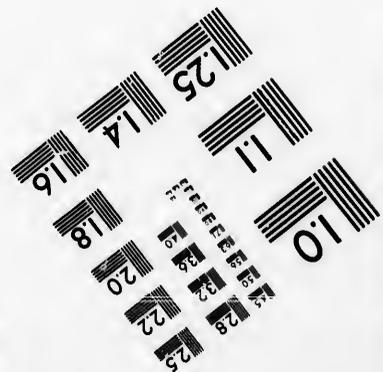
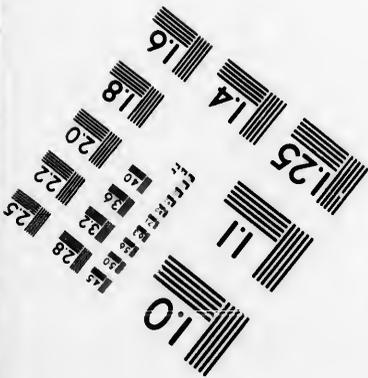
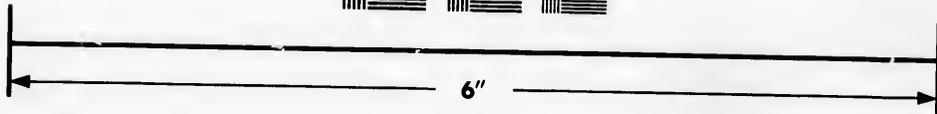
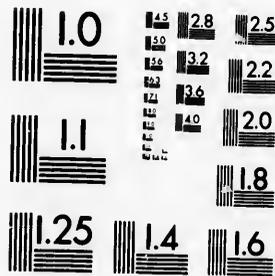


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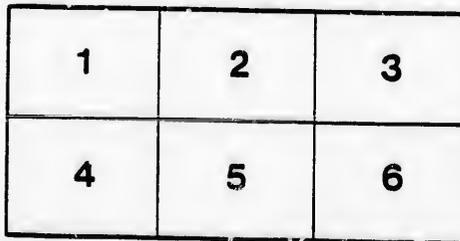
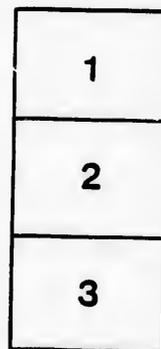
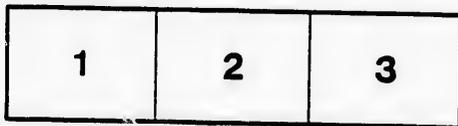
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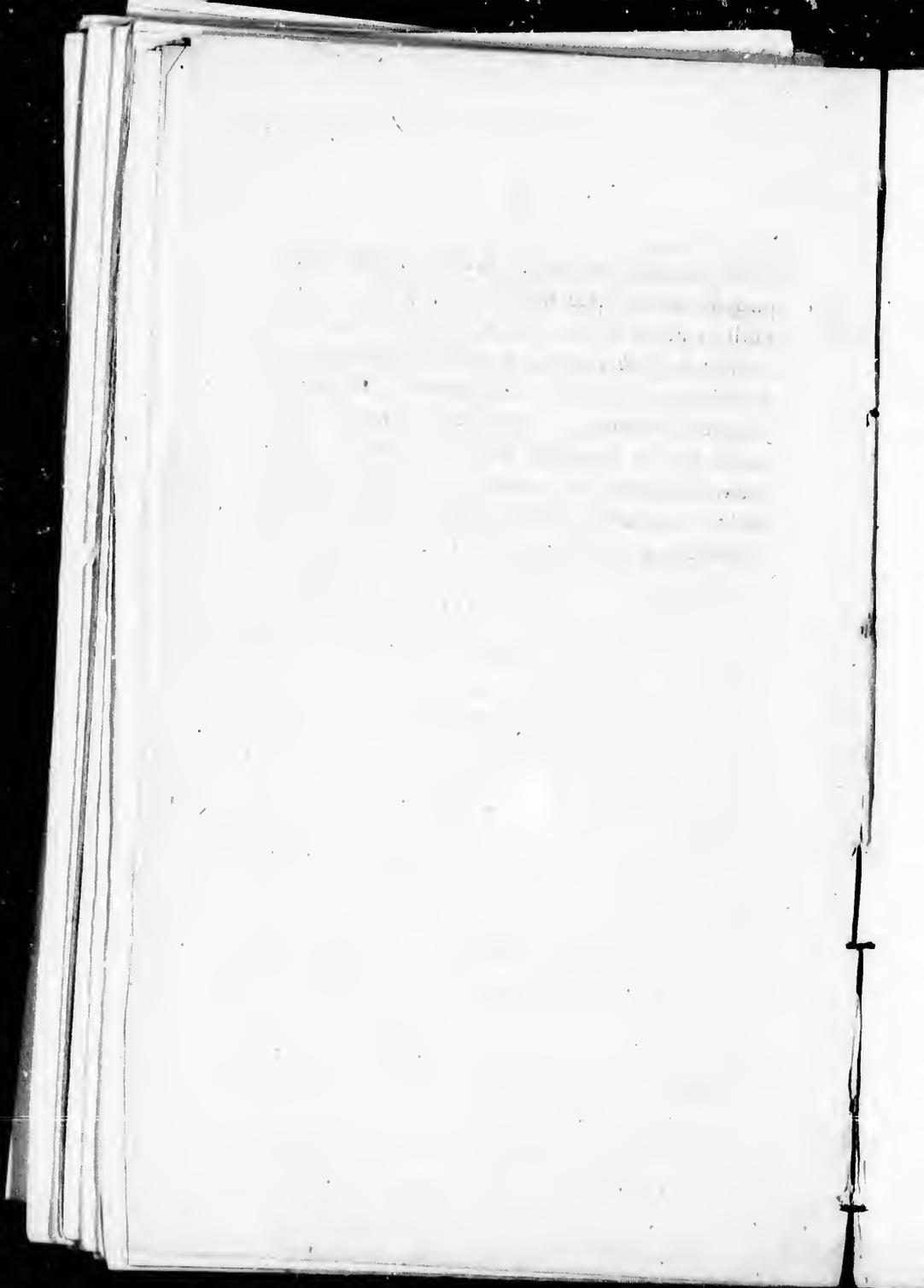
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DAMNABLE HERESIES DEFINED AND DESCRIBED, IN

▲

S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN NORTH WILBRAHAM,

JUNE 15, 1808.

AT THE ORDINATION OF

REV. THADDEUS OSGOOD,

TO THE OFFICE AND WORK OF

AN

EVANGELIST.

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BY JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.

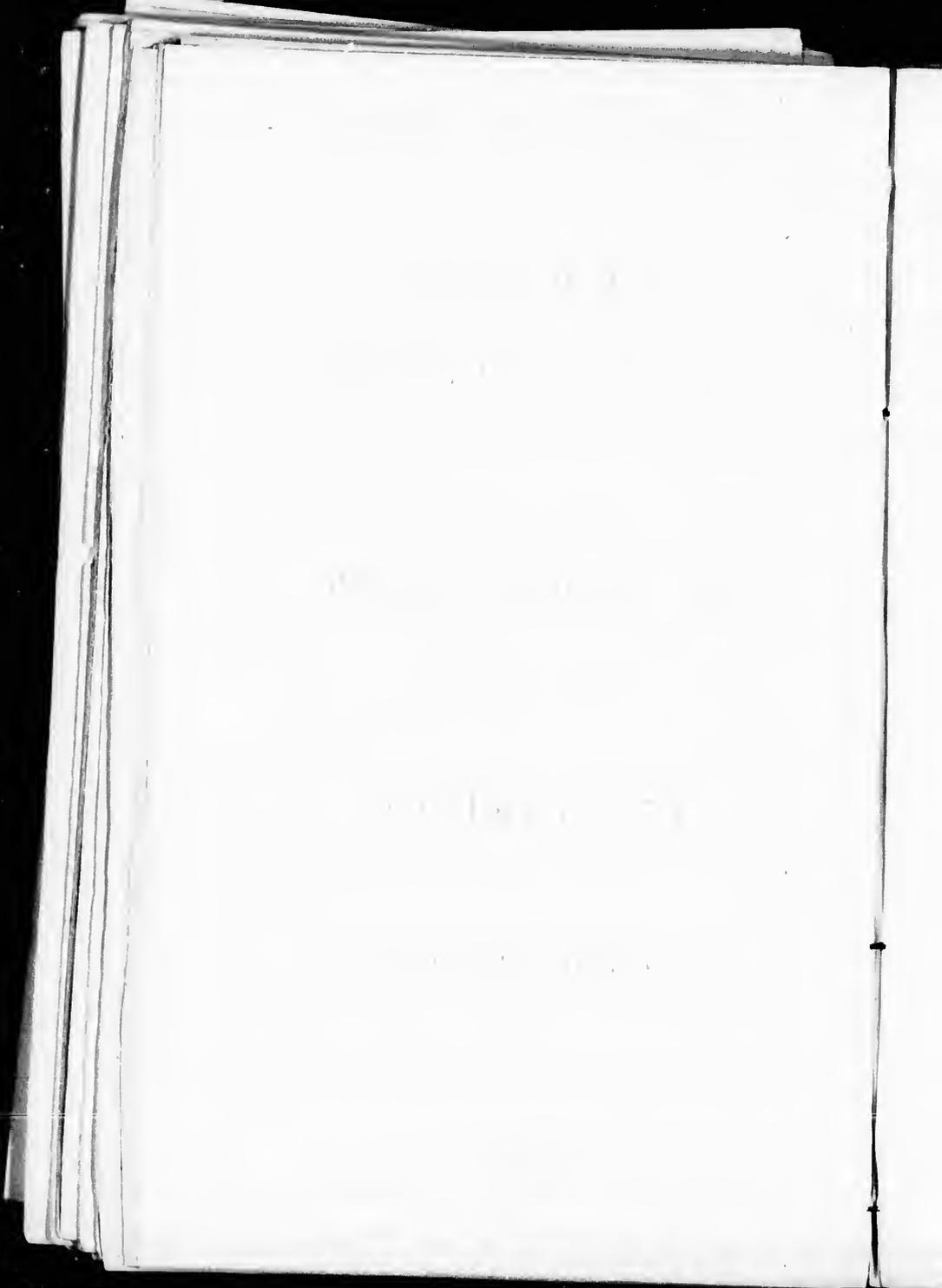
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WEST-SPRINGFIELD.

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MONTREAL.

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1846.



DAMNABLE HERESIES DEFINED, &c.

1, PETER, ii. 1.

*There shall be false Teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them ;—*

THE gospel is a complete system of doctrines and duties. It teaches what we ought to believe, and what we ought to do. The use of faith is to promote a right temper and practice.

Some plead, that if we live as we ought, it is indifferent what we believe. But the truth is, no man will live as he ought, if his faith be grossly corrupt. They who put away a good conscience, are such as make ship-wreck of faith.

It is not indeed every speculative error, that destroys the faith or vitiates the life. But there are some great and leading truths, which we cannot relinquish without forfeiting our own salvation, nor oppose without endangering the salvation of others. St. Peter speaks of certain false teachers, who by embracing and propagating damnable heresies bring on themselves swift destruction, and seduce many to follow their pernicious ways. These are they, who deny the Lord, that bought them.

St. Jude in his epistles, speaks of the same deceivers. When he wrote to Christians concerning the common salvation, he exhorted them to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints: What this faith was he shews by its opposites. "There are certain men, who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

It has often been enquired, what are those errors in religion, which may be called *fatal*. Every sectary is disposed to conceive the sentiments, which discriminate his sect from others, to be essential, and every deviation from them to be damnable. Hence he admits to his communion none but those, who adopt his peculiarities; and such as do adopt them, he considers as sincere converts and true Christians,

These he admits without scruple, and without demanding higher qualifications. For thus he argues, "My sentiments are opposite to human depravity; they are offensive to men's native corruption; consequently all who embrace them are renewed and sanctified. Here is the grand criterion of true grace." How small soever may be the peculiarities, which divide different sects, it is easy in the zeal of party to magnify them into essential requisites for salvation.

The apostles exhort us to contend for the faith delivered to the saints. They teach us, at the same time, to receive those who are weak in the faith, and not trouble them with doubtful disputations. But where shall we draw the line between things, for which we must contend, and things which we must not make the subjects of uncharitable disputation? This question is clearly answered by Peter and Jude in the passages now before us.

There are two things, which they consider as damnable heresies; One is "*denying* the Lord who bought us;" the other is, "turning the grace of God into licentiousness." Those, therefore, who acknowledge the Lord that bought or redeemed us, and at the same time improve the grace of God in our redemption to the practical purpose of advancing true holiness in heart and life, cannot be charged with receiving and spreading damnable heresies; for tho' they may err in some less important matters, they hold the substance of that faith, which has been delivered to the saints.

The first heresy, which may be considered as destructive, is "*denying* the Lord, who bought us," or the great doctrine of redemption by Jesus Christ. They who reject this, reject all that is peculiar to the gospel; all that distinguishes it from natural religion, or from a mere scheme of moral philosophy.

The Scripture teaches us, that God is a being of perfect rectitude, wisdom, power and goodness—that he exercises a moral government over his intelligent creatures—that his will, however made known to them, is a law to which they are bound to submit—that his law requires all righteousness,

and condemns all sin in temper and action—that all transgressors of his law offend against his authority, incur his displeasure, and deserve punishment. To this every man's reason must assent. This is what is generally called *natural religion*. It is a religion adapted to guide the conduct of holy and innocent beings. But it by no means comes home to the case of sinful and guilty creatures.

These, having already fallen under condemnation, need first to know, whether there be any help, or any hope for such as they are. The relief provided for, and offered to such, is what is properly called the *gospel*. This instructs us, that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God—that God, in his selfmoving mercy, has constituted a Redeemer of sinners—that this Redeemer is in an eminent and peculiar sense God's own son, his express image, the brightness of his glory, possessed of Divine attributes, entitled to Divine honours, the Creator, and Upholder of all worlds—that this wonderful person, being manifested in our flesh, bare our sins in his own body, made himself a sacrifice for them, and having purged them by his blood, rose from the dead, ascended to glory, and became head over all things for the Church—that thro' him God has shed forth the holy influence of his spirit to convince men of sin, renew them after his image, and sanctify them to a preparation for that world, to which the Redeemer has ascended—that pardon is now graciously ensured to penitent and believing souls, and that the Divine Spirit is freely granted to those who seek it. This is the scheme of grace stated in the gospel. It is the rejection of this scheme, which our Apostles call "denying the Lord, who bought us," or redeemed us. And the denial of him in this character, they call a damnable heresy; because it is a denial of the whole gospel considered as a plan of redemption for sinners, and as distinct from the religion of nature.

There are those who acknowledge Christ as a *teacher* commissioned of God to instruct us in our duty by his doctrines, and yet deny him as a *Redeemer* sent to deliver us from pun-

ishment by his death. These are justly ranked among those, who bring in damnable heresies, for they deny him in his most important character. If we were guiltless and holy beings, and needed only to be instructed what our duty is, such men as the Apostles, endued as they were with heavenly gifts might have been adequate to the work. But we needed *redemption*, as well as instruction; and to accomplish this, no being merely human, however richly endued, was sufficient. "For such an high priest became us, who is *holy, harmless and undefiled*, and who is made *higher than the heavens*; who needed not, like the ancient priests, to offer sacrifice first for *his own sins*, and then for the people's; for this he did *once*, when he offered up *himself*. The law made men priests, who had infirmity; but the word of the oath, maketh the Son, who is *perfected for evermore*." Therefore "the blood of Christ, who through the *Eternal Spirit* offered himself *without spot* to God purgeth the conscience from dead works."

If any ask, why the denial of the redemption excludes men from salvation? I answer; Because it implies a temper inconsistent with salvation. He who imagines, that he needs no redemption, must think that he deserves no punishment, and such a man will exercise no repentance; for what has he to repent of, who has never done any thing to offend God's purity, or to deserve his displeasure? In order to our receiving pardon, we must know ourselves, be convinced of our sins, feel a godly sorrow for them, and realize our desert of condemnation. The innocent need no pardon and will ask for none.

No man, under a deep conviction of his guilt, will deny his dependence on mercy, nor refuse to receive mercy through a redeemer. Christ came to save them who are lost. They only who see themselves to be lost, will resort to him as a Saviour.

Besides; As God in his grace has appointed a way of salvation, they who receive it must receive it in this way. If such a method were wholly unnecessary, we cannot suppose God would have ordained it. If it be necessary, we must submit to it. Our Lord says to the Jews, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." The apostle says, "There

is salvation in no other, and there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby they must be saved." To transgress God's law is to rebel against his authority; to deny the Saviour is to trample on divine grace. How sore must be the punishment of those, who tread under foot the Son of God?

Do any think, after all, there is no occasion for recurrence to the redemption? They must then imagine, that the *justice* of God will secure them from punishment. But if you expect to stand a trial, and claim an acquittal at the tribunal of justice, produce your cause, bring forth your strong reasons, and declare that you may be justified. Remember you must carry with you to trial a heart unstained with sin, and a life unspotted with iniquity, must maintain before the all seeing Judge, that you never have transgressed his law or offended his purity in thought or action. If you have no such plea to make, then thankfully accept that mercy which comes to penitent sinners through the redemption that is in Christ. We have considered one heresy, which the Apostles pronounce destructive, "denying the Lord, who bought us." There is another equally fatal, which we will now, in the second place, consider; 'This is turning the grace of God into licentiousness.'

To deny the grace of God in the redemption, is to reject the gospel and resort to natural religion. To admit the grace of God and make it an encouragement to sin, is to renounce all religion.

"The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godlily in this present world." Whatever admiration, we may profess to feel, of the grace of God in our redemption, if we make this grace an encouragement to ungodliness and worldly lusts, and an exemption from our obligation to sobriety, righteousness and godliness, we as really incur the danger of damnation, as if we renounced the redemption and all the doctrines of grace connected with it. That Christ is not the minister of sin, and that we have no encouragement to a wicked life on the ground of our being under grace, and not under the law, the Apostle plentifully asserts,

and abundantly proves. The gospel, as a dispensation of grace, while it provides for the pardon of penitent offenders, gives no indemnity to wilful transgressors. It teaches, that "to whom we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are," and his wages we must receive, "whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness. And the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

As there were in the times of the apostles, so there are in the present times, some, who, turning the grace of God into licentiousness, bring on themselves the destruction, which the gospel denounces against the workers of iniquity.

1. In this class we may reckon, first, those who oppose faith in Christ to works of holiness.

The Apostle teaches us, that "we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law." The deeds of the law are deeds of perfect obedience; for such are the deeds which the law requires. We cannot therefore be justified by the deeds of the law, because we are all transgressors, and can produce no such deeds. If then we are justified, it must be by faith through the redemption that is in Christ. But the faith which justifies, is a humble, penitent, heart; purifying faith; it works by love, and is careful to maintain good works. Hence the apostle demands, "Do we then make void the law thro' faith? Nay," he asserts, "we establish the law." Against those who pervert the grace God by relying on a speculative faith, St. James thus argues, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say, he hath faith, when he hath not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and you say to them, Be ye warmed and filled, but give them not the things needful for the body, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead being alone.

2. They who from the redemption of Christ argue for an absolute and unconditional salvation, turn the grace of God into licentiousness.

There are some such hereticks. They confess that all men

are sinners, and that, as sinners, they are *in themselves* debtors to Divine justice. But then, they say, Christ has paid for all men the debt which they owed, and justice can have no further demand upon them. Hence they conclude, that no man's salvation at all depends on his repentance, faith, obedience or any thing done by him, but is alike sure to every man, what ever his character may be ; and that a wicked and impenitent life will expose no man to future punishment.

This is a total perversion of God's grace. The gospel nowhere teaches us, that Christ has paid our debt to God's justice ; or has bought us out of its hands, that we might sin without danger, and be saved without repentance. But it teaches us, that " Christ has been set forth a propitiation for sin to declare the righteousness of God in its forgiveness, that he might be just, and the justifier of *them who believe.*"

The Redeemer has introduced and established a gracious covenant, which offers blessings on certain terms or which promises pardon and eternal life on repentance, faith and abedience. If we reject these terms we are as certainly exposed to condemnation as if no covenant were established, and no Saviour were appointed.

To say, that Christ has paid the debt absolutely for all without distinction, whether penitent or impenitent, is to adopt a language very dissonant from that of the gospel. Christ has purchased salvation. This is offered freely ; and all who accept it by repentance and faith are interested in it. But for those who remain impenitent no debt is paid. They are under condemnation. They are debtors to justice. And believers are debtors to Christ, bound to live, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. To such there is no condemnation.

3. They who embolden themselves in a course of sin from the declarations, which God has made, of his mercy ; and conclude that they shall escape punishment, because God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, turn the grace of God into licentiousness. They make the grace of God which is the great motive, and the only encouragement to repentance,

an argument against it, and an occasion of greater boldness and obstinacy in sin and impenitence. It is doubtless true, "God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. What then is his pleasure? It is "that the wicked turn from his way and live." He must turn or die. St. Peter tells us, "God is long suffering towards us, not willing, that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." His long suffering then is no argument, that the impenitent will not perish; for the design of this is to lead them to repentance; and if they pervert it to encourage impenitence, they expose themselves to more aggravated punishment. Thus despising the riches of God's goodness, they treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

4. The gospel teaches us, that the renovation of our corrupt nature is a necessary preparation for heavenly happiness, and that this renovation is a work of God's grace. Hence some infer, that the sinner has nothing to do in the work; that if God is pleased to renew him he will be renewed; if not, he must remain as he is, and take his destiny; that nothing, which he does, or can do, has any relation, or tendency to his conversion, and he may as safely abandon himself to vice, as attempt a reformation of his manners; as safely neglect, as attend on the means of religion; as safely oppose the grace of God, as seek it by prayer.

This surely is to turn the grace of God into wantonness in sin. It is to sin, because God is gracious. It is to receive God's grace in vain, and more than in vain. It is to trample on it, and treat it with despite. The Apostle argues in a very different manner; "Work out your salvation, for God worketh in you"; do all things without murmuring and disputing." "As workers together with him, we beseech you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain; for he saith, In a day of salvation I have helped thee."

It is plain doctrine of scripture, that the renovation of a sinner is a work of God's Spirit. And this doctrine is agreeable to reason. For if there be in him a predominant inclin-

nation to sin, there can be nothing in him, independent of God, to oppose and overcome this inclination, and introduce a contrary one. To suppose there could, would be to suppose, there might be two opposit inclinations existing in the mind at the same time, and both predominant. But then, it does not hence follow, that there is nothing for him to do, or that nothing, which he does, can render his case more or less hopeful. The contrary is most evident. Where God sends the gospel, men are not left to themselves. They have not only the external means of religion, but also the awakening and convincing influences of the Spirit, which are common to all, who attend upon these means.—Hence the gospel is called “a ministration of the Spirit;” and they to whom it comes, are said “to have the Spirit ministered to them, and to have received the Spirit in the hearing of the word of faith.” Some who were stiff-necked and obstinate are charged with “having *always* resisted the Holy Ghost.” They must therefore have always had it. Christ says to the Laodiceans, “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him.”

Under the impressions of gospel truth, and the awakening influences of grace, there are things which sinners may do. They may renounce the gross forms of vice; they may lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and frame their doings to turn to the Lord; they may read and hear the word of salvation, and they may call upon God for his mercy and grace; and the desires and prayers awakened in them by the word and spirit of God, they may hope, will be regarded. In this way, there is more probability of their saving conversion, than if they should cast off fear, restrain prayer, and give themselves up to work all iniquity with greediness. Of the Jews, it is said, “When God slew them, then they sought him, and turned and inquired early after him; but their hearts were not right with him, nor stedfast in his covenant; yet he being full of compassion so far forgave them, that he destroyed them not,” but prolonged their space of repentance. “There is a day when God may be found. In this day let sinners

seek him ; and let them turn to him with their hearts, and he will have mercy on them and abundantly pardon them.

*Our subject affords us several useful Reflections.*

1. All the doctrines of grace tend to holiness.

Justification by faith, and pardon by repentance, are doctrines according to godliness. If there were no hope of acceptance with God without legal perfection, our case must be desperate, for this perfection, we have not attained, nor shall we attain in the present life. Total despair would break the force and extinguish the influence of every motive to virtue.

Redemption by Christ urges to purity and good works. It shews the dreadful evil of sin, which could not be expiated by human sufferings, by any sufferings but those of the Son of God, who is perfected for evermore. And it demonstrates the mercy of God to forgive the repenting sinner ; “ for he that spared not his own Son, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ? ”

The doctrine of the agency of the spirit in conversion exhibits this change to be important and attainable. Whatever weakness of nature and strength of corruption we feel, we may believe, that the grace of God is sufficient to effect the change, and may be encouraged to wait on him for the grace which we need.

If we cordially receive the great doctrines of grace taught in the gospel, we shall not make them our encouragements to sin, but shall feel their influence animating us to piety and good works. “ Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound ? God forbid. How shall we who are dead to sin, live any longer therein ? ”

2. We never ought to censure men as embracing damnable heresies, as long as they profess a dependence on the grace of God in their salvation, and exhibit the influence of grace in a holy life.

We may meet with some who agree not with us in our explanation of certain scriptural phrases, or adopt not our modes of expression in stating particular doctrines ; but if

they acknowledge in substance the doctrines, which are really important, and appear to live under the practical influence of them, then they embrace not the heresies which the scripture pronounces damnable. If they confess themselves guilty and impotent, and dependent on divine mercy, if they honor Christ as the Lord who bought them, consider his righteousness as the ground of their justification, look to the grace of the holy spirit for sanctification and preservation, and improve these doctrines of grace as motive to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, then clearly they fall not under the condemnation of those, who bring in damnable heresies. They may not assume to explain, how corruption is transmitted from father to son and from Adam to us; how the spirit works in the renovation of a corrupt heart, or how the blood of Christ expiates human guilt; but they believe, that we are all fallen creatures, and feel themselves to be within this description; they believe, that their saving renovation is a work of divine grace; that the death of Christ on the cross is an adequate sacrifice for human guilt, and that this sacrifice is accepted of God in behalf of all who repent of sin and rely on the Saviour. In this belief they commit themselves to the mercy of God for pardon, and to his grace for sanctification, and devote themselves to the service of God with a resolution and care to walk in newness of life. These have, in substance and influence, the faith once delivered to the saints; for they neither deny the Lord who bought them, nor turn the grace of God into wantonness.

3. Before we exclude any from our charity, as entertaining destructive errors, it becomes us to examine, whether we ourselves be sound in the faith. How earnestly soever we contend for particular doctrines, if these doctrines leave us servants to sin and corruption, we certainly retain one damnable heresy; the greatest and worst of all. While we retain this heresy, our contention for purity of faith is but an ostentatious hypocrisy.

4. We never ought to exclude any from our charity and fellowship for circumstantial differences in the *ceremonial*

parts of religion, while they profess to believe, and appear to regard its essential *Doctrines* and *precepts*.

There is a material difference between erring in the circumstances of a particular ordinance, and rejecting the ordinance itself. If a man spurns a known institution, he discovers a pride of heart inconsistent with the Christian spirit. But while he reverences the institution itself, and complies with it according to his understanding of it, his circumstantial error is no evidence of insincerity, and no reason for rejecting him from our charity; for he neither denies the Lord who bought him, nor perverts the grace of God to licentiousness.

5. Let us be thankful for the gospel, which has opened to us a scheme of salvation adapted to our condition as sinners, and conducive to our happiness as moral and intelligent beings. It discovers a way of recovery from guilt, and of restoration to the favour of God. It explains and inculcates the temper which qualifies for the enjoyment of God, and it offers grace for the attainment and improvement of this temper. We profess to have received this scheme of grace; Let us walk according to it, being rooted and grounded in the truth. If trusting in ourselves, we reject God's grace; or trusting in his grace we embolden ourselves in sin, we shall bring on ourselves swift destruction.

6. Our subject teaches us the importance of the gospel ministry, the great object of which is to state and proclaim the religion of Jesus, and persuade men to embrace and obey it. At the same time, it warns ministers to consider the guilt which they incur, if they bring in the heresies denounced by the Apostles; They will thus bring destruction on themselves and on those who follow their pernicious ways.

*Finally.* We are led to contemplate with pity and concern the condition of those who enjoy no regular and stated ministry of the word, and who consequently are exposed to the seductions of those evil men who lie wait to deceive. And while we lament their unhappy condition, we have reason to rejoice in the measures taken by many Christian societies in

our land for spreading the knowledge of the truth among them, and for guarding them against the dangers, which threaten them.

It is matter of thankfulness and joy, that, in this day, many, endued with respectable talents, and animated with a benevolent and godly zeal, have offered themselves to the work of carrying the gospel to those regions, where a stated ministry is not, and at present cannot be enjoyed.

We are refreshed and delighted this day with the zeal of our young brother, who voluntarily offers himself to this arduous work; and that he may go forth to it with advantages for greater usefulness, now presents himself to receive ordination from our hands.

We commend you, Dear Brother, to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to keep and preserve you, and to make you an able and successful minister in the regions, where you may be called to labour. As you expect to make a sacrifice of time and property, we must suppose, that your motives are pure and pious.

We have, in the preceding discourse, suggested what ought to be the substance of a minister's preaching; and you will allow a particular application of it to yourself from us, who have heretofore licensed you to preach the gospel, and also from me, who, at your desire, have endeavoured to assist you in your professional studies. To speak the same things, which I have before spoken, will not be grievous to me, and for you it will be safe.

Go forth in the strength of Divine Grace, and make the divine oracles the rule of your conduct, faith and preaching. Teach men their fallen and depraved state, and the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. Teach them the dignity of his person, the perfection of his example, the purity of his doctrines and precepts, the efficacy of his atonement and intercession, the necessity of renovation, and of the agency of divine grace in this change. Explain the nature of repentance toward God and faith toward Christ, and the fruits by which their sincerity must be proved. Shew how all the

doctrines of grace cordially received, operate to holiness and good works. In a word, make the gospel appear to be what it really is, a doctrine according to godliness.

Pay a particular attention to the young ; take them by the hand and lead them along in the path of wisdom and virtue. Encourage family religion, and inculcate on parents their duty to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Study the things which make for peace and edification. Comfort the feeble minded, convince gainsayers, and reprove the unruly. Form churches where you find a competent number of well disposed Christians within a convenient vicinity. Where a good work appears to be begun, spend some time there, that you may advance and establish it. Avoid vain jangling, and foolish and unlearned questions, for these gender strife. And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle toward all men, patient, apt to teach, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. Take heed that your good be not evil spoken of, nor your ministry despised or blamed thro' any indiscretion in your preaching, or conversation ; but as becomes a man endued with knowledge and understanding, shew out of a good conversation your works with meekness of wisdom.

May the providence of God take you into its holy keeping ; may his grace guide your steps, strengthen your heart and succeed your labours. May the seed which you sow, spring up and bear abundant fruit. You will go forth bearing precious seed ; may you return with joy, and bring your sheaves with you. May the wilderness under your culture become a fruitful field, and the joy in the result of your labours be greater than the joy of harvest.

