspection of these and other passages of the same import, will shew that this agency is **DISTINCT, NECESSARY, GRACIOUS, SANCTIFYING, DIVINELY POWERFUL.**

1. To the Holy Spirit is assigned a *distinct agency* in the salvation of men. As certainly as the Scriptures teach the doctrine of the Trinity—that in the one God there are three persons—or, which is the same truth, that the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; so do they teach, also, that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit act distinctly with reference to the salvation of sinners. The Eternal Father is the great First Cause, as he, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved



us, has sent his Son, and given his Spirit, that we may be saved. The Son, as appointed and sent, assumed the office of Mediator, and in this character was united to the human nature in the person of Jesus the Christ, and in this nature died for us, rose from the dead, is exalted to Heaven, and reigns to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. The Spirit is now given as the Comforter, the Advocate, the Sanctifier; that he may be the efficient cause of our salvation, and may, by his special and gracious work, bring us to God, and communicate the blessings of redemption. This is the obvious meaning of the passages which we have quoted, compared with those which speak of the Father and the Son, and contemplated in the entire light of God's dispensation of mercy, as it is revealed in his word. It is, indeed, admitted that much of the language of the Bible, on this as well as other subjects, is highly figurative, and is designedly accommodated to our capacities; yet this in no degree affects the doctrine that is taught: the truth thus communicated is to be received as indubitably true, and the facts thus asserted are to be recognized as unquestionable facts. It is the reception of scriptural doctrine, whether delivered in a literal or figurative manner, as a revelation of what is, and not merely as an exhibitory representation, that shall make our faith stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. When we read, therefore, that the Spirit is given according to the divine promises, that it is his office to "teach"—to "convince"—to "lead"—to "testify"—to "seal"—to "sanctify;" we are authorized to believe that to him is assigned a special and distinct agency in the great system of man's redemption.

2. The agency of the Holy Spirit is *necessary*. Every purpose of God is firm, all the revelation of his purposes which he has made to us is true, and the ends which he designs to accomplish by his plans, are both definite and certain. Concerning his purposes he has said, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure;" and with respect to the end which he has designed, "My word shall not return unto me void, it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Now, as in the natural world God has shewn his wisdom by the establishing of a certain connection between his purpose as it exists in his own mind, and the end which is proposed, through the agency of second causes; so, also, in the dispensation of grace, he has appointed means for the purpose of effecting the design of this dispensation. But as in the natural world he preserves his own influence and exerts his own power, whatever means may be used, whatever second causes may be employed, by controlling, and moving, and governing the whole course of nature; in the

plan of redemption, also, while suitable means are selected, and fit instruments are employed, he reveals himself as accomplishing this great work by a supreme divine agency. This we see clearly in the appointment of the Son to the office of the Mediator, as an essentially necessary part of his own plan. Without shedding of blood there is no remission, and other blood than that of his own Son avails not: less than a sacrifice of infinite value, is not sufficient to procure the forgiveness of sin. I do not affirm that it was antecedently impossible for God to devise any other plan: thus to decide were presumptuous; such knowledge is too wonderful for man, that is a worm of the dust. I only affirm that on the principles of justice and mercy revealed in the Bible, applied to the case of fallen man in his relations to Jehovah, the sacrifice made by the Son of God was necessary, that God might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth. And on the same principles I conclude that the agency of the Holy Spirit was necessary, in the view of God's infinite wisdom and goodness, in order to secure the final result of the mediation of Jesus Christ. So that as the mediatory office of the Son was, according to the revealed purposes of the Most High, a dictate of his perfect wisdom and goodness; so also is the agency of the Spirit equally the result of divine wisdom and goodness. Further, on the same principles we may safely determine that this part of the divine plan is necessary to the full exhibition of the glory of God, and the honor of the Saviour, and necessary to us as sinners who are called to be partakers of eternal life. Without this divine influence what sinner would repent and believe, that he might be saved; what believer, even, would persevere, and go forward, and reach the kingdom of heaven? There is important meaning, meaning which implies the indispensable necessity of the Spirit's work, in our Lord's declaration, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come." Nor is there less meaning in Paul's solemn admonition, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." Oh, that men would but consider—that believers would but feel as they ought, their need of this divine agency!

3. The agency of the Holy Spirit is infinitely *gracious*. The Lord reveals it as his peculiar glory that he is a gracious God. And he has made the most glorious exhibitions of grace in the great scheme of redemption. Especially does grace shine in the gift of his own Son. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners, is a gracious Saviour, and on this account, especially, that he saves his people from their sins. Par-

don of sin through his blood, peace with God, deliverance from death, the possession of eternal life—every blessing bestowed, is of grace. Nor is grace less manifest in the gift of the Spirit, the purpose for which he is given, or the manner in which he performs his office. He is called “the Spirit of grace,” “the good Spirit.” Two attributes of grace, as it is described in the Scriptures, are worthy of particular attention, in considering the gracious character of spiritual influence: first, freeness; secondly, sovereignty.

All the operations of God’s Spirit are perfectly free. Grace cannot be deserved; where grace is given, merit is left out of view, and the grace of God to sinners consists in bestowing favor on those who deserve his displeasure. In perfect consistency with this attribute of grace, the Spirit operates in the work of salvation. No man has any claim, on the ground of deserving, to the gift of the Spirit. As the sinner is simply guilty before God, so he is only sinful, unclean in the view of this blessed and glorious Agent in salvation. Neither his desires nor his efforts can entitle him to this infinitely precious blessing. Even a saint is a subject of spiritual influence on the ground of mere favor; his faith, his love, his holiness, is the fruit of the Spirit, and cannot be a reason, in regard of merit, for continuing this dwelling of the Comforter with him. And the sovereignty of grace is equally manifest; for it is entirely of his own good pleasure, according to the will of God that the Comforter comes, and is the Spirit of grace and of truth to us. “He divides to every man severally as he will.” He gives grace, and more grace, or he withdraws from men and leaves them to their own will without respect of persons. By sovereignty is not meant arbitrariness, or that there are not adequate reasons for every difference that is made among men; but only that these reasons are not revealed to us. This sovereignty is, indeed, the exercise of infinite wisdom and goodness, and it is to his glory that while he is infinitely good, and fulfils every promise of God, he works freely, and agreeably to the dictates of his own infinite wisdom and benevolence.

4. The agency of the Comforter is *sanctifying*. His nature is infinitely holy, and it is his purpose to produce holiness by his influence. To him, sin in every form, and in every degree, is perfectly hateful; and as Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, and to take away sin by the offering of himself, the agency of the Spirit is designed to remove the sinfulness of our nature, and to make us holy. This view of his office is frequently and strongly expressed in various forms of speech; in the text now

before us, and in many others. In regard of his nature and of his office, he is "the Holy Spirit," and "the Spirit of holiness." Nothing unholy can be imputed to him; nothing that is evil can be affirmed of his operations, without the highest degree of impiety.

It is, however, the purpose for which the Spirit is given, and the effects of his operation, that require our particular attention. On this account his agency is affirmed to be *sanctifying*. The restoration of the image of God in the soul, which has been effaced by sin, is the peculiar object of his work. Indeed, the whole Mediator system is designed, and is framed with a view to this change of the sinful character of man, so that he may be recovered to holiness, and be reinstated in the favor of God. The ultimate end is the glory of the Godhead, the immediate end is the salvation of sinners, "through the sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth." With this view, the Father formed his plan of mercy, the Son made atonement for the sins of men, and offers intercession with his own precious blood in their behalf; and the Spirit, together with all his influences and the means which he employs, is freely and abundantly given. And He, "being come," performs his entire work in perfect harmony and co-operation with the Father and the Son, and according to the character and condition of the subjects of salvation. In the performance of this agency, having anointed the beloved Son of God in his official character, and borne testimony concerning him, by the will of the Father, in the signs and mighty wonders which were wrought, he gave, by his inspiration, the knowledge of all the truth to the disciples, enabled them to preach the gospel with powerful demonstration, and indited the living Oracles by which men may become wise unto salvation. For this purpose he accompanied the first preaching of the gospel with miraculous works, and with energy which opened the hearts of multitudes to attend to the things which were spoken by the Apostles; and of this gracious influence the three thousand converts made on the day of Pentecost were the first fruits, and many myriads in Judea and other parts of the world, both Jews and Gentiles, were the early harvest: they all were "called to be holy," being renewed in their minds, that they might be new creatures in Christ Jesus. And as "he abides with the church for ever," his operation is designed for the same purpose, and is followed by similar effects. Does he reprove, accuse, convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; shew to the sinner his sin, his guilt, his just condemnation; portray to his mind the solemnities of the judgment to come, and the terrors of damnation; awaken within him the pangs of remorse, produce the sorrows of repentance, and excite him to call on God, and strive to enter in

at the strait gate; it is that the sinner may cease to sin, and become holy. Does he create within him a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him, and lead him to the Saviour by faith in his blood, that he may be forgiven, and to the throne of grace, that he may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need; he inclines the heart to believe, and raises up within him sincere and strong desire to the God of all grace, and then brings down peace with God, and the comforts of pardon and hope from on high, that the sinner may be holy. Or does he enlighten or comfort, guide or strengthen, support or bless with joys divine the renewed man; all is designed to make him more holy. All his gracious work, as he dwells in the believer, leads him by his influence, makes intercession in him with groanings that cannot be uttered, pours out a spirit of grace and supplication upon him, bears witness with his spirit that he is a son of God, and so an heir of God, and a joint heir with Jesus Christ, and seals him unto the day of redemption; all his agency as he guides him into all the truth, and shews him the things of Jesus Christ, and richly endows him with every gift, and bestows on him every spiritual blessing, is certainly designed to make him more holy, and more devoted, faithful and active in the service of God; and is perfectly suited to sanctify him, in his proper measure, for his station on earth, and to sanctify him completely in the end, that he may dwell with God in heaven.

5. The agency of the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, is *divinely powerful*. Paul prays that believers may "abound in hope through the *power of the Holy Ghost*;" and asserts that "the Gentiles were made obedient in word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, *by the power of the Spirit of God*." Speaking of the operation of God in quickening those who were dead in trespasses and sins, which is obviously the operation of God the Spirit, he teaches that this is "the exceeding greatness of his *power* to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his *mighty power*, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." And a full and fair comparison of those passages of scripture which describe the operations of God on man as the subject of salvation, with those which exhibit the agency of the Spirit, will satisfy us that we do not mistake the meaning of the Apos le, when we suppose him to teach distinctly and designedly, as an important truth, that the Spirit operates with a Divine omnipotence. Besides, the terms which are used to express the effects of his influence, such as regeneration, renovation, new creation, quickening the dead, strongly favor the position which has been stated; we may therefore receive it as a correct description of the agency of the Spirit of God in the salvation of sinners.

Shall we then admit that the agency of the Spirit is physical, as it is termed, according to the objection of those who find difficulty in ascribing omnipotence to the Spirit in his official character? By no means; for it is impossible for us to understand the mode of his operation so as to define it, as it is in itself, in this manner, or in any other; and we should thus seem to ascribe the limitation of the creature to the uncreated and infinite God. And, moreover, if we conceive of the power by its effects, we cannot admit the language to be correct, for these are not physical changes which are accomplished by the blessed Comforter. Nor can we at all concede, on the other hand, that the Spirit operates in sanctification by a merely moral influence. It is true that means are used in producing and perfecting the great change in man from sin to holiness; means, in all their variety, and in the most full and suitable manner are appointed to us, and recognized by this holy agency in their proper character and efficacy; and it is true, also, that in one sense, and that too a very important sense, the whole change made in man is a moral change: but I affirm that all this gives us no ground on which we can determine the nature, or the mode of the agency of the Holy Spirit. Philosophy is utterly at fault, when she attempts to reason, by analogy from man to God.

But I willingly dismiss such speculations, and return to the plain doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, as I believe it to be, that the sanctifying Spirit exerts a holy, divine power in the work of salvation. And I resume the subject merely for the purpose of saying, that, in this view of the Spirit's operation, it is obvious to conclude, that his influence in accomplishing the work of grace is special and immediate; not that the use of appropriate means is at all excluded, or that the efficacy of truth as the means of sanctification is in any degree diminished by the special influence of the Spirit: and, further, his agency is always divinely effectual, and certainly produces every effect which it is intended to produce, yet in a way that is perfectly consistent with his own glorious nature and holy wise and benevolent purposes, and with the liberty and accountability of man. The renovation of the sinner is a work that is wrought, truly and effectually, not by created might nor by created power, but by the Spirit of God.

I close with remarking that the doctrine of the word of God concerning the character and agency of the Holy Spirit, distinctly teaches how the Christian shall persevere and grow in grace, and how the Church of the Lord shall be revived and increased, until it shall extend over the whole earth. We live under a dispensation of grace in which the Son of God is the Mediatorial

**Head, and the Spirit of God is the sanctifying Agent.** As we believe in Jesus the Saviour for justification and the gift of eternal life; we must also receive the Holy Ghost, walk in the Spirit, and live by the Spirit, if we will perform the work assigned us, and be prepared to reside in the new Heavens wherein dwelleth righteousness. It is not sufficient to contemplate the doctrine of the Spirit's influence as a subject of intellectual perception, or to receive it with a speculative faith; we must so believe the truth concerning the blessed Comforter, that we shall ask this good gift of the Father, and live by his gracious power. Would the Christian but desire, and seek, and cherish the indwelling and operation of the Spirit of truth, and abide in his fellowship; how brightly would His light shine upon his heart and be reflected on all around! How much would he be able to do for God, for his Redeemer or his fellow men, while his own progress in his preparation to receive the prize, and wear the crown of victory would be rapidly accelerated! Were the Church, having received the whole truth of God in the love of it, and leaning with a strong faith on her Divine Redeemer, fully aware of the strength and blessing provided for her in the gift of the Holy Ghost, according to the Saviour's promise in its full import, how soon would she appear in the view of the whole world, "clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners!" I am persuaded that one great reason, perhaps the chief reason of the infrequency, the rapid declension, and even corruption of revivals in the Churches, is to be sought in their disregard of divine influence. But a day will come in which the errors of the church shall be corrected, her pride humbled, and her faith in God by the Spirit strengthened; and then, in answer to united, believing prayer, the Spirit shall be poured out from on high, and by his mighty and gracious energy the world shall be converted to God.

[It may not always be possible for writers to adapt their manuscript copy to the precise limits allotted for each number of this work. In instances where there may be space to spare, the editor will feel at liberty to occupy it with extracts from works of eminent writers, illustrative of the doctrine under discussion. The following, from Dr. Owen's work "On the Spirit," is selected as appropriate in the present number.]

#### THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT, AS A COMFORTER.

WHEN our Saviour left this world, he was very far from laying aside his care of his disciples. He has given us the highest assurance that he continues the same care, love, and grace towards us as when he laid down his life for us:—but as there was a double work yet to be performed in our behalf, one toward God, and the other in us, he has taken a twofold way of performing it. That toward God, he was to discharge himself, in his human nature, in Heaven; the other, of which believers are the immediate object, is committed to the Holy Spirit; and the peculiar name whereby he is distinguished in this work is, The PARACLETE, which we translate the COMFORTER. It was with respect to the sorrows of the disciples, that he was promised under this name; and his work is still to support, cherish, relieve, and comfort the church, in all trials and distresses; and herein he manifests,

1. His infinite condescension.—He is by nature over all, God blessed for ever. It is a condescension in the divine excellency to concern himself in any creature whatever. God humbleth himself to behold the things that are done in heaven; how much more in submitting to the discharge of the office of Comforter in the behalf of poor worms on earth!

2. His unspeakable love.—The apostle prays for the presence of the Spirit with the Corinthians, under the name of the "God of love and peace;"—and the communication of the whole love of God to us is committed to the Spirit; for "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost;"—and hence the same apostle distinctly mentions the "love of the Spirit," joining it with all the effects of the mediation of Christ; "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit." Rom. 15:30:—all that love which he exercises and communicates to you. It is of great use to us to consider, that there was infinite love in the susception of this office by the Spirit; and it is evident from the nature of the work itself; for the consolation of the afflicted is an immediate effect of love. There is not one drop of comfort or spiritual refreshment administered by the Holy Ghost, but what proceeds from his infinite love.

3. His almighty power.—The apostle proposes this for the support of weak believers:—"Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." That Holy Spirit who dwells in them, is greater and more powerful than Satan, who attempts their ruin. Who can declare the dejections, fears, and discouragements that believers are obnoxious to! nothing but Omnipotence itself is suited to obviate them. If we take a view of the condition of the Church in itself, and in the world, how weak is the faith of most believers! How great their fears! How many their discouragements! How many are the temptations, calamities, and persecutions with which they are exercised! It is evident then how necessary it was that their consolation should be entrusted with him who possesses infinite power.



**THE**  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

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No. 8.      PITTSBURGH, JANUARY, 1833.      Vol. I.

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**SERMON VIII.**

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BY DAVID ELLIOTT,  
OF WASHINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA.

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**THE DECREES OF GOD.**

**EPHESIANS 1:11.** *Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*

My design in the selection of this passage of scripture, is to make some remarks on what are usually called the **DECREES OF GOD**, or the **DIVINE PURPOSES**. This is a doctrine which is known to be peculiarly obnoxious to many. One reason of this, no doubt, is, because it is so imperfectly understood, as held by those who receive it as a doctrine of the Bible. Multitudes have never examined it in the light of God's word. They have contented themselves with the garbled and distorted statements of men who either did not understand it themselves, or who sought to promote sectarian interests by misleading others. For the fact is notorious, that neither the pulpit nor the press has been wanting in exhibitions of this doctrine, which would be rejected by its intelligent friends with as much abhorrence, as by those who made them.

It is admitted that the doctrine of the Decrees of God, is not free from difficulties. But is this an uncommon case? This will not be pretended. The same may be alleged of all the radical doctrines of the Bible. They have all their difficulties: or, rather, men make difficulties in their discussion, by departing from the simple statements of the word of God, and attempting what is beyond their depth and comprehension. And if on this ground the doctrine in question is to be set aside, on the same ground, all that is valuable in the Bible, and consolatory to the hopes of the Christian, must be also rejected. But are men prepared for this?

The object which we propose, therefore, at present, is to give a simple, scriptural exhibition of this doctrine, as we understand it to be contained in the Holy Scriptures, avoiding as much as possible all refined speculations which tend to bewilder, rather than enlighten the mind in its researches after the truth. Nor will it be attempted to enter into long trains of controversial discussion with those who hold different views. This would occupy too much space for a single discourse, and if necessary or proper, may be better done at another time, or by abler hands.

In the passage before us, the fore-ordination of Christians to the heavenly inheritance is affirmed. This inheritance, which Paul and his fellow christians had obtained, had become theirs on the ground of their being predestinated to its possession. To this predestination they were indebted for their participation in the blessings of salvation. It was "according to the purpose of God," and formed a part of that purpose. He had blessed them "with all spiritual blessings in Christ:" and that he had done "according as he had chosen them in him before the foundation of the world." The Apostle, while stating this fact in relation to himself and his fellow christians, that they were indebted to the purposes of God for their elevated privileges and hopes, affirms, moreover, that the purposes of this same God extend to all things. For these purposes, he declares to be the foundation of his acts: and as his acts extend to all things, so must his purposes from which these acts proceed.—"Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Beginning, then, with that which is more general, I remark.

I. That the Decrees or purposes of God **EXTEND TO ALL THINGS**. This is clearly taught in the text. God "*worketh ALL THINGS*." Here, we have the Divine acts [*"worketh"*] in the administration of his government. He works, or puts forth his power. And this administrative or providential agency extends to "all things"—so it is asserted in the passage before us. There is nothing to which it does not reach, and about which it is not concerned, for it is universal. Nor is this the only passage which speaks this language. Christ, in answer to the Jews who accused him for healing a man on the Sabbath day, says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." John 5:17. In this declaration, there is a recognition of God's unceasing and continued agency in the management of the universe. There is no interruption of his providential acts; but he "*worketh*" on all days and without intermission. And as the Father worketh, so doth the Son.

They concur in will and operation, and of course, their agency is co-extensive. How *far* it extends is determined by the apostle in another place, where he represents the Son as "upholding *all things* by the word of his power." Heb. 1:3. *All things*, therefore, are the objects to which the Divine acts extend, and about which they are employed—examine also Dan. 4:34,35. Ps. 135:6. Acts 17:25,26,28. Job 38—39—40—41. Matthew 10:29—31. 6:26,30.

Indeed unless we admit the universality of God's providential acts, we shall find it difficult to maintain that they extend to anything. For the same arguments which would prove that any *one thing* might exist and operate without providential agency or control, would prove that *all* might: and thus an universal independency would be introduced into creation, totally subversive of the dominion of God, and incompatible with all just conceptions of the relations existing between creatures and their Creator. Few, however, I presume, are prepared to adopt this Atheistical absurdity, and withdraw our world and the universe from the dominion of Him who ruleth in the heavens.

I am aware that some who do not reject the providence of God altogether, tell us that when God created the universe, he impressed on it *general laws* for its government, and that these laws are amply sufficient to that end, without any particular and continued agency of God. That there are what are called laws of nature, I do not feel inclined to deny. But if these laws can operate without any agency of God, then they are independent of God. And if they are independent of God, they must have been so in the first moment of their existence. For that which is dependent in the first moment of its existence, must be so in the second, and the third, and so on as long as its existence is continued; as it is evident that no lapse of time or series of operations, can change the essential character of a dependent being, and clothe it with the attributes of independence. If therefore, the laws of nature were independent in the first moment of their existence, they must have been self-existent; for it is contrary to all correct notions of God, to assert that he could create a being independent of himself. But to affirm self-existence of the laws of nature, is to place them on an equality with God. It is to make them very God. This is the obvious and necessary result of maintaining that the laws of nature operate in the government of the universe, without any agency of the Creator. The scheme, therefore, which involves such impious absurdities cannot be true, but must be rejected as contrary to the word of God, and the established principles of all sound philosophy.

Allowing, therefore, the infallible correctness of the Apostle's language and doctrine, that God "worketh all things," I proceed to remark, that what is true in this respect of the divine acts, is true of the divine purposes. For the Apostle affirms that he "worketh all things *after the counsel of his own will.*" God acts according to a fixed plan. For, "known unto God are *all his works* from the beginning of the world." Acts 15:18. The operations of his providence, are only the evolutions of his purposes or decrees. The providence of God, therefore, being universal, his purposes must also be universal. His acts cannot be more extensive than his purposes of action. The one being universal, the other must be so too. For it cannot be endured for a moment, that an infinitely wise God should act without settled purposes, and that all the results of his providential agency should be fortuitous and contingent.

The declaration of the Westminster Catechism, that God "hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass," seems to be fairly sustained by this view of the text. If in the administration of the divine government there be any thing about which providential agency is not concerned, then there is something respecting which there is no purpose. But if the providence of God extends to all things, then *all* are the objects of divine decrees. For God "worketh all things, after the counsel of his own will."

Some explanation may be necessary here to avoid misapprehension. While it is asserted and believed that the decrees of God are universal, it is not maintained that they extend to all things in the same manner. There is a difference in relation to different objects. With regard to sinful actions, for example, the purposes of God are not concerned about them, in the same manner in which they are about holy actions. In holy actions God works by an immediate divine agency in their production. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Eph. 2:10. "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. 4:24. Now, creation is a work of God which necessarily involves an exertion of divine power in its production. To such power, therefore, these "good works," and that "righteousness and true holiness" to which men are created by the Spirit of God, must be ascribed as the efficient cause.

But we cannot say that God thus creates sinful actions. He is not the efficient cause or author of sin, in the same manner in which he is of holiness. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, nei-

ther tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." James 1:13,14. But while it is thus certainly true that God is not the efficient author of sin, still both the agency and purposes of God extend in some form or other to sinful actions. "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." Acts 4:27,28. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Acts 2:23. Now the crucifixion of Christ which is referred to in these passages, was evidently a sinful act; yet it took place "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." In its accomplishment, the human agents concerned, did what God's "hand and counsel determined before to be done." Still God was not the author of the sin involved in that transaction. This is pointedly charged upon others. "Him—ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

As then, we have the revealed fact, that the purpose of God does extend to sinful actions, and yet that he is not the author of the guilt involved in these actions, we are obliged to believe that there is a difference in the manner in which he decrees acts which are sinful and those which are holy. The decrees of God in relation to these sinful acts, have been usually called *permissive*. Whatever exceptions have been taken to this term, it appears to us certain, that God does *permit* such actions, or they would not take place. If committed contrary to his permission, it would seem to imply a want of power to prevent or control them. They would possess an independency of character, which would place them beyond the restraints of Omnipotence. And if such be the fact, that God does permit sinful actions, I cannot see that there is either contradiction or absurdity, in saying that he decreed to permit them.

We arrive, then, at this result: *that the purposes of God extend to all things, but not in the same manner.* To *holy* actions they extend, so that he is their author, or originating cause: to *sinful* actions, so as not to incur their guilt, or make him their author. If you ask me, how can this be? I answer frankly, I do not know. Nor am I concerned to explain how it can be—It is enough for me that the fact is revealed. I would not be wise above what is written. And I have no doubt, but one great cause of the difficulties connected with the treatment of this subject is, that men attempt to explain what cannot be explained.

Let us take things as they are stated in the word of God, and cease to go beyond our depth, and we shall less frequently "darken counsel by words without knowledge."

And here, I would dispose of another difficulty in the same way. I refer to the common objection against the doctrine of God's decrees, that it is destructive of human liberty. To this I reply, by saying that both are revealed, that is, the purposes of God, and the free agency of man. How they consist, I am not concerned to explain. The fact, that they do so, is evident. The Jews and others who were concerned in the crucifixion of the Saviour, acted *freely*. This none will deny. At the same time, they acted in exact accordance with the "determinate counsel of God," though they intended it not. Now, the reason of this complex fact, involving the fixedness of the divine purpose, and the entire freedom of the human will, is not explained, and we must be content to take it as it stands in the word of God. The certainty of the event, arising out of the decree of God, destroyed neither the accountability nor the liberty of those engaged in this transaction. These remained free from all encroachment, while the counsel of the Lord stood firm and received its full accomplishment. Why, then, in the view of this fact, should men so positively assert that the decrees of God are destructive of human liberty? Is it certain that the decrees of God, and the liberty of man cannot consist, because the narrow intellects of men cannot comprehend or explain how these things can be? A proper degree of reverence for God's word will teach us to bow to its decisions, though we may not be able to fathom all their incomprehensible depths.

In addition to the universality of the divine decrees, it may be remarked here that they are *eternal, holy, just, wise, absolute, unchangeable and sovereign*. Various scriptures assign to them these attributes. The apostle Paul expressly mentions "the eternal purpose" of God. Eph. 3:11, also 1:4. Their holiness, justice and wisdom, are fairly deducible from these attributes in the divine nature. Examine the following texts in this connection, Rom. 11:33, Eph. 3:10, Rev. 15:3,4. Their absolute character is indicated in Romans 9:11.13.16.18. They are also unchangeable. "I am the Lord, I change not." Mal. 3:6. With God there "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Jas. 1:17. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Rom. 2:29. Heb. 6:17. Their sovereignty is often referred to. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes

even so; Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." Luke 10:21. Matth. 2:25,26. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?" Dan. 4:35. See, also, Ps. 135:6. At these particulars, however, we can only glance. I proceed, therefore, to notice,

II. THE DECREE OF ELECTION, particularly as it relates to men. "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men are predestinated unto everlasting life." Con. of Faith. Contemplating all men as fallen, God, "out of his mere free grace alone," determined to rescue some from destruction, and exalt them to glory. This election and predestination of men to eternal life, is taught in many places in the holy scriptures. Thus in the text, Paul and others are said to be "*predestinated*" to the inheritance which they had obtained—also, in Romans 8:29, "Whom he did foreknow; he also did predestinate," &c. The same is taught in Eph. 1:4, "*according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.*" Believers are also said to be called, "*according to the purpose of God.*" Rom. 8:28. Certain distinctions are made between man and man, "*that the purpose of God according to election might stand.*" Rom. 9:11. Hence the apostle, speaking on this subject, says, "*the election hath obtained it.*"—"So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Rom. 11:7. 9:15,16. The following scriptures are full to the same purpose; Rom. 9:22,23. 2 Tim. 1:9. 1 Thess. 5:9. 2 Thess. 2:13. Indeed the apostle Paul enters into an elaborate argument, in the ninth and eleventh chapters of the Romans, to prove this very doctrine. And it is difficult to conceive how any one can read Paul's epistles with but a small degree of attention, without meeting with this doctrine on almost every page.

The doctrine of the predestination of men to eternal glory, embraces *the means*, as well as *the end*. So it is stated in our Confession of Faith. "As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so he hath, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, *foreordained all the means thereunto.*" Chap. III, § 6. This is evidently the scriptural view of the subject. For the scriptures no where encourage the belief that men are appointed absolutely to eternal glory in heaven, without any regard to holiness of character and conduct. On the contrary, they always include in the appointment of God, the means of salvation, and the qualifications for its enjoyment, as well as ultimate salvation

itself. Thus men are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." 2 Thess. 2:13. And "whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Rom. 8:30. Effectual calling, therefore, and justification must, according to the decree of God, go before glorification. Men must become holy, and obtain deliverance from sin, through faith in Jesus Christ, before they can enter into glory. Such is the appointment of God. For Christians are "chosen in Christ, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love," Eph. 1:4; and they "are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation." 1 Pet. 1:5.

This view of the subject, (the only scriptural one,) completely refutes the common objection against the doctrine of election, that it leads to sin, and opens the door to licentiousness. It is often alleged, that if men are elected to eternal life, their salvation is secured, and they may live as they please. But this objection is founded in ignorance, or in a desire to pervert and mislead. Those who are appointed to eternal glory, are appointed to holiness, to faith, to a right use and improvement of the means of grace, with all that is necessary to final salvation, and that, in a way which does not impinge upon the liberty of the will. The decree of God in relation to their salvation, embraces all these. Indeed, these constitute a part of that salvation to which persons are chosen, and are necessary to its enjoyment. Such appears to have been the view of the apostle when he penned the following passage. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. 1:10,11.

The election of a portion of the human family to eternal life, without any regard to their faith or holiness as the ground or reason of their election, is received by many with great abhorrence, and rejected as arbitrary and unsuitable to the character of God. Those who take this ground, affirm that God, contemplating all men as fallen, determined to provide a Saviour, in whom he would give to all sufficient grace for their salvation, and to save such as improved this grace to purposes of faith and holiness. Hence, they allege, that the election of persons to eternal life, always has respect to faith or holiness, foreseen in those who are its subjects, as the ground or reason of that



**election.** In other words, election is nothing more than the purpose of God to save such as he foresaw would make a wise improvement of the common grace given them in Christ the Redeemer. These are views which have long been entertained by many, and are still extensively prevalent among those who do not fully accord with the doctrines of grace.

But against the adoption of this scheme, there are several objections. 1. In the first place, it makes that to be the ground of the divine purpose, which the scriptures represent as its effect or consequence. According to Paul, persons are "chosen in Christ, *that they should be holy.*" Eph. 1:4. Here, the implication evidently is, that the subjects of this choice were, at the time of their election, contemplated as under sin and unholy, and that their holiness was a subsequent effect in view of the Divine mind in electing them to eternal life. Holiness, therefore, is the effect or consequence of the decree of election, and not its cause. Of course, the scheme which reverses this order, is at variance with the scriptures, and cannot be admitted as true. 2. Another objection to this scheme is, that it suspends the purpose of God upon the will of the sinner, and transfers the ground of salvation from God to man. For although, according to this hypothesis, God is supposed to have given to all sufficient grace for salvation, their election to eternal life, is made to depend on their improvement of this grace, for purposes of faith and holiness. Now, what is this, but to give the sinner the entire control of the purposes of God? It is, moreover, to make him the author of his own salvation; because, as already stated, it is on the ground of *his* foreseen improvement of the grace of God, that he is elected to eternal life. And what is the tendency of the doctrine which thus subjects the will of God, to the will of the creature? Is it not to nourish pride and self sufficiency, and encourage boasting in the sinner? thus subverting what the apostle has established, when he says, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8,9. For in the improvement of divine grace, which forms the basis of the decree of God, the sinner has a work whereof he may boast, and for which he is not indebted to the grace of God. And thus far, at least, salvation is of works and not of grace, contrary to what the apostle teaches. Will it be said that for his ability to improve the grace given him in Christ, the sinner is dependent on that grace? This, however, is to concede the whole question; for if it be grace communicated in Christ on the ground of sovereign mercy, which moves, inclines, or enables the sinner to improve its impulses for the atonement of faith and holiness, then the whole of

salvation must depend on the purpose of God to bestow that grace, and make it operative for these ends. Instead, therefore, of the decree of election being founded on the sinner's improvement of the grace given him, it is the decree of God which secures that improvement, and inclines and enables him to lay hold on eternal life. So that the scheme which would go to make God's purposes subservient to man's will, must be rejected as unscriptural and dangerous. 3. A still farther objection to this scheme is, that it is contradictory to itself, and to the holy scriptures. It is contradictory to itself. For while it contemplates all men as fallen, and indebted to the sovereign mercy and purpose of God for that sufficient grace which has been granted to every man in Christ, it makes the grace of God a debtor to man by suspending its successful operation, on the improvement made of it by the sinner. It is sufficient grace, and yet it is insufficient, until the sinner makes it sufficient by improving it for the purposes of salvation. It is also contradictory to the holy scriptures. They give no intimations of the purpose of God in electing sinners to eternal life, being founded upon any anticipated goodness in those who are the subjects of this choice. On the contrary, their language on this subject is, "I will have mercy, on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy; therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy." Rom. 9: 15, 16, 18.

But it would occupy too much space to notice all that might be urged in opposition to this scheme. Besides, it would lead to the discussion of questions incidental to the doctrine which it is our business at present to establish. These few remarks may be sufficient to show, that the views of those who place the election of men to eternal life on other grounds than the divine sovereignty, or "mere free grace alone," are fallacious and unscriptural. The objection that this is an arbitrary ground, unworthy of God, proceeds from erroneous notions of the divine sovereignty. Men confound it with blind purpose—a purpose formed without reason, and which is totally regardless of the principles of right and wrong. With such views of the sovereignty of God, it is not surprising that they object to it, as having a control in the decrees of God in relation to men. Their mistake, however, must not be permitted to operate to the prejudice of the truth in the minds of others. "The sovereignty of God," to use the language of the venerable Dr. Scott, "is, I apprehend, a very different thing from arbitrary power: it is the sovereignty of infinite wisdom, knowledge, justice, truth, goodness, and mercy."—"God does

nothing without the best possible reasons, but he does not gratify the pride and curiosity of fallen rebels, by assigning his reasons to them. He doubtless has reasons for choosing a sinner to salvation, but the sinner's merit, or inferior degree of criminality, or more docile disposition, or *natural* voluntary concurrence with his grace, is not of the number of these reasons." Upon the whole, then, we are brought back to the plain, scriptural representation of this matter, that it was "out of his mere free grace alone," and for reasons known to himself, that God did, from eternity, elect a people to the enjoyment of everlasting life.

But as election implies the choice of some, from amongst others, what, it will be asked, has God done in relation to that portion of the human family who are not chosen to eternal life?

It has already been remarked, that in the formation of his adorable purposes of salvation, God contemplated man as fallen. To God all things were present from eternity. Before his all-comprehending mind, the creation and the fall of man, with all their circumstances were present. Beholding the whole human family, therefore, as fallen, and liable to death, he determined to save some, and "*to pass by*" others, "and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath *for their sin*, to the praise of his glorious justice." And what objection can there be to this? Are men sure that this is so inconsistent with the character of God, that it cannot be true? Let us examine and see how the case stands.

That by the fall, the whole race of man was rendered liable to wrath and condemnation, cannot be well doubted. "By one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."—"By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Rom. 5:12, 18. "And were by nature children of wrath, even as others." Eph. 2:3. Now this liability of the whole human family to condemnation and wrath, was either just, or it was not. If it was just, as we believe, then God might have ordained the whole human family, on this ground, to eternal misery, without any charge of injustice or cruelty. For there could be neither injustice nor cruelty in providing for the certain infliction of a punishment which was justly due to them on account of sin. And if God might have justly acted in this manner towards the whole, why not towards a part? The election of the other part to salvation, cannot alter *their* case. They are not less deserving of punishment after the others have been appointed to salvation, than before. Being still contemplated as under sin, they are justly, *on account of sin*, ordained to everlasting condemnation and misery.

But, it will, perhaps, be alleged that it would have been unjust in God to have consigned the whole of our race to perdition, without making provision for their salvation. If this allegation be well founded, then God was bound in justice to provide a Saviour; and the scheme of salvation, instead of originating in the infinite love of God, as the scriptures teach, was formed to meet the just claims which his creatures had upon his justice. What, according to this view, comes of the grace of the gospel? It is entirely destroyed. Salvation is no longer of grace, but of debt, as God owed it to his fallen creatures to provide for them a Saviour, and would have been unjust if he had not made such provision. But all this is so completely at variance with scriptural statements, that it cannot fail to secure its own rejection. The only legitimate conclusion then, is, that viewing man as fallen and guilty, God might in justice, have ordained the whole to wrath for their sin. And if there would have been no injustice in thus leaving all to perish, there can be none in leaving a part. If he might have done the greater, no possible reason can be assigned why he may not do the less.

From these remarks, you will perceive that we consider God merely as "*passing by*" those whom he has not elected to eternal life, and "*for their sin*, ordaining them to dishonor and wrath." In this God stands acquitted of all injustice. For is it not just, that God, foreseeing that man would fall, that without special grace he would go on in sin till death, should, *for his sin*, determine to inflict upon him the punishment it merited? As already shown, God was under no obligations to provide a Saviour, or to impart grace to convert the sinner, and fit him for heaven. His doing so, in the case of the elect, was a matter of *sovereign mercy*. They had no claim upon him for the blessings of salvation. And in reference to the enjoyment of these blessings they must all say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory." Neither have the others, who are not the objects of God's electing love, any claims upon God. All have been forfeited to his justice, and in the view of the divine proceedings towards them, they can only say, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints—Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments."

Many passages of scripture support these views. "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded."—"Therefore, he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."—"What if God, willing to show his wrath; and to make his power known, endureth with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, and that he might make

known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory."—"Because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." Rom. 11:7. 11:18,22,23. Matth. 11:25,26. See also Rom. 9 and 11, throughout. 2 Tim. 2:20. 1 Pet. 2:8. Jude 2:4.

These, and other passages of the word of God, shew that God, in the administration of his government, and the distributions of his grace, does *act* differently towards those who perish, from what he does towards those who are saved. And as the divine acts or operations, are only the evolutions of his purposes, he must have determined differently respecting them. We wish it to be distinctly recollected, however, that God exerts no positive influence on the wicked, leading them to sin. It is enough that he leaves them to their own hearts' lusts. They will of choice run the downward road to destruction, and be the executioners of their own sentence. The decree of God infringes not upon the liberty of their wills, nor does it exert any constraining influence over them. So that when they shall have received their final doom, they will only be made to "eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

Against the whole of this doctrine, according to which a part of mankind are elected to eternal life, on the ground of sovereign grace, and a part left to perish in their sins; it is frequently objected, that it involves unjustifiable partiality on the part of God, and that, for this reason, being inconsistent with his character, it ought to be rejected. To this I would answer, 1. That we are ignorant of the reasons by which God is governed in making this discrimination, and are, therefore, incompetent to pronounce in the case. That God, as an infinitely wise, holy, just, and merciful being, must have good and sufficient reasons for every purpose which he forms, cannot be doubted. To suppose the contrary, would be to divest him of all the high attributes of his character. Without a full knowledge, therefore, of all these reasons, of which God has not seen fit to put us in possession, it is arrogance to pronounce on the partiality or injustice of that which, as we have seen, the scriptures reveal. 2. If this objection be valid against the doctrine in question, it will be equally so against all distinctions, both in the natural and moral world, the reasons of which are not apparent to human discernment. But it cannot have escaped the observation of any one, that both in the natural and moral world, such distinctions do obtain. In nature, there is an endless diversity, the reasons of which do not appear. There, is the fruitful valley and the barren mountain, the beautiful rose and the craggy thorn, the innocent lamb and the ravenous wolf, with a thousand other varieties of a similar kind, all involving

the principle of sovereign discrimination on the part of the Creator. Why not, then, charge God with partiality in giving favorable distinction to some of these parts of creation over others?

But lest these natural distinctions should not be thought analogous, I remark that such distinctions are to be found in the moral world, and throughout God's intelligent creation. Look at the different *orders* of intelligent beings. Why these distinctions of men and angels, of cherubim and seraphim? What diversity, also, is there among men? in their outward worldly circumstances, and mental endowments? And, what is more directly to our purpose, what a difference in their religious privileges, deeply affecting their eternal interests? For many ages, the Jews had exclusive possession of the oracles of God and the means of salvation. And since the wall of partition between them and the Gentiles has been broken down, how few of the nations of the earth enjoy the light of the gospel? Now, whatever may be said about the sin of the church in not imparting the gospel to those who are without it, how does it happen that *we* have been distinguished by having it sent to us, while millions of the heathen world have been "passed by," and left to grope in darkness without a single ray of light to direct them to Christ? Who adjusted the plan, and directed the movement which put us in possession of these rich blessings, while no train of measures was put in operation, to give these same blessings to others who were without them? None will venture to say that the hand of the Lord has not been in this matter. Let men look at these facts. *Here* is one part of mankind, having no superior claims on the divine bounty, in possession of high spiritual advantages, tending to promote their eternal interests, and *there* is another part, entirely destitute of these advantages, and left exposed to sinful influences which jeopard the salvation of their immortal souls. Now in view of these facts, what shall we say? "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." Yet on the principles of those who make objection, we must either deny the facts altogether, or refuse to admit that the agency of God is concerned about them. Because, to admit the other, is to admit the sovereign right of God to make such distinctions among his creatures as he sees fit, though the reasons of his proceedings may be entirely concealed from us. The objection, therefore, against the doctrine of election, as involving undue partiality on the part of God, is refuted from known and acknowledged facts, which every where obtain, both in the natural and moral world, and in which the same principle of sovereign discrimination is conclusively established.

Having given this summary statement of the doctrine of God's decrees, I would, in the conclusion, 1. Warn men to beware of

the rashness of asserting, as is too often done, that this doctrine necessarily involves partiality and injustice on the part of Jehovah towards our fallen race. If the facts be as we have stated them from the word of God, it cannot be less than presumptuous thus boldly to pronounce in relation to this deep mystery. "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?"—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right."

What, though men cannot understand this doctrine in all its mysterious depths? The facts in the case are sufficiently evident. These are all that God has seen fit to reveal. These we are bound to believe on the credit of the divine testimony, instead of rashly arraigning the justice of God, or refusing to acknowledge his sovereignty. The language of God to Job is here applicable. "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." That God must have purposes cannot be denied, without divesting him of his wisdom and intelligence. That there is much of sovereignty in these purposes, the scriptures plainly indicate. The admission of this sovereignty, however, is that against which the pride of the human heart makes vigorous resistance. And here, perhaps, after all, is where the greatest difficulty lies. Men find it hard to allow that God has a right to act as a sovereign in his own dominions, without "giving an account of any of his matters," to those who cannot comprehend the justice of his proceedings. And when this justice is not apparent, though the fault may be in their own defect of vision, they invade the prerogatives of Jehovah, and practically disavow their belief in the decision of God's word, which affirms that "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Against such rashness men should guard. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord."

2. Men should also guard against abusing the doctrine of the decrees, by continuing in sin. Although the decree of God is the procuring cause of all good in man, it is not the cause of sin. This belongs to man. God has decreed to punish sin, to consign to eternal misery every transgressor of his law, who lives and dies in impenitence. But he has not decreed to exert any causal influence in the production of their sinful dispositions, or their courses of transgression. The guilt of sin, therefore, rests with the sinner; the punishment of that guilt will find its certain infliction in the decree of God. The decree of God, therefore, furnishes no excuse for sin, nor any encouragement to its commission. On the contrary, it gives alarming prominence and certainty to the miserable end of the sinner, by assuring him of the disastrous issue of a sinful course. This assurance of dis-

honor and wrath for their sins, ought to serve as a powerful motive to drive men from sin, and engage them to escape to the blood of the Saviour for deliverance from its curse.

3. The doctrine of the divine decrees should be improved for our encouragement in duty. God has chosen his people to salvation. He has also chosen them that they should be holy. Hence, they ought to seek for holiness, that they may enjoy salvation. Every holy aspiration, every believing prayer, every pious effort which they make, may be traced to the divine decree, and considered as among its gracious results. When, therefore, we exercise any holy dispositions, or perform any holy acts, we are hereby furnished with evidence that we are in the chosen way of salvation, and are encouraged to hope, that in the use of the appointed means, God will carry us forward to eternal life. Indeed I can hardly conceive of a stronger motive to holiness than that arising out of the purpose of God. If we are appointed to holiness, and holiness constitutes a part of salvation, we should exert every nerve that in our hearts and lives we may have evidence that the divine purpose is receiving its accomplishment. For the decree of God, it will be recollected, does not in any way conflict with man's free-agency. This remains entire. The liberty of the will suffers no restraint from the purpose of God. On the contrary, it finds in this purpose, an additional excitement to duty, and the attainment of eternal salvation. Hence we should exert ourselves, in the use of all our powers, that we may be holy, recollecting that to this God's people are chosen, and that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

4. Finally, let it be recollected, that it is the commands of God, which form the rule of duty, and not his decrees. His decrees form a rule of action to himself, but not unto us, farther than they may be exhibited in his commands. Now the commands of God are, that we repent, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and obey the gospel. These are matters of vital importance. To these, then, we ought to attend. It is our duty, to which we are bound by the most solemn obligations. As far as God has revealed his purposes, let us honor the truth by believing it, however high and mysterious. But whatever the purposes of God may be, the command of God makes it the duty of all to repent of their sins and seek pardon by faith in the atoning blood of a crucified Saviour. The decrees of God exert no influence to prevent men from complying with these demands. Pray, then, that you may be enabled to comply with the commands of God, and the calls of the gospel. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure."—And may the God of all grace bless, and assist, and save you, for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen!



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

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No. 9.      PITTSBURGH, FEBRUARY, 1833.      Vol. I.

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**SERMON IX.**

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BY ROBERT G. WILSON, D. D.,  
PRESIDENT OF THE OHIO UNIVERSITY.

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**THE REQUIREMENTS OF GOD ARE RIGHT AND  
REASONABLE.**

PSALM 19:8. *The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.*

THIS Psalm discloses to us the ways in which God manifests himself to his intelligent creatures. The visible creation, particularly the heavens, afford to the contemplative mind, such evidence of the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator, that in the want of reverence, worship and love, we are without excuse. These heralds of their Maker's praise, speak in a language intelligible to all the tribes of men, and in a voice which is heard from the rising to the setting sun. The doctrine, however, which they teach, with all its grandeur and excellence, is evidently deficient; as it affords no knowledge of the way in which sinners can be reconciled to God, whose law they have violated. Another way of knowing God, is by the revelation which he has given us, here called the law—the testimony—the statutes—commandments, &c. These terms are often used to express particular parts of the living Oracles, but here, it is believed, each one is used to signify the whole of divine revelation. In this exhibition of scripture excellencies the text is found: *The statutes of the Lord* (that is the various instructions given us in his holy word) *are right*, both in themselves and in their effect, and the proper use of them rejoices the heart. That the statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart, is the proposition, the illustration of which, now claims our attention.

In undertaking this task it becomes us to remember, that a revelation from God is justly expected to communicate what we did not know, and what we could not have known in any other

way. Such doctrines it is our duty to receive, on the authority of him who has revealed them. Revelation is not intended to set aside the use of reason, but to furnish us with the knowledge of truths which lie beyond its reach, and without supernatural aid must have forever remained in darkness. When those truths are made known, it is the province of reason to examine and judge of the evidence which proves that they come from God; and also to determine the precise import of the language in which they are communicated: but our limited faculties are not competent to determine what is, or what is not consistent with the infinite perfections of Deity. If, in a revelation purporting to be from God, there should be found doctrines which necessarily and unavoidably involved a contradiction, they could not be received as divine, for God is one, and his system of truth is perfectly harmonious. But that a revelation of the nature of God, and of his Providence and Grace in saving lost sinners, should contain things above our comprehension, is what all might expect. In our own existence, and in every thing around us, there are mysteries into which human reason cannot pry: much more may we expect, that in the character of the Creator, and in his moral government, there will be found things beyond our comprehension, which we must receive on His testimony who has condescended to reveal them. The conclusion to which these observations are intended to lead, is this, that in regard to revealed truth, having sufficient evidence that it is such, it is our duty to believe on the testimony of God, and wait for the manifestation of its rectitude, by its salutary effects, and the disclosures of that day which will reveal God's righteous judgments. The only method by which we can prove that the statutes of the Lord are right, is by presenting them to view, and shewing that in their nature and effects, they are adapted to our condition, and calculated to promote our present peace, and future happiness.

1. One of the statutes of the Lord which is adapted to the condition of men universally, and is calculated to promote their happiness in time and eternity, is that which commands all men every where to repent. The law, the transgression of which is sin, is holy, just, and good: it is the expression of the will of God, who is the Sovereign of the universe, in whom we live, move, and have our being. The transgression of this law, supposes a heart hostile to the government of God, and unmoved by all the favors which he has bestowed. The rational natures which we possess: the opportunities of intellectual and moral improvement which we enjoy: the hope of escaping his wrath through the mediation of Christ: and obtaining the rest and blessedness of heaven, are favors which he has freely bestowed. Now to rise up in rebellion against this being, who is inconceivably great and profusely kind, is so base, and so unworthy of an intelligent

creature, that repentance is the reasonable service of every transgressor. The condescension of God toward our degenerate race, has added strength to the obligations which bind us to the performance of this duty. The angels who fell have been reserved in darkness under chains to the judgment of the great day: but for erring men, God's coequal Son must leave the bosom of the Father; assume the nature of man degraded by sin, bear our sins in his own body on the tree; and die the accursed death of the cross, that those who believe in him might escape the penalty of the broken law, and become partakers of the joy and blessedness of heaven. Almost six thousand years have elapsed, since the first gospel promise was made to man; and during this long period, the wonders which God has wrought to effect our redemption, has cast much light on his glorious character, and filled with adoring wonder the sinless inhabitants of heaven. According to the plan of redemption, laid by infinite wisdom, and perfected by the Saviour's death, men every where are required to repent. The sinner violates the law of his Lord, his Benefactor, and his final Judge, by doing what he has forbidden, and by leaving undone what he has commanded; now what reason can he assign for such conduct? on what plea will he rely for his justification? He cannot say that his interest requires it, for he is assured that "the wages of sin is death—the soul that sinneth it shall die,—and cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." He will not allege that he is under no obligations to the Lawgiver; for in him he lives, moves, and has his being. His kindness, free and unsolicited, gave him a nature superior to the brutes, and placed him where he enjoys privileges withheld from many of his fellow men. Therefore, as all men have sinned, the statute which commands them to repent, is right.

2. The statute which requires men to yield themselves to God, is, also, so agreeable to the nature of man, and the relation in which he stands to his Creator and Preserver, that its rectitude cannot be reasonably questioned. That man yields himself to God, who employs all his powers of body and of mind, all his influence or weight of character in society, and all the wealth which he possesses, to advance the interests of the kingdom of God among men. Man was originally made in the image of his Creator. Love to God and delight in his service controlled all the powers he possessed, and engaged him in yielding obedience to his Maker's will. But being tempted by Satan, the enemy of God and man, he fell from his primitive rectitude, took part with this grand enemy in opposition to the will of the Creator; and by his transgression subjected himself and posterity to the penalty of the law. In this condition his ruin, to finite minds, appeared inevitable. If the law which he had violated was just, the Lawgiver must either

tarnish his justice, and infringe his invariable truth, or inflict the penalty upon the transgressor. Man, who had now rebelled against his Maker, was of a rank inferior to the angels who left their original state of purity and holiness, and are suffered to sink in remediless ruin, and for any thing that we can see, might have been abandoned forever. Before the work of creation began, God was perfectly happy in the enjoyment of his own unbounded excellence, and must have continued so, had he left man to the perdition into which he had plunged. But as the heavens are high above the earth, so God's ways and thoughts, are above those of men. The plan of redemption was laid; and hope excited in fallen man, by the declaration that the woman's seed should bruise the serpent's head. Men multiplied upon the face of the earth; but each succeeding generation became more corrupt than the former, demonstrating that the world by its wisdom knows not God. During the long period which preceded the coming of Christ, wickedness in all its forms greatly abounded, and the feeble light which then shined upon men, was principally confined to one nation. But the coming of Messiah, the Deliverer, the family from which he should spring, the time and place of his birth, his reception among men, and the various circumstances attending his life, death, resurrection, and the Kingdom which he came to set up, were foretold by Prophets of different ages, so that all danger of mistaking the person when he actually appeared, was taken away. When the Saviour was born, it was of a virgin, of the family of David, and at Bethlehem. The sceptre was passing from Judah, into the hands of the Romans: the second temple was then standing, and the seventy weeks of Daniel were then closing. When he entered upon his public ministry, the words of Isaiah were verified, "Behold your God will come—he will come and save you. Then the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped." This Redeemer, by his obedience and death, finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. He founded the kingdom foretold by Daniel the prophet: "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." Now, upon this foundation, eternal life is offered to every one who receives Christ as he is offered in the Gospel; and they are required to yield themselves to God as those who are alive from the dead. In common with the rest of mankind they fell in Adam, and by the violated law, are condemned to eternal death: from which they are delivered by the precious blood of Christ, "who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all

iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Now can we suppose that men who have been bought at such a price, will hesitate to yield themselves wholly to the service of their benefactor? In the provision made for our redemption, God has manifested a Father's love toward us; therefore he says, "If I be a father where is my honor, and if I be a master, where is my fear?" The sinner is utterly unqualified for the enjoyment of God and the employments of heaven, until he is renewed by divine grace: and being renewed, he delights in the service of God, and in the advancement of his cause among men, and will therefore cheerfully employ all his powers in advancing his kingdom in the world. The service of God is also the most natural and honorable employment of our faculties. He is the only being in the universe who is absolutely perfect; and the perfections of his nature, infinitely transcend the excellencies which belong to the most exalted of his creatures. Therefore the most appropriate and honorable use of our powers, is to yield ourselves to God: our interests in time and eternity demand it: and to this we are sweetly and forcibly inclined by the principles implanted in regeneration.

3. The statute which requires us, "Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all for the glory of God," is also right, and calculated to rejoice the heart. The apostle uses the term *glory*, to express lustre or brightness, when he says, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory." When the word is applied to God, it is used figuratively, but expresses the lustre of his perfections, which when beheld, produces an effect on our minds something similar to that which is produced by the brightness of a luminous body. Whatever tends to manifest the perfections of Deity, and to draw out the benevolent feelings of our heart toward God, to whom these attributes belong, tends to promote his glory. If the object of our worship be sovereign in the bestowment of his favors; if upon us, who are all under the curse of the broken law, "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; and it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy," reverence, deep humility, and a constant waiting at his footstool, should be visibly instamped on our character. Thus we will tacitly acknowledge, to those around us, that God is such as his word represents him, a being who does according to his will, in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. If it be a fact, that God has manifested toward us great love and astonishing condescension, in giving his Son to die for the ungodly, and in opening to us a door of hope, while fallen angels were left to perdition; gratitude, praise, and lives devoted to his service may reasonably be expected. This will manifest that we feel our obligations to so kind a benefactor, that

we are aware of the ruin from which his grace has delivered us, and feel the constraining influence of his love. These dispositions shew forth the glory of God, while feelings of a contrary character are every where acknowledged to be dishonorable to God, and degrading to man. The manifestation of God's glory, is the highest possible end at which an intelligent being can aim. When the Almighty created this world, we are told that he made all things for his glory; and his people, saved by his grace, are to him a crown of glory and a royal diadem. Intelligent creatures, in all their actions, have some end in view; we can no more suppose a rational action without an end, than we can suppose an effect without a cause. Now as the glory of God is the highest and noblest end of human actions, if men do not aim at this end, it is apparent that they are pleased with what is inferior, and prefer it before that which is most exalted and noble: which is the indubitable evidence of depravity. The inference is therefore unavoidable, that to aim at the glory of God in all our actions is right; and as it is agreeable to the will of God, it must rejoice the heart.

4. A fourth statute found in the word of God, requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves; this is also right, and calculated to promote the peace and happiness of mankind. Man was evidently formed for society, and much of his religion is manifested by his conduct toward those with whom he associates. He is required to love them, not more, but as himself; to avoid doing them an injury, as he would the infliction of an evil upon himself. This precept is set in the clearest and most impressive light by Christ himself, when he says, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them;" the rectitude of which has been acknowledged by men of all classes, and in every age and nation. In the ordinary and daily occurrences of human life, men need a rule which the weakest and most uncultivated can understand, and which the most unskilful may apply on every emergency. This golden statute refers him to the feelings of his own bosom, as the standard by which his conduct toward others is to be governed. The excellence of the rule consists in its adaptation to all the dealings of men, the ease with which it is applied by the most uncultivated, and the perfect rectitude of its decisions. Every man in the feelings of his heart, is a friend to himself; and though many do what is ultimately injurious, they do so under the apprehension, that at that time it is calculated to promote their happiness. The depraved propensities and ungovernable passions of men, often lead them in the forbidden paths of vice; when both themselves, and their neighbors feel the injury: but in the exercise of sober judgment, these excesses are condemned, and justice, truth and holiness approved. Then the rule will lead directly to that con-

duct toward our fellow man, which will promote his best interests, and afford to us peace and joy on reflection.

In this manner I might proceed, in shewing that the statutes of the Lord are adapted to our necessities, and salutary in their effects: but in regard to those which have been mentioned, their rectitude and utility are questioned, perhaps, by none. There are, however, some others, the propriety of which is not so obvious: against which objections have been made; and objections of such magnitude as are thought sufficient to set aside, as imposture, the whole of divine revelation. When the Jews hesitated to receive the doctrine of Christ, because, as they supposed, he was destitute of human learning, he said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me:" and added; "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." So I would say, if the statutes which have been exhibited, and others of a similar character which might be mentioned, be right and salutary, let them be faithfully observed, and this will pave the way for the reception of those which are more obscure. Men are induced to reject the revelation of God, not because its requirements do not contribute to the best interests of mankind, but because of the self-denial, watchfulness, and holiness which it requires, and the sentence of condemnation which it pronounces upon the disobedient. Depravity, and not the want of evidence, is the source of infidelity. If this were not the case, men would obey those statutes which they judged to be right, wherever found, and the multitude found in the holy scriptures, which are acknowledged to be just and salutary, would induce the belief, that He who had given so many statutes adapted to the condition of man, had not departed from his usual character of wisdom and benevolence in some others, the propriety of which may not be, to all, equally manifest. The impartial and candid, would attribute the obscurity which, in their view, rested on some parts of revelation, to their weakness or prejudices, rather than to any want of rectitude in the statutes of the Lawgiver. Those parts of revelation which announce the providences of God toward nations and individuals, will frequently appear to men strange, and inconsistent with the general benevolence of Deity, because they are not able to see the several parts of the great plan which he is executing. The objections felt, arise from the limited capacities and knowledge of men; not from the want of wisdom or goodness in the plan, or in the manner of its execution. Joseph, at the time he was sold into Egypt, was the most amiable and promising of all the sons of Jacob. Who, on seeing him reduced to a state of hopeless slavery, by the hands of his wicked brethren, does not stand aghast, and exclaim, How can the righteous Ruler of the universe, suffer the wicked to prevail in this manner, against the

righteous? And still further, when Joseph fell under the displeasure of Potiphar, his master, and was cast into prison, not for any crime, or act of indiscretion, but for the most illustrious virtue; how prone are short sighted mortals, to say, surely there is no God in heaven, who minds the affairs of men! But the termination of this portion of sacred history affords ample proof, that God knows the end from the beginning, and is able to make the wrath of man to praise him, and to restrain the remainder thereof. The history of the Bible is a history of Providence: and this portion of it proves, that circumstances apparently the most adverse, may lead to an end the most prosperous and desirable. The objections made to some parts of divine revelation, are manifestly unreasonable and irreverent: yet there are men who venture to make them, and their effects upon the multitude are exceedingly pernicious. Of these objections, the following will serve as a specimen. 1. "In the Bible we meet with contradictory declarations, sufficiently manifest to impair the credibility of the whole work. In Num. 23:19, it is said, God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent. In Gen. 6:6, it is declared, that it repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And in 1 Sam. 15:11, God is made to say, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be King: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. Again, it is said, Mal. 3:6, I am the Lord, I change not. And generally unchangeableness is ascribed to God: but in Isa. 38:1, he declared to Hezekiah, then confined to his bed, 'Thou shalt die and not live,' and shortly after, by the same prophet, 'Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.' Thus both repentance and mutability are ascribed to God."

For the removal of these and all similar objections, it will be sufficient to observe, that human languages are adapted to the wants of man; and when applied to Deity, are necessarily figurative, and a very imperfect vehicle of thought. Among men, the hands are the instruments of action: and the volume of inspiration ascribes to God, who is a Spirit, and without bodily parts, hands, as the instruments by which he exerts his power. After the same manner, feet, eyes, ears, &c., are ascribed to God, though we cannot suppose that they belong to a Being who is purely spiritual. Now if we ascribe to Deity, the organs of perception and the instruments of action which belong to man, it is not surprising that we should attribute to him human passions, when his actions resemble those of men, who are influenced by such emotions. God created the world and all things that are therein, as we learn from the first chapter of the book of Genesis: afterward he determined to bring a flood of waters to destroy man and beast. When men act in this way, they are said to repent:



and we use the same term in speaking of God: in men it is always accompanied with remorse and self-reproach, in God it signifies no more than an action similar to those of men, when they repent. Therefore, to object to the Bible because it ascribes repentance to God, is as unreasonable as it would be to object to the ascription of bodily parts to him, or to the use of human language. A revelation could be of no use, rather I would say, it would be no revelation, if it were not given in a language which men could understand: all languages adapted to the use of men, must be feeble in expressing the nature of God and things divine, and when thus employed, must be understood with limitations. Again, that God is unchangeable, is a doctrine often and plainly taught in the word of God: nor does the case of Hezekiah form any exception. This prince being confined to his bed by a disease which in its nature was mortal, and which, without supernatural aid, would certainly terminate in death: the prophet was sent to announce to him his condition and his duty; "Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live." The effect of this message was salutary: Hezekiah wept sore, and prayed, and the same prophet was sent to say to him, that the Lord had heard his prayer, and had added fifteen years to his life. Now we are assured, that "Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world;" this addition of fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah, in answer to his earnest prayer—the mortal disease with which he had been seized, and the prophet's first message, which brought him to feel his dependence, and the second message which filled him with gratitude and joy, all were known to God from the beginning, and were parts of the same benevolent and gracious plan. We behold the works of God in parts, as they successively present themselves to our view, and to us, these parts seem to have belonged to different plans, and to argue mutability in the divine purposes; but this is owing to our weakness, for with God they are all harmonious, and such as he at first designed. A vessel, on leaving this country for Europe, may steer a southerly or a northerly course, in the hope of meeting, at a certain latitude, with a wind which will carry her directly to the destined port, without subjecting the master to the charge of changing his design: so God may threaten the life of his servant by a mortal disease—announce by his prophet the natural tendency of his malady, and thereby bring him to a due sense of his frailty—he may heal the disease, and add fifteen years to the life of his servant, without subjecting himself to the charge of mutability.

2. Another objection is founded upon the order which God gave to the Israelites, to exterminate the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, Deut. 20:16,17. "But of the cities of these people which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou

shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: but thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizites, and the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee." This is thought to be so contrary to humanity and justice, and so contrary to the known benevolence of Deity, that it is difficult to suppose that it proceeded from him who made of one blood all nations of men, and is no respecter of persons. There is nothing in the whole system of revealed truth, against which ungodly men feel stronger objections, than the exercise of God's sovereignty. The first sin proceeded from a desire to be as gods, knowing good and evil; and every subsequent transgression is an impious attempt to extricate ourselves from the yoke of our Maker. The command given to the Israelites, to exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan, proceeded from the Sovereign of the universe, "Who does his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say to him, what doest thou?" The Canaanites were wholly given up to idolatry, as is manifest from every part of their history: and had yielded themselves to the practice of uncleanness in its most detestable forms. Had the righteous Judge of all the earth swept them away with a flood, as he did the inhabitants of the old world, all would have acknowledged that he was righteous. Had he consumed them with fire and brimstone, as he did the wicked Sodomites, none would have charged him with injustice. The difficulty arises from the circumstance, that the Israelites were commanded to execute God's vengeance upon them. Here we must remember, that the whole creation, animate and inanimate, constitutes God's host: upon whatever part thereof he chooses, he may call, and duty requires that part to obey. When he contended with Pharaoh, he commissioned the waters of the Nile to afflict his kingdom, by becoming blood. He called for flies, frogs, and locusts, and they obeyed his call, and engaged in war against his enemies. So when he engaged in war against these Canaanites, he sent hornets among them: he attacked them with hail stones from heaven: the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. Now the children of Israel received the command from God, to exterminate this devoted people, and were bound to obey by the strongest obligations. Some will probably allege, that the custom of shedding human blood would be likely to harden their hearts, and deprive them of those feelings of humanity, and compassion for the sufferings of our fellow creatures, which constitute the glory of our nature. On which I remark, that such is the depravity of the human heart, that we pervert even the forbearance and goodness of God to the increase of our iniquity; and doubtless bad men among the Israelites, were made worse by these scenes of blood. But when they remembered that God,

the righteous Governor of the world, had commanded it because of the great wickedness of the people; would it not tend to impress them with a deep sense of the great evil of sin, and the tremendous judgments which, sooner or later, overtake the ungodly? In this view it would prove a salutary lesson to those who were concerned in it: and to the surrounding nations, as instructive as the deluge, or the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus it appears that it accords with the perfections of Deity, and is liable to no valid objection.

3. It is further objected, that a future judgment, such as the scriptures teach us to expect; and a state of rewards and punishments, in the world to come, are highly improbable. Mr. Collins, an infidel writer of the last century, asserts, "that it is greatly improbable that God should especially interpose to acquaint the world with what mankind would do altogether as well without." The scripture declaration, That God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, is one of those statutes, of the rectitude of which, in the present state, we are very incompetent judges. That man who assumes the prerogative of determining, in opposition to revelation, or without its aid, what God will, or will not do, comes to his conclusion, without the knowledge of the premises from which it is drawn. God, who is the Creator and Governor of this, and all other worlds, may have reasons for the appointment of a day of judgment, of which we are totally ignorant. The displays of his moral perfections, particularly his justice, love, and mercy, among us, have been astonishingly great, and have excited the adoring wonder of the holy angels. Who then can affirm, that the knowledge of these facts will be of no use to intelligent creatures of other worlds? The apostle asserts, (Eph. 3:10,) that the gospel was preached to Jews and Gentiles, "To the intent that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God." There is good reason to believe, that the day of judgment will so fully disclose the righteousness of God, and the loveliness of his moral character, that it will afford intense and lasting delight to all holy beings, and overwhelm with confusion, shame, and remorse, those who have rebelled against him. The advantages which the day of judgment shall afford to the intelligent universe, are to us, in this dark world, in a measure conjectural: but when we are told that the angels desire to look into the mysteries of redemption, the conjecture is more than probable, that the revelation of God's righteous judgments, will edify and delight them. Solomon tells us that "all things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and the wicked: to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean." And that, "No man knoweth either love or hatred, by all that is before them." The reason of this state of things is

learned from the gospel the present is a state of trial. The gifts of Providence are not distributed to men, according to their merit; the good are often exercised with affliction, persecution, and reproach, while the wicked enjoy prosperity and peace. In this state of things, an opportunity is afforded to Christians, for the exercise of submission to the will of God, patience under the afflictions which he lays upon them, and fortitude in pursuing the path of duty, in the midst of discouragements and difficulties. The expectation of another state of being, where rewards and punishments will be distributed, according to the character which men sustain, rests upon the persuasion that God is just, and powerfully stimulates to virtue. Infidels themselves, acknowledge that "the doctrine of rewards and punishments in a future state, has so great a tendency to enforce civil law, and restrain the vices of men, that reason will not decide against it, on principles of good policy." Then may we not ask, if the doctrine has a tendency to restrain vice, and enforce obedience to civil laws, is it not probable that the Creator, who wills the good of mankind, would affix to his laws such sanctions? In this world their effect is salutary, and if they tend to restrain the vicious inclinations of man, they may be beneficial in another state of existence. The probability that these sanctions are annexed to the divine law, is just as strong, as that there will be a future state: for if the Governor of the world shall render to every man according to the deeds done in the body; and rewards and punishments are not distributed in this life, in exact accordance to character, then he has designed us for another state, where even-handed justice shall be administered to all. These remarks, it is hoped, will satisfy the candid reader, that arguments drawn from the nature of things, render it probable that there will be a judgment day, and a future state of rewards and punishments. But our observations are confined to a very short period of time, and to a very limited portion of this vast universe, and cannot enable us to determine what the Supreme Governor will, or will not do. That the events which have occurred in our world, may be important to other orders of intelligent beings, as manifestations of the infinite perfections of Jehovah, will scarcely be questioned: and if so, their full development in the transactions of the judgment day, and the future state of rewards and punishments appears to be indispensable.

4. It has also been objected to Christianity, that it establishes a system of priestcraft and spiritual despotism over the minds and consciences of mankind. When we remember that it is the duty of the christian minister, to exhibit the truth of God so clearly, that the ungodly may be alarmed, the hypocrite unmasked and the errorist detected, it is not surprising that the enemies of divine revelation, should level their heaviest artillery against

them. Ahab, the wicked King of Israel, hated and persecuted the prophet Micaiah because he told him of his wickedness, and the approaching judgments of an offended God. Ministers are men of the same nature, and subjected to the same weaknesses and infirmities with others. Some of them, no doubt, in entering the sacred office, are actuated by very unworthy motives; but that this is not the case with all, and that it was not the design of the institution of the ministry, candor will constrain all to allow. It is generally admitted, that the knowledge of the arts and sciences tends to elevate and adorn our nature, and shed a lustre upon society where that knowledge is cultivated: hence those who devote themselves to teaching these branches, are held in high estimation in every civilized land. The gospel minister is employed in teaching the great principles of morality and religion: the duties of rulers and ruled, parents and children, and of neighbor to neighbor; together with the duties which we owe to God, our Maker and final Judge, that we may enjoy communion with him here and hereafter. The faithful performance of these duties, promotes the happiness of men in civil life; and in its bearing upon the future state, is of infinite importance. Now if those who instruct in the liberal arts and sciences, are justly entitled to a competent and decent support, reason and justice will award the same to the Christian minister. Should he lay claim to an extravagant degree of wealth or power, I would not justify him or advocate his cause, but simply refer to the warrant which the scriptures give him, "Do ye not know that they who minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple; and they who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel." During the dark ages, a power over the consciences of men was claimed, altogether unwarranted by the word of God; and the same power is probably claimed at this day, where the papal usurpation prevails: but what is contrary to the christian scriptures cannot be urged as an objection to the ministry which they have established. When an officer of government receives bribes and perverts justice, to promote his own pleasure or emolument, we never charge it to the constitution, because such conduct is contrary to that instrument: in like manner, the errors of ministers ought not to be charged to the holy scriptures, when these errors are there so clearly condemned. Let any man examine the character and qualifications of a Gospel minister, as they are exhibited 1 Tim. 3:1—7. and he will find much to applaud and nothing to censure. He must be vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre, but patient; not a brawler, not covetous, &c. The power with which he is vested,

was given for edification and not destruction; and is altogether ministerial and declarative; it is not civil, but ecclesiastical and spiritual. The complaints therefore which are made against the christian scriptures, for having established a system of priest-craft, and spiritual despotism in the world, are entirely without foundation.

The depravity and malevolence of the human heart, have suggested numerous other objections to the system of revealed truth, which our limits will not permit us to notice. The evidences which prove our scriptures to be a revelation from God, are overlooked; and weak, frivolous, and unfounded objections are urged, to quiet the clamors of conscience, and keep men in countenance, while they live in the violation of God's righteous law. The same historical evidence by which we prove that Herodotus, Livy, Tacitus and others, wrote the books which bear their respective names, proves that the books of scripture were written at the time they say, and by the persons whose names they bear. That these writers were sent of God to deliver to mankind the doctrines which they inculcated, is proved by the astonishing miracles which they wrought, in the presence of friends and foes, and under circumstances in which the spectators could not be deceived. That the sacred writers were divinely inspired, is further evinced by the gift of prophecy. The knowledge of future contingent events belongs to God only: and where such events are announced years, and even ages before they come to pass, the Spirit of God must have communicated them. Nothing can evince the depravity of the human heart more clearly, than the opposition which men make to divine revelation. If the Bible be examined concerning the character of the Supreme ruler of the Universe, it teaches us that he is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in all his attributes—righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works—merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and in truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty. This Being we are required to reverence, love and worship. The duties of men in the various relations of life are also stated concisely and justly: rulers are required to be wise men, fearing God, loving truth, and hating covetousness. He that ruleth over men, must be just, ruling in the fear of God. The ruled, are required to submit themselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake, and be subject to the higher powers. The duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, and neighbors towards each other, are stated so plainly, that he who runs may read. Let the whole community adopt the revealed will of God, contained in the holy scriptures, as the rule of faith and practice, and soon shall we see society exhibiting a degree of order, harmony and improvement, never before witnessed.

With the following practical inferences, I shall now close my remarks on this subject.

1. Our gratitude is due to God, that his statutes are right, rejoicing the heart. The services which masters, kings and emperors require of those who are bound to obey them, are not always for the benefit of the servant. Those who take part with Satan the god of this world, and like Ahab, sell themselves to do evil, are not employed in business which will ultimately yield them either pleasure or profit. But God has connected our duty and interest, so that when we obey his will, we are most effectually promoting our present and future happiness. Many of the statutes of the Lord, require us to do, what is by no means pleasant to our depraved propensities: but our condition is hazardous in the extreme; it is only by violent and painful remedies, our utter ruin can be prevented. This then should encourage us in yielding obedience to the will of God, that while we are obeying his commands, we are using the best means of securing our present and eternal felicity.

2. The disposition, so prevalent in the world, to reject divine revelation as the rule of faith and practice, proceeds from human depravity, and not from any want of sufficient evidence. To be able to make objections to certain parts of revelation, and to ridicule and vilify scripture institutions, and holy men, is thought by some to manifest more acuteness and discernment than falls to the lot of the vulgar, while it only betrays an uninformed mind and a depraved heart. This is the testimony of scripture in the following passages: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, *because their deeds were evil*. Unto you, therefore, who believe, he is precious; *but unto them which be disobedient*, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner. If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; *in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.*" Reason concurs with revelation in establishing the same point. For if God has given a revelation of his will, and sufficient evidence of it, then nothing but alienation of heart from God, prejudice, or some corrupt bias, can prevent men from receiving it: but if he has not given sufficient evidence that a revelation has been made by him, nothing but alienation of heart from God, prejudice, or some corrupt bias, can induce men to receive it as such. The question then is, whether Paul and the other apostles, acted from selfish, ungodly and depraved motives, in believing and preaching Christ, or whether Voltaire, Hume, Gibbon, Paine, and others, acted from unworthy motives in rejecting him. The answer is obvious, and the fact is established: human depravity is the source of infidelity.

8. The fact, that the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, should induce us with cheerfulness, to apply ourselves to the study of the scriptures. In the affairs of life, a regard to our own happiness, is a governing principle. Christ hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel, and the retributions of eternity are calculated to excite the deepest interest. Why, then, should we not pursue that course which shall rejoice our hearts upon a dying bed, and enable us to lift up our heads with joy, amidst the conflagrations of the last day? The statutes of the Lord will lead us to the knowledge of our condition as sinners: to the knowledge of Christ, the only Saviour; and to the knowledge of the rest and blessedness of heaven: where the beloved of the Lord shall see Jesus as he is, and be like him, and dwell in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

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No. 10.      PITTSBURGH, MARCH, 1833.      VOL. I.

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• **SERMON X.**

BY ASHBEL G. FAIRCHILD,  
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**THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, ESPECIALLY IN  
ELECTION.\***

LUKE 4:28—30. *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, WERE FILLED WITH WRATH, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way.*

OUR Saviour had explained to the Nazarenes a prophecy of Isaiah, and informed them that it was accomplished in himself. This seemed to afford them much pleasure. But after all, he was aware that they entertained objections to him, on account of the obscurity of his birth. He also knew that they had heard of the miraculous cures he had performed at Capernaum, and expected him to do at least as much for the people of Nazareth, "where he had been brought up." This expectation, he, for wise reasons, did not intend to gratify. He proceeded therefore to show them that he had an undoubted right to perform his miracles when and wherever he pleased, according to the dictates of his own wisdom and goodness: and if he should withhold his favors altogether from them, he would be fully justified by their unbelief. In making such discriminations, he was acting just as the prophets Elijah and Elisha had done. Vs. 25,26,27. The proud self-confident Nazarenes imagined they held an irresistible claim to the miraculous services of the Lord Jesus; and could not brook the idea that they deserved to be passed by in the distribution of the divine favors. To perform cures at Capernaum, and none at Nazareth—this was an unpardonable offence. And when the Lord Jesus ventured to justify himself, by asserting his *sovereign* right, to "do what he would with his own," and to confer unmerited favors as his own infinite wisdom and goodness might direct; they were all on a sudden transported with rage. And forgetting the sacredness of the day, and the purpose for which

\*This discourse, (furnished at the request of the Editor,) is an abridgment of a small treatise lately published by the author.

they had assembled, they rushed upon him with one accord, and made a bold and desperate attempt to destroy his life.

The Nazarenes were by no means singular in their resentment. The doctrines preached by our Saviour have always aroused the enmity of the carnal heart. This has been especially the case with those doctrines which exhibit God in the character of a *sovereign*. Of this kind, I shall refer you to two examples, which I design to make the subject of my further remarks.

I. *God's sovereign disposal of ALL events.* •

II. *His SPECIAL purpose of mercy.*

I. There are few things taught in the Bible which have given more offence than the doctrine that God is the disposer of all events. And as it is well known to be a doctrine of our branch of the church, it has, towards her, occasioned no small share of hostility. Men have undertaken to deduce from it a long list of absurdities and blasphemies, which they have exhibited to the world as parts of our theological system: such as that "*God is the author of sin*,"—"that we deny man's *free-agency*, and make him a *mere machine*,"—that "we set aside the *necessity of means*, and maintain a system of *fatali-ty*." To support these charges they produce a detached passage of our Confession of Faith, which says, that "God ordained whatsoever comes to pass." If, however, we turn to our standards and read the whole sentence, all these slanders will be effectually silenced. God "ordained whatsoever comes to pass; yet, so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." Chap. III. § 1. Here are three very important limiting clauses, to which I wish to call your attention.

1. The first of the clauses declares, that God has SO ordained all things, as NOT to be the author of sin. And you may now see upon what grounds men have labored to fix upon us the odium of a tenet, impious and shocking in the extreme, and worse, if possible, than atheism itself.

2. The second limiting clause, denies expressly any such foreordination as would set aside free-agency. "Thereby, neither is violence offered to the will of the creatures." Here again you may see with what justice the clamor is raised against us, "that we deny free-agency and make man a mere machine." You may now be assured that such a charge has nothing in our standards for its support. Turn to Chap. IX. § 1., and you will read thus, "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil." 'This indeed is a truth of which we are all perfectly conscious. And we are aware that to deny it would be to set aside man's accountability to God.

3. The third limiting clause in the sentence says, that God, "so" ordained all things as not to take away human liberty, nor the necessity of means, but rather to establish them. "Thereby, the liberty or contingency of second causes is not taken away, but rather ESTABLISHED." Here again, you may see the dishonesty, or rather I should say, the ignorance of those who

charge us with denying human liberty, or the efficacy of means, or with maintaining a system of fatality. Charity should perhaps leads us to the conclusion that they have never seen, or never attentively examined the standards of our church. Any other supposition would be attended with such an imputation against their morals, as I am unwilling to bring. Those who hold the doctrine of our church, as you now learn, must believe in human liberty, in the necessity and efficacy of means, and must be, if possible, more free from fatalism than any others. If any have held contrary to this, they did not believe our doctrine; and it is uncandid, it is illiberal, it is unchristian to blame the whole body with the eccentricities of a few individuals.

All truly Calvinistic divines, distinguish foreordination into efficacious and *permissive*. By the former, is denoted, whatever God accomplishes by his *positive agency*; by the latter, whatever for wise reasons, he chooses to permit. This distinction you will find is admitted by our church. Chap. V. § IV, and Chap. VI. § I. In this view of the subject, the doctrine will be fully presented in these two propositions,

1. Nothing comes to pass, without the agency or permission of the Deity.
2. What God now does, he always intended to do, and what he now permits, he always designed to permit.

The first of these positions needs no proof. The second is evidenced by the unchangeableness of God. To make this matter plain, let us suppose that God creates a new world to-day; you will admit that he does it from *design*. And if so he must always have had that design, or else he has formed a new purpose and is changeable; which he denies, saying, "I am the LORD, I change not."

Again; if God creates a world to-day, and does so from *design*, when did he form that design? Not till to-day? Why not sooner? Is he more wise, more mighty, more benevolent to-day, or does he see something new, which induces him to form an intention which never existed in his mind before.

It may also be demonstrated from *his foreknowledge*. For whatever any being foreknows he will do of his own accord, *that* he must already have resolved to do. If, for example, you know that you will, of your own accord, take a journey to-morrow, you must already have resolved upon that journey. Now God foreknew that he would, of his own accord, make a world to-day. He knew it from eternity. How did he know it? If his determination was unsettled at that period; if he had not already come to a decision on the subject, how could he *certainly* know that he would create a world to-day? The same reasoning applied to any thing else that God does in creation or providence, will issue in the same conclusions. Indeed if we deny the principle, that *what God now does he always meant to do*, we disrobe him of his perfections, and reduce him to the level of a creature.

In the same manner it may be shown, that *what God now permits he always meant to permit*. Did God know from eternity that he should permit a wicked man to persecute his church to-day? How did he know it? If his purpose was not settled, how did he know *certainly* that he should permit him.

From what has been said, you may easily understand what is meant by *foreordination*. But I think proper now to present the subject in another point of view. To *foreordain*, in the technical sense in which the word is used by Calvinists, signifies to *determine to render a future event certain, whether by positive agency or permission*. Thus: if you could know that the giving of a tract to a drunkard, would, with infallible certainty, issue in his reformation, and you determine to give the book; in this case you *foreordain* the reformation of the drunkard. You determine to do what renders his reformation *certain*, and you fulfil your decree by *positive agency*. Now suppose you could know with equally infallible certainty, that the reformation of the drunkard will occasion some of his friends to attack him with much profane abuse. I say you know it with *absolute certainty*, and yet rather than lose so great a good as the drunkard's reformation, you adhere to your determination; you give the book and thus render it certain that a man will commit the sin of profanity. Here then you *foreordain*, or are the innocent occasion of the *certainty* of an evil action. But it is plain that you did not "ordain" it in the same sense as you did the other event. You did not, properly speaking, *will* it. In itself considered you hated it. Yet rather than lose the great good you had in view you chose to bear with the evil. We say then, that you foreordained these disagreeable things *permissively*.

Now in one or other of these senses God ordained "whatsoever comes to pass." No event would ever have taken place but for his agency or permission. When he formed this world he had in view his own glory, which is necessarily connected with the highest good of the universe. He did not begin the work, as an ignorant architect commences a building, without a settled plan. No. He beheld with an intuitive glance, all the possible results of an infinity of systems, and out of them all chose ONE. All the long train of consequences which would flow from that system, passed in review before him. He held his eye steadily upon every event,—every action that would sooner or later flow out of this plan of operations. He saw, as one *certain* result, that men would sin, that men would be punished. He knew that he could, by destroying free-agency, or by a variety of other alterations in the system, prevent the entrance of sin. But probably such alterations would have interfered with the main end he had in view and he saw it would be best to permit it. He might have determined to leave sin unpunished, but this would have tarnished the lustre of his glory. Besides, this plan was so admirable, that sin itself would be overruled for the promotion of his glorious designs. Perceiving then, all these results; being able to calculate to a *certain*ty, all the holiness and all the sin, all the happiness and all the misery, that would take place through his agency or permission, from the commencement to the end of time, he deliberately chose this system and ushered it into existence. He did not choose it for the sake of the sin and misery, which, through the freedom of man, would certainly attend it; but he chose it for the greater good which would be effected by it, in spite of the existence of sin and misery. I say, being able to calculate to a *certain*ty all the events which would result from it, he put the system into operation; and thus, either *efficaciously* or *permissively* determined the *certain*ty of whatever comes to pass.

In support of this doctrine we appeal to the *sacred oracles*. Paul, in Eph.

1:11, says, "In whom we have an inheritance, being **PREDESTINATED** according to the **PURPOSE** of him who *worketh all things* after the **COUNSEL** of his own will." Here is "Predestination," a "purpose" of God, and a "counsel," according to which he *worketh all things*. The same apostle, in Rom. 11:36, speaking of God, tells us that "Of Him, and through him, and to him, are **ALL THINGS**." Does this bear no resemblance to the doctrine? Again, in Acts 4:27,28, we read thus, "Of a truth, against the holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together, *for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy COUNSEL determined before to be done*." Here we ask, Were not the sufferings and death of Christ *certain* events? And did not God for wise reasons *intentionally* permit the Gentiles and Jews to do as they did? And were they on that account deprived of free-agency? No. On the contrary they acted the more freely, for God had for a long time held them back from taking the life of Jesus, but when the appointed time came, he was delivered into their hands. I shall add but one more passage, although it would be easy to cite a hundred. The brethren of Joseph acted very wickedly in selling their brother to go into Egypt, and did it of their *own accord*. Yet Joseph says to them, Gen. 50:20, "But as for you ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive." Does not this look as though the selling of Joseph was a *certain event*, and that God permitted it for wise reasons? Indeed how could the Most High certainly know any thing future, unless it were certain? That foreknowledge which God has of the actions of his creatures, must be *certain*; for nothing else deserves the name of knowledge. To foreknow that a thing may be, or may not be, is to know nothing about it. It follows, that all that was foreknown to God from eternity, was *certain* from eternity, and will infallibly take place, through his agency or permission. But this is nothing but the doctrine of foreordination.\*

\* Pressed with this kind of argument, and supposing the certainty of an action to be inconsistent with its freedom, some have denied that God is able to know all future events. What an idea is this! That God has set in operation a system, without being able to know whether its results will be for his glory! for this he cannot know, unless he knows all the future actions of his creatures. Dark indeed must be the prospects of the Supreme Ruler of the universe; and awful must be his suspense and anxiety, while sitting at the helm of affairs. He can make no provision beforehand to meet an emergency, but must govern the universe by sudden snifts and expedients. This theory is not only contrary to sound reason, but is contradicted by *all the prophecies*, and by the whole tenor of scripture.

To avoid these dreadful consequences, some have invented a theory, if possible still more absurd, viz. that although God could if he pleased, foreknow all the voluntary actions of his creatures, yet that he *chooses not to know them*, lest by rendering them certain he should infringe the liberty of the will. This scheme is pressed with all the difficulties of the former one, and in addition has some that are peculiar to itself. It represents the all-wise God, as putting a system into operation, shutting his eyes, and refusing to look at all its consequences, and of *choice*, remaining ignorant whether it will eventuate in his glory; plunging forward in the dark! According to the first of these theories, God is necessarily imperfect; according to the last he is voluntarily so. This hypothesis was advocated by the Chevalier Ramsay, and from him, it was adopted by the learned and eccentric Dr. Adam Clarke. There is little danger of its being advocated by any reflecting theologian. But it serves to show how heavily the doctrine of the Divine foreknowledge presses upon Arminianism.

*Obj. 1st.* If foreordination be true, what encouragement have we to pray? I answer; a thousand times more than if the events of life depended on creatures or chance. It was a part of his eternal plan to answer the prayer of faith. He has so arranged *all* events as that every effectual fervent prayer of the righteous shall be fulfilled, and that without resorting to a miracle, or interfering with any other of his purposes.

Now take away this doctrine, and see what encouragement you will have to pray. You ask God to save the life of a sick friend; but God must not interfere, for he has left it to creatures or to chance whether he lives or dies. You pray for the conversion of a sinner; but you pray in vain, for God has left it to chance or to his own natural inclination to decide the question. Thus you see that the denial of the doctrine, and not the maintaining of it, discourages prayer.

*Obj. 2d.* If the certainty of men's actions is determined, how can they act otherwise than they do? *Ans.* They can *if they will*. They have the *power*. A man is able to commit a wicked action which it is *certain* he will not commit. And he has power to refrain from an act, which it is still absolutely certain he will perform. "But if I had done otherwise than I did to-day, would not God have been disappointed?" No: If you had done otherwise, the *certainty* would have been otherwise.

*Obj. 3d.* Why was not language so unpopular and so liable to abuse, as that on the subject of the *decrees*, left out of our standards? *Ans.* Why is such language found in the scriptures? Why did Paul say, "predestinated according to the purpose of him who *worketh all things* according to the counsel of his own will"? Why did he not leave out the whole of his first chapter to the Ephesians, and the 8th and 9th to the Romans? No doubt there are many who would gladly have omitted them, and who would now expunge them from the Bible if it were in their power. The scriptures contain abundance of language as *unpopular*, and as liable to abuse as any used in our Confession. Indeed I have often thought that there are many passages, which, if adopted verbatim in our standards, would have excited even more "wrath" than is at present indulged against us.

## II. *God's SPECIAL purpose of mercy.*

Perhaps there is no doctrine which has occasioned so much "wrath" against our church, as the doctrine of God's special *purpose of mercy*, or, to use a scriptural term, that of "*election*." And inasmuch as this is a truth very clearly and distinctly taught in the word of God, great labor and ingenuity have been thought necessary in order to overthrow it. One very common expedient, employed for this purpose, has been to hold up false and distorted views of it, by which it may be brought into discredit. It will, therefore, be highly necessary in entering upon the subject, to guard it against the misrepresentations of its enemies, and to define it as clearly and accurately as possible. I remark then,

1. That it is no part of the doctrine of election, *that God made a part of mankind merely to damn them*. This is an aspersion cast upon it by its

enemies. But it is not true. Election, properly speaking, has nothing to do with the damnation of a single sinner. It is a mere purpose of love and mercy, proceeding from that God who affirms with an oath, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. If he destroys sinners, it is because their perdition is inseparably connected with his own glory and the highest good of the universe. At the same time, *in itself considered*, he desires the happiness of all his creatures.

2. It is no part of election, *that the elect will be saved, let them do what they may*. It is certain that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The elect cannot be saved unless they come to Christ, and experience the renewing influences of his Spirit. They can no more enter heaven without a preparation for it, than the non-elect. If a man is never concerned about the salvation of his soul, if he does not repent and flee to the Saviour, there is nothing in election that will save him. "Chosen," says the apostle, "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

3. It is no part of election, *that the non-elect will not be saved let them do what they may*. If they would repent and believe the gospel, there is nothing in election that would destroy them. If they would come to Christ he would "in nowise cast them out." What hinders them? No decree of God; nothing but their own aversion to holiness and their love of sin. Election does not stand in their way. Election merely says that some shall be made willing; but if any are willing to come without it, God has solemnly promised to save them. The non-elect will not be lost unless they voluntarily persist in impenitence to the last.

What then is the doctrine of Election? I shall endeavor to exhibit our views of it by an easy illustration.

Suppose the monarch of some mighty empire hears that a small province of his dominions has rebelled against him. Having no pleasure in their death, he sends them an offer of pardon on consistent terms. They all to a man refuse to accept of it. Still inclining to mercy, he sends out ambassadors, commissioned to use every entreaty with the rebels. These go forth and use every effort in vain. The rebels exclaim, "our cause is just and we will die rather than submit." The compassionate monarch, hearing of this, cries out, "how shall I give up all these my subjects to suffer death! I will go myself, and by my personal influence will prevail on the greater part to accept of my proposal of pardon; and inasmuch as such signal obstinacy ought not to go unpunished, I will execute the sentence of the law upon the rest of them, that they may serve as ensamples to all my subjects." This determination he carries into effect. The greater part are reconciled, and the remainder punished.\*

\* It is generally admitted that God from eternity determined to punish all the finally impenitent, *knowing*, at the same time, who the finally impenitent would be. The Calvinist only adds to this, that God is able to overcome their wilful obstinacy, and bring them to an acquiescence in the terms of salvation, but, for wise reasons, *permits* them to continue in sin, and become to the universe appalling monuments of his justice. And herein consists the sovereignty of his dispensations towards them. Thus their destruction is of themselves; and their refusal of mercy was, in the order in which it stood in his mind, *prior* to his determination to punish. Our Confession of Faith assigns, as the only reason why the non-elect cannot be saved, that "they do not truly come to Christ." Chap. X. §IV.

But let us now make a slight alteration in the case, and suppose that this monarch, being a prophet, clearly foresees the rebellion before it will take place. He reasons with himself, and makes up his determinations. Does the circumstance that all his determinations were formed previously to the rebellion, alter their moral character? Does it detract at all from the glory of his wisdom, justice, and mercy? Can you condemn him for pursuing the very course he ought to have taken if his purposes had never been formed until the time? Can you censure him for resolving to make a desperate effort to save some of his rebellious subjects? This were to blame him for being merciful. Will you condemn him because he determined to be beforehand to make a public example of some of the rejecters of his mercy? Can you say that he fixed their condition by his decree, and thus rendered it impossible to accept his pardon? No. They fixed their condition themselves. They were "ordained to wrath and dishonor for their sins." The monarch's determination to punish was, in the order in which it stood in his mind, subsequent to their refusal of a pardon.

Finally; will you censure him for not constraining all to submit to his proposals? This is to allow him no room for the exercise of discretion. The good of his empire might, for aught you know, require that he should make examples of some of the obstinate rebels.

Now although no illustration will exactly meet the case; yet, I think, I have, in every material point, exhibited the Calvinistic view of election.

1. God is the sovereign Lord of the universe. This little spot of his dominions has rebelled against him. All mankind are in a state of sin and condemnation; all are exposed to his wrath and curse.

2. God, in infinite mercy, has offered a pardon to rebels of Adam's race, through the Redeemer. His language is, "Whosoever will, let him come;" and "him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." But notwithstanding the free offer, mankind continue in their rebellion, and "will not come" to Christ that they might have life. Like the persons mentioned by our Lord in the parable of the supper; "they all *with one consent* began to make excuse." Left to himself, every individual will reject the offer of a Saviour, and sink to endless ruin. If God does not interpose, in the omnipotency of his grace, to subdue the obstinacy of the sinner's heart, all will perish in the refusal of his mercy, and Christ will have bled and died in vain.

3. God has determined that so distressing a result shall not take place. He was not willing to see the whole human family perish, as they inevitably would, if left to themselves. He did not intend that his Son should bleed and die in vain. He has not committed the question of man's salvation to the decision of chance or human depravity. He has determined to save *some*. By the special influence of his Spirit, he renews their hearts, and sweetly constrains them to yield. Thus he "*calls* them according to his purpose," *justifies*, and *glorifies* them. What proportion of the human family are included in this his purpose of mercy, we are not informed. But in view of the future days of unclouded prosperity promised to the church, it may be inferred, that by far the greater part of the descendants of Adam, will at last be found among the *elect* of God. And although the number of them is indefinite in the view of man, yet, with God it is so *certain* and *definite*



that he cannot be disappointed. Having thus explained what is meant by Election, I proceed now to *establish* the doctrine,

### 1. By the FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

It is admitted that God changes the hearts of some sinners and saves them through Christ; and that he does so of his own accord. Now, did he *fore-know* that he would do this? Did he know it *from eternity*? How did he know it, if it was *uncertain*? If his purpose was not already fixed; if his resolution was at all wavering; how could he know with *certainty* that he would change the hearts of some sinners and save them? Let any candid man look at this, and he must believe the doctrine of election. It may be further evinced,

### 2. By the HOLY SCRIPTURES.

You admit the Bible to be the word of God. If so, its statements are all entitled to implicit confidence. Here there can be no error or mistake. Let us then go to the Bible; and let us go, not to alter, to pervert, or to wrest it from its natural meaning; but with a sincere desire to know what the Lord hath spoken, and determined to acquiesce in all his decisions, however repugnant to our pride or our prejudices.

Turn to the 1st chapter to the Ephesians, and in the 3d and 4th verses you will read thus: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as *he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love.*" That his meaning might be still more evident, the apostle adds immediately, verse 4. "Having PREDESTINATED us unto the *adoption of his will.*" What is this but the doctrine of election? Look now at the 11th verse of the same chapter. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being PREDESTINATED according to the PURPOSE of him who worketh all things after the COUNSEL of his own will." Does not this look like election?

Turn now to the eighth chapter to the Romans. At verse 28, the apostle asserts that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God." And how does he prove it? By a reference to the eternal purpose of God in election. "And we know," says he, "that all things shall work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the *called according to his purpose.* For whom he did *foreknow* he also did *predestinate* to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did *predestinate* them he also *called*, and whom he *called* them he also *justified*, and whom he *justified* them he also *glorified.*" Now if the doctrine of election be not true, what force is there in his argument?

In 2 Thess. 2:13, we have this declaration: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath *from the beginning CHOSEN you to salvation* through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." And in 2 Tim. 1:9. we read, "God hath saved us and called us with an *holy calling, not according to our works*, but according to his *own purpose and grace*, which was given us in Christ Jesus *before the world began.*" Surely, language has no meaning, unless these

passages assert the doctrine of personal election to holiness and salvation.

When Paul preached the gospel at Antioch in Pisidia, we are informed, that "as many as were ORDAINED to ETERNAL LIFE believed." Acts 13:48. And at the commencement of a Christian church at Corinth, God looked on the heathen inhabitants and said to Paul, "*I have much people* in this city."

Let us now hear what Jesus, our divine teacher, has said on this subject. He "was foreordained before the foundation of the world" to be a Mediator; and entered into an engagement to give his life as a ransom for sinners. But would he undertake the painful task on an *uncertainty*? Would he consent to endure the sorrows of Gethsemane, and the anguish of Calvary, leaving it to *chance*, or to the depraved heart of man to decide, whether any should ever be redeemed by his blood? No: he well knew, that in such an event not one soul would ever be saved: and that he would reap no reward of his death. Hence it was *rendered certain* that some should come to him, and experience the saving benefits of his sufferings. We read of a *promise of eternal life before the world began*. Tit. 1:1,2: "Paul—an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's *elect*—in hope of *eternal life*, which God, that cannot lie, *promised before the world began*." To whom was it promised? Not to creatures, for they were not yet in existence; but to the Lord Jesus. The ancient prophets frequently refer to this promise made to the Messiah, and say, "a seed shall serve him." "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." "*Thy people shall be WILLING IN THE DAY OF THY POWER*." The Lord Jesus frequently spake of those who were promised him, with inexpressible affection, as his "SHEEP," and as those that were GIVEN him, by the Father. "I lay down my life for the *sheep*." Elect Gentiles were counted as *sheep* before their conversion. "And *other sheep* I have which are not of this fold; them also *I must bring*, and they shall hear my voice." John 10:16. Again, he says to the Jews, verse 26, "Ye believe not *because ye are not of my sheep*." And alluding to the promise of the everlasting covenant, "all that the Father *giveth me SHALL COME* to me." John 6:37. "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he *should give eternal life*, TO AS MANY AS THOU HAST GIVEN HIM." John 17:2. To the mother of Zebedee's children, he says, "To sit on my right hand and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them *for whom it is prepared* of my Father." Matth. 20:23. And again; in his prayer in the garden, "I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but *for them whom THOU HAST GIVEN ME*." John 17:9. Once more, he says, "No man can come to me except it were GIVEN UNTO HIM of my Father." Chap. 6:65. Many of our Lord's hearers were highly offended at this last declaration, and "went back and walked with him no more." Let me ask you, my hearers, in the words of your Saviour, "Will ye also go away?" Are any of you "ashamed of Christ or of HIS WORDS"? Remember they are the words by which you will be condemned or acquitted at the last day. You may wrest, pervert, or oppose them, but you cannot alter their meaning, or cause one jot or tittle of them to pass away. You may now refuse to believe them, but the time is coming when conviction will be pressed upon you with an eloquence, infinitely surpassing that of human or angelic tongues. The day is approaching that shall behold the Son of man bursting forth in dreadful glory from amid the clouds of heaven. He shall "send forth his angels and gather his ELECT from the four

winds." Then will he preach the doctrine of election to an assembled universe, loud as the thunders of the archangel's trump. To those on his right hand, he will say, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."

I am aware that all the passages we can bring in support of election, may be ingeniously *explained away*, so as to "please men;" and so can any truth contained in the Bible. The Universalist professes to be able, in this way, to erase the idea of future punishment from its pages. The Unitarian, also, will tell you that he can explain away the doctrine of Christ's divinity. For my own part I cannot conscientiously pursue such a course, I would sooner deny the scriptures altogether, than attempt an evasion of their proper meaning. Various expedients have been employed to evade the passages which treat of election; and some have entertained unfriendly feelings towards us, because we could not adopt their expositions. Let us then examine some of them, and see whether we are so highly censurable in rejecting them.

1. Some tell us that ALL MANKIND were "chosen in Christ." But let us try this mode of exposition upon a few passages. Eph. 1:4,5. "He hath chosen [*all mankind*] in him before the foundation of the world—Having predestinated [*all mankind*] unto the adoption of children." Again, Rom. 8:30. "He did predestinate [*all mankind*]~~—called—justified—and glorified~~" them. This is universal salvation without much disguise.

2. Others explain the passages quoted, of an election of *nations*, and not of *persons*. But has God ever "chosen to salvation" nations, as such? Has he "predestinated" whole nations "unto the adoption of children," and *given* them to Christ? Well, if so, they will all come to him. Having been "predestinated," they will be "~~called—justified—and glorified~~;" and as nations consist of particular persons, it is after all, a *personal* election.

3. Another expedient, to get rid of the doctrine, is, to explain those scriptures as meaning, that God predestinated some unto salvation, *because he knew that they would believe and be saved, at all events*. I cannot adopt this scheme for several reasons. The **FIRST** is, that it is *not countenanced by the scriptures*. It is true, Peter says, "Elect *according* to the foreknowledge of God." And we admit that God's election of men is *according* to his foresight of the fall and ruined condition of our race; and to his knowledge of the certainty, that without the interposition of his special grace, all would refuse his mercy and perish. But the inspired writer does not intimate that he chose any *because* he knew they would have faith. Paul also says, "Whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate." But the verb **KNOW** is often used to signify *love*. Thus, "I *know* my sheep and am *known* of mine." "Depart from me, I never *knew* you." So in this case, "Whom he did *fore-know*," or love from eternity, "them he did predestinate," "called," &c. agreeably to his declaration in Jeremiah, "I have loved thee with an *everlasting love*, THEREFORE with loving kindness *have I drawn thee*." 31:3.

My **SECOND** difficulty, in adopting the above scheme, is, that it *disagrees with the scripture*. The apostle says, "God hath chosen you—through

sanctification of the Spirit and *belief* of the truth." So far are faith and holiness in man, from being the moving causes of his election, that they are only the *means* through which God fulfils his designs of mercy. So, again, "as many as were *ordained* to eternal life *believed*." Here it is evidently the design of the sacred writer, to represent the faith of believers as proceeding *from* the purpose of God to save, not that purpose as proceeding from their faith. Besides, the expression, "according to the good pleasure of his will;" and "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," plainly imply *sovereignty* in the predestinating act.

**THIRDLY.** I shall mention one more difficulty in the way of adopting the expedient referred to. Faith is either the work of man in his own heart; or it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Either man or God, is the *prime, moving cause* of its existence. If man be that cause; if we suppose that faith owes its existence in his heart to any work of his; then, to say that God chose some to salvation, because he foresaw their faith, is to say that he chose them "according to their *works*," which the apostle denies. Besides: it represents God as moved in his designs of mercy, by something good foreseen in the creature: for faith is something good. St. Jude calls it "holy faith." It would follow of course that when the apostle gave *thanks* to God for his own election and that of others, he is to be understood as merely expressing gratitude, that the LORD had foreseen their faith; and his language is to be paraphrased as follows,

"God, I thank thee that, as thou knewest well, I would not be as other men are; thou knewest that I would have faith whilst others would remain in unbelief. Thou knewest there would be something in me, that would lead me to Christ and salvation. And foreseeing this good disposition of mine, thou didst choose **ME** to salvation in preference to other Jews. And for this reason, thou didst meet me, when on my way to Damascus I was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against thy disciples." Was this the meaning of the apostle, when he gave thanks to God for his election? No. "Not according to our works" says he, "but according to *his own purpose*, and grace."

But faith is not of man. It is *wrought in the heart* by the blessed Spirit. God is its prime moving cause. The scripture assures us that it is "not of ourselves," but "the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8,9. Jesus is said to be "the *author* and finisher of faith." Heb. 12:2. And it is placed among the "fruits of the Spirit." Gal. 5:22. If, then, God from eternity knew, that some would have faith, he knew that it would be a gift bestowed by himself; inasmuch as left to themselves, not one would ever come to Christ. And how did he certainly know that he would bestow that gift, unless he had already *resolved* to bestow it? And why had he resolved to bestow it, unless he had already formed a *determination to save*; which is the same thing, as election?

Have we not reason to suspect the soundness of any system, which cannot be supported without elaborate criticisms, numerous evasions of scripture texts, and frequent alterations in the translation? And may not our suspicion be confirmed, when we see the advocates of that system plainly manifesting a dislike to some parts of the Bible, never referring to them, except it be to do away their obvious meaning, and appearing always displeased, when

they are read or quoted, even without comment, by others? Do not these things betray a lurking consciousness of holding some opinions, not easily reconciled with the word of God?

I proceed now, to reply to a few objections, which may be urged against the doctrine of election.

*Obj. 1st.* "If I am not one of the elect, what good will it do if I go to Christ?"

*Ans.* Just as much good as if you knew you were elected. Election cannot injure you. It only touches the question whether any shall be constrained to come. But if you are willing to come, God has solemnly promised to save you at all events.

*Obj. 2d.* If election be true, how can God be *sincere* in his invitations to all, to believe and be saved?

*Ans.* He is sincere, because if all men would repent and believe the gospel, they would infallibly be saved; and because he requires of them, in order to their salvation, only what it is their duty to do, and what they are blameable for not doing; and further, because he is most willing that his invitation should be accepted. Again: it is only on account of the universal rejection of his offers, that he makes any selection at all from among mankind. In eternity, when he formed his purpose of special mercy, he viewed mankind as having already refused his overtures. Their refusal, as to the order in which it stood, in the divine mind, was *prior* to that purpose. Election represents God as saying, "I will make an unlimited offer of pardon to mankind, and as they will all refuse it, I shall interpose by my special grace, and constrain some to submission." Hence it is plain that his offers are just as sincere, as they would have been, if he had not formed a purpose to save a single one of mankind.

*Obj. 3d.* This doctrine represents God as *partial*, and as a "respector of persons."

*Ans.* I grant that God is *discriminating* in his goodness. This is visible wherever you turn your eyes. He gave nobler powers to men than to worms, to angels than to men. He passed by the rebel angels, and provided a way of mercy for Adam's race. He has passed by the heathen, and sent his gospel to us. He brings one person into being, to become the child of many prayers and instructions, while another is left to the corrupting influence of evil example. But is God therefore *partial*, or a "respector of persons"? "No;" you reply, "because he has *wise reasons* for making these differences." Very well: this is the very answer we intended giving to your objection. Partiality is an *unreasonable*, *capricious*, or *unjust* preference of one person above another. But God is not actuated by caprice in choosing some to eternal life, for he has *wise reasons* not always known to us, for what he does. He is not *unjust*, for he gives to no one less than he deserves. He does not respect the persons of the great, the learned, or the noble of this world, for he calls "not many" of them. He does not accept the person of the rich, on account of his wealth, but has "chosen the poor." He still treats them uniformly according to their moral characters, so that "in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him."

*Obj.* 4. If election be true why need I use any exertions to obtain salvation?

*Ans.* God's decree, instead of taking away the necessity of means, rather *establishes* it. He determined to save Noah by means of the ark, but that did not render the ark unnecessary. He determined to save Paul and his fellow passengers from shipwreck, by the exertions of the sailors; but did this render their exertions superfluous? God had promised to give him all that sailed with him. Yet, as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, "Paul said to the Centurion, *Except these abide in the ship, YE CANNOT BE SAVED.*" Because God had determined to deliver these States from European oppression, by the instrumentality of Washington and his compatriots, does it follow that there was no need of their services? And if God has determined to bless you with a bounteous harvest, does that prove that you may safely neglect to sow the seed? So, if you leave your salvation to God's decrees, without any anxiety or exertion on your part, you will sink to hell in spite of election. "Chosen," says the Apostle "THROUGH *sanctification* of the Spirit and *belief* of the truth."

*Obj.* 5. The doctrine of election is discouraging.

*Ans.* Who is disheartened by it? *Ministers of the gospel?* No: it affords them the greatest encouragement they can enjoy. Was it, think you, disheartening to Paul, when visiting the corrupt city of Corinth, to be told by the Lord, "I have much people in this city"? O, take not from us this most precious truth of the Bible! Under the burdens and trials of the ministry, we must sink without it. But is this doctrine discouraging to *praying Christians?* O, no. They never beg of God to convert a careless sinner without a tacit confession of its truth and preciousness, made in pleading with the Lord, that he would himself determine the question of the man's salvation, by the interposition of his own *special constraining* influence. Were it believed by them, that the destiny of immortal souls had been committed to chance, or to the wayward inclinations of the natural heart, the lips of prayer would be sealed in everlasting silence. To whom, then, is the doctrine discouraging? To the *anxious sinner?* No. He casts himself upon this glorious truth as his last hope. When driven from all his "refuges of lies," he is brought to feel, that "if discriminating mercy does not pluck him from the pit, he forever sinks. He feels that he must take his life in his hand, and cast himself at the footstool of sovereignty, pouring out this sum of all his hopes 'Lord if thou *wilt* thou *canst* make me clean.'" No, my brethren; this doctrine takes away none but false self-righteous hopes.

Says one, "I should like this doctrine if I were a christian, but it makes me uneasy while I continue in sin." But do you therefore wish it were false? Because you will not accept of mercy, do you wish all others to refuse it? Because you choose to continue in sin and perish, can you not be contented to perish alone? Must you have the whole world sink to despair with you? Because you will force your way to perdition, do you wish to drag down the redeemed from heaven to mingle their wailings with yours? O! who are they that indulge this spirit? Are they men? or are they devils?

*Obj.* 6. The doctrines of predestination and election are mysterious.

*Ans.* It is true, that when traced out in all their bearings, they are, in

some degree, mysterious. But is that a good reason for rejecting them? Can you fully comprehend the sublime doctrine of the Trinity? Can you give a satisfactory answer to the question, how sin found an entrance into heaven? Can you explain to me the nature of the union between mind and matter? Can you tell me how the grain you cast into the earth, "springeth up and groweth?" To say you will not believe what you do not fully comprehend, is to deny the greatest part of human knowledge, is to cast contempt upon the revelation of heaven itself.

Does any one say, "My system has no mysteries in it. I can easily reconcile all difficulties that occur." Then, my friend, your system is most certainly false. For Peter tells us that there are some things in Paul's epistles "*hard to be understood*, which they that are UNLEARNED and UNSTABLE, *wrest*". . . . What those things are, it is easy to imagine. And if they were "hard" to an inspired apostle, how is it that they are all so easy to you? No, my friend, if your system has no mysteries in it, it is not the system of the Bible; for "great is the *mystery* of godliness."

*Obj.* 7. It is objected that these doctrines *do harm*.

*Ans.* Are they doctrines of the Bible? and is it not true that "ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God—and is *profitable*"? But how is it they do harm? By rendering Christians *negligent*? The apostle Paul was a most zealous advocate of the doctrines, and did he neglect the service of his Divine Master? Did he labor less than the other apostles? Are Calvinists, at the present day, less engaged than others in Bible, Tract, Temperance, and Missionary Societies, in Sunday Schools, and other efforts for the conversion of the world? Will it be said that the doctrines exert an injurious influence upon society? Let us appeal to fact. Which are the most moralized portions of Continental Europe; and what is their prevailing creed? What part of Great Britain is most distinguished for purity of morals; and what theological system predominates? Nay, apply these questions to our own country, and the objection will vanish.

I grant there is one way in which they may do harm. When men labor to impress the public mind with the idea, that Calvinists believe that God is the author of sin; that they deny free-agency, and consider the use of means unnecessary; I say, when efforts are used to impress such ideas upon people, some will take occasion to say, "If all these large and respectable bodies hold such sentiments, there is a strong probability of their truth, and we may be safe in acting accordingly." In this way harm may be, and is often done, not by the truth, but by its enemies. The doctrines have many important uses. They display, in a clear light, the total depravity and enmity of the human heart, in that, without the special agency of the Holy Spirit, all would have rejected the overtures of reconciliation. They shew the sinner his inexcusableness, whilst continuing in sin. They discover to the Christian what he would have been but for constraining grace; and teach him to give the glory to God alone, who "has made him to differ" from others. They make it apparent, that God is *not such an one as ourselves*, and thus correct those false notions of his character, which we are apt to entertain. They display the mercy of God in its most transcendently glorious point of view, as making a last desperate effort in behalf of a sinking world. They are set in the scriptures as "a sign to be spoken against—that the thoughts of many hearts

might be revealed." They discover who is willing that the Lord should reign; who has confidence enough in his wisdom, purity, and goodness, to trust all events in his hands; and are adapted to lay open to view the hypocrisy of those who cry *hosannah*, but are hostile to the government of Jehovah. \* \* \* \* \*

From what has been said we may learn the secret source of that "wrath" which is aroused against these doctrines, especially election, wherever they are maintained. I have no doubt, indeed, that some oppose them merely because they do not understand them. I am led to this belief by the fact, that some who deny them *in words*, do, notwithstanding, embrace them *substantially* as matters of experience. They will tell you they never would have chosen God, if he had not first chosen them. They will acknowledge that if he had left them to the natural inclinations of their own hearts, they never would have accepted the Saviour. Now this is the very essence of election. But there are others who hate and oppose it, because they see it in a light which disturbs their sins, and tears away their self-righteous hopes. The idea that they are so depraved as to need the *constraining* influence of Almighty grace, in order to their salvation, gives a deadly wound to their pride; and leaves them no peace till they are reconciled to God. Hence, on one occasion, when our Saviour preached it, many of his hearers "went back and walked with him no more." At another time, as we are informed in our text, when he preached it to the Nazarenes, the people were so enraged, that they made a daring attempt upon his life. But against what is all this enmity directed? It is against that glorious purpose of mercy, without which not one sinner would ever have been converted to God; not one of our ruined race would ever have been admitted to glory. \* \* \*



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

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No. 11.

PITTSBURGH, APRIL, 1833.

VOL. I.

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**SERMON XI**

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**HARMONY OF THE DUTY WITH THE PROMISE  
IN THE WORK OF REGENERATION.**

*EZEKIEL 18:31. Make you a new heart and a new spirit.....*

*Ch. 36:26. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.*

THERE is no inconsistency, but the most perfect harmony between these two passages. The one is the command, the other is the promise of the same JEHOVAH; made known to us by the same prophet. The one is from Mount Sinai, the other from Mount Zion. The one is the voice of justice, the other of mercy. The one is an exhibition of supreme authority, the other of infinite condescension and kindness. The one is the law, the other is the gospel. Both require our special attention separately, and in their connection. We must not derive from the command a train of thought, or a course of conduct, inconsistent with the promise; nor are we to suppose for a moment, that the promise is intended to exempt from the claims of the command. Our wisdom and our safety consist in receiving both, according to the letter and spirit. This is not the only instance, in which the same thing is commanded and promised. God now *commandeth all men every where to repent*, and yet Christ is exalted a *Prince and Saviour to give repentance and remission of sin*. We are commanded to believe in the Lord Jesus, and yet faith is the gift and the work of God: Wash you, make you clean, and yet the kind promise is, "*I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean.*"

These and other passages, which need not be mentioned, con-

tain, like the text, both a command and a promise relating to the same thing. It will be our object then,

I. To consider what is implied in the **COMMAND**.

II. What is implied in the **PROMISE**, and,

III. What course we should pursue under the **COMBINED INFLUENCE OF BOTH**.

I. What is implied in the command, make you a new heart and a new spirit? Here it will be proper to ascertain the meaning of the term *heart*. In Scripture, this term in its metaphorical sense, is frequently used as nearly, if not quite, synonymous with mind, including the operations of the understanding and the exercise of the affections. No person who reads the Bible with attention, will doubt the truth of this statement. The current meaning of the term, however, with us, is more limited, including the affections only. In either sense, therefore, it includes the exercise of the affections, or what is called in other words, the moral character. A change of heart is a change in the objects of the affections, or a change of moral character. But the heart may be frequently, and greatly changed, and yet not become that *new heart* which God commands us to make. *Wicked men and seducers wax worse and worse*. There is a progress in wickedness as well as in holiness. One sinful pursuit is relinquished for the sake of another, not less, perhaps more criminal than the former. When a new heart is mentioned, as in the text, there is a reference to the old, or former state of the heart. This reference is carried out by the Apostle Paul. "Put off the old man, &c. and put on the new man," &c. The old heart is that which we all possess by nature, the thoughts of the imagination of which are evil and that continually; which is *deceitful above all things, &c.* in which the ruling principles are the love of sin and *enmity against God*. In the new heart, these things are reversed; sin becomes the cause of unfeigned sorrow, and the object of ceaseless hatred; God becomes the object of supreme love and desire. The new heart, in short, is the heart of a Christian; of one who is *born of God*; in whom old things, &c.; of one in whom the principles of spiritual life exert a supreme control, in whom the spirit of prayer, of meekness, of humility, of submission, of heavenly devotion habitually prevails. This is the new heart and new spirit, which God commands us to make; this is the work we are required to perform.

Another observation is necessary: according to the constitution of the human mind, every affection must have an object,

without which the affection cannot exist. If we cherish the affection of love, there is an object that is beloved; of hope, there is some object which we both expect and desire; of fear, there is some object from which we apprehend danger. These affections can be excited only through the understanding. No man can call forth his affections by a simple act of volition, as he can move his hand: To love an object, it is necessary that he first believe that the object is amiable; that there is in it something good, the possession of which would contribute to his happiness. Where the mind thus believes, the affection springs up spontaneously, without an effort designed to call it forth.

If, then, we would obey the command of God by making a new heart, we must do it according to the constitution which he himself has given to the mind: in no other way can the work ever be done.

Having seen what the new heart is, which we are required to make, and the manner in which the work is to be accomplished, we are now prepared to inquire, what is implied in this command, what useful instruction does it furnish?

1. It implies that God has an undoubted right to that which he commands, to this new heart, which he requires us to make. *His commandment is holy and just as well as good.* The Psalmist declares that "*the statutes of the Lord are right:*" "*Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.*" When his character is considered, he can demand nothing of his creatures but what is perfectly right; for he is *a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.* No proposition in mathematics can be plainer than that God has a right to the new heart and new spirit which he commands us to make.

If infinite excellence deserves to be loved, then it is right that we should love God supremely: for such are the attributes which compose his character. If unbounded goodness, exercised towards sinful and unworthy creatures, towards wilful and determined enemies; if long-suffering and patience, exercised towards those who deserve the deepest perdition; ought to be loved, the great Jehovah deserves our most ardent affection: for both in the dispensations of his providence and in his word he has proclaimed himself, from day to day, and from year to year, *the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.* With the deepest sincerity, our hearts should correspond with the devout exhortation of the psalmist, *O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his mercy endureth forever. O, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!*

The first and great commandment to all intelligent creatures is, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c. We have ceased to obey, ceased to love God; yet this law is not repealed, and never will be repealed. It flows from the character of God, which is immutable, and from the relation we sustain to him as his creatures. We have apostatized from God, we have rebelled against him, but no sinfulness, no wickedness of ours, can possibly dissolve this relation; it will forever be a truth that he created us, and has done us good through the whole of life. We may prove incorrigible and perish through our wilful unbelief and impenitence; but even in the pit of perdition it will not be less true than it is now, that God is our Creator; and that we ought to love him supremely. The command to make a new heart, is but an additional claim for that love which is required by this first and immutable precept of the moral law. To the lost spirits from Adam's family, to the apostate angels, even to Satan himself, while infinite ages of misery and despair are rolling on, the command, make you a new heart and a new spirit, with undiminished authority, will continue to present the claims of God.

Whatever they may think, and however they may feel, it will forever be right that they should love God. This right is founded not on their thoughts and their feelings, but on the immutable perfections of his character and on the relation they sustain to him as intelligent creatures.

2. The command in the text implies, that it is our duty to obey; to exercise towards God all that is included in the new heart, which we are required to make. This command is adapted to us as sinful, depraved and condemned creatures, for whom, at the same time, a Saviour is provided, and to whom, through this Saviour, pardon is offered.

Our hearts will never be what God requires, until they are deeply and fully impressed with those doctrines and facts, which constitute the grand peculiarities of the gospel; until in their exercises there is a special reference to Christ, as the only, the all-sufficient Saviour. The new heart required of us, can never be complete without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and repentance towards God. It is our duty then, it is our interest, it is, indeed, the only way in which we can secure our happiness for time and eternity, to believe in this divine, this crucified Saviour, and to repent of our sins with a godly sorrow. Being guilty and condemned, can any thing be more obvious than that we should believe in that Saviour through whom alone pardon can be obtained?

Having sinned against God, sinned when at the very moment, we knew better, sinned from design, can any thing be more reasonable than that we should be sorry for these wanton offences? Nothing can be more reasonable; for God commands us thus to believe and repent. Even our love to God will be modified by the truth of the gospel. If we love him as we ought, it will be as Immanuel, as *manifest in the flesh*, as in Christ, as having first loved us. In the exercises of the new heart are included, gratitude to God for the numberless unmerited favors received from his hand; hope, through his mercy, of eternal blessedness and glory; joy in the Lord; peace of conscience; hatred to sin; an earnest and habitual desire for greater degrees of holiness; together with the firm purpose to live in obedience to all the precepts of the Bible. The man who cherishes these devout and spiritual affections is the happy man; you may bind him with fetters, cast him into the dungeon, break his bones on the rack, consume his body at the stake; but if the love of God warms his heart, if the hope of heaven lives in his soul, he will still be happy. When earthly sources of pleasure are dried up, he will *joy in God through the Lord Jesus Christ*. Even the bitterest sorrows of repentance will be commingled with joys more pure and elevating than earth can yield. It is, therefore, our duty to make this new heart, to exercise these devout affections; because God commands it, and he commands it because it is our interest and our chief happiness.

It is our duty, then, that we should make not only a *new heart*, but also a *new spirit*; that we should not only be pious, but eminently so; that we should not only believe, but be *strong in faith, giving glory to God*; that we should not only love God, but love him with all the heart; that we should not only serve the Lord, but be *fervent in spirit* in his service; that we should not only commence a religious life, but *persevere, grow in grace, and go on to perfection*.

3. If we disobey this command, and neglect this duty, we are, most assuredly, guilty; and this guilt, with all its aggravations, will lie at our own door, and, without repentance, will be visited upon our own head. Every day, every month, and every year, that we spend in disobedience to this command, in the neglect of this duty, is a day, a month, and a year of guilt; increasing, not according to the simple ratio of addition, but according to the compound ratio which includes all the aggravations of this guilt. Though they exceed our comprehension, these aggravations are estimated with perfect accuracy, by the mind of our infinite

Judge. They arise from a great variety of sources; from the time spent in this wicked rebellion, from the goodness, the kindness, the long-suffering of God towards us; from the solemn warnings, the loud and earnest calls, the precious promises, the gracious invitations addressed to us, from the authority which we resist.

Refusing to make a new heart, is refusing to believe in Christ that divine Saviour who died for us; is refusing to accept of that pardon which is purchased with his blood, which we so much need, and without which we must forever perish. To reject the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father, with a voice from Heaven, has declared himself to be *well pleased*; to reject this *unspeakable gift of God*, the evidence and pledge of divine love to our sinful and miserable world; to reject this Saviour, who has endured the agonies of the garden and the cross for us, this compassionate, this Almighty, this only Saviour; is perilous beyond the conception of all created minds. Yet this is implied in refusing to make a new heart. For that faith by which the Saviour is received, and with whom all the blessings purchased by his death, is an essential exercise of the new heart. Can God look with complacency, or without the strongest indignation on the heart from which his beloved Son is excluded? Christ dwells in the heart by faith; where faith does not exist, there Christ does not dwell, and where Christ does not dwell, there the approbation and love of God cannot be enjoyed. Refusing to obey this command, is refusing to love God; for this love is another essential exercise of the new heart. That which he demands of us is a *reasonable service*. As our Creator, as our Preserver, as our Father, we ought to love him. And above all, we ought to love him, *because he first loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*. To refuse, therefore, to love him, is most unreasonable, most criminal, most dangerous. Repentance for sin, is another exercise of the new heart. And have we sinned against God our Creator, our Preserver and Redeemer, as all of us will confess we have, and yet refuse to be sorry for it? And can we persevere in this refusal, and be guiltless? Can we expect that God, *who is of purer eyes than to behold evil*, will approve of this impenitence? Most assuredly he will not.

But further: there can be no neutrality in this case. The Lord Jesus admits of none. *He that is not for me is against me, he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad*. The heart that is not made new, remains a sinful and wicked heart; for such it is by nature. If the Saviour is not received by faith, he is rejected;

designedly rejected by unbelief. Where the love of God is not cherished, there is *enmity against God*. Where there is no sincere repentance, no *godly* sorrow for sin, there is the approbation and love of sin. If it were possible for the work of making a new heart to progress so far as to destroy all sinful principles, extinguish all sinful affections, efface all sinful impressions, and stop at this point, this heart could not receive the approbation of God. There must be positive spiritual affections in exercise. There must be an active living faith, *working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world*. There must be supreme love of God, resulting in cheerful obedience to all his precepts. There must be a repentance so deep and so permanent as to endear the *blood of Christ which cleanses from sin*, and will produce unceasing watchfulness against it. The want of this faith, and of these affections, though there were no sinful principles or affections, would be criminal in the sight of God; how much more criminal and guilty will the heart be in which there is a practical unbelief, which rejects the Saviour; an active enmity which resists the Spirit and truth of God; a determined impenitence, which not only loves and delights in sin, but refuses to forsake it? To suppose that such a heart is not most deeply criminal, is to suppose that God can look with approbation on the deliberate rejection of his beloved Son; on the workings of deep-rooted enmity against himself; on that impenitence which implies the supreme love of sin. This he cannot do, unless he can repeal the law which he has given, can recall the declaration, that in his beloved Son he is *well pleased*, can divest himself of infinite holiness. As he is *the Lord and changes not*; as he cannot *deny himself*, cannot become a co-worker with his enemies in obscuring his own glory, in destroying the happiness of the universe; so certain is it, so absolutely certain is it, that all men, every where, are deeply criminal in refusing to make a new heart and a new spirit; in refusing to believe in Christ, to love God and to repent of sin.

But it is not more certain that we are guilty in disobeying this command, than it is that God has promised *to give a new heart and a new spirit*: and *he is faithful who has promised*; he will accomplish the work; he will redeem his pledge.

II. Let us, then, consider what is implied in this promise:

1. It certainly implies, that *we need that which is promised*. We may, and often do, promise to each other, that which is not indispensably necessary. A man may promise assistance to his neighbor, when this neighbor could accomplish the object without this aid, though not with the same facility, nor within the

same time. Not so with God; he promises that, and that only, which is needed, and without which the purpose would not be accomplished. When he promised to make Ishmael *a great nation*, it is certain that without the constant support and protection of Jehovah, Ishmael never would have multiplied into a great nation. When the kind and cheering promise was given to Paul, *My grace is sufficient for thee*; we see clearly, and he felt deeply, the necessity of this grace to sustain him under the numerous trials which awaited him in every place. It is further implied, that none but God can accomplish his own promise. He may employ the instrumentality of second causes; but these can accomplish nothing without the wise and powerful agency of the Great First Cause. Had the highest angel in heaven been required, by his own wisdom and power to preserve Ishmael, his posterity never would have equalled the stars of heaven in number. Had this angel, or an host of such angels, been required to protect, to comfort, to animate, to preserve Paul, till the appointed hour of his departure should come, they must have utterly failed. Although they may and do *minister for those who are heirs of salvation*, yet it is the *power of God alone* by which these heirs are to be kept through faith unto salvation.

We need the new heart and the new spirit which God has promised; that is, we need divine assistance that we may believe in Christ, love God and repent of our sins. The promise implies also, that God alone can produce this faith and excite these affections; and that without his omnipotent aid, we never would believe, or love, or repent. But the promise is *yea and amen*, sure and steadfast. He can and will work in his people *the work of faith with power*; he will *shed abroad his love in their hearts by the Holy Spirit*; he will, by his goodness, melt their hearts and lead them to repentance. That they may *work out their own salvation with fear and trembling*, he will, of his good pleasure, *work in them to will and to do*.

It is divine assistance, then, that is promised, and it is divine assistance that we need, by which we are enabled to believe, to love, to repent, and to exercise all spiritual affections included in the new heart. Faith is the act, and love and repentance are the exercises of our own mind. The Holy Spirit does not believe for us, or in our stead; but he enables us to *believe through grace*; he does not love or repent for us, but he calls into exercise these affections in our own mind.

This is the doctrine of the Bible, plainly taught in a great variety of passages; especially in all those which refer the work of



regeneration to God. *We are his workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus; born of God; born of the Spirit; you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and in sin.*

This is a doctrine, too, respecting which we hope and believe there is no diversity of opinion among Christians. However they may differ respecting the mode of the Spirit's operations, all will agree that they need his aid, that through the grace of God they are what they are; that *by grace they are saved through faith, and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God;* all will unite in the devout exclamation, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." That professed disciple of Christ, who believes that he needs not divine aid, is not prepared for the songs of the redeemed in heaven.

2. This promise implies our entire dependence on God for the new heart and the new spirit which he has promised to give. We have the utmost assurance that God will accomplish his promise; yet he was under no obligation to make this promise: it is, therefore, a most gracious promise, arising from his infinite mercy and compassion, yearning over our sinful and miserable race. We do not and cannot deserve the blessings included in this promise. At the moment when they are bestowed, we deserve the displeasure of God on account of our sins. Although we are permitted to pray for these blessings, we cannot demand them on the principle of justice, as our right. For all the exercises of the new heart and the new spirit, we are entirely dependent on the mercy and compassion of God.

This truth is plainly taught in connection with the promise. "I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you; be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel." If the promise itself should fail to convince us of this truth, these declarations will produce the conviction. The same truth is implied in the devout and grateful acknowledgments offered to God by the pious in all ages. Passages containing these expressions of praise, are too numerous to be cited. Thanksgiving and praise are offered to God for blessings both temporal and spiritual, under both the old and new dispensation. The exercises of the new heart have been the same in all ages and will continue the same till the last hour.

All these grateful acknowledgments imply the conviction of entire dependence on God for the blessings received. Prayer, and especially prayer in the name of Christ, as all prayer ought to be, implies our entire dependence. It is this deep sense of dependence which gives to prayer that character of humility and earnestness without which, however eloquent and appropriate may be the words, it will be, in the ear of God, worse than *a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal*. If any thing was due to us on the ground of merit, or as the reward of service, we might demand it of God on the principle of justice; but this demand would not be prayer. Many other passages with clearness teach the same truth. *Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou, that thou didst not receive?* is language which can be used, in its true sense, by those only who feel and acknowledge their entire dependence on God.

3. If the promise implies that we need all the blessings included in the new heart, and that God alone can bestow them, and of course that we are entirely dependent on his good pleasure for these blessings; the fact is also clearly implied that we are *helpless* in ourselves, as it regards the accomplishment of this work. If it be admitted, as we presume it will, that God does nothing in vain; that when he produces an effect, this effect could not be produced without his power; that when he promises to accomplish any purpose, this purpose could not be accomplished without his agency; then it will follow, that the promise, solemnly made, to give us a new heart, implies that we are helpless, that we could not possess this heart in any other way; for if we could, then the promise of God, and the agency of God in performing this, would be in vain. It is perfectly accordant with the common sense of all men, that that which we receive as a gracious gift, as an unmerited favor, cannot be the product of our own efforts; that which is the work of God, cannot, in the same sense, be our work. Regeneration is ascribed to God, as his work, and as his alone, in language so clear, so unequivocal as to exclude all other agencies. If we are *born of God*, then it is *neither of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man*. If we are *his workmanship*, then we are not our own. The new heart includes faith; and faith is the act of our own mind; yet this act never would be performed without divine aid. It is both the gift and the work of God.

But a truth of such deep interest ought not to rest on the common sense or the common opinion of men. *What saith the*

*scriptures? How readest thou? Without me, said the Saviour, ye can do nothing. The truth is doubted by no man, that the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me. No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him. Can a work, which requires divine power to accomplish it, be done by those who are without strength? Our prayers to God are nothing but mockery, unless they imply our helplessness. When we ask God to help us, to cleanse our hearts, to strengthen, protect, defend, deliver, guide, and save us, do we believe that we ourselves can do these things? or do we believe that our sufficiency is of God; that he is our strength, our support, our defence, our salvation?*

Let it not, for a moment, however, be supposed, that this helplessness is insensibility or hardness of heart, as it regards spiritual things. Whenever you hear a man say that he is helpless, and see him remain as unmoved as the rock, be assured that man neither understands nor believes what he says; he is merely alleging this as an excuse for his neglect of duty, and for the love of sin which he does not intend to forsake. The truth that we are *without strength*, is one of those *things of the Spirit* which the *natural man* neither understands nor believes. It is the real feeling produced by this truth, that completes the work of preparation for the reception of Christ; that humbles us in the dust, that brings us, with entire submission, to the foot of the cross. The want of this belief and of this feeling is the cause of that insensibility which so much prevails. Bring sinners to feel that they are guilty and that they are helpless, and it is impossible for them to remain unmoved. The more deeply conscious we are of our helplessness, the more earnestly will we pray that we may receive the help of God. If we *pray with the Spirit and with the understanding*, we pray for that, and that only, which we do not possess, which we need, which God has promised to give.

Nor, let it, for a moment, be supposed, that there is the shadow of excuse for this inability. It is a criminal inability. So far as we are helpless, so far we are criminal. That we cannot, without divine assistance, believe in Christ, love God, and repent of our sins, is, at once, the measure and the proof of our guilt. To say that we cannot believe in Christ, who has died for us, and whose atoning blood is essential to our salvation; is to say, that we cannot believe and confess that we are sinners.

To say that we cannot love God, is to say, that we cannot cease to hate him. To say that we cannot repent, is to say, that we approve of sin, and are determined to persevere in the practice of it. That is, though the plain and positive declarations of God have decided otherwise, yet that it is right to reject the only Saviour, to hate and disobey God, to love and pursue sin.

These are two facts, therefore, the conviction of which should exist and operate together in our minds; that, as it regards the work of our own salvation, we are utterly helpless; and that this helplessness in its very nature, is sinful. Both of these facts are pressed upon our minds by the testimony of clear and numerous passages of scripture. Nor can we, for a moment, admit the painful suspicion, that any intelligent Christians will doubt either of them; or will not say from the heart, that they accord with their own experience.

III. Finally; in securing the great interests of eternity, what course should we pursue, under the influence of that instruction derived from this command and this promise of God?

The command, if we mistake not, teaches us, that he has a right to all the spiritual exercises of our hearts; that this is our imperious duty; and that we are guilty, in not thus *giving him our hearts*. The promise teaches us, that we need divine assistance in making this new heart; that for this we are entirely dependent on God; and that without this aid we are utterly helpless. The course of safety is marked out by the combined instruction and influence of both together. What God has joined we must not separate. We cannot receive the one, as it ought to be received, without the other; we must receive both, or we receive neither. If from a professed regard to the one, we forget and neglect the other, we only prepare for ourselves the cup of bitter disappointment.

The course, then, seems to be this: as guilty and helpless sinners, we should go immediately and directly to God, confessing, most humbly and sincerely, our sins, and pleading most earnestly for his mercy. By confessing our sins, we acknowledge the authority, the justice, the goodness of the law which we have transgressed, and by which we are condemned for these transgressions. By pleading for his mercy, we acknowledge our need, our dependence, and our helplessness. This is the way pointed out in scripture. *He that covereth his sins shall not pros-*

*per; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy.* If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The confession flows from the belief and feeling that sin is an evil, which deserves the punishment of eternal death. Confessing our sins, with this contrition of soul, we will forsake them. By pleading for mercy, we admit that the justice of God would be eternally glorified in our condemnation; that we do not deserve the blessings for which we pray; that if we are saved it will be *to the praise of the glory of his grace.* The more deep and vivid these convictions of our guilt and helplessness become, the nearer we should approach the cross of Christ, and with the more humble importunity should we pray. If we feel so much of the old heart of stone, that we can neither confess nor pray as we ought, this is but the clearer proof of our perishing need, of our dependence and helplessness; and presents to us the more urgent motives to come to God, that he may give a new heart and a new spirit. If it appears impossible to feel, even in the faintest degree, the desire that God would give us a new heart; it is but the still more clear and alarming proof, flashing into the soul, of our great and imminent danger. We should come to Christ as we are; guilty, that we may be forgiven; helpless, that we may receive strength; vile and polluted, that we may be purified; insensible, even dead in sin, that we may be quickened and made alive. The sick, not the whole, need the physician; need him, because they are sick, and cannot help themselves.

Were we not both guilty and helpless sinners, we would not need the Saviour. Without the deep conviction of this truth, we never will come to the Saviour; because the motives to bring us would not operate on the mind.

The Psalmist pursued the very course pointed out by this command and this promise. No person can read, in the 51st Psalm, the confessions which he makes, and the prayers which he offers up, without perceiving that they flow from a very deep and humbling sense of his need, his dependence and his helplessness. The sins of his nature and his life are confessed with shame and contrition. "For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me." In whatever pursuit he was engaged, to whatever object he turned his attention, his sin met his view, occupied his thoughts, grinding him down into the very dust before God. Does he behold the robes and the throne of royalty? he is reminded of his vileness, his need of cleansing. Does he reign over an extensive empire? sin has had dominion

over him. Does he receive the adulation of his subjects? his conscience reproaches him with his own baseness. Does he sit in judgment on the different cases brought before him? his own case is decided, and he is condemned by the *Judge of all the earth*. He renounces all merit of his own, from any source, in any sense, or in any degree, and pleads for mercy according to a rule of proportion entirely different, according to the *loving kindness* and *tender mercies* of God. The very blessings which God has promised to bestow, are the blessings of which he feels his perishing need, and for which he prays. The Lord has promised to give a new heart and a new spirit; his prayer is, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." "Then, saith the Lord, will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you;" his prayer is, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Taught by painful experience his own weakness, when left to himself, his earnest prayer to God is, *take not thy holy Spirit away from me, but uphold me with thy free Spirit*.

Such is then the course we should pursue under the combined influence and instruction of this command and this promise of God; that is, to come directly and immediately to Christ, and to God through him. Coming to Christ is a movement of the mind, under the deep conviction of our guilt and helplessness. While the command requires us to make a new heart, the promise assures us that God will give this heart. As the Lord fulfills his promise in us, then do we obey his command. As the Lord takes away the heart of stone, then does the heart of flesh, that is the new heart, cherish its spiritual and devout affections. As the Lord draws us, then do we run after him. When the Lord turns us, then are we turned. When the Lord exerts his gracious power, then are we his willing people. This is the *new and the living way*, the only way of safety for guilty and helpless sinners to return to God. If we attempt to obey the command to make a new heart, in our own strength, without dependence on divine aid, nothing but disappointment and final perdition will be the result. *No man, says the Saviour, cometh to the Father but by me; and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out*. We cannot call into exercise those affections included in the new heart by an act of volition; suitable objects alone can produce this effect. These objects are found concentrated in the cross of Christ.

1. From this subject, we see how thankful all Christians should be. For that faith which unites us to Christ, through whom we

obtain pardon; for that love which fills and warms and expands and elevates the soul; for that repentance which extinguishes the love of sin; for that hope which sheds the light of heaven over the darkest scenes of earth; we are indebted to the rich and sovereign mercy of God. He sought us and found us when we were lost; he justified us when we were ungodly; he quickened us when we were dead; he saved us when we were helpless. *Eternal life is the gift of God to us; to us, who deserved the deepest perdition.* Gratitude should fill our hearts and control our lives: *We should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again.* If it cannot be infinite in degree, it can be eternal in duration. In no small degree is it the joy of earth; it will be the joy of heaven. Without ceasing, we will ascribe *blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, unto our God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

2. Impenitent sinners are left entirely inexcusable. To say, indeed, that there can be an excuse for sin, is a plain contradiction in terms; yet a great many are alleged, either publicly or secretly, by those who are determined to reject the gospel and live in sin. These excuses are frequently derived from the perversion of important truth. It is a truth, that, as it regards the great work of salvation, we are helpless; yet no careless, impenitent sinner on earth believes this. He has heard and learned to repeat the word; but to him, remaining unconcerned in his guilt, it is a word without meaning. While he alleges this as an excuse, he is conscious to himself, that this is not the reason why he lives in sin, but because he loves it. Against the conviction of this truth, his proud spirit makes the hardest and longest effort. It is the last work of the Spirit, in preparing the heart for the reception of Christ, to produce this conviction. Every truth, when believed, will produce its appropriate effects. The effect of this truth is as far from that provoking indifference, which so generally prevails, as the east is from the west. The belief of this truth will produce a state of the most deep and intense feeling. The want of this feeling proves the want of belief in this truth. You are helpless, indeed, O ye impenitent sinners! but this is one powerful reason why you should come to Christ, that you may obtain mercy. You are indeed sinful and depraved, your hearts are hard as the rock; surely, then, you ought to come to that blood which cleanses from sin, to that God who has promised to give a new heart, to take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh. Your excuses imply, that if they

were removed out of the way, you would come; if you were not sinful, not guilty, not helpless, would you then come? But for what would you then come? For pardon?—the guilty alone need pardon. For the cleansing blood of Christ?—the sinful and defiled alone need this blood. For the quickening power of the Spirit?—the helpless alone need this aid. The excuses you allege for not coming, are the reasons why you should come. Come, then, to the Saviour who has died for you, and *who is able to save unto the uttermost all who come to God through him.* God, for Christ's sake, will pardon your sins, *purify your hearts by faith, strengthen you with might, by his Spirit in the inner man,* and will bring you in safety, through all the trials of life *to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven.*



THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

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No. 12.

PITTSBURGH, MAY, 1833.

Vol. I.

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**SERMON XII.**

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BY SAMUEL MARTIN, D. D.  
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**THE OBLIGATION TO REPENT AND BELIEVE.**

**MARK 1:15.** *The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the gospel.*

WHEN Jesus heard that John was cast into prison, he well knew what would be the melancholy issue. That his ministry and his life were soon to close by the cruelty and injustice of the effeminate Herod. The ministry of John being now closed, Christ enters into Galilee and upon his office. Galilee, as it seems, was a place of thickest moral darkness. Of this place the prophet spoke, in special reference to the light that now shone upon it, saying: "*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*" Isa. 9:2. Matt. 4: 15,16. The time of accomplishing this prediction is now fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, says Christ, and believe the gospel.

Μεταμελομι and Μετανοεω are the only two words used in the New Testament for repentance. The former is never, that I know of, used to signify gospel repentance. It is used in its appropriate sense, Matthew 21:29. "A father said to his elder son, Go work to-day in my vineyard, and he answered and said I will not; but afterwards Μεταμεληθεις, he repented and went; or, he became concerned about his contempt of his father's order and went." Judas when he saw the innocent Jesus, whom he had betrayed, condemned, repented, (μεταμεληθεις) became deeply concerned, &c. Μετανοεω signifies a change of mind and behavior under a sense of past wrong. So it is used Matt. 11:21. "Wo unto you Corāzin; wo unto you Bethsaida, for if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented (μετνοησαν) long ago in dust and in ashes." In this sense its use is frequent. The exhortation before us is to repentance,

evangelical, deep, and sincere; and to faith unfeigned and saving. The latter clause, believe the gospel, should rather be literally translated, "believe in the gospel," since it implies the credit of its truth, together with the reliance of the soul upon it for salvation.

Two ways of access, and only two, to rest and heaven, have ever been made known to men. The one by obedience to the law, whole and perfect: "*he that doeth these things* (what the law requires) *shall live by them.*" The other by the acceptance of Christ's righteousness, and repentance. On the first plan salvation is now unattainable, "*the law having become weak* (or unable to save) *through the flesh.*" On the latter, faith in the righteousness of Christ, it is attainable; through the ample provision which grace has made to repair all the breaches which sin has occasioned on the claims of law and justice, and for healing all diseases with which, through sin, our natures are infected. To be saved by Christ's righteousness, it must, by an act of grace in God, be reckoned ours; and our souls must be brought to a cordial acceptance of it. Our sin must be washed away and our natures made holy.

Repentance is a godly sorrow for sin, flowing from a lively apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ towards creatures so lowly degraded by sin, which produces a turning from sin unto God and duty; and to repent, in our text, seems to imply the whole reformation which is embraced in the work of sanctification.

In the injunction contained in our text, repentance precedes faith, though in the work of grace it follows faith as its fruit or effect. The reason of which may be found in the extensive meaning with which the word is used, viz. including the whole work of grace upon the soul. Besides, there is a form of repentance, that precedes faith. This arises from a view of the law as passing sentence against us, from a deep conviction of our sinfulness, and a fearful apprehension of instant wrath. Filled with consternation and alarm, the sinner beholds incensed justice, with the cherubim and flaming sword pointing every way, to bar his escape from punishment. Yet all this may consist with a hatred of God's law and with the love of sin which it condemns. It is a sorrow, which, in some melancholy instances, worketh death. It is usually, however, in a lesser or greater degree comprehended in the work of God upon the soul by which it is brought to Christ. Still faith, or believing, is the first saving contact of the soul with Christ. In relation to this primary exercise of faith, it is called, "coming to Christ." On the accomplishment of the work of regeneration, faith, the divinest gift, is bestowed, as an instrument to put in operation the new-made man. Though it first embraces Christ as a priest, since through this office provision is made for pardon, which is that, for which a guilty soul so loudly calls, yet he cordially embraces Christ in all his offices. He embraces him as a willing Saviour, as one suited to his case. He exults in the discovery that the offer is free. He is fully convinced, that no salvation can be his,

but that which is without money and without price. By faith the sinner first obtains an interest in salvation; and by the same grace of faith, he lives to Christ. He soon finds that "without faith it is impossible to please God," or obtain meetness for enjoying him. With what words, more fitly spoken, could Christ have opened his important ministry than with these, "*Repent ye, and believe the gospel!*"

These words may be considered as a warning or entreaty. When our Lord sent forth his disciples by two and two, "*They went and preached that men should repent.*" Paul, in declaring the fulfilment of his commission, to which he was so marvellously set apart, told Agrippa that he had showed to all to whom he had been sent, "that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." In this was intimated, the duty which they owed, as well as the deep interest which they had in performing it. Perseverance in sinning can never fail to bring with it, the loss of soul and body in hell. Yet however universal this conviction may be, the consciences of men slumber under it, and they need to be reminded of the necessity of turning from their evil ways. The time, too, had come when the blessings of Christ's kingdom were prepared; when the Spirit was to shed down his abundant influences upon men; when pardons were to be bestowed upon multitudes, gentiles as well as Jews. A time had come, most auspicious for guilty men, in seeking grace to repent, and the opening of their hearts for the reception of the Holy Ghost. Vainly do any look for success in proposing to men the blessings of salvation, until they are convinced of sinfulness, and taught their need of repentance. An apostle, and even Christ himself, could be no better to them, "than a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument," until their hearts were restless and sore under the charge of their guiltiness. Most aptly, therefore, did Christ and his apostles address the understandings and consciences of their hearers; saying, "*Ye should repent.*" The same voice warns and entreats them. Pressed to repent, impending danger is announced; pressed to repent, the hope of escape is presented. How lovely and attractive are the ways of mercy with sinful men! Entreaty, persuasion, and warning, how divinely commixed in the addresses of God to them, whom he would rescue from hell, and raise to heaven! The gospel comes not to men in the storm that rends the rocks and cleaves the mountains; nor in the earthquake that shakes and bursts the earth, while its groans are heard afar; nor in the fire which threatens and brings instant ruin: it comes "with a still small voice," to which the ear may listen with delight. To which the heart may respond with gladness. To the self-condemned wretch it says, "*You are not come to the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire; nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest; and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which voice, they that heard entreated that it should not be spoken unto them any more: for they could not endure*

*that which was commanded; and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But you are come to mount Zion, ....and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."* Heb. 12: 18—22. 24, 25. When tones so sweet descend from heaven and breathe their softness on the human ear, how unspeakable the crime of inattention or neglect! "How shall they escape that turn away?" The word refuse, means, not to accept. It is opposed to a gracious offer. A command, or entreaty to believe and repent, addressed to men dead in sin, implies God's design to give what he requires, repentance and faith. The general voice of scripture lifts up this truth, That repentance and faith are free gifts of God to men; while they are duties which we owe, and which by the working of his Spirit he enables us to perform. Thus in accordance with this view the prophet expostulates, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" And Israel prays, "Turn thou me and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after I was turned I repented," &c. Such is the rich grace and compassion of God toward creatures, in whom he might glorify himself, in the exercise of justice, by punishing them with "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power."

But it is proper to consider these words in the light of a command. "*This (says John) is his commandment, that ye should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.*" It is a command, however, accompanied with circumstances peculiarly encouraging. The divine right to require repentance and faith is as unquestionable, as is his right to require obedience to the moral law: and who will doubt that God has a righteous claim upon all our race to perfect obedience to this pure and perfect rule of righteousness, which, though "*it was ordained unto life,*" will be found "*to be unto death*" to every one who depends upon it for acceptance with God. If justification be sought by the deeds of the law, the sinner must fulfill, unaided, all its requirements, and must stand alone at the judgment seat. His condemnation follows of course. It is true, that death is the just punishment of all those who remain impenitent and unbelieving; for besides the aggravated guilt of rejecting Christ, and choosing to go on in a sinful course, they are indebted to God, to do the whole law; and that without a name to mention, or a plea to offer for forgiveness. While, in this channel, no mercy flows to present hope to man; a blessed hope is opened "*by the hearing of faith;*" or by the gospel proposing salvation by faith in the righteousness of Christ. For while the gospel demands repentance and faith as duties which we owe; it holds forth God in Christ as proposing by his gracious operations on our hearts, to produce them in us as living graces; and standing qualities of the new and heavenly life. Thus God is said to have exalted his Son "*to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgive-*

*ness of sins.*" Acts 5:31. When the believing Jews heard of the work of grace at the house of Cornelius, they said, "*then has God also to the gentiles granted repentance unto life.*" Paul enjoins on Timothy "*meekness*" in "*instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*" Faith is expressly called "*the gift of God.*"

To the Philippians Paul says, "*that it was given to them to believe,*" and the Saviour expressly says, "*this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*" John 6:29. To believe on Christ is indeed a work which God requires that we perform; while at the same time, it is a work which he works in us. Were it of man exclusively of the Spirit's working in us, then faith, as a deed of righteousness of our own, would justify. Faith is reasonably required; for what can be more reasonable, than to believe the truth upon satisfactory evidence; and what more reasonable than to require that men act under the influence of and in accordance with the thing believed? If, without reasoning about the cause, the case is so withal, that the latter form of believing, I mean, "*believing with the heart unto righteousness,*" is impossible, through the corrupted and degenerated condition of man, is there any ground of blame in the Divine procedure, arising from the circumstance that he exerts his power on the human heart in producing the very thing he requires? And does the circumstance that he does so, or that his doing so, is indispensable to success, render attempts useless and unpromising? or, does not this rather lie at the foundation of our hope, and operate as the exciting cause of all reasonable endeavors to obtain salvation? That there is a gracious sovereignty which God exercises in the application of redemption, and which he exercises in perfect consistency with liberty of will in man, no one who believes the scriptures, and has respect for himself, will deny. "*Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.*" These words are plainly addressed to the gentile nations; to worshippers of idols. They call their attention and their worship from idols unto the true God, and specially to Christ, who here addresses them as their Saviour. Objects of mercy less hopeful could not be imagined. No where could the tide of human depravity have risen higher: no where could its overflowings have extended faster, endured longer, or carried greater desolation. Yet Jesus looks upon them and exclaims, "*Look unto me, and be ye saved, . . . for I am God.*" The power and the will, and the wisdom are here: and your looking shall not be vain. This involved a purpose of God to save: and did they look, and were they saved? We ourselves are witnesses. We, the descendants of the "*gentiles who followed not after righteousness,*" have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. I have said that this call was accompanied with a divine purpose and the execution is of God. Hear what follows. "*I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return—that unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall*

*swear.*" These words are properly directed to heathens in every age and in every clime. They show that the sinner is taken as God finds him: with all his sins upon him. They show that Jesus Christ, in whom all the blessings of God's covenant are treasured up, by means appropriate, which he himself has provided, is bringing the obstinate wills of men into subserviency to his own design; that with floods poured upon dry ground, he is rendering the desert a garden of the Lord.

If we consider the divinely constituted relation between Christ and the elect in the economy of redemption, it may aid us in discovering the propriety of the command to believe, as well as the means of obedience to it. Sinners, who shall be saved, are contemplated by God the Father as in Christ, and as his, in Christ, from everlasting. "He (God the Father) hath chosen us in him, (Christ,) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy," &c. Christ is responsible to the Father for all that were given him in the great decree. "I (says Christ) have manifested thy name to the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word." He intercedes for them. After praying for his disciples he adds, "neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word." It pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell in Christ for the use and benefit of sinners who should be saved through him. Thus the obedience of his life and death is the sinner's justifying righteousness. Thus the sanctification of the soul, produced by the working of the Spirit of Christ, is the sinner's personal holiness. Now sinners are commanded to believe and repent under these circumstances, even when "dead in trespasses and sins." What effort, then, can be consistent in sinful man; but that of striving with Christ for the gift of the Holy Spirit to change his heart, to work faith and every grace within him. The unrenewed sinner, like the renewed man, can do all things by Christ strengthening him. Repentance and faith are fruits of Christ's death, and with every new-covenant blessing, are of free grace to men; while neglect in seeking them through the proper channel, or in essaying to repent and believe is flagrant crime, and wilful disobedience to the divine command.

I have said above, that in obtaining faith, there is an exercise of sovereignty in God; which ought to satisfy every inquirer, that faith "is not of ourselves."

The everlasting ruin of men, is ascribed to God's withholding, or withdrawing his power and grace from men. Moses said to the Israelites, "Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, or ears to hear unto this day." Deut. 29:2.4. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so Father, for so

it seemed good in thy sight." **Matt. 11:25.** The prophets, earnest and anxious as they were, could not conquer the obstinacy of their hearers, nor constrain them to believe. "Who," exclaims Isaiah, "hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The Saviour, after quoting the above, adds, "Therefore, they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, he hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, and be converted and I should heal them." These passages surely mean something. They surely do not mean, that if we do not believe, the fault is God's. They surely do not mean, that men are not under obligations to believe, and justly condemned for unbelief. To me they seem to signify, that from many who enjoy the means of grace, God, in adorable sovereignty, withholds the renewing and converting power of his Spirit: and leaving them to such an use of means as degenerated man can make, the effect is, the hardening of their hearts, and the darkening of the understanding. To others whom he pleases he gives new hearts and new spirits, by which they discern the truth, feel its influences and yield to its powers.

On this subject there are two mistakes. Which of the two is most dangerous my reader will judge.

The first is, *that since men are unable of themselves to repent and believe, it is unjust in God if he command them so to do. And therefore the just God does not command them to repent and believe.*

The second is, *that a just God would not command men to do what they cannot do; yet he does command men to believe and repent, and therefore they are able.*

The first of these, that God does not command men to repent and believe, &c., is proved untrue by so many passages in scripture directly requiring them, and by so many plainly implying the duty, that nothing but wilful and determined opposition to divine truth can deny it. None can read their bibles in the exercise of common sense, and not discover that they are not only commanded duties, but also that they are enforced by the most solemn sanctions. To say that God is unjust, were to utter blasphemy. Now as we are sure that God has commanded us to repent and believe, we are also sure, that it is consistent with truth and holiness and justice: for all God's commands must be such. Let such then as deny this truth, ask themselves, whether the declarations of Jehovah are to be rejected or his authority disowned, because they cannot see the reasons on which they are founded, or reconcile them to their views and feelings?

The scriptures, if they prove any thing, do prove that we cannot repent, believe, or perform any spiritual duty without the power of divine grace. If then God cannot, consistently with his righteousness, command us to do what we are unable to do, then all law and all authority are at an end. Then let the infidel lift up his voice and exclaim, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God

of Jacob regard it." Men may read their bibles, but are not bound to believe them. They may hear the gospel offers, but are at liberty to reject them. They may listen to the history of redemption; and look upon the blood that flowed in sealing a covenant of redemption for man; but without crime "account it an unholy thing." Such views of a dispensation of grace toward men, how profane! Let then the ministers of Christ take up the words of their Master, and proclaim, with growing solemnity to the dying all around them, "Repent and believe the gospel;" and, let them add, "he that believeth not shall be damned."

The second mistake summarily is: That since God does command men to repent and believe; and as God is just, therefore men are able to repent and believe. It is believed, that all who embrace the standards of the Presbyterian church, in their plain, common-sense, and unmetaphysized meaning, do believe and teach, that those powers and faculties, whose exercises are prescribed by the divine law, are still in man; and that the law demands no more, than that these faculties and powers be employed as it directs: While they believe also, that all these are so impaired and deranged, through sin, that they can in no case be so directed and exerted as to answer the demands of the law; but on the other hand they dispose and incline them to disobedience, and expose them to the penalty which the law threatens. This they call depravity, or corruption. In this the inability of man consists. With this inability man was not created. From this estate, the power of divine grace can and will deliver many. The mysterious manner of the operations of grace in preparing the human heart for the exercise of the dispositions from which believing proceeds, and upon the existence of which, its continued exercise depends; I pretend not to explain. But that God has purposed so to connect the operations of grace, with human efforts used in the appointed channel of seeking them; that the duty of believing is presented to us in the most favorable aspect, and with strong inducements to the performance. Very many, while seeking the graces of repentance and faith, have, ere ever they were aware, repented and believed. And the Spirit of the Lord, though they knew it not, was the agent that stirred up the spirit of seeking which was successful. These commands, though they assert the divine right to the obedience which they claim, are strongly sanctioned and enforced by the unmerited grace whereby they are done in us; while our own mental operations proceed in their natural order, and are free and voluntary.

That the power of obeying a command, is, in every case, indispensable in order to justify the command, is by no means self-evident. Commands are often given, when mere instrumentality is only contemplated in those to whom they were addressed. The disciples of our Lord were commanded to go forth and heal the sick and cast out devils in their Master's name; they did so,



but who will say, that the power was not of Christ, their Master? Lazarus was commanded to "come forth from the grave;" but who will say, that he could hear the voice or move a limb? A man had lain at the pool of Bethesda for thirty-nine years: all the while infirm and helpless. The passing Saviour addresses him, saying, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk." Did our Lord contemplate his ability to rise when he commanded? or did the command proceed from a purpose to give it? Peter said to the lame man at the temple's gate, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk;" and the effect was that he was soon seen walking, and leaping, and praising God. Add to this, that the scriptures no where teach that men have the ability or capacity or power of embracing Christ, or of repenting and believing. Neither Christ, nor prophet, nor apostle have taught men so. To the contrary you read in every page.

But if any should say, that if God commands us to do what we are unable to do; then must he employ compulsory force in producing the change, and thus destroy human liberty. God does say, the Father, to God the Son, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." From being unwilling, they shall be made willing. This teaches the certainty of the success of Christ, in gathering in the proper subjects of his promised kingdom; but with equal plainness it teaches the persuasive means to be employed, and the voluntary acceptance of Christ and his salvation by them. Philosophy has thrown so much glare around the subject of human freedom, as to produce the effect of downright darkness. Let us try an illustration by means of instances. God is necessarily holy, and it is absolutely impossible that he should sin. Is he not, therefore, a free agent? Is not Satan a free agent, though all his volitions and actions are sinful? If he be not, why is he condemned and punished? Is not man as fallen a free agent, though his choice of evil is continual: and when by grace he shall be purified and translated to heaven will he not be a free agent, though, to sin will be impossible? Freedom of will, or agency, is not dependent on the moral or immoral estate of any being. It consists in liberty and power to act according to the nature, disposition or propensity which they possess. We conclude, therefore, that the exercise of sovereign grace in the production of repentance and faith is consistent with human liberty; that the command to believe is just and right. That it is recommended to us, by the blessed ends produced by it, and the hope of success in complying. God's purpose and grace exerted is the strongest inducement to employ every appointed means for accomplishing the duty, and obtaining the rewards connected with them.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

Let none regard this doctrine as discouraging to sinners in seeking salvation. Our condition, is a lost condition. The salva-

tion provided is for the lost. Christ, the great Shepherd, is seeking to save them. His voice, by his under-shepherds, is heard through the streets and lanes of cities, by the high ways and hedges, and in the remote and long deserted wilderness, gathering his wanderers home. By means of his word and Spirit; he has achieved wonders already. Who can count the number that have entered the city, where no sun nor moon shed their feeble light; where the glory of God shines resplendent; "and the Lamb is the light of it." Christ did not shed his blood to save one of a nation or generation of men. A multitude which no man can number, from every nation and tongue and people shall be saved. This salvation will be effected "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy." Salvation is "of faith, that it might be by grace." Faith is a gift of God. Through the sinner's use of the means of believing, God ordinarily so changes the human heart, as to render it susceptible of the impression which the truths of God's word are calculated to make; and in a manner, so consistent with the ordinary operation of truth upon the heart, brings it to a saving acceptance of Christ, that though his power in the work is almighty, his agency is not discerned as distinct or separate from the word. If this be so, then let the sinner be told, while he seeks salvation through faith, to seek it through the truth, and to strive as in an agony with God to send his Spirit to "break up the fallow ground," and prepare it for receiving the good seed, and to water and warm it that it may grow.

In preaching to our fellow sinful men, let all of us be careful, while we press on sinners the duty of believing, to guard them against self-confidence. Let us mingle the riches of grace, which, as to place stands pre-eminent in the great salvation, with all our earnestness in pressing duty upon sinners. Tell them, that they ought indeed, to "run and will;" and to do it always and with all their might. But tell them, too, that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," that any are saved. O, that we could bring the inhabitants of our widely extended and largely populated world to fall as helpless and as spiritually dead beneath the cross! Then would sacrifices of broken and bleeding hearts be every where offered. Then would the groans of sin-sick souls ascend in the ears of the God of sabaoth, through the Advocate of man; and soon, very soon would joy and gladness and praise fill the earth, and spread over heaven. Amen.

## SERMON XIII.

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### JUSTIFICATION.

**ROM. 3:24,25,26.** *Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

THE leading doctrine in the text, is free justification through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone."

I. Justification supposes condemnation, and it is of vast importance to know the nature and the extent of this state of condemnation. "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they used deceit, the poisons of asps ~~is~~ under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Rom. 3:9—18.

We are not by these or similar declarations to understand that there is nothing good or amiable in man, while in a state of condemnation. Men have been condemned, and condemned and suffered justly under human law, who were yet possessed of many amiable and useful qualities. So, also, under God's government. Men in a state of condemnation may know the truth, and they may approve of the truth to a great extent. They may have a strong sense of their obligation to God. They may, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, be good fathers, and good mothers, and

good neighbors, and may even be good and useful members of the church, and yet be under a sentence of condemnation.

The law under which man is, both as a creature and a sinner, is holy, and just, and good. It is spiritual and exceeding broad. It requires perfect, and universal, and perpetual obedience. And it denounces death,—even eternal death, for the very least transgression. It particularly requires supreme and unceasing love to God. “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Rom. 3: 19, 20.

Dost thou then ground thy hope of pardon and acceptance upon the law? Thy works must be perfect,—and thy obedience must be universal and perpetual,—or all will be of no avail. The law under which thou art, still thunders, “As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Gal. 3: 10.

II. The only ground of a sinner’s pardon and acceptance before God, is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference.” Rom. 3: 21, 22. “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” ver. 24, 25.

To understand this righteousness we may take the following facts,

1. Christ as man and mediator was made under the law, and made under it in the form of a broken covenant of works. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4: 4, 5. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” Rom. 8: 3.

2. Whatever divine justice demanded of man as a sinner, was fulfilled by Christ in the character of a surety. He assumed human nature in all its purity, Luke 1: 35. “For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.” Heb. 7: 26, 27. He fulfilled all righteousness,—was always doing good,—was literally without guile,—without fault of any kind.

He bore, also, the curse or the penalty of that law, whatever it was. Nor can we have any adequate conception of the nature and extent of either his obedience or sufferings. "He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. 5:21. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." 1 Pet. 2:24.

This righteousness is called the righteousness of God. It is eminently and exclusively so. It is God's contrivance. It is God's appointed mode of saving lost sinners of the human family. It was wrought out by God. God was manifested in the flesh. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. It is **THE ONLY** righteousness on account of which God can pardon and accept a sinner. From the giving of the first promise till the consummation of all things in the song of the redeemed, there is not a ray of hope to any of our race, but through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshiped him that liveth for ever and ever." Rev. 5:9—14.

We may reason about the matter as we please, but there is no getting over the stubborn fact. Not another name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.

III. Sinners are interested in this righteousness and in all the blessings connected with it, by faith. Rom. 3:22,25,26. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:16.

What then is justifying faith? Strictly speaking, it is resting upon the satisfaction of the Redeemer alone, for pardon and acceptance. Hence it is said to be faith in his blood. Hence it is also said, "he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2:2.

More largely, faith is taking God at his word, and making the right use of all that he has been pleased to reveal. God has said to the gospel hearer,—“thou art a sinner,—a lost sinner,—dead in trespasses and sins.” He has said in plain terms, “the wages of sin is death,—he who believeth not is condemned.” He has further said, that he has not left thee to perish in this state of condemnation. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” John 3: 16,17.

God has again and again said, that the righteousness of the surety is complete. He was well pleased for his righteousness' sake, for he magnified the law and made it honorable. The surety was raised from the dead,—was received into glory,—and seated at God's right hand,—and the Holy Ghost has been promised, and has been given as the fruits of his death and intercession. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Gal. 3: 13,14.

God is this moment “in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,”—and he is praying and beseeching you, a lost sinner, to be reconciled to him. And he tenders to you pardon, and peace, and eternal glory, through the atonement. The Redeemer, himself, “is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins.” “He is able to save to the very uttermost, all who come unto God by him.” He is now saying, “Come now and let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” He encourages you to ask the great and inestimable gift of the Holy Ghost. “If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Luke 11: 13.

Now, sinner, believest thou these declarations? Canst thou take God at his word,—and take home to thyself these and similar declarations of Him who cannot lie? He who thus believeth shall be saved. He who thus believeth passeth from death unto life. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already,

because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3:14—18.

IV. Union to our Lord Jesus Christ is the great fact upon which our personal justification rests. And this union is exactly of the same kind with that which existed betwixt Adam as a covenant head, and the person who is justified. See Rom. 5:12—19. It is evident that in this passage as well as in the parallel passage, 1 Cor. 15:18, that the apostle speaks of the whole human family, as connected with one or other of these two: Adam and Jesus Christ. It is equally evident that God deals with all the human family, and with every individual of it as connected with one or other of these men.

Hence also the importance and peculiar meaning of the phrase, so often used in the New Testament, *IN CHRIST*. See Rom. 8:1. Gal. 3:28. 1 Cor. 15:18. 2 Cor. 5:17. Rom. 16:7.

#### INFERENCES.

1. The doctrine of eternal justification is not supported by scripture. If any thing is clear in the bible, it is that all men are divided into two grand classes,—believers and unbelievers,—sons of God and children of the devil. There is no middle state,—no third class. Nor can any man be in both these states at one and the same time. See John 3:36. 5:24. Rom. 8:1,9.

2. From the same facts it is evident that the doctrine of initial justification, or incomplete salvation, cannot be supported by scripture. No man can be partially in a state of condemnation, and partially in a state of salvation. There is no half way, or middle ground betwixt being in a state of condemnation and acceptance.

3. A person may have very imperfect views of God's plan of salvation, and yet be in a justified state. And the converse is true. A man may be very well informed in theology, and be very orthodox in his creed, and yet be in a state of condemnation. Justifying faith is unconditional submission to the righteousness of God, or in other words, submission to God's plan of salvation. See Rom. 10:3—12. See also the case of the Pharisee and publican. Luke 18:9—14.

The only satisfactory evidence which any man can have of his being in a justified state is a holy life. When a man's state is changed, his nature is also changed. "Jesus gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity." The spirit of adoption is a spirit of holiness. Consult the reasoning of the apostle. Rom. 6:9—14.

You are, my friend, a lost sinner, and you despair of salvation from every other quarter. And you submit yourself unreservedly to God's mercy as he has been pleased to reveal it. This is enough. It was thus with Abraham and all the Old Testament saints. They rested their salvation upon God's bare word, without having any

adequate conception of the manner in which that salvation was to be procured. It was thus with the disciples previous to the day of Pentecost. It has been thus with the most distinguished of God's people in every age. God's mercy, tendered to them in a full and free promise, has been their only ground of hope. In the great and important matter of personal justification, extensive theological knowledge, any more than extensive literary and scientific attainments, has not been of much use. When all comes to all, the man who is to be saved must bow to God's sovereignty and account it a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom he is one of the chief.

4. A sinner is not justified because he is holy, or because he has in him some good dispositions; but he becomes holy and acquires good dispositions, and has these good dispositions cherished and strengthened, because his state is changed and he is accepted in the Beloved. See Luke 1:74. Rom. 8:15, and Gal. 4:4,5,6. The right knowledge, and the right application of this fact is that which chiefly distinguishes evangelical from legal preaching.

We close. The gospel is God's proclamation of a full and a free pardon to men under a sentence of condemnation. And to preach the gospel is not to amuse the imagination with metaphysical discussions, or with criticisms on words and phrases in this and the other language, or as used in this and the other department of social intercourse. To preach the gospel is in God's name to declare the fact that "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself;" that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." It was in this manner that the apostle preached the gospel in the passage before us. "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference: for all have sinned; and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. 3:21—26.

END OF VOLUME I.