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DISCOURSE

ON

PREACHING THE WORD;

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WITH NOTES.

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DISCOURSE.

2 Timothy 4: 2.—Preach the Word.

While Paul was in prison at Rome, "ready to be offered" in martyrdom for the faith of Jesus, he addressed to Timothy his dying counsels; the results of his own experience in the work of the ministry, during his long and devoted life. They are worthy of such a minister of Christ as Paul was, standing on the borders of the grave, and just going to his solemn account. He seemed designing them to be,—and they were,—a solemn conclusion of his labours for his Lord, and for the souls of men. They served to shew how he would continue to labour, might his life be spared; and in what manner he would that his brethren after him should preach, to the end of the world. Among these dying counsels we find the text.

It does not seem the apostle's design, in this direction, simply to advise his young brother to continue in the ministry; nor that he should preach the gospel, in distinction only from gross heresy, "another gospel," "doctrines of devils." There was little or no necessity for such advice to Timothy.

By reference to other passages of Paul's writings we get light on his particular design in the direction. We find him cautioning Timothy against "striving about words, to no profit;" against "giving heed to fables, and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying;" against "oppositions of science, falsely so called, which," says he, "some professing, have erred from the faith;" against "turning aside unto vain jangling," and "doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railing, evil surmisings, and perverse

disputings." And farther,—for he was obviously anxious for the honour of Christ, and the good of his Christian brethren, as concerned in this subject,—we find him enjoining, "hold fast the form of sound words;" "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." And again says he to Timothy, "but foolish and unlearned (i. e. unprofitable) questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes."

Taking Paul, then, as his own interpreter, his counsel to Timothy, in the text, respects the matter of his preaching, in those things in which he might err otherwise than in preaching gross heresy; and in which he might be in danger of running into error, as a final result. The apostle had seen some of the churches perplexed and divided, by preachers who departed from the simplicity of the gospel, and wasted time and strength, in controversies and preaching on points of minor importance, ending in lamentable defection from the truth, and injury to the churches. Therefore he gives his young brother the affectionate and solemn injunction,—"I charge thee, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and dead, at his appearing and his kingdom, PREACH THE WORD." By this, he apparently means the great, fundamental, and yet simple instructions of the bible; to preach, as he elsewhere expresses it, "the cross," "Christ Jesus and him crucified,"—"the unsearchable riches of Christ:" to do this, studiously avoiding whatever was "unprofitable and vain," and irrelevant to the great objects of "the ministry of reconciliation." He would go all lengths with any of his brethren, in studying and preaching "the mystery of godliness," and "contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints." He shewed, too, how well he could put forth his powers for these purposes, when occasion required. But he had no taste for heartless philosophizing. He would "preach down error," and preach up the truth, by "preaching the word." He would enlighten the ignorant, "win souls" to Christ, edify the people of God, and aid the prosperity of Christ's kingdom, by "preaching the word."

It is not difficult to discover the bearing of Paul's great principles on the dangers and mistakes of some ministers, even, upon

this subject. The history of the Church informs us of much of the kind of preaching which was to great and good purpose; and of many well contested victories of the friends of the truth, over errorists and their heresies. But it also acquaints us with subjects and modes of preaching, which occasioned a miserable waste of some good men's time and labours, in the study and in the pulpit; hindered them from giving the kind of instruction adapted to be "spirit and life" to men's souls; and prepared the way for the coming in of errors in sentiment and practice, "like a flood." It tells us of unhappy controversies, commencing on unessential points, about which Paul and Peter themselves might have differed in sentiment, and yet neither of them have been a heretic; but which resulted in the defection of one or the other from "the truth as it is in Jesus."

The feelings and views of Paul, therefore, which led him to exhort Timothy to "preach the word" in distinction from the things he named, would probably lead him to exhort us, at the present day, to "preach the word," in distinction from preaching opinions, dogmas, or speculations; in distinction from threading,—in the pulpit, or out of it,—the mazes of philosophical or metaphysical theology; in distinction from preaching "*about* a truth, and about it," as once said an excellent man, "but not preaching *it:* preaching the word in distinction from preaching on propositions which are, at best, of a doubtful character, as to their accordance with the scriptures, and in all probability startling and perplexing to many Christians; and in distinction from preaching conjectures, which, it is true, may lie somewhere in the neighbourhood of the truth, but, respecting which, there is all the uncertainty of course attached to conjecturing, in theology, as well as in any thing else. Well might Paul have asked,—and it becomes every minister to ask,—'What have these things to do with preaching the word? with setting forth "Christ Jesus and him crucified?"' And what may not the spending of time and strength upon them have to do with bringing in great errors, both in faith and practice?

Farther light is cast on the direction in the text, if we recur to the preaching of our Saviour, the prophets, and apostles: allow-

ing for the facts, that Christ was the Great Author of all truth, and that the prophets and apostles were inspired men.

Our Saviour was in the practice of setting forth the testimony of the scriptures; prefacing and interweaving his instructions with "thus it is written," "as it is written," "as the scripture hath said." When the multitudes gathered around him, he "preached the word unto them." In the synagogue at Nazareth, he exhibited the direct and solemn instructions of the bible. When, after his resurrection, he would shew to two of his disciples that it "behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead," to accomplish the redemption of sinners; he confined himself to "the word" for his whole argument; "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them, *in all the scriptures*, the things concerning himself." This he did too, notwithstanding he could have produced conviction in their minds by a much shorter process, and "in the twinkling of an eye." For he would put honour upon the word, as the only sure guide of men's inquiries respecting the truth, and as the only rule of their faith. A striking lesson to us, proud spirited men, so prone to "lean to our own understandings," and to rely on the strength of our own reasonings, instead of the simple testimony of the scriptures.

The prophets cast light on the text, by their example. It is very noticeable how uniformly they prefaced and interspersed their instructions with "Thus saith the Lord." They felt that they were responsible for a faithful delivery of the exact message God had committed to them; and they steadily answered that responsibility.

The apostles, also, were in the habit of basing all their instructions upon the teachings of the Holy Ghost, recorded in the Old Testament, or given directly to them by inspiration. When they would set forth a doctrine, they did it by "shewing from the scriptures," what was truth. Wherever we find them, they are "preaching the word." They did not deal either in undefended assertions; but followed them with expositions of proofs; "testified," "opened," "expounded," "reasoned out of the scriptures," to men, in "persuading them concerning the Lord Jesus."

The text is yet further illustrated, in the preaching and writing of many ministers, of former times, and of the present. There is a richness in the works of such men as Flavel, Owen, Baxter,

Edwards, Cecil, and many others, of their times and ours; which will make them to be read by Christians, with satisfaction and profit; and by unconverted persons with seriousness and feeling; till "time shall be no longer." What is the secret of this? Not so much their talents for argumentation, powerful conception, or eloquent expression; though they had all these. It was their having enriched their minds, and thus their preaching, from that inexhaustible store-house of divine instruction—"the word of God."

The design of Paul's direction, then, we trust, is clear. It enjoins on us to set forth, in the instructions of the pulpit, the riches of "the scriptures of truth."

The subject is closely connected with the prosperity of the cause of truth, and with ministerial usefulness. Let me invite to it your serious and earnest attention,—my brethren of this Seminary, anticipating an entrance upon the sacred office. The text, and the explanatory facts and passages adduced, set forth a principle, to be kept in mind in all your course of preparatory studies here, and to govern you in all your future studies and ministrations. It is proposed, in this discourse, to shew the preparatives for preaching the word, in the sense of the expression set forth; and the reasons for making this the object of our studies, and the great characteristic of our instructions.

I. We consider some of the preparatives for preaching the word. I speak here of habits of mind, and modes of study, as separate from a plan or course of theological education.

1. It is important to have a conscientious reference to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all our studies. It was one of Paul's fraternal benedictions to Timothy, "The Lord give thee understanding in all things." It is our privilege to use this as our prayer, every hour of our studies. We "lack wisdom," and must "ask of God." This we must do humbly; for there are no promises to pride; and it is to the humble that the Spirit vouchsafes his teachings. We must do it in a willingness to know the truth, whatever it is; for a mind reluctant to be convinced, of whatever God is pleased to declare for our instruction, will remain in ignorance and darkness. It must be done in an implicit submission to the divine teachings; for it does not comport with the

object God has in view, in the revelation of his will to men, that on this point they make any reservation. The frame of spirit with which a student or pastor should open his bible, should ever be, 'What God declares, I will implicitly receive.' Such prayer God will answer. Such frames of feeling he will bless. It is a precious promise, for the encouragement of those who thus ask, "He, the Spirit of truth, will guide you into all truth."

An inestimable privilege it is, for a minister, in the consciousness that he is frail and fallible, in his researches for instruction, for himself and his people, frequently to lift up the ejaculations, "That which I see not, teach thou me;" "Lead me into thy truth, and teach me, for thou art my God;" "Oh! send out thy light and thy truth." Those who thus commit themselves to divine teaching and guidance, may rest confidently on another promise, also; "And ye shall know the truth." And what are all the satisfactions, ministered to the soul of any man, by his "reasoning pride," compared with those of him, who thus waits on God for teaching; and finds the truth, as his reward.

In this connexion, I would remark, my brethren, that we do well to use the bible as our prayer book, in our closets; that we may enjoy its light in our studies. The scriptures never so beam with light, nor are disclosed in such beauty and glory, nor take such hold on the soul, as when read and turned into prayer, at the footstool of the "throne of grace." The light, beaming from that throne, seems to shine down upon the sacred page; and will help us, both to get instruction for our own good, and to judge wisely what we are to bring forth for the good of those to whom we minister. Of all the modes of studying the bible, this is the best. We should, in suitable proportion, study it philologically and theologically. But to study it prayerfully, is the method upon which is to be placed most reliance. This must prepare us to study subjects; to write our sermons; to preach in the pulpit; and then to preach in our "manner of life."*

* On the dependance of our preparations for the pulpit upon prayer, it is a striking remark of the pious Martin Boos; "Those are not the best sermons about which we have most anxiously laboured; but those which we have begged of the Lord, with prayers and tears."

2. On all subjects of religious instruction, we should have a careful recourse to the scriptures, for information respecting them. This is of such importance, that it may be safely asserted,—when you find in what manner, and how much, a minister uses his bible, in his study, as well as his closet, you may know what kind of preacher he is. "We have a sure word of prophecy, whereunto we do well that we take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place."

Do we know what or how we should preach, but from "the word?" When a minister is to prepare a sermon, where is he to get his subject, but here? When he has chosen it, what does he know respecting it, from intuition, or his own opinions, meditations, or speculations; or from reading what other men have written? What has he to do, what can he do, till he has devoutly and teachably inquired for the mind of God upon his subject, as revealed in the sacred scriptures? Our Lord commands us, "Search the Scriptures." "Have ye never read?" he was accustomed sometimes to ask men; reproving thus their inattention to "the word," and indicating the importance he attached to it, as the source of instruction. The minister of the gospel is called to follow his subject over the pages of the bible, as his first and main business; asking, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" "What saith the scripture?" and "holding fast the faithful word," as that alone which can shew him what he is to receive himself, and teach to others.

When he has thus gathered the instructions of the scriptures on the subject in hand, he has obtained light, which will not fail him; materials for a sermon, worth using; a foundation on which to build his own faith and that of his people, which nothing can shake; instructions "more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey comb." This is the course which Paul pronounced "noble," in the Bereans; and which God ever richly rewards. To such a searcher of the scriptures, the bible, as the "witness of God," has declared "the truth." Having set this forth, he is prepared to say to his hearers, fearlessly, "Search the scriptures, whether these things

are so." And never let man's "reasoning pride" ask to be made wise in any other way than through such testimony.

By no means do we advocate using the bible without study; nor plead for a minister to have the privilege of spending his life, in compiling from his bible, weekly concordances of texts upon the subjects he chooses; nor is it expedient to bring into the pulpit the minutiæ of criticism, belonging in the study. We advocate going to the bible to get the materials for thinking,—laborious, serious, devout thinking,—materials obtained in a careful interpretation of the various passages of scripture which belong to the subject in hand; and in the use of which materials, a minister shall help his hearers to think, to know what is the truth, to feel the obligations of duty, and to be savingly profited.

"Preaching the word" does not, of course, suppose that we deal principally, or alone, in the language of scripture. There may be, in sermons, lucid exhibitions of divine truth, with scarce a formal quotation of scripture in them. But the happy art is undoubtedly to be cultivated, which some preachers have, of so interweaving the rich and powerful language of scripture, as to give life, light, and force to every paragraph of a sermon.

Some sermons seem to have been written by men who have a general acquaintance with the bible. Sermons which are designed to do good to immortal souls, my brethren, should show that the preacher has filled his heart and mind with the instructions of the word upon the subjects he presents; and that he has prayed them into his whole frame of feeling.

3. A supreme interest should be felt in the study of the scriptures. What books ought to interest any man, especially a minister, like the word of God? In what study should his heart delight, so much as in this? What discussions of even religious truth, should possess for him half the interest with which he should regard the revelations of the Holy Ghost? We have great occasion to be suspicious that all is not right in the state of our hearts, if we find ourselves inclined to read the books of men, rather than the book of God; or to follow the path of some favorite speculation, rather than the path of divine truth, as marked out in the scriptures. Not that we are to deny ourselves the

pleasure and profit of reading the works of good men, both ancient and modern; nor to refrain from investigating and drawing upon the resources of our own minds, by pure thinking. But we should have such feelings respecting the holy bible, that we shall pass from our highest efforts of mind, and from the reading of the books of the greatest and best men, to "the word," saying in ourselves,—'after all, this is THE BOOK; here is the source of impulses to thought; here are the aids to reflection.' The clear and powerful argumentation, the commanding eloquence, the captivating elegance, and the lofty conceptions, of some writers and preachers, are all good in their place. But how far, immeasurably far, are they exceeded, by David and Isaiah, Paul and John, and their brethren and companions, in the communication of "the mind of the Spirit." It has been justly said, by a favourite Christian poet, —and ever should the student and minister feel the force of the sentiment,—

> "A glory gilds the sacred page,
> Majestic, like the sun;
> It gives a light to every age,—
> It gives—but borrows none."

Had the Most High honoured our world with the gift of one man to dwell in it, on whom he had bestowed the talents and the heart of Gabriel; yet we might truly say, that in the contemplation of this book, he would find ample range for the powers of his mighty mind, and inestimable matter of interest for his angelic heart. We have no reason, indeed, to doubt, that these same revelations of the word to us, compose an interesting portion of the subjects of the delightful contemplations, which will to eternity go on among the pure spirits before the throne of God; and which are to unite them in the love and adoration of God for ever.

4. In all our studies we should habitually keep in mind the supreme authority of the decisions which the word reveals, respecting truth. The moment you open your bible, you are virtually hearing God speak. God appeared, in a miraculous manner, to many of his ancient servants; asserted to them solemn truths, and gave them high commands. But the word of God, which we have, is his voice speaking to us, now, in all the reality

and authority which attached to his audible addresses to Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Paul, and John. Those direct "voices from the excellent glory," were given for a time only, as substitutes for the equally inspired and authoritative instructions of this holy and glorious book.

The simple fact, that "Thus saith the Lord," on any subject, is enough. Our implicit faith is authoritatively claimed, to whatever is thus authenticated. Our preaching according to it is solemnly enjoined. And the reasonings of our minds, as perplexing us respecting the decisions of the word, or as varying from those decisions, "one jot or tittle," have no right in our breasts, or in our pulpits. The intellectual and spiritual attitude of the holy Habakkuk was, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me." Readiness of mind to receive the decisions of the sacred record, and watchfulness for the truth at the openings of the word, well become "ambassadors for Christ."

Here is a danger, into which some good men, as well as others, have run, to the disadvantage of the cause of truth, to their own injury, the embarrassment of Christians, and the destruction of others.

The temptation is a very subtle one, to let the researches of our reason, ere we are aware of it, run before the testimony of revelation; and finally, to let the decisions of reason come into competition with the decisions of revelation. An affecting case of this, in a good man, was that of the venerable and pious Dr. Watts, in the latter years of his life. Let any minister, who is fond of thinking and writing with his bible shut, read Dr. Watts's "Solemn Address to the ever-blessed God, on a review of what he had written in the Trinitarian controversy;" and see how a Christian and a minister may perplex himself, and become almost deprived of his hope in Christ, and of his confidence in the decisions of the bible, by running into adventurous speculations, and letting his pride of opinion and reason quarrel with his heart, and with the positive and holy declarations of the word of God. In like manner have other men, on other religious doctrines and points of doctrine, bewildered themselves and others; interfered

with the firmness of their own belief, and that of others, in the truth; with the growth of piety in their own hearts, and the hearts of others; with the comforts of their own hope, and the hopes of others; and with their own charity towards those who have been compelled, from love to the truth, to differ from them.

On the danger which we are considering, I once heard an eminent scholar and minister, of our own time and country, remark, "When I keep to the bible, in my inquiries on divine truth, I am on a rock,—a firm foundation. But when I indulge in the adventurous speculations of my own reason, I am at once, out at sea, without chart or compass."

Affecting illustrations of the dangers of a fondness for adventurous speculation, in a thoughtlessness of the authority of the scripture testimony, we have seen, in some distinguished errorists. They began, probably, with preaching the truth. But, from indulging in such speculations, growing confident in their own theories, and ultimately taking reason or an erroneous philosophy, for their guide, they first unsettled their own minds respecting some one truth; then gave up one truth after another; till they renounced the Christian faith, as to all its important and distinguishing features; and finally gave up the bible itself. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

In the cases of such, the way was, doubtless, prepared for a defection from the truth, in their having never "received the love of the truth." Paul gives some fearful premonitions respecting such. "For this cause" (i. e. their not having received "the love of the truth,") God shall send them strong delusions, that they may believe a lie." We see such men spend their lives, "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." It is no matter of mystery; for they reject the guidance which God offers them, by his own word and Spirit. "Seducing spirits," in their own breasts, in other men, and from the ranks of the great deceiver, lead them astray.

A strange and melancholy process it is, by which many a man is seduced into error. He cautiously, timidly, and slowly, but ingeniously, cunningly, and decidedly, rejects the truth. He learns to take pleasure in the unrighteousness of error, and in the pride of

having made some supposed discovery of new light,—which may prove to be, as an eloquent preacher once remarked, only a "new edition of old darkness."

He professes to be in the earnest pursuit of truth. But, with the very book of God in his hands,—the pride of human reason in his heart keeping him from using it,—he "gropes, like the blind,"—"gropes as if he had no eyes," and "stumbles at noon-day, as in the night." In the progress of time, it is found that he has gone away on the circuitous path of error, till he has turned his back on God, the truth, and heaven; and he is far on in the way downward to the terrible "portion of unbelievers." If he be in the sacred office, and possess any influence, he goes not alone on that path. He becomes a blind leader of the blind; and makes, with a crowd of precious souls, who ought to have been saved through his instrumentality, the fearful plunge into ruin and woe eternal.

It is by no means to be the opinion of the Christian student and minister, that the scripture forbids the use of reason, in matters of religion. It invites, yea directs us, to "prove all things;" and apostolic example, especially, illustrates and enforces this direction. But the word of God requires still, that human reason shall perform its office in its proper sphere. On "the things of God" reason is bound to use, and supremely rely upon the logic of the bible; and should never presume to run before the word, or away from it, in search of truth, by its own dim taper-light. God requires in his ministers,—and how reasonably,—the implicitness and humility of faith. It is alike our duty and our privilege, to "sit at the feet of Jesus, and hear his word," as that alone which can inform us what he would have us believe, do, and teach. While we industriously use our reason, in its proper work of studying the testimony of the word, and please ourselves with making progress in knowledge, and with grasping after better and better acquaintance with the great eternal truths of revelation; still are we to look narrowly for that limit to the curiosity and adventurousness of the human mind, where God has written, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther."

Nor do the scriptures place any unreasonable restraints upon

the right of free inquiry; about which so much has been and is still said. What is this right of free inquiry, in matters of religion? If I do not mistake the spirit of the divine instructions, it is, the right which you have to study the bible as much as you please,—and your inclination never can exceed your duty in this matter;—and your right to study it as independently as you please of the interpretations of other men, except as they agree with the tenor and spirit of the word itself; to find in it all the truth you can; to believe all the truth you find in it, and not a particle more; and all this under responsibility to but one Being in all the universe, to Christ, the "King of Truth." But to Him, remember that your responsibility is solemn; and that it is to be accounted for at his final tribunal.

5. We should accustom ourselves to place a high value upon the scriptures, as the only satisfactory source of argument, on all the great subjects of religion. From the habits of mind, and modes of discussion, sometimes seen in the pulpit and the theological chair, it seems to be the opinion of some, that their strength in argument and skill in persuasion cannot be shown, and the subject in hand properly set forth, unless they draw out a chain of abstract reasoning;—as if the scripture views given of the doctrine were old fashioned, trite, and not affording sufficient range for their powers.

Now, has God, in giving to men his announcements of truth, and the reasons for their faith, on any matter of doctrine, set forth his mind with a feebleness inviting the rivalry of man's powers of argumentation? Is it the reasoning of man, ever so ingenious, that carries conviction to the conscience and heart of the sinner?

It becomes us, my brethren, to guard, faithfully, against an undervaluing of the scripture arguments, with which we are called to press the understandings and consciences of men. "Be not wise in your own conceit;" "Cease from thine own wisdom;" says the word, to every minister. Never sit down to study, never enter the pulpit, in proud reliance upon your own mental strength. It requires the might of the greatest human mind, to set forth, in a suitable manner, what God has said, as disclosing the means for producing conviction; without spending time or ef-

fort for the invention of curious reasonings of your own, with which to entertain your hearers. That reasoning is the reasoning from which men find it hopeless to attempt an escape, which is derived from the scriptures.

Look at Paul's feelings and practice on this point. How cautious was he to bind himself, in all his researches and preaching, to the sacred, beautiful, and sublime simplicity of divine truth. How did he deprecate "leaning to his own understanding," and bringing man into the work of God; either in the construction of his arguments, or the manner of his preaching. "When I came to you, brethren," says he to the Corinthians, "I came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified;" "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Again says he, "For Christ sent me to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Among ministers of Christ, eminent and well worthy of our imitation, stands this apostle, as devoting his great mind to the simple, childlike reception of the testimony of Jesus; and a like simple and heart-enlivening exhibition of it in all his instructions. We see little of Paul,—the man. He hid himself behind his subject; and in reasoning with his fellow men, devoted "all his heart, soul, mind, and strength," to placing before them, with the eloquence of unaffected piety, the simple truth, and the ineffable glory of "Christ Jesus his Lord."

6. Another thing concerned in the direction of our text, is what Paul calls "rightly dividing the word of truth;" by which we may understand him, preaching upon,—and of course principally studying in private,—the subjects for which the character and circumstances of our hearers call most; and which are prominent on the sacred pages.

Curious points of inquiry, having no important practical bearings, may be started, even in reading the scriptures, and especially by a fanciful mind; which, it would seem, no man, of common

sense need be told it is inexpedient to spend time in agitating, any where, and above all, in the pulpit. It would be easy to give a numerous catalogue of questions which have been brought forward for discussion, and which have been subjects of warm disputation in the church, in past times, besides many agitated at the present; the real importance of which,—with all due deference to some great and good names,—seems, to say the least, very questionable.* Many a man has made for himself some point, or set of points, of curious inquiry; and made them too, perhaps, dividing points between himself and other men; has magnified them into disproportionate importance, by long contemplation of them; and has contrived to bring them forward in almost all his preaching; who, if he could be persuaded to stop thinking and preaching upon them, for a few years, and then go to the prayerful, teachable, and candid searching of his bible, would find that the bible either says nothing about them, or that it shews them as of minor importance, in comparison with most others. It would be an easy matter for a minister to spend his life, and the strength of his talents, in discussing a long catalogue of such curious points; at the bottom of which catalogue a good man's heart would incline him to write—*What is the use of discussing such subjects?* —points, in agitating which, a minister would not be in the way to establish one important article of the Christian faith; nor to touch one heart, nor to arouse one conscience, nor to "convert a sinner from the error of his way." Did Paul preach upon such subjects? Did our Lord Jesus Christ ever trifle in this manner? Talk upon such points to an unconverted man, who is inquiring, in deep solicitude, "What shall I do to be saved?"—is this what he needs? Preach upon them in a congregation, where the Holy Spirit is quickening the people of God, and awakening the unconverted; are these the subjects which will minister to "godly edifying," and lead sinners to repentance?†

The great and fundamental subjects of divine revelation; the instructions which stand in one way or other connected with the great system, "Christ crucified;" which are essential in our sys-

* Note A. Appendix. † See Appendix, Note B.

tem of faith as Christians, and are designed to influence our characters and manner of life; the instructions which shew us God in his glory; ourselves in our guilt and unworthiness; the will of God, and our duty; the subjects on which we feel, and over which we want to pray; and which, like the omnipresence of God, are with our thoughts every where; the subjects which are practical in their character; and which, from this circumstance, find their way to men's hearts and consciences, and are likely to have effect, soon or late; the subjects, in a word, on which it is not safe for our hearers to be in ignorance, mistake, or error:—in setting forth *these* matters of instruction, are we "rightly to divide the word of truth." There may be ten thousand provable propositions, invented by a curious student of the bible, or a wrangling theologian, which are capable of being discussed, ably and ingeniously, in the theological chair, or the minister's meeting; and belonging there, if any where; without a knowledge of which propositions a sinner may "be saved." But there are numerous, great, essential, and solemn truths and duties, inscribed on the pages of the bible, as with a sun-beam; without a knowledge of which, a sinner certainly will "be damned." A minister who spends his time on the first, may perhaps be a good man, and may be "saved, so as by fire;" but he certainly misjudges in regard to this matter. Many a dying sinner, sitting under his ministry, will slide away down to perdition, unhindered by his most able and ingenious discussions of such subjects. A serious declaration of God it is, respecting such, truly, "his blood will I require at the watchman's hand." On the other hand, a minister who devotes his time, talents, and opportunities to the instruction of his people on the last named class,—and they are enough to occupy a longer life than was ever yet given to man,—he is "a workman needing not to be ashamed;" he will see the glory of Christ, and the salvation of men, through his own instrumentality.

In a word, the shortness and unspeakable preciousness of the time which any minister has, in which to labour for the divine glory, and the salvation of men, forbid that he spend it in mere grave and ingenious trifling; and demand that he should faithfully improve it, in bringing forward as many as possible of the great and

important subjects of divine revelation; and as few as possible of nice points of speculation: that he should preach as much of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" as he can have time to preach, on this side of heaven.

In pursuing the examination of this subject, we consider, as was proposed,

II. Some of the reasons for using such matter of public instruction, as is enjoined in the text.

1. We briefly notice a few reasons, of a general character, in which all are concerned, who attend upon the preaching of the gospel; especially those who have not yet submitted their hearts to its saving efficacy.

Great importance is attached to the knowledge of divine truth in the scriptures themselves. For this knowledge hearers depend much,—oftentimes too much,—on their ministers. But that dependance must be faithfully answered.

The character of a people, for intelligence in religious things, depends upon it. According as we preach, or withhold, the word; and according as, on the one hand, we preach it simply, definitely, plainly, pointedly, fully; or, on the other hand, preach it indistinctly, circuitously, partially, or adulterated by "carnal contrivances;" so will it be with our hearers. Look for the minister, in the state of his people's minds, as to intelligence; if he has had opportunity to do his work for a reasonable length of time; for, in most cases, the character of his ministry, will be more or less visible.

One great object of God in sending the Holy Spirit into the world, is to inform men's minds and hearts respecting the truth. He "opens their understandings, that they may understand the scriptures."

We are to tell men, among other things, that they must "believe." But we lay no foundation for their faith, except in a full exhibition of "the word of truth."

The preaching of the word is that alone which will keep its hold on men's consciences, and constrain them to feel some interest in the concerns of the life to come. This is popular preaching with the *consciences* of men; and that, many times, when feelings of opposition to it arise in their hearts. Here is probably one explanation of the singular fact, that after Paul's first arousing sermon in the synagogue at Antioch, "the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath; and the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together, to hear the word of God." Popular preaching, my brethren, is the faithful declaration of the "counsel of God." Unconverted men will often go away from hearing such preaching, uneasy and offended. But their consciences, under the urgency of truth, will compel them to come and hear more of it.

This is the kind of preaching which awakens and fixes the attention of the thoughtless sinner; strips the world before his eyes of its deceitful charms; compels him to say to God, like the trembling Adam in Eden, "I heard thy voice." This it is which pricks him in the heart; discloses to him his guilt, as a transgressor against God; prostrates his pride; drives him forth from his false refuges; uncovers before him the abyss of destruction; and makes him to cry, in consternation and agony, "What shall I do to be saved?" This is also the preaching,—thanks be to God,—which points the sinner to the cross, to "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world;" to the "door of hope;" to the great and eternal refuge of his soul from the wrath to come. This is the means by which faithful ministers prepare the way for revivals of religion. Such preaching the Holy Ghost descends to bless, to the unconverted. Here was the instrumentality of the apostles in the events of the "day of Pentecost." Here is the instrumentality of ministers of the present day, in the events of these Pentecost months and years, in which many of the people of God rejoice. While, during such bright harvest seasons, many a minister "reaps in joy;" by the testimony of converts respecting his preaching of the word, he is pointed back to the past days and years, in which, he remembers, that under clouds and discouragement, he went forth, with a heavy heart, "bearing precious

seed," and "sowing it in tears," which his Lord and Master, he now finds, had determined should not be lost.

2. There is another class of reasons, in which our fellow Christians, sitting under our ministry, are more especially concerned; and in which are disclosed some of the great results of our labours for the church of God, in distinction from the world.

Preaching the word assists to make *enlightened Christians*. It is communicating to them the best of all learning and wisdom. It assists them to take rational views on all the great subjects which concern the eternal life of men; and to be clear in their conceptions of them. It helps them to know what they are to believe, and why they are to believe it. They may be "babes" in the knowledge of speculative niceties; but under the preaching of the word they will have knowledge which is "hid from the wise and prudent." On "the things of the kingdom of God," they become well informed, think justly, discriminate accurately, and reason correctly and conclusively. They acquire an education in the school of Christ, by which their minds become, in the best sense, enlarged and elevated. It is both surprising and delightful, to see how much the simple preaching of the word does, for the intellectual as well as moral elevation of many a humble disciple of Christ.

Preaching the word of Christ assists to make *practical* Christians. For in so doing, my brethren, we speak of things which are not to be, in God's children, matters of that knowledge which "puffeth up," or to remain in the mind as a dead letter; but which are to have an influence on their characters and lives. Preaching the word is spiritual, distinguishing, searching, serious preaching; and therefore assists to make "the path of the just as a shining light." It promotes faithfulness in duty, circumspection in conduct, diligence in the Christian course. We set before them instructions, which, if spiritually discerned, will have a directing, quickening, and sanctifying influence; preparatory to our "presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Our preaching, in the pulpit is thus again preached to the men of the world, in the practical godliness of Christians. Thus also we can enter into the holy satisfaction of Paul, when, referring to the exemplary

character of his Corinthian brethren, he says, "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us; written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart;" "great is my glorying of you."

This is the kind of preaching which ministers to Christian *experience*. We thus set forth that which God the Holy Spirit is pleased to bless, as a means, at first, of "creating men anew in Christ Jesus unto holiness and good works," and afterwards of great spiritual mercies, increasing them in gifts and graces. Under such preaching it is, that we see those who have sensible and satisfactory experience of the "love of God shed abroad in their hearts;" of "faith which worketh by love;" of "godly sorrow," and yet of "joy and peace in believing;" of hope, consolation, quickening, light, deliverance from the reigning power of sin, spiritual discernment of Christ; and a rich inventory of other blessings, making the Christian happy, and preparing him to give honour to his Lord and Master.

This is the kind of preaching which ministers to the *prosperity* of Christians. In the instructions of his word, "the Lord God hath given us the tongue of the learned, that we should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." In dispensing "the sincere milk of the word," we furnish that by means of which they "may grow." We "strengthen the weak hands, confirm the feeble knees," and "say unto them that are of a fearful heart, be strong." Thus the people of God will prosper in the spiritual manhood. "They shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." They will be assisted to "press toward the mark of the prize of their high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Instructions of such a character minister to the *firm establishment* of Christians. It is probable that one of the causes of feeble hope, partial satisfaction, and the suffering, by some Christians, of spiritual infirmness generally, is, the failure of their ministers in regard to a clear, instructive, practical preaching of the word. The great adversary takes advantage of partial and indefinite ex-

hibitions, as well as of the entire concealment of the truth, and the teaching of error; to do injury to Christians, as well as to destroy the souls of unconverted persons. On the other hand, what is the secret of the spiritual firmness of some other Christians? They have comparatively little darkness, few fears and doubts, and are successful in "fighting the good fight of faith." Through the preaching, as well as their private study, of "the word of Christ," and with that word "dwelling in them richly, in all wisdom," they have become as "mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever." Does an unbeliever seek to dispute with such a Christian, and to ensnare him with the sophistry of error? The Christian can reason with the unbeliever "out of the scriptures;" and that is reasoning which none can "gainsay or resist." An eminent civilian once remarked; "In my early life, on a journey, I accidentally fell into the company of a plain but pious man, with whom I undertook to argue in favor of infidel opinions, then fashionable; but I found that plain bible-read Christian to be too mighty for me."

Is the hope of such a Christian assailed?—he is prepared to "give a reason of it." Through the means of such instructions, he is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." And all the skepticism in the universe cannot move him.

This is the kind of preaching which ministers to the *enjoyments* of Christians. The word which we preach is "the word of faith," saith Paul," of "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." By it, therefore, the acquaintance of Christians is assisted with "him whom their soul loveth." They are brought into a "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ," in which they behold the divine glory, and feel the inspiration of their confidence. It assists the preparation of the believer to say, in the fulness of his joy, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

The Christian comes away from the cares, labours, perhaps trials of the week; and enters the sanctuary to be fed, refreshed, quickened. We may set before him husks, the "wisdom of

words;" the cogitations of ingenious minds united with cold hearts. In a text, used merely as a topic for an essay, we may bring forward a piece of bread, and ingeniously beat it out into impalpable leaf, and set it before the pious seeker of spiritual food: and he will go away hungry; for, after all, we have given him only a crumb, from our Master's table. Many a minister has probably preached at some times, a sermon, of which he was himself conscious that something was the matter; he was not satisfied with it himself, while he was preparing it, or preaching it; and felt that he had not profited himself or others by its means. Perhaps this may be one difficulty; it lacked the richness which the more careful use of his bible, in preparing it, would have imparted.

There is a way of preaching,—and a prosperous state of religion, in our own hearts, my brethren, will help us to know and practise it,—in which we may assist the children of God to feel, on the sabbath, that it is Christ's feast-day; and in the sanctuary, that they are in "his banquetting house." It is among the richest privileges of Christians, that under a ministry, of which it is a prime characteristic that it is a ministry of the word, they find "the sabbath a delight," and the sanctuary, "the gate of heaven," to their souls. Higher is the honour of such testimony, for any minister, that he thus "feeds the church of God," than is the honour of him who sits upon an earthly throne; or whose talents, in the business of any station, however high, are the admiration of the world.

This is the kind of preaching, which stands associated, in the minds of Christians, with the *advancement of the kingdom of Christ and the salvation of souls.* For the dispensation of the word every where, they pray; and some of their most earnest desires are satisfied, when they see divine power and grace answering their prayers. Thus it was with Christians in the days of the apostles. They caught, with lively interest, at the intelligence "that Samaria had received the word of God;" "that the Gentiles had also received the word of God;" that "the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region" of Antioch. The Gentiles, we are told, listened and were "glad, and glorified the word of the Lord."

To glance only at a few more reasons, of this class. What is the source of all light and comfort, respecting our future prospects? Paul answers, "the word of the truth of the gospel." When was it that the early Christians "believed unto salvation?" Paul answers again, "after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." And thus it is still. How is purification and holiness promoted, in the people of God? Our divine Redeemer answers, in his intercessory prayer to the Father for them; "I have given them thy word;" "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth;" and says he to them, "now ye are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you." Moreover, that is one of the important conditions on which he recognizes the relation of Christians to himself,—"if my words abide in you." What is it which indicates to the world the Christian's character? Paul answers again, "Holding forth the word of life." What was it which caused the hearts of the two disciples, on the way to Emmaus, to burn within them, in a quickening of their holy affections towards Christ? It was while talking with them, he "opened unto them the scriptures." And what is it which the gracious taste of the children of God relishes? David answers, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste; yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth." And says Jeremiah, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart." All of these reasons, brethren,—and many more which might be mentioned, did not time fail,—urge us, and encourage us, to follow closely the precepts and examples set before us, on "giving ourselves to prayer and *to the ministry of the word*."

3. There is a class of reasons in which ministers themselves are specially concerned, as to their usefulness to others, and their own spiritual prosperity and happiness in their work.

It was the express object of God our Saviour, in instituting the ministry, that it should be "the ministry of the word." Paul manifestly felt this, when he gave to Timothy the direction in the text; and when he asserted, "Christ sent me—to preach the gospel;" "We are ambassadors for Christ."

These and many other like instructions, and examples of holy men, should always be conscientiously considered by us; especially when tempted to "turn aside" to things "unprofitable and vain."

God has especially and repeatedly enjoined it. To different messengers of his will, in different ages, he said, "Preach the preaching that I bid thee;" "These things command and teach;" "Speak all that I command thee;" "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you; neither shall ye diminish aught from it;" "The prophet that hath a *dream*, let him tell a *dream;* and he that hath *my word*, let him speak *my word* faithfully." Thus are we bound,—and we ought to rejoice in the bond, to consider it no restriction of mind, no imprisonment of intellect,—to devote our studies and preaching to setting forth, with the utmost simplicity, the mind of God; dealing in the "perfect word." In the fear of God are we called to continual use of our bibles, in our studies, and in our instructions to dying men, both in public and private. We have not to decide the question—What shall be the general character of our preaching? God has decided that matter. It is to be general, in its comprehension of all things which are able to "make men wise unto salvation;" and particular, in our so preaching these things, as to "commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Would we be powerful preachers? The omnipotence of "the mind of the Spirit" has been put forth on the pages of the bible, and furnishes us with matter for powerful preaching. All the force of human intellect that ever man has shewn, as unassisted by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, when compared with the majesty and strength which the scriptures disclose, is, indeed, like the impotence of man's mortal arm, compared with the omnipotence of God, who created, upholds, and moves all worlds.

The enemies of Stephen "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke." Why? Because he was "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost;" the "Spirit of truth" was in him, and he set forth truth from the word of God, as well as under the teachings of inspiration. Paul "mightily convinced the Jews." Under the disadvantages of what some called "contemp-

tible speech," how did he accomplish this? In "shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." And in such matter of preaching was it that he made a Roman governor, upon his seat of office, to "tremble." The secret of the eloquence of Apollos was, that he was "mighty in the scriptures;" he had a holy art of using the bible in preaching;—which we sometimes still see men possess,—a gracious skill in unlocking and bringing forth from "the word" its precious things. And our "Lord and Master" will see to it that those to whom we minister shall be satisfied with such preaching.

Would we avoid the perplexities and unhappiness of pride, in regard to the matter of our discourses? Our text shews us how this is to be done. Ministers are under temptation at some times, to feel solicitude respecting the opinions and judgements of men, on their preaching. And truly, if the main questions for a minister were, 'How shall I impress men's minds with a conviction of my talents and mental superiority? what shall I say to them out of "the visions of my own heart?" what subject or doctrine, of my own invention, shall I set forth?'—then he might live in continual solicitude; labour, to weariness; wear out life, to no purpose; die, and go to the grave and the judgement-seat, as unprepared for what is before him, as his hearers are likely to be, under his proudly originated instructions. If he do suffer his bible to lie unstudied, and use it only as a reading book, and collection of mottos for sermons,—or orations, more properly,—he will have trouble enough, from a proud heart, and from those invariable attendants of pride, "the fear of man," anxiety about men's applause, envy of the popularity of others, and a train of other evils. His studies will be laboriously carried forward; and his public labours performed under a bondage worse than Egyptian.

But if, regarding yourself, as you really are, only as a messenger of God; coming to men from sabbath to sabbath, to make known his will, not your own; his truth, not your own dogmas; his commands, not your own or other men's maxims;—as coming to set before them "the faithful word;" then, as thus taking your proper place, and discharging your proper office, you cut yourself off from temptation to the solicitude and self-flattery of pride.

You will be able to maintain a frame like this,—'I am but a messenger of God. I deliver what he has directed. When I can say on any subject, "I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God," I am at rest. If men are pleased to call what I have delivered, "foolishness;" or to tax me with want of genius, or of liberality of sentiment, or with having failed to "please men;" I will leave all that with the Master "whom I serve." "My work is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." Let each sermon be studied with this direction inscribed upon your table, "PREACH THE WORD." Let the arrival of each sabbath find you with the faithfully prepared instructions of "the word," and ready thus to shew what the Lord has said. Thus prepared for the day of preaching, enter the pulpit with this resolve, "I will go in the strength of the Lord," "in the fulness of the blessings of the gospel of Christ." Let not the thought enter your mind, 'What will men think of me?' "It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of the Father that speaketh in you." You, as God's messenger are above the reach of men's captiousness, fastidiousness, and contemptuous underrating of your talents, and cavilling at the doctrines you set forth. By the "foolishness of preaching," the "preaching of the word," "it pleases God to save them that believe."—"The foolishness of preaching!" said Paul, doubtless quoting the contemptuous language of men who hated the truth. But how does he shew the wonderfulness of the effect, as disproving the unworthy charge. No: that is not "foolishness," my brethren, which God, through our feeble instrumentality, makes to "convert the sinner." It is the "power of God;" the almighty energy of the Divine Mind, acting on the minds of men with an efficiency which makes to appear as "nothing and less than nothing," the boasted greatness and strength of the mightiest mind, unhumbled by the grace of God. Yes, my brethren,—let us fill our sermons with this which men are pleased to treat as "foolishness;" and God, in his own time, will make it appear that we have dealt in that which is "wiser than men."*

Would we have the distinctive features of Christianity to be the distinctive features of our ministry, as a totally different affair

* Appendix, Note C.

from a plausible, misleading, and rotten ministry of error? Preaching the word, directly, distinctly, "in simplicity and godly sincerity," is the way to make sure of this. The errorists of our day, in no one thing more frequently shew themselves to be the "enemies of the cross of Christ," than in the fact that they have as little to do with the bible as they possibly can; and that when they pretend to use it, they are mainly, and that with great pains taking, occupied with endeavouring to explain it away from interfering with their doctrines.

Would we preserve, undivided, our forces, as defenders of the faith of Jesus Christ? Let us be united, as "the heart of one man," in preaching the word.

Would we shut the door against the insidious incursions of error, and its advocates, into our churches, and against the bringing in of "questions and strivings, unprofitable and vain?"—We are to "preach the word." This will prepare our hearers to distinguish between truth and error. Moreover, nothing more perplexes and confounds an errorist, than the testimony of the scriptures. This has been seen, clearly, in the great contest "for the faith," which, in late years, has been going forward in our New England States. Some of the most influential advocates of a once popular, but now, we trust, declining heresy, have made very precious confessions, indicating their conviction that they cannot get along with the bible, in any other way, than to place its authority and inspiration down on the same level with those of the writings of ancient heathen. Nor does any thing so thoroughly disconcert the refined speculations of proposition-makers and philosophical theologians, who have any regard left for the authority of the scriptures, as, in discussions with them, to take the ground, "to the law and the testimony;" and steadily, boldly, and seriously, to follow up the questions, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" "What saith the scripture?" There is such a sacredness in the testimony of the Spirit, in the word; such an impressiveness in the authority of its decisions; that it will put pride, in a conscientious man, to the blush.

Would we have quiet minds respecting truths which are attended with a measure of mystery, and which shew us that there

are "things of God" which lie beyond the reach of our knowledge? A close adherance to the testimony of the word, in our studies and preaching, will secure to us and our hearers this benefit. While we become thus prepared decidedly to "speak that we do know;" in the frankness and honesty which become humble learners, we can also say, to those who question us, respecting things mysterious, *we do not know, and therefore cannot tell.* And if thus stopping where the bible stops cannot satisfy the spirit of unholy curiosity in others; we can yet, with reason and confidence, return their questions, and say, 'Do *you* know? and can *you* tell?" Many an unprofitable and perhaps impatient dispute, might thus also be avoided.

Who have been most successful in defending the faith, and their "praise been in the gospel, throughout all the churches?" who, regarded with most confidence and affection, as "able ministers of the New Testament?" who, as most faithful pastors, in "feeding the flocks;" and the most successful in "winning souls?" They are the ministers who have "preached the word;" and who, in "contending for the faith," have drawn their arguments from the word; and depended upon the power of the Holy Ghost accompanying it, to convince men of the truth.

Would we have a harvest to reap? As the servants of Christ, we are to "sow the word," which he has pronounced to be "good seed." This will "spring up, and bear fruit; some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred-fold." All else is dead seed, which will never spring up; or "tares," which will bring forth fruit unto death, and make fuel for eternal fire.

Would we have our preaching such as will bear to be examined, and tested as to its soundness and tendency to edification? The word of God is "very pure;" therefore the preaching of it will stand any test by which it may be tried. Our hearers are told to "take heed what they hear." They are solemnly bound to do it; not only in a humble reception of the truth, if that be preached, but likewise in a careful detection of error, if that be preached, in any manner or form. If hearers do their duty, preaching will be tested; and there is no preaching but that of *the word*, which will bear the examination of faithful, serious, de-

vout hearers, who are seeking spiritual profit. They have a right to expect that we shall come to them with the testimony of God. We pay a very poor compliment to their understandings and hearts, if we think we can indulge our pride of intellect and opinion, and put them off long and quietly, with our inventions and unprofitable refinements. Their Judge and ours is righteous. He has said, "Feed the flock of God." To "the shepherds," through whose neglect of this injunction the "diseased" are "not strengthened," the "sick are not healed," the "broken" not "bound up," "that which was driven away" not "brought back," and "that which was lost," not "sought;"—to such shepherds it is a solemn reproof, "Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord God; Behold I am against the shepherds, and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them."

Would we review our past labours, from time to time, with satisfaction? We must prepare the way for it, by acting on this instruction. The apostles, in looking over their numerous fields of labour, were able to speak of them, with satisfaction, as the places "where," say they, "we have preached the word of the Lord." And says Paul, in his farewell interview with the elders of Ephesus, "I take you to record, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God:" an appeal which every messenger of God should be prepared to make, with that holy confidence which is inspired by having been faithful.

Would we be on a course which will carry us entirely away from the latitudes of unimportant, nice, perplexing, useless, and worse than useless discussions and controversies, either with one another, or the enemies of the truth; and would we be safe from the entanglements of errors, small and great? Our wisdom is to study and preach the word. The bible, prayerfully studied and faithfully preached, never yet set Christian ministers to doting about "questions and strifes of words," or contending for any thing of less importance than truths which lie at the foundation of

the Christian system, and of the Christian's hope.* There is a delightful harmony, on all fundamental truths, among those who study and teach the bible with a right spirit.

Life is short, brethren. Go forth and preach the word as your great business; and God will so bless it that you will be saved the trouble of much controversy. Be cautious of shewing too much attention to the theories and dogmas of speculatists. Cultivate that independence, allied with faith in the testimony of God's word, and that Christian simplicity and holy energy of character, which shall prepare you to move forward in the study and declaration of God's counsel, unhindered by any of the skeptical question-making and hair-splitting, with which philosophy, "falsely so called," may seek to hinder the great work.

Contend earnestly for "the faith once delivered to the saints;" but let this be done rather in the continual discharge of the artillery of "the word." This is the regular warfare, ordained by Christ, to continue to "the end of the world;" and the "weapons" of it are destined to prove "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds."

We can only glance at other considerations, belonging to this part of our subject.—The minister who preaches the word, is employed on "God's thoughts." What exalted subjects for contemplation! How rich in instruction! "As the heavens are high above the earth, so are God's thoughts above our thoughts." In the contemplation of these, he rises toward the everlasting throne. He is spending his time and talents to the best purpose, because on subjects best adapted to the great ends of the ministry. He is acting in his proper capacity, as a messenger of God. He is in no man's catalogue of adherents, who prides himself as being the architect of a theory or a system; for he is an adherent to no system but that entitled, "Christ Jesus and him crucified." He gets bewildered in no mists of false philosophy; and therefore enjoys a prosperous establishment in the truth. He is never in want of subjects on which to preach; for he has a bible full of subjects; and ample instruction there, too, upon them all. In his preaching, he is continually making deposits of solid, efficacious truth, in the

* See Note D. Appendix.

minds and hearts of his hearers; and is helping on that progress of knowledge and conviction of the truth, by the preaching of every sermon, which he may hope that the Holy Spirit will make effectual to salvation. He is answering the dictates of his own conscience, and of grace dwelling in his heart; is acting from love to Christ, and to his fellow men; is in the way to "both save himself, and them who hear him;" and is preparing to render his account, as a "steward of the mysteries of God."

Looking forward, by the light of truth, to the scenes of the judgement and of eternity, two other considerations present themselves, in which are concerned both the "ambassadors for Christ" and those to whom they are sent.

We are forewarned that the instructions dispensed in this state of probation are to come into reference and use, in settling the decisions of the final judgement. "The word that I have spoken,"—said Christ, respecting him who receives it not,—"the same shall judge him, at the last day." John, in describing his vision of the judgement, writes,—"and the books were opened." It is a thought, my brethren, which should ever be present to our minds, that the bible will come into solemn use on that great day, as the book out of which ministers have been directed to preach, and their dying fellow men to hear, the instructions of "Him with whom we have to do."

And, on the preaching of the word, God has suspended, in a solemn manner, the eternity of our hearers, as well as of our own souls. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, both in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." It is an intimate, a solemn connexion, which the studies and preaching of every minister have, with the eternal joy or wretchedness of both himself and his people. When therefore he sits down in his study, to prepare for the pulpit, well does it become him to think "how dreadful is *this* place!" When, on the sabbath, he enters his pulpit, to deliver the messages of God's word, with what emotion may he again take up the thought, and

say, "How dreadful is *this* place!" And when, under the solemn responsibilities which will have accumulated, from the instructions of the word, they shall "stand before the judgement seat of Christ," with a joyful or terrible eternity before them; oh! then will both minister and people once more feel "*How dreadful is* THIS *place!*"

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

Some specimens of curious questions, which were gravely debated in former times, are given by a late lecturer on intellectual philosophy, and well illustrate the point under consideration. After giving several questions in the department of intellectual philosophy; he states a few which were debated in the departments of morals and natural theology.—"In morals, Whether ethics were an art or a science?—Whether, if the mind had freedom of choice, this independent *will*, be an entity or a quiddity?—Whether we should say, with a dozen schoolmen, that virtue is good, because it has intrinsic goodness; or, with a dozen more, that it has this intrinsic goodness because it is good.—In natural theology, Whether angels pass from one point of space to another, without passing through the intermediate points? whether they can visually discern objects in the dark? whether more than one can exist at the same moment in the same physical point? whether they can exist in a perfect vacuum, with any relation to the absolute incorporeal void? and whether, if an angel were in vacuo, the void could still truly be termed *perfect?* With respect to the Deity,—whether he exist in imaginary space as much as in the space that is real? whether he can cause a mode to exist without a substance? whether, in knowing all things, he know universals, or only things singular? and whether he can love a possible unexisting angel better than an actually existing insect." See Brown's Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind, Lect. I.

To these topics of discussion it would be easy to add others, of later times; some of which are emphatically "foolish and unprofitable;" and others of them, from the irreverent approaches which they make to the divine attributes, may with strict propriety be termed profane.

As touching this general subject of curious questions, Cecil has also some very just remarks, in the introduction to his sermon on Luke ii. 13, 14, entitled "*The Song of Angels.*"

"It is a lamentable consideration, how little man is disposed to consider those special and important truths, which God has revealed to him for his benefit.

"In respect to the passage before us, for instance, a Philosopher reads it:—'Now,' says he, 'let us inquire whether this was an impression made on the minds of these shepherds, or whether it was an actual vision presented to them:' and thus he spends his time in empty speculations. A Painter reads the passage:—'I could very much wish,' says he, 'that I had been there, to have caught an idea from that scene.' A Musician reads it:—'I should exceedingly like,' says he, 'to have heard this harmony, and to have examined how far it agreed with our present rules:' but since this is impossible, he sits down, turns it into music, and puts it into a song; not considering what important lessons it contains. A critical Divine reads it:—'This,' says he, 'is a singular event; and it will lead me to consider the ministry of angels, and whether it has totally ceased in our day or not.'

"Thus men trifle with the Word of God! A real Christian alone makes a proper use of such a passage. He asks his conscience, 'What am I to learn from this? What instruction and encouragement does it afford?'"—*Cecil's Works, Vol. II. Sec. XVII.*

NOTE B.

Great importance is sometimes attached to merely speculative points in theology, on which it is difficult to find any express instructions in the bible. This latter fact, too,—lack of light from the scriptures respecting them,—we occasionally hear confessed, by those who agitate such points. Now the silence of the bible, on many such subjects, is doubtless to be regarded as an intimation that we are not to attempt to pry into them; they being, for wise reasons in the Divine Mind, shut up from our knowledge. On many other subjects, we may doubtless regard the silence of the bible as the divine attestation of their insignificance, and destitution of practical importance to us. We may rest assured, that the scriptures set forth, in no doubtful language, every doctrine and point of doctrine, and every duty, with which we have any particular concern; and shew, by the manner in which it is presented, the measure of importance to be attached to it, in our studies and public instructions. We commit sin, by giving to points of discussion which we, in the spirit of curious research, may originate, greater prominence than to the plain and essential truths and precepts on which God has been pleased to make explicit and repeated declarations. Moreover, a minister ought not to be willing to waste his time in inventing propositions, on any subject upon which the scriptures give no information.

Philosophy, it is sometimes maintained, in relation to such subjects, gives light upon them. Very well: add them,—as new discoveries,—to the department of *philosophy;* and call them philosophical subjects. But do not undertake to introduce them into the system of *Christian theology;* nor bring them into a place so sacred as the pulpit, for discussion.

NOTE C.

Said a pious woman, who delighted much in the scriptures, and who was more than commonly happy in her religious experience—"When I attend upon the instructions of the sanctuary, I feel myself to have little concern with the person who occupies the pulpit. The *message of God* to me, is that with which I have to do." This is as it should be. The messenger should be forgotten in the message. Our hearers ought to be so occupied with what we preach, *as the word of God*, that they shall forget us. We should be humble enough to be entirely willing that they should so lose sight of us; should pray that they may do this. But to this end, what pure truth, how full of the teachings of God, must our instructions be. Let not leanness in our discourses, as to the presence of rich truth, and their fulness with human inventions, compel hearers to see us, and that too as "preaching ourselves," and not "Christ Jesus the Lord." Paul, in expressing to some of those who had been blessed under his ministrations, his joy in them, says, "For this cause, also, thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

NOTE D.

It is by no means designed to enter an indiscriminate protest against controversy. There ever have been, and ever will be, occasions when the friends of truth must "contend earnestly for the faith," assailed as it is in thousands of ways. If errors are advanced, good men must examine and expose them; and set forth the truths which they are designed to subvert. It is a painful duty, but an indispensable one; and the errorist is answerable for the sin of occasioning or creating a controversy.

The remarks in the discourse have reference to those disputes which are originated, by pride of opinion, at first upon comparatively unimportant matters; and which, through the pertinacity of the originator, finally lead to long and troublesome controversy, and the introduction of heresy into the churches. It seems a device of the great Adversary, when an important contest for the faith is going forward successfully, to set some good man (if he can get a good man to do such a thing, so much the better for his purpose, and so much the worse for the cause of truth,) to bring forward a point of difference, small or great,—it makes not much difference which,—upon which the defenders of the faith may get into controversy. Thus is created a division of that strength which should have been put forth, undividedly, in contest with the enemies of the gospel. Heresy, in some new form, perhaps, springs up. Occasion is given to "our enemies" to "laugh among themselves;" and Satan laughs with them at the success of his artifices. And Zion is made to mourn and weep.

GENERAL NOTE.

The general principles advanced in the preceding discourse, though having reference to the ministrations of the pulpit, obviously apply to the private religious instructions, which ministers are called to give. Some of the best opportunities to lead men to the knowledge of the truth, occur to the minister in the intercourse of private life; and some of his most effective preaching may be done out of the pulpit. The right use of such opportunities, and the real benefit of his personal conversation upon religious subjects, will very much depend upon basing his counsels on the same foundation with his public preaching. There is an indefinite, prosing, sentimental way of talking upon religious subjects, which will leave faint impressions, or none at all, on men's minds. For the same reason that a minister should avoid preaching indefinite, prosing, and sentimental sermons, should he also avoid such kind of conversation. Point,—the point of plain, simple, scriptural truth,—should mark religious conversation, as well as preaching.

The unconverted man, uninterested in the "things which belong to his peace," needs something to arouse and fix his attention. A single text of scripture, though simply uttered, may accomplish the object. The reader may have been informed of the effect produced upon the mind of a young student, not of a religious character, by a minister's proposing to him, as a mathematical question to be solved, the text: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" The caviller and errorist need to be convinced. It is the pride of such men, to draw a minister on to their ground, in a dispute or argument. Instead of contending with them, in the use of weapons like their own, a single arrow from God's armory, well aimed,—a single text of scripture, having a direct and heavy bearing upon conscience,—will sometimes silence all flippant and reasoning unbelief. "For I will give you," said Christ, "a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." The serious and troubled inquirer comes for friendly counsel. What he wants is,—not any man's opinions, in the way of theory, upon regeneration, or the manner of a sinner's turning to God; but the plain, practical instructions of the word of God,—the light of the bible upon his path of duty; to be told, "repent," "believe," "make you a new heart," "submit," "call ye upon the Lord." The young Christian comes for counsel, in his entrance upon his new duties. The experience of Christians who have gone before him, is instructive. But the affectionate, solemn, heart-stirring counsels of the scriptures, are what he needs, first of all. "Thy word," says David, "hath quickened me." The trembling and perplexed Christian wants assistance; he is in the dark, is sorrowful, knows not what to think of himself. The bible furnishes precisely the counsels which his case requires. Speculating with him, on the endless ways of self-deception, will only increase his difficulties. And, on the other hand, reasoning with him, against his doubts and fears, will do him little good. Open the bible almost any where; in the writ-

ings of David and Paul especially; and your eye will light upon something which God the Spirit has said, applicable to just such cases.

In like manner, for the backslider; for the tempted soul; for the Christian, bowing under the weight of temporal affliction; for the Christian, anticipating "the bitterness of death," and about to descend into the grave;—for all these, are there ample, satisfactory, and safe counsels, in "the word." A minister having his memory stored with the bible; and his heart made tender, and his mind wise, by the teachings of the Spirit accompanying the word; can have his tongue to be "as the pen of a ready writer; and be both a faithful watchman, and a "son of consolation" to the true children of God.

A recent Christian poet, the heavenly-minded POLLOK,—whose early departure from this life is mourned by all who admire and love talents consecrated to "Christ and the Church,"—has expressed so justly and impressively his sentiments on the restlessness and curiosity of the human mind, that the author of this discourse is persuaded he need offer no apology for quoting them.

"In mind, in matter, much was difficult
To understand: but what in deepest night
Retired, inscrutable, mysterious, dark,
Was, evil; God's decrees; and deeds decreed,
Responsible. Why God, the just, and good,
Omnipotent and wise, should suffer sin
To rise. Why man was free, accountable;
Yet God foreseeing, overruling all.
Where'er the eye could turn, whatever tract
Of moral thought it took, by reason's torch,
Or Scripture led, before it still this mount
Sprung up, impervious, insurmountable;
Above the human stature rising far;
Horizon of the mind—surrounding still
The vision of the soul with clouds and gloom.
Yet did they not attempt to scale its sides,
And gain its top? Philosophy, to climb
With all her vigor, toiled from age to age;
From age to age, Theology, with all
Her vigor, toiled; and vagrant fancy toiled.
Not weak and foolish only, but the wise,
Patient, courageous, stout, sound-headed men,
Of proper discipline, of excellent wind,
And strong of intellectual limb, toiled hard;
And oft above the reach of common eye
Ascended far, and seemed well nigh the top;
But only seemed; for still another top
Above them rose, till giddy grown and mad,
With gazing at these dangerous heights of God,
They tumbled down, and in their raving said,
They o'er the summit saw: and some believed,
Believed a lie; for never man on earth,
That mountain crossed, or saw its farther side.

Around it lay the wreck of many a Sage—
Divine—Philosopher ; and many more
Fell daily, undeterred by millions fallen ;
Each wondering why he failed to comprehend
God, and with finite measure infinite.
To pass it, was no doubt desirable ;
And few of any intellectual size,
That did not sometime in their day attempt ;
But all in vain ; for as the distant hill,
Which on the right, or left the traveller's eye
Bounds, seems advancing as he walks, and oft
He looks, and looks, and thinks to pass ; but still
It forward moves, and mocks his baffled sight,
Till night descends and wraps the scene in gloom :
So did this moral height the vision mock ;
So lifted up its dark and cloudy head,
Before the eye, and met it evermore.
And some provoked—accused the righteous God.
Accused of what? Hear human boldness now !
Hear guilt, hear folly, madness, all extreme !
Accused of what? the God of truth accused?
Of cruelty, injustice, wickedness !
Abundant sin ! Because a mortal man,
A worm at best of small capacity,
With scarce an atom of Jehovah's works
Before him, and with scarce an hour to look
Upon them, should presume to censure God—
The infinite and uncreated God !
To sit in judgment—on Himself, his works,
His providence ! and try, accuse, condemn !
If there is aught, thought or to think, absurd,
Irrational and wicked, this is more—
This most ; the sin of devils, or of those
To devils growing fast : wise men and good,
Accused themselves, not God ; and put their hands
Upon their mouths, and in the dust adored.

"The Christian's faith had many mysteries too.
The uncreated holy Three in One ;
Divine incarnate ; human in divine ;
The inward call ; the sanctifying Dew
Coming unseen, unseen departing thence ;
Anew creating all, and yet not heard ;
Compelling, yet not felt :—mysterious these ;
Not that Jehovah to conceal them wished ;
Not that religion wished : the Christian faith,
Unlike the timorous creeds of pagan priests,
Was frank, stood forth to view, invited all,
To prove, examine, search, investigate,
And gave, herself, a light to see her by.
Mysterious these—because too large for eye
Of man, too long for human arm to mete."

Oxford Divinity,

EXHIBITED FROM THE WRITINGS OF

BISHOP DOANE AND BISHOP M'ILVAINE,

TOGETHER WITH SOME REMARKS ON APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION—THE ABUSE OF LUTHER AND CALVIN—AND THE LITURGY AS A PRESERVATIVE OF DOCTRINAL PURITY.

BY

A Presbyterian.

MODE OF OXFORD OPERATION,

DESCRIBED BY BISHOP M'ILVAINE.

"Should we conceive of the grand enemy, actually employing a band of men, concealed under profession of Protestants, (and we may do so for the sake of illustration, without offence) to lay open a secret road for Popery, into the very citadel of the Protestantism of England, we could readily understand that they would select the most *gradual* means, as the most *effectual;* the most *noiseless* and *unseen*, as the most *ensnaring;* that they would seem to be great opposers of Romanism, in some points, while insinuating it in others; would break ground at a distance, where they would be least feared and remarked; get their position fixed in peace, 'while men slept;' then cautiously commence approaches, gradually familiarizing the watchers upon the walls with the sound of their working, and never putting forth a new approach, till the novelty of the former was forgotten. We can readily conceive that the weapon of such a siege would not be as the Roman Catapult, hurling, in open day, its bolts and fiery darts. Some Christian Archimedes, with the bright mirror of the word, would soon burn up the engine and put the workers to confusion. But the weapon would be the *pick* of the sapper, digging at the base; and the foundation selected would be that of the bastion, which, while in reality the key of the fortress, *is least known in that importance to the multitude*, and therefore the least watched; and their object would be, like that of the gun-powder plot, under the Senate-House and Throne, to subjugate the whole, in the ruin of the head; and could they only persuade some honored and trusted men of the city, under the sincere supposition, on their part, that they were only searching after *hid treasures of Antiquity*, or endeavoring to effect some useful *restoration* in the old walls of a venerable monument of ancient prowess, *to do the digging for them*, till they themselves could work unseen in the mine, it would indeed be great gain. By and by, it would be seen that a portion of the wall was fallen—then another, but each with such interval, that all lookers-on had grown familiar with the sight of the first dilapidation, before the second was permitted. By and by, that bastion is in ruins, and the city at the mercy of the enemy, but all has gone on so gradually and imperceptibly that it excites but little apprehension." p. 30.

TENDENCY OF OXFORD DIVINITY.

"With the return of Justification by Inherent righteousness, has come back the Romish Doctrine of the Nature and Office of Faith; of the *opus operatum* of the Sacraments; of Baptismal Justification; of Original sin; of Mortal and Venial Sins; of Sin after Baptism; with most evident and lamentable leanings, to say the least, towards the whole array of Romish Purgatory, Invocation of Saints, Prayers for the Dead, Multiplication of Sacramentals and of all external pomp and parade in Church services; Transubstantiation, Miracle-working," &c.—"Why not expect the same results from the same circumstances, now as well as in the early ages of the Church? The way is as well prepared, the dead are alike prayed for, passages of Scripture are just as favorably interpreted. Where is the barrier? In Tradition, answers Dr. Pusey. All are to be held fast, where the ancient Church drifted upon a lee-shore, by the single anchor of Tradition, let down into the shifting sands of men's whims, and caprices, and prejudices, and corruptions, assaulted on all sides by 'the Prince of the Power of the Air.' But had not the ancient Church that anchor better than we have it? Was not Tradition, in their day, more accessible, because they were so much nearer its head-springs; more simple and uncomplicated, and easily settled and readily used? How then if they were not held fast from driving upon the dark mountains of Purgatory, are we ever to be held to our moorings? Oh, no! Prayers for the dead, and the denial of a plenary absolution for sin after baptism, and the granting of a purification in another world, all of which are attained already in the race of this divinity, pressing on to the prize of its high calling, must soon cross the invisible line that separates from Popish Purgatory, and carrying Tradition along, bid it raise its voice, as it will easily find the excuse for doing, as the bold preacher of the doctrine, of which it was before the appointed antagonist."

Bishop M'Ilvaine, p. 534.

"To make the cross of Christ of none effect; first, by making it foolishness to the Greek, and a stumbling block to the Jew; and then, when men would embrace it, by turning it into an idol, like the brazen serpent of a former age; so that men, retaining the name of Christ upon their lips, and making the sign of the cross upon their foreheads, might be substituting a foundation of wood and stubble, for "Jesus Christ and him crucified;" their own cross, for his; an inward sacrifice, for the one oblation once offered by the Son of God; this has been the grand effort of Satan, to which the errors and heresies of every century of Christianity bear most impressive testimony.

Bishop M'Ilvaine, p. 108.

"And lo! another angel stood in heaven
Crying aloud with mighty voice: Fallen, fallen,
Is Babylon the Great—to rise no more!
Rejoice, ye prophets! over her rejoice,
Apostles! holy men, all saints, rejoice!
And glory give to God, and to the Lamb.
And all the armies of disburthened earth,
As voice of many waters, and as voice
Of thunderings, and voice of multitudes,
Answered, Amen. And every hill and rock,
And sea, and every beast, answered, Amen.
Europa answered, and the farthest bounds
Of woody Chili, Asia's fertile coasts,
And Afric's burning wastes, answered, Amen.
And Heaven, rejoicing, answered back, Amen."

Pollock's Course of Time.

"To those who shrink from controversial topics, and would shun all controversy, let it be said, in parting, it is not given to man. We hold the truth only by dint of never-flinching firmness. The price of religious, not less than civil, freedom is perpetual vigilance." —*Bishop Doane, Bf. Ex.* p. 160.

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