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A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

GENERAL ASSOCIATION

OF

C O N N E C T I C U T ,

AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING,

New-Haven, June, 1850.

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D I S C O U R S E .

Ep. iv. 3—6. “ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

THE obvious meaning of this passage is the true one ; and that is as if it read thus ;— “ The religion of Christians is divine, and it is therefore one and the same in all of them. By means of it they coalesce in one mystical body. United in this celestial manner, whatever differences in other respects may appear among them, are to be borne with reciprocal meekness, always keeping in all things the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Each of the principal members of this paraphrase, in their order, will be particularly considered, and an application to this General Association will conclude the discourse.

I. *The religion of Christians, being divine, is one and the same in all of them.*

“ One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism” only can be from heaven, in application effectual, and in result eternal. By whomsoever this may be questioned, it will be at once admitted by those who contend not only that truth is the instrument of sanctification, but also that in no case can the human soul be sanctified without it. Without admitting the necessity of the presence and perception of truth in every soul in order to its renewal, yet it is unquestionable

that the scriptures throughout are so far from tolerating for a moment any other than the true religion, as instituted by God, and regulated by His word, that on the contrary there is no sin of man against which the Lord our God, who is a jealous God, more fiercely rages, than that of attempting to corrupt or supercede it, by the inventions and commandments of men.

There are those who confess that the Christian religion is objectively one and the same, who, nevertheless, waver in their apprehensions as to its subjective identity in the souls of true believers. Truth, they admit, is uniform and fixed; but as perceived by different persons, it is various; and also that it is in the same person different at different times.

That persons called Christians hold diverse and even opposite doctrines, and even true believers differ in many respects from each other, is lamentably true. But this is far from being the same with the supposition, that the truth itself is a different thing in different minds. For where the truth in a given instance is apprehended, the perception itself is a true one, otherwise the truth is not apprehended. There can be no subjective truth unless it corresponds to the objective truth.

The notion that subjective religion may vary indefinitely and yet be true, or equivalent to the true, opens wide the door to libertinism; and by denying that one and the same Lord, one and the same faith, one and the same baptism are essential in all cases, they are made of no importance in any.

To prevent misapprehension of the point here stated, let it be distinctly understood that, a positive and uniform faith and practice, and that conformable to scripture, in all who are recognized as Christians, does not exclude in believers a subsequent growth in grace and in the knowledge of God; nor, by consequence, an inequality among them in respect to more or less of faith and holiness. Whilst all of them are partakers of "like precious faith," some may

be stronger than others, just as men, women and children have a common humanity, and in that respect are alike, equal and entire.

As to the essential articles of the gospel of Christ, fundamental to a true church, and indispensable to rightful membership in it, something will be said in the sequel ; and its place here be supplied by a brief consideration of the manner in which this subject is oftentimes regarded. Some are opposed to all creeds or confessions of faith. Others tolerate them, if they are short and indefinite. Others receive them as articles of peace, or mere symbols of concord. Others again, as containing the substance or raw material of doctrine, to be wrought up at the will and pleasure of individuals. It is obvious that these several classes agree in the main as to one point, viz. that there is no fixed and definite body of revealed doctrine, the knowledge and belief of which is a test of character. What James Arminius directly aimed at 230 years ago, and failed to accomplish, has come to pass in our times, in effect if not in form. He wished to comprehend the whole Protestant world in one denomination, by excluding all creeds, save the recognition of the scriptures as a divine revelation, and the practice of the outward ordinances of the gospel, and the maintenance of good morals. He did not regard doctrinal points as indifferent, but he would leave every one to his own opinions, free to maintain them, provided he did not make any system of doctrine a test of Christian character and essential to salvation. When thoroughly sifted, and especially when their practice as an expounder of their real opinions is adverted to, it will appear, that so far as any test is used, except the wish of an admission to their fellowship, it is one relating to the disposition of men rather than to that of their faith. Moral qualities are deemed decisive of Christian character. For example — one affirms that he wishes to discover the truth and to do his duty, and he purposes to devote himself to the pursuit of wisdom and righteousness, adding that he

holds the scriptures to be the word of God. Now according to the theoretical and practical principle of those who are opposed to creeds excepting in a loose and general way, this person exhibits sufficient evidence of Christian character to be admitted to church-membership, and with few exceptions, so far as personal religion is concerned, even to the Christian ministry. If this be not so, how is it to be explained, that persons claim to be recognized as Christians and as Christian ministers, whilst they either do not positively believe or do actually reject articles of faith held as vital principles by those of whom they demand the right hand of fellowship, and complain of them as oppressors and persecutors if their demand is denied? On what other ground can this demand be made except on that of moral integrity, in sincerely holding his opinions, and in wishing and aiming to discover the truth? If the question was, whether men possess religious liberty and the rights of conscience, and are independent of all human authority in matters of religion, it is on all hands already settled. But that is not the case in hand. The demand is made, not of the right to think for themselves, but to be regarded and treated as Christians, let them think as they may, provided they are conscientious therein.

That persons of this description are really indifferent to doctrinal truth as a test of character, appears in another particular. In all past time as well as the present, men of lax faith and who have swerved from the severer principles of their age, or of that communion in which they were trained, have earnestly desired to maintain a good standing with those whose belief and practice they have renounced. How now can this course be justified, except on this general ground, that modes of faith are not a test of character? For to hold fellowship with men of a false faith is more than to receive others as Christians with no faith at all, but only a determination to embrace one as soon as it can be found.

In short, there is no medium between a fixed body of Christian doctrine and order, commensurate with the

salvation of individuals and the integrity of the visible church as the pillar and ground of the truth, and a libertinism of principle and practice more or less licentious, ending in infidelity.

Those men then, who are tenacious of all that is held by them as scripture truth and duty, and who are rigid and uncompromising in their principles, are right in one point, if not in all. They have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, or what they verily believe to be such, in respect to persons. Call them mistaken as to their faith, if you will, and teach them the way of God more perfectly if you can, but denounce them not as malignants and persecutors.

II. It is by means of their union in faith and obedience, that Christians are united with each other.

Having one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Father, who is in them all, true believers coalesce in one body, being members one of another, and have one spirit. Being joint partakers of Christ, eating his flesh and drinking his blood, they are all one in him. Hence the church is fitly called the mystical body of Christ, "Being joined to the Lord, it is one spirit with him." The fellowship of saints, is first with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and then one with another, as its natural consequence and effect. Without this previous union with Christ, there is no Christian union with each other, or with the church. Now faith is the bond of union — the marriage-ring, with Christ: "Christ dwells in the heart by faith." This is the bond of union which when manifested brings all who have like precious faith together, making the society — the church of the faithful.

The union of men resulting from their communion in the faith of Christ is irresistible and unavoidable. No true believer in Christ, when he discovers the like faith in another, can help loving him. Be what he may in

other respects, Barbarian, Sythian, bond or free — a friend or an enemy before, ignorant or learned — a prince or a beggar — just so soon as the image of Christ appears in him, out goes his heart to him, and he cannot help it. The outward manifestation of his love may by a thousand causes and occasions be prevented and restrained, but the inward affection is irrepressible.

On the other hand, it is impossible for a true believer to receive and love as a brother in the Lord any one, who does not exhibit the faith of Christ. However respectable and amiable he may be in other particulars, or however closely allied to him he may be by nature and all social and civil affinities, yet if he be not Christ's, or does not appear to be his, it is impossible to give him the heart of Christian fellowship, whatever he may do with his hand.

For this faith there is — there can be — no substitute — no equivalent. It may be counterfeited, it may be denied — it may be derided and trodden under foot ; but it has no equal.

From this view of Christian fellowship, it is plain that true believers are not at liberty to make terms of union at their option. Men can associate for various purposes and with various persons at their option, and dissolve their societies at will. Not so with Christians. The church is the house of the living God — it is the body of Christ — it is the temple of the Holy Ghost — it is the pillar and ground of the truth. It is no contrivance of men, nor is it at their disposal. All who are made overseers in the church are not Lords of God's heritage. They are overseers to feed and cherish, not to work and drive. They are merely ministerial in their office, and can neither originate nor abrogate any thing. To come worthily to the communion of saints is not theirs to give, but to them for whom it is prepared of the Father.

The truth of all this, is in a general way acknowledged for the most part, whilst it is virtually denied by many. To set forth the present state of the visible church even when it is in its best estate, and to assign the chief causes

of its internal difficulties and its outward dangers, though it would be seasonable, and might be useful, is yet here and now impossible. A few observations only can now be made; and these, if not heard with candor, will be made in vain. The terms of church fellowship take their conditions from the point of light in which the church itself is regarded. According to scripture the final cause of the gospel and all its ordinances, is the salvation of souls from sin and death by bringing them to Christ by faith in time, and by vision in eternity. In this sense, the kingdom of Christ is not of this world. It is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. It cometh not with observation, but is internal; and terminates not here, in observation; for we walk by faith, and live by faith, and die in and by faith. The redemption of Christ is not a temporal but an eternal redemption: for in the world the church is in tribulation — groaning and travailing in pain — waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies. Where this view of the church is held, all its administrations of the word and ordinances, and its use of the keys, will be regulated by the one single principle mentioned — the salvation of souls from sin and death by bringing them to Christ, and building them up in him. *Here is the faith and patience of saints, and of them who keep the commandments of God.* On the other hand, where the church is regarded as an organ of this world's reformation, by which its temporal state is to be altered and elevated; governments, laws, learning, agriculture, commerce, manufactures, manners and customs to be redeemed from the hands of wickedness, and the kingdom of Christ become the kingdom of this world, the terms of communion and modes of church administration will take all those forms, which in the judgment of church rulers and leaders, will best fit the gospel and its institutions to the regeneration of the world. Of course, the door is opened to the wisdom of men, to shape divine things now in this way, now in that, as occasion and policy may prescribe. Hence the

ministry no longer copies the example of the apostles, who *gave themselves CONTINUALLY to prayer and the ministry of the word*. They have something else to do. Pastors of churches give heed to other cares, than that of the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers. It would sound strangely in our ears, were a bare recital made of the various employments of professed ministers of the gospel. The apology for this desecration of the ministry is found in the supposed adaptation of all their devices to the world's conversion. Just so, as to the terms of fellowship in churches and in the ministry. Whoever is fitted for usefulness in the world, and makes a good member of civilized society, and especially if disposed to aid in reformation at home and elsewhere, and is willing to conform to the external worship of the church, and wishes for admission to its communion, is by no small number regarded as worthy of it. Here let no one say, that by most of those to whom the foregoing observations are in any degree applicable, the spiritual and eternal nature and design of the gospel is as firmly held as by any others, and is by no means neglected. Be it so. Yet, let observation and experience decide, if the junction of temporal with spiritual—the mixing of secular with sacred, both in labours, expedients, and hopes, has not been at the expense of the latter, and resulted in putting the spiritual and eternal in subordination to the temporal. Specifications here might easily be made; but that charity that hides a multitude of sins, imposes silence.

The notion of a general purgation of the world, and its amendment as to all temporalities through the medium of the Christian religion, has some strong affinities, as to its particular effects, to the notion of an intermediate state of purgation and amendment after death. This intermediate state either before or after death, separates the soul of man from eternity. The preacher for example, before whose mind is spread out a captivating prospect of temporal changes just now about to be realized, and which are to be

hastened by his agency, and these changes to be radiant with celestial glory, cannot but be dazzled by the lustre thereof; and be detained and live fixed in them. Is he not now separated from eternity? All that is eternal is removed from proximity and contact with his soul. Do you say that it is an image of eternity? Be it so. As an image of God, separates from God and is idolatry, so an image of the celestial Jerusalem, the eternal city of God, here below separates from the spiritual and eternal, and is carnality. In the mind of the Papist, the force of divine and eternal things is repelled by the interposition of purgatory. That intermediate state makes a great gulph between them. Every form of an intermediate state of Christ's kingdom on earth, between his spiritual dominion by faith in the soul of man here, and his triumphant reign in body and soul in glory hereafter, makes a like separation and digs as broad and deep a gulph. The extension of the gospel to all nations, and the conversion of individuals to Christ, is a totally different thing from an universal or general conformation of nations to the spirit of pure Christianity, and the reign of universal plenty and comfort—refinement and love. Read the New Testament carefully, and with your eye on this question, and you will find Christ and the Apostles invariably connecting the present with eternity, and that eternity as just at hand. All the motives they urge come from eternity and return there. Time and earth and outward things are everywhere and always made momentary and contemptible—nay as insidious enemies—to be watched against with ceaseless jealousy, to be resisted without intermission, and to be overcome and overcome unto death. In short, the true doctrine of Christ crucified, makes, when it takes effect, a double crucifixion—the true believer is by it “crucified unto the world and the world unto him.”

A mistaken philosophy also has led some persons to unscriptural views of the qualifications for church membership and the ministerial office. They suppose that there

remains in fallen man, a natural aptitude to gospel truth and grace. Being thus susceptible, nothing more is necessary in order to bring sinners to Christ, than to present him and his benefits fairly before their minds. As there is a natural congruity, in the opinion of these persons, between the susceptibilities of man on the one hand, and the qualities of the gospel, on the other, to excite and to hold them; just as soon as they come in contact, the attraction of affinity takes effect in cohesion, and union is consummated. The chief thing wanting, when the means of grace are adequately employed, to effect this mutual embrace of man and the Saviour, in any given case, is the attention of the sinner to the subject. A purpose to attend—a willingness to open the door for the admission of the truth, secures this condition; and though the desired effect may not instantly follow, yet the process is begun, and if continued will certainly reach the desired termination. A profession of religion now answers two purposes—it secures attention and is an additional motive to continued attention. By this view of man's nature, a consent to attend to religion is substituted for its actual reception.

Of those who embrace this erroneous scheme, some belong to the Calvinistic communion, and they reconcile it with the doctrines of depravity and grace as held by their brethren in the following manner. It is a constitutional property of man to seek his own happiness. This is the impulsive cause of all his voluntary actions both good and bad, for it is his susceptibility of pleasure and pain, which renders him an active and moveable being. This self-love, as it is a necessary and unavoidable element in every act, gives moral quality to none. As therefore a good man and a bad one are moved to action by the same impulse, viz. the pursuit of their happiness, the difference between them, is not in their persons, but in their actions, of which alone moral qualities are predicable. They have thus the doctrine of depravity, because they confess that mankind are guilty of depraved conduct—of total depravity, for

previous to repentance, they acknowledge that all the voluntary acts of man, are contrary to the divine law, and thus all his actions being depraved, he is guilty of total depravity. They also confess that man himself is totally depraved; but in a reflexive sense: his actions being depraved, and his actions being his own, their moral qualities revert back to him, and he may in this sense be called a depraved man. But this is not the evangelical doctrine of the depravity of man. That doctrine is, that man himself is depraved, and hence his actions are depraved;—“for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?”

Besides, this exposition of total depravity excludes the doctrine of man's natural depravity—a cardinal point in the Calvinistic system; and, it may be added in biblical theology. Nevertheless, the persons of whom we are speaking, scruple not to affirm, that man is depraved by nature. They use the word nature in a sense which enables them to say that man sins by nature without having a previous sinful nature. Their notion of self-love furnishes the solution of what, on the face of it at least seems like a contradiction—that man is a sinner by nature and yet has not a sinful nature. Self-love being a natural and blameless principle, and common to both sinful and holy actions, and freedom to act either way being also a natural attribute of man as a free and accountable agent, he may be said to act naturally when he sins, and to be by nature a sinner and yet not have a sinful nature. This theory is simple and easily intelligible, and as its advocates claim, relieves the old doctrine of the depravity of man, of its most difficult and distressing point, viz. —that man is himself depraved. For if man's actions only are bad, he himself is blameless, except reflexively and in relation to his actions. In few words, man is a sinner in his actions and by them—not in and of himself. To prevent mistakes, by actions here are meant the internal purpose as well as the external deed. Accordingly in regeneration, no more is required than a

change of conduct — a reformation of life — not any of himself. The change is in his actions, not in him. As a sinner he procured his happiness illegally, as a saint he does the same lawfully; of course he is the same both before and after regeneration, the alteration being in his mode of life, not in its principle and motive. The self-love scheme, or as it is sometimes called, the happiness system, logically carried out, results in a conclusion, from which many amongst us, who seem to favor that system, would doubtless revolt. “For if our own happiness, (I borrow here from another*) that is, the happiness of ourselves or of the species, be the sole object and rule of man, he needs no other. If any other rule is to be referred to, to guide us in our pursuit, then this rule, and not our own happiness, is our ultimate law; and this law would have no validity except as the dictate of a supreme authority over man; and that supreme authority is God: and thus obedience to God, and not benevolence to man, either to ourselves or to others is the *criterion* of our duty, and the essence of our perfection. But this would little suit the enlightened eudæmonist, who by his first maxim, necessarily excludes the idea of a divine revelation.”

In this view of human nature, and of man’s depravity, it is plain that a purpose to reform one’s life, is the beginning of true holiness; or regeneration. This purpose is elicited by shewing to man that his happiness is best promoted by obedience to God. All therefore that is needful to secure his regeneration — to elicit this purpose — is to present him the truth as to the pains of sin and the profits of holiness. Whatever secures this — secures his effectual reformation. If he now be willing to give his continued attention to truth and the means of regeneration and sanctification the work is done as to his conversion; and he ought to be forthwith admitted to the church as a disciple of Christ. The grace

* London Quarterly, March, 1840. American Edition.

of the Holy Spirit is acknowledged to be necessary to effect this. Pelagius confessed there was a languor in man which required the exciting grace of God. But the work of the Spirit was to revive the native powers of man, not to infuse new vital principles. Hence the action of the Spirit was a divine moral suasion with him, not a new creation. In this way the doctrinal phraseology of Calvinism in the article of depravity and its immediate adjuncts is retained and employed, whilst its meaning and force are taken away. According to scripture and the faith of our received standards, depravity is a personal quality, derived from birth, and inherent in the soul, defiling the man and all his actions. In the intelligible and decisive figure employed by Christ — the tree is corrupt and cannot but bring forth corrupt fruit. The obvious sense of scripture as we read along from chapter to chapter and from book to book is that men themselves are corrupt, and all their actual wickedness is ascribed to their personal depravity. In the brief and comprehensive saying — “The wicked will *do wickedly*” we have the first truth as to this matter, that sinful actions proceed from sinful agents.

Regeneration in like manner is personal, affecting the agent: a change in him — “Ye — must be born again.” Men become “new creatures” not by reformation of life — but on the contrary, they lead a new life, because they have been made new creatures, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” — In a thousand forms this truth appears throughout the scriptures. And as to both points, the ordinary conceptions of the body of plain believers, accord with the obvious meaning of scripture. In all ages of the church pious men have felt and deplored their inward corruptions, and have prayed for internal sanctification. The writings of godly men, and the examples of scripture saints furnish us with boundless evidence that according to their bitter experience, there is “indwelling sin” in man, independent of his purposes and actions — “for when they would do good evil is present with them” and the “evil

which they would not that they do." "They find a law in their members, warring against the law of their minds, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin, which is in their members." Whether Romans vii. 9—25, be applied to man before or after regeneration is immaterial to the point in hand, for in either case it is fatal to the self-love scheme, and to the notion of liberty of choice either way.

That man is a depraved and ruined creature from his birth, and "by nature a child of wrath," is indeed most appalling! Consternation and amazement impel us instinctively to turn away from its terrors, and to resist the conviction of its reality. If we draw nigh to explore it, reason reels, philosophy grows frantic, the spirit faints, and hope expires. Wretched men that we are! who shall deliver us from the body of this death! No wonder that the doctrine of man's guilt and condemnation from his birth is the *magnum scandalum* of the system which holds it, and of all who profess, proclaim and defend it. When traced to its origin in the fall of the first man, or when developed as to its malignity and vastness in the light of its remedy, by the crucifixion of the second man—the Lord from heaven, the wonders multiply—prodigy on prodigy! To know these things as true, to feel them, so as they shall not be a savor of death unto death, transcends our powers. The Jew rages and exclaims—blasphemy! The Greek mocks—and exclaims foolishness! The called of God only—both Jews and Greeks are able to say—being strengthened thereunto with all might by the Spirit in the inner man—"We thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead!" How acceptable now to the unsanctified mind of man, is the persuasion that his case as a sinner, though dangerous is not ruinous, having the means of escape in himself and at hand. For if that love of his own happiness, which has led him to sin, is adequate to lead him to repentance and holiness, then the way of life is as wide open as that of death, and he is as capable of the one as he has been liable to the other. This is

indeed a great light to them who before apprehended that they were in the region and shadow of death! No wonder that this cheering belief is hailed as glad tidings of great joy! How tenacious of it! how ready and earnest to defend it! "All that a man hath will he give for his life."

But we must hasten, and therefore proceed to notice the manner in which the doctrine of grace is disposed of. According to the evangelical system, that internal and inherent change wrought in man by divine power in regeneration, by which he is inclined and enabled to embrace the gospel with saving faith, is called grace because it is the free gift of God's mercy, and the name of the cause is given to the effect. It is by the grace of God that sinners repent and believe the gospel. As this grace is not common to all, but the privilege of a part, it is rightly called special. This word grace, and the phrase *special grace*, are retained by those of whom we are speaking, but in a different sense from that just given them. As they explain grace, if they be not misunderstood, it is not a divine work in them, but an external work for them, and on this wise. God foreseeing by *scientia media*, that if certain of the children of men are brought into being and put into contact with the gospel at certain times and under certain circumstances, they will by means of self-love and the liberty of contrary choice, embrace it and be saved. In the behalf of these persons, and in infinite kindness to them he determines to give them being, and to locate them and preserve them under these auspicious circumstances, and thus bring about in the result their eternal salvation. Here now is *personal election*, for it is the choice of God to give these persons being and salvation in the manner specified:—it is *grace*, for it is in mere favor to them that he gives them their being and its consequent blessings; it is *special grace*, for it happens to them alone, and is an especial act of God's free kindness and overruling providence. The phraseology of Calvinism is thus employed, and the doctrines of eternal personal election and special

grace, are professedly held. All this solution turns on what is called *scientia media*; or the middle knowledge of God. By middle knowledge is meant that knowledge of God which is between his knowledge of things possible, and his foreknowledge of things future, and it relates to contingencies depending on free-will. For example, God knew that if John was created and had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with Jesus, he would believe in him. He knew how the will of John, (although its actings were contingent, having liberty either way,) would act under the particular circumstances belonging to his personal knowledge of Jesus, and his intercourse with him. By determining now on the creation of John, and the providential disposal of those circumstances, he determined his salvation, and it may be called special grace, and electing love. This scheme is not the doctrine of election and grace as professed in our communion. Personal election, is a choice of persons already in being, or contemplated as in being, when some are taken and others left, both of which are, previous to that discrimination, alike as to character and condition, and by grace they are made to differ from the others whom they before were like. “*Of the same lump, one vessel is made to honour, and another to dishonour.*”

Besides, this scheme bears a burden, which, its abettors being judges, is grievous to be borne. For if the divine purpose to give being to one whose contingent agency he foresees will be determined to faith and salvation, is properly called grace, and his faith and salvation are to be ascribed to the special love of God, because he gives him the opportunity to save himself; the reverse of this picture presents us with the case of the unbeliever and the lost, whose unbelief and ruin God in like manner foresaw, and yet gave him his being in view of his perdition; and shall it be said that, his unbelief and destruction are to be ascribed to the hatred of God and his purpose to destroy him? If not, this scheme is lame, its legs are unequal, and it falls to the ground.

In view of these causes of the changes made in the terms of communion both ecclesiastical and clerical, it becomes us as upright men and faithful servants of Christ, to double the watch at the door of the house of the Lord. Names have lost their office to point out things, and well known symbols and ancient standards no longer designate who they are that bear them. Let no one be dismayed at the taunt, that he is a blind and servile adherent to the Shibboleth of party, because he refuses to make no distinction between the chaff and the wheat, and to give the right hand of fellowship, asking no questions for conscience sake. When you require of him who asks your Christian fellowship, evidence of his having *one Lord, one faith, one baptism* with yourselves, you may put to silence all clamour against you, if apostolic authority be not abrogated amongst us.

III. AND LASTLY. *When united in faith, and submitting to the authority of Christ and his Apostles according to the written word, differences in other respects appear among Christians, they are to be borne, with reciprocal meekness, always keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*

Every believer is burdensome to his brethren, in some respect or other, at one time or another, and needs that "charity which beareth all things." Peculiarities of temper, diversity of abilities, inequalities of knowledge and temporal condition, and indwelling sin in all, show that the oneness of saints is spiritual and mystical, not natural and æconomical. "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him," is a case of conscience and a problem of love, which all members of the household of faith are obliged to solve. Churches in their best estate are liable to disturbances, and oftentimes of a tumultuous and threatening description; but when the vital organs of faith and obedience are sound and entire, peace is soon restored.

and the unity of the spirit continues. It is by the restorative virtue of pure doctrine and morals, that relapsed individuals and decayed or divided churches, and fraternities of churches and pastors are reclaimed. When this is wanting, the *vis medicatrix ecclesiae* is extinct, and dissolution is inevitable. "Tell it unto the church" is the ultimate resort of all gospel plaintiffs; but if the church be itself the party offending, or if it be perverted or indifferent, there is no remedy.

Hence the urgent necessity of preserving immaculate the vital principles of gospel union; for by these alone can all other evils to which the church is liable be resisted or removed. Whilst then all the infirmities, and even sins of Christian brethren are to be endured, so long as they assail not that by which they are to be both meekly borne with and affectionately reclaimed, the sin that seeks the heart and spirit of Christ's mystical body, is to be at once repelled, and no place given to it, *no not for an hour*. "*If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?*" If wood, hay, and stubble, are mixed up with gold, silver and precious stones, and all are on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone, there is solid footing for patience and hope. Wood, hay and stubble are perishable and momentary; they disfigure but they do not corrode, they may conceal, but they do not annihilate the gold and precious stones of the sanctuary, neither do they crush its foundation.

The constituent elements of "the faith once delivered to the saints," fundamental to the being of a sound and healthful christian community, are the doctrines of Eternal Personal Election — Original Sin and Native Depravity — Particular Redemption* — Efficacious Grace — and Final

* New England Calvinists have been accustomed to make a distinction between redemption and atonement. In redemption they have included the application of the atonement by the special agency of the Holy Spirit. While therefore they have held to general atonement, they have held to particular redemption.

Perseverance. Scripturally understood and cordially embraced, they are the vital truths of the Gospel of our salvation. They are several in enumeration, and distinct in apprehension, yet they are essentially one — one body — one spirit. If any amongst us are otherwise minded, let them openly and explicitly show wherein they dissent, and their reasons for it, and if they are not as openly and explicitly met and refuted, it will be because “there is not left a prophet in Israel.” As to the meaning and compass of these several points, they cannot be better defined, than they are in our Confession of Faith—the doctrinal articles of Saybrook Platform.

Happily for the Congregational Ministry and Churches of Connecticut, a body of evangelical doctrine, which from the beginning united those who have held it one to another, to scripture and to Christ, remains with us unaltered and unrepealed. Whatever here and there a particular church may have done to the contrary, or ministers on their private responsibility may have preached or published impugning either of those cardinal truths above mentioned, or the spirit and scope of the whole, that symbol of the faith and fellowship of the Fathers has never been set aside, by any act annulling its legal or moral obligation on every minister associated here, or in the districts within our bounds, and on each consociated church. However remiss our immediate predecessors or we, may have been, in our duty both to have and to hold, to teach and to require with all earnestness, this body of doctrine, that remissness inculcates not that form of sound words and gospel ordinances under which we were nurtured, and whose possessions we occupy, *but ourselves*. If present or past unfaithfulness or disaffection annuls any thing, it is not the right and title of Saybrook Platform to its authority, but our right and title to the names we bear, to the posts we fill, and the associated fellowship we profess to observe. All this, let it be repeated, is well for us, and for those who may come after us. Had our Fathers left us their several

usages and opinions only; had they lived without form and order, dissociated, and independent, with no other intercourse than that which was accidental or occasional, without a common and acknowledged symbol of their faith and worship, anomalous, heterogeneous, vagrant as to their theology, we might well exclaim — these are usages, mere usages — of no more force than other customs and fashions, which are always and everywhere changeable and evanescent.

Usages may be displaced by usages, as one custom or fashion is pushed aside by another. Not so with solemn covenants — with constitutions, with those organic compacts, symbols and ordinances which unite many into a body corporate and politic fitted to include thousands and tens of thousands, and intended to be transmitted from generation to generation. Each subsequent accession of individuals to a community thus formed involves on their part, an express or implied assent to its principles, and a promise to abide by them. And no release from this obligation can be inferred or implied from the carelessness of those who admit or the ignorance and indifference of those who are admitted to its privileges. There is but one way of avoiding the charge of faithlessness and hypocrisy in cases of this sort, when the symbols of a religious community, no longer express the actual faith of those whose public standards they are; and that is by altering or abrogating them with the like solemnity with which they were formed, adopted and ratified. Until this be done, no subterfuge will avail, from numbers, from the sanction of particular names however venerable, from public opinion, from the lapse of time, or any other cause, to shield a Christian denomination from the reproach of being one thing in name and another in reality. Of a revolution of this sort, we have no indications; for one and all proclaim themselves Calvinists, and glory in the name. A suspicion to the contrary, and much more an open charge of Arminian or Pelagian heresy, is resented as an injury,

and repelled as calumny. When certain statements of doctrine, or modes of explaining, vindicating and applying them are excepted against, as being in effect a subversion of the cardinal points of the system which is in force amongst us, the reply is, that there is no variation essentially and of much moment in these new views; that they are but *shades*;—that *shades of difference* hinder not substantial agreement. If this be so, the day of concord—of unity in spirit in the bonds of peace, cannot be afar off. For if these shades are merely shades, and those who make them are the servants of Him who is without “variableness or shadow of turning,” they will not long glory in that as an honorable distinction, which to say the least of it is a badge of human imperfection. “Shades of difference,” of which we often hear, may mean much, or little, or nothing at all. One thing they certainly mean—and that is a *difference*. If they be of so trivial a description as to be beneath solemn and earnest rebuke and resistance, they are too trivial for the notice of those who bring them forward and glory in them. When men filling the sacred office of the ministry, descend from their high and holy vocation to the making of shades of difference, which minister questions for strife—difference—rather than godly edifying, their occupation cannot be long. Weariness and disgust will bring them to a better mind, or the churches will provide for themselves better ministers.

A P P L I C A T I O N .

IN view of the present posture of our ecclesiastical affairs, Christian Brethren, the question has been publicly put to us, “what shall be done?” The answer I have to return is obvious in this discourse. I speak here for one; and for one only, except in so far, as the scriptures speak by me. All contentions would cease amongst us, were it to appear unequivocally, that the doctrines of our Con-

fession of Faith are cordially held in their genuine import. This will make peace, and nothing else will, and nothing else should. Until this comes to pass, every sound member of our churches and our ministry, can do no otherwise than to bear testimony to the truth both in word and deed, according to the place he fills, and the official acts he may be called to perform. This testimony will not be fruitless, whilst it exonerates him who makes it, from the “guilt of being a partaker of other men’s sins,” and of “being ashamed of Christ and his word,” it is mighty through God, for the defence of the faith when assailed, and its recovery when trodden underfoot. “The time to favour Zion has come, when her sons take pleasure in the dust and stones thereof.”

Christ came into the world “that he might bear witness to the truth;” and “*he* was faithful and true.” As his ambassadors to lost men, and as the shepherds of his people, we follow his steps the most closely, and do the work he assigns us the most acceptably, when we too bear witness to the truth. The best argument which we can offer to prove that truth to be of God, and worthy of all acceptance, is its power on ourselves, which by making us faithful unto it, makes us faithful in all things else. This is the “wisdom which is from above” — a divine philosophy — pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of merey and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” This divine philosophy no lexicon can define, no school can teach. No vender of the wisdom of words can sell it for money or for fame, no hypocrite can counterfeit it, and no thief can steal it. It derives no power from the great, no dignity from the learned, no ornaments from the rich. With these or without them — over them as a queen, or under them as a victim, it is the same, incorruptible, unchangeable and immortal.

Having, Christian Brethren, no infallible head on earth to determine whatever controversies may subsist amongst us, and no metropolitan or diocesan overseers to inspect us,

to rebuke the turbulent, to correct the erroneous, and to cast out the heretical, we in our several places, as occasion may require, may fulfil our office as witnesses to the truth. No power is wanting to do this, and to do it effectually, other than the "spirit of wisdom, of power, and of a sound mind." Singly or jointly, with less or more of formality, with many or few, we may as to right, we should as to duty, we can as to ability (if of the truth ourselves) give testimony to the "faith as it is in Jesus." As this faith is not a speculative theory, but a divine revelation; as it is not of men, nor by men, but of God, and by the Holy Ghost;— as sin and death on the one hand, and righteousness and life on the other are its material;— as it is communicated by regeneration, and not by human persuasion;— and as it is upheld and continued in the world, not by policy, or intrigue, by combination and address, by wealth, patronage and such like, but by supernatural grace and God's omnipotence; we need not fear to bear witness unto it, however scanty our talents, and learning, and rank, and wealth, and numbers, may be. In this case, — "they that be for us, are more than they that be against us." "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble — But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty — and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence." "The form of sound words," — "The faith of God's elect," gives light to all other lights, and borrows from none of them. It gives substance to philosophy, without which it is wind and confusion; — it gives sense to learning, without which it is vanity and vexation of spirit; — it gives righteousness to man without which he is a felon in chains; it illuminates the world, without which it is the region and shadow of death. "Where is

the wise, — where is the scribe, — where the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" No; Brethren — no — there is nothing to fear for the faith. The fear is for ourselves, lest we desert it. The victory we are to win, is not for the Gospel to make *it* triumphant, but for *ourselves*, that we be constant. As to God's word, he will see to it, that it shall not return unto him void, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The gates of hell assaulting the kingdom of Christ prevail not against *it*; but alas! how many of its visible members! — how many of its ministers! — yea, of its men of renown, who have done many mighty works, are overpowered and led away to captivity and death! In times like ours, of convulsion, revolution and all but universal lawlessness and self-will, it is necessary that the cautionary words of Christ, "he that endureth to the end, shall be saved" should be continually thundering in our ears. He is the wise man, who knows that temptation is to be resisted; and he the great man that does it. The faith and patience of saints makes them thus illustrious in wisdom and power. If you, Christian Brethren, are thus taught of God, and armed with his might, sarcasm, and calumny, and conspiracy, and oppression, and poverty, and exile will make you *martyrs*, but will never avail to make you *traitors*. Make God's word the law of your reason, and you cannot err; the law of your will, and you will not sin; the law of your hopes, and you will never faint. It is a lawless reason which makes the heretick — a lawless will the schismatick — lawless hopes the malignant — and altogether the apostate and son of perdition. To the law then and to the testimony: these can never be broken. Glory ye in his holy name. If God be for us, who can be against us? Lift up the heart — lift up the voice — put on strength — fear not, for he is with thee — be not dismayed, for he is thy God.

