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SERMON XXV.

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ADVANTAGES OF DENOMINATIONALISM.*

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."—EPH. iv: 4.

THE Holy Scriptures teach us to believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; in one perfect and sufficient Mediator, who "once for all" offered a sacrifice; and in "one Spirit," whose office is "to convince of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come."

On this three-fold personality, divine, conjunct, and one in essence, attributes and purpose, rests the imperishable faith of the one holy catholic church. This church, is the body of Christ. And this body Christ the head fills with his fullness of wisdom, truth, righteousness, love, and grace, and thus causes it to be the perpetual manifestation of himself, until the end shall have

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But let us confess gladly that on all sides, there is a disposition shown to cultivate the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. Sectarian rigors relax. Denominational prejudices are giving way. Schemes of practical union and coöperation are considered, and the non-essentials of worship, of dogma, and of government, are treated as secondary to the catholic faith in the creed of the primitive church, and to the supreme importance of the vital truths of our common Christianity. The controversies of earlier days have been mostly buried; and Calvinists and Arminians, Prelatists and Presbyterians, are consulting how they may make a united stand against the common foe, and conquer the world for the King of Zion. This tendency to union of spirit, heart and purpose, needs to be prayerfully and strenuously encouraged by the adoption of such practical measures as will give it voice and power.

The Evangelical bodies of England and France have formed alliances, which, though without ecclesiastical power, do nevertheless combine the efforts of all for securing the largest success for the word of life. Why may we not have in this country a synod, or convention, or association, made up of delegates from the several denominations, and meeting annually or tri-annually for the purpose of unifying more completely the feelings and sentiments of the several denominations? If such convention were called upon the basis of the cardinal doctrines of the gospel alone in which a general agreement exists—the so-called scandal of Protestantism would cease. Then we should present a united and compacted front, and every eye would perceive that our several denominations, while doing their own work in their own way, are nevertheless in very truth members one of another—believing in one body, one spirit, and one hope of their calling.

SERMON XXVI.

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ADORNING THE DOCTRINE.

“That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”—Titus ii. 10.

THE church of Christ in apostolic times was constituted in a manner somewhat different from its present state. The formal

agencies for the diffusion of the gospel were then more various and remarkable than now. There were gifts of a supernatural kind, such as tongues, prophecies, interpretations, which were distributed among the disciples in that age, but which disappeared entirely from the church within a century after our Lord's ascension. And the question may occur, whether it was upon any of these extraordinary and temporary means that the early believers chiefly relied for the spread of the gospel? This question we may answer at once in the negative. For it must be evident to every careful reader of the New Testament that whilst a certain importance was attached by the apostles and the first disciples to these peculiar offices and qualifications, yet the great reliance of the church was then as it is now upon two powerful agencies, which alone and inseparably survive—the Truth, and the Life: the truth of God, as announced and expounded by the voice of the preacher, and the life of godliness which must accompany and illustrate the word proclaimed. It is to the latter of these kindred agencies, or rather to the close and inevitable connection that subsists between them, that I now call your attention. What can every believer do, to contribute to the efficacy of the gospel among men? The answer to this question is our subject. The chief work of every Christian is to make religion lovely. Religious truth, as expressed in the Word of God, can receive nothing of embellishment or enrichment from the works of man. The law of the Lord is perfect. Without the adhesion or obedience of a solitary creature, the glorious gospel of Christ would be just as worthy of esteem and homage, as it is now, or as it will be when the angel having the everlasting gospel shall have preached it to all that dwell on earth. But religion as a system of faith, made known by human agencies, requires for its complete expression the Christian life, with all its recommending graces. The doctrine must be adorned in all things. Consider then,

First, **THE DOCTRINE** ; and

Secondly, **THE ADORNING**.

I. **First. The Doctrine** ; that is, the truth as taught ; and more explicitly, the truth concerning God our Saviour. This teaching, as men are put in trust with it, we shall regard in a three-fold light ; as

A system of faith held by the church of Christ ;

A message proclaimed by his servants ;

A profession made by individual believers.

In each of these senses, the doctrine of God our Saviour is to be adorned.

(1.) As a creed, or system of belief, religion demands this adorning. It is incomplete and ineffectual without it. The Bible, whence alone are derived those elements of truth which are embodied in the

creeds and confessions of evangelical Christians, is a rule both of faith and of practice. This will appear from the very structure of the word of God. Salvation by grace as there announced, is the doctrine of sober, righteous, and godly living. Much of the Bible is biography. In this Holy Book are not only "written excellent things in counsels and knowledge," but likewise admirable examples of those who through faith obtained a good report. An important, a very attractive part of Scripture is that which relates the acts and sufferings of the righteous under both dispensations. What would the Bible be without its records of good men's lives: without the story of patriarchs, prophets, judges, kings: of disciples, apostles, martyrs; and especially without the life of

"A witness nobler still—
Jesus, at once the Finisher,
And Author of our Faith?"

Precious indeed for its doctrinal teachings; for its precepts and commandments, warnings and consolations; yet certainly curtailed of its most delightful features, and far less "profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." If this be true of the Bible itself, much more may we say, that the Truth as reproduced in uninspired language, as rendered in articles of belief, or other standards of doctrinal correctness, requires, in order to be fairly presented before the eyes of men, a life that shall reflect, that shall adorn it. Apart from this, it is feeble and powerless. Divorced from this, it is but half truth at best. Orthodoxy without vital piety, the creed without the living church, is religion spoiled of its costliest ornament. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." "From such, turn away." It is the body without the spirit: or rather, it is the skeleton without the flesh.

(2.) Secondly. Religion as taught from the pulpit, requires the illustration and embellishment of the Christian life. The ministry of reconciliation is God's chosen and sanctioned instrumentality for diffusing and preserving "the doctrine which is according to godliness." We are not in danger of setting too high a value upon the faithful preaching of the Word. That the Saviour should in all ages have chosen and ordained among his people some who should be stewards of the mysteries of God: that he should make them able ministers of the New Testament, inclining their wills and affections to the care of souls, enlarging their minds to some suitable apprehension of the truth, nourishing them up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, preventing on the one hand their departure from the simplicity of the gospel, and on the other their discouragement in view of the trials almost inseparable from their calling—this is a marvelous grace and blessing, for which our daily thanks and praises should

ascend to God. Without an earnest, intelligent, laborious ministry, dark indeed were the condition and prospects of the churches! Soon would "the thorn and the thistle come up upon their altars" (Hos. x:8.), and their candlestick be removed out of its place. But is this enough? Is the preaching of the word, however faithful, an adequate exponent of the Truth as it is in Jesus, without that testimony which consists in the corresponding lives of his people? Is the beauty, the fragrance, the completeness of the Gospel, as the "doctrine which is according to godliness" expressed by the message of salvation, when it goes forth alone and unsupported, as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," a report by none believed, by none reduced to practice? Far from it, my brethren. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." The doctrine requires to be adorned by the living virtues of its professors. To set before the eyes of men the excellence of religion, true and undefiled, it is not enough that some should preach it. There are "epistles of commendation" that must accompany our message. "Ye are our epistles, known and read of all men; manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." Where is it then that the doctrine of God our Saviour, has its brightest earthly manifestation? It is where the preacher of the cross stands surrounded, supported, confirmed by witnesses chosen of God: "speaking wisdom among them that are perfect;" his images of piety mirrored in creditable examples; where for every doctrine stated there is an obvious parable in the person of some believer, whose "manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, afflictions" are "fully known." It is where the doctrine is adorned. But oh! how feeble and ineffective the rendering of that truth, when instead of "shining lights, holding forth the word of life," there are to be seen in the congregation and the church, those who are "spots and blemishes, clouds without water, trees without fruit!" When the preacher has to mourn that he has "run in vain, and labored in vain," because the worldly life, the contradictory practice, the unmoved, apathetic state of those who ought to be teachers, but have need to be taught again the first principles of the oracles of God, are continually making the preaching of the cross of none effect.

(3.) Thirdly. Religion as professed by every individual believer, needs to be thus adorned. How solemn and affecting is the scene, where one whose heart the Lord hath touched, comes out from the world, and takes the vows of God upon him! Often has the transaction left on the mind of some spectator a serious,

a saving impression. Behold! another witness to the power of divine grace. Hark! another voice to say: "Whereas I was blind, now I see!" How signal a rebuke to the unbelief and vanity of the age! What a pressing invitation to others to come and follow Jesus! But the force of this teaching must not be confined to the moment of espousing the cause of Christ. It should attend every period of discipleship; it should emanate from every act of a public or salient character. Be the occasion what it may; when such a man comes to notice; when the opinions of men are called for in regard to him, and they take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus, that he is one who professes to know and fear God, and to be a citizen of heaven: his presence, his name, should be an instant, a pungent admonition, a vivid reminder of those important truths to which, as a disciple of Christ, he has set to his seal. Such examples there are, known doubtless to all of us; men who are a sweet savor of Christ, the very salt of the earth. And what has made them such? Is it not that the doctrine of God our Saviour is in their case adorned, by the attractive graces which the Holy Spirit has wrought in them: namely, by "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report?" And if in other cases, alas! too many and too manifest, the salt has lost its savor, the fine gold has become dim, what is it but that the same religion, the same profession has failed thus to flower and blossom and bear fruit; has lacked the ornaments of humility, consistency, fidelity, sobriety, heavenly-mindedness which might add so much to its dignity and grace? Are we to wonder that religion thus exemplified should be a by-word and a reproach? That the more notorious and prominent it becomes, the more does a religious profession unattended with decided virtues, unrecommended by positive and recognizable traits of goodness, should provoke the censure, the ridicule, the contempt of observing men? Of such a profession, what more could be said than the Saviour himself declares, "It is good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men?" (Matth. v. 13.)

II. Thus far we have spoken of the doctrine; considering it to mean religion as taught, in the three-fold sense of a system of belief, a message proclaimed, a profession of faith. Thus understood, we have seen that the doctrine, or the truth taught concerning God our Saviour, requires, in order to its efficacy and completeness, the ornament of a life that honors and reflects it. The Saviour commits to his people the precious interests of his cause. They are ambassadors for him; stewards of his manifold grace; vessels containing a divine treasure. Religion, of which

they are the witnesses and interpreters, has a claim to respect and admiration entirely independent of their conduct. The grace of God that bringeth salvation—the good news of “the kindness and love of God our Saviour,” how that “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saves us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, whom he sheds on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour:”—This doctrine of Redemption, wherever and however made known to men, should by its own merits, command acceptance. If announced by angels in the simplest and briefest form to a race of beings whom selfish interests and blind prejudices did not govern, this gospel would be embraced at once. But as made known to sinners of mankind, it requires the further exposition of the life. And as expressed in human language, imperfectly and feebly, it needs the confirmation of a holy life. Even thus adorned, it may fail to elicit due reverence and affection. Witness the immaculate Redeemer himself: “I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me.” (John viii. 49.) But unadorned, unrecommended by the graces of a Christian character, the truth as received, as preached, as professed by Christians, is utterly powerless and unsavory to men.

What then, my brethren, are the ornaments so positively required to set forth in a becoming and winning light the religion we would recommend? The Bible itself contains no more perfect and beautiful enumeration of them, than that which the apostle gives in explanation of our text. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us”—here it is—“that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” “Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts!” Renouncing for ourselves, and rebuking and condemning in others, not only that worship of idols, which is the rudest form of the atheism of the natural heart, and those gratifications of the senses, which are the grossest food of its desires; but all those dangerous devotions that steal away the heart from God; covetousness, which is idolatry; the love of the world, which is enmity against God; and the works of the flesh, which are not only those vile and loathsome passions that men acknowledge as such, but also “hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, envyings.”

“Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts!” But is this “*adorn-
ing*” the gospel? To renounce what the world approves and practices, will this recommend the doctrine? If our chief business as disciples be to make the religion of God our Saviour lovely, shall we consult its interests by a palpable and displeasing contradiction of prevailing tastes, opinions, usages; instead of a course of tolerance and concession that should nicely and delicately avoid on the one hand dishonor to religion, and on the

other offence to the world? Questions like these have arisen in every period of spiritual declension, and on every point of Christian ethics, as often as a new form of worldly pleasure has come up to plead with easy consciences for permission and approval. If questions like these, my beloved brethren, trouble and ensnare you, let it be enough to remember that the first requirement of your calling was a severity toward self which forever excluded indulgence in earthly delights: "If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross, and follow me." If then there are pursuits and recreations to which you are invited, on pretext of their innocence or insignificance, decide by this criterion: "Are these the things that draw the heart from God? Do they tend to ungodliness and worldly lusts? Are they akin to those practices which I myself, when convinced of my sin and danger, and urged to fly to Christ, did by the grace of God forsake and renounce, and do still in my Christian profession deny?" By the answer, let your course be determined.

But let no man doubt whether in thus renouncing and abjuring worldly things, he shall adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. For from this negative part of a disciple's duty, results a grace positive enough, which the world itself is at no loss to recognize and admire as a jewel rare and lustrous: a precious ornament of the Christian character. That grace is *consistency*! Yes, often at those very points where the Christian's narrow path crosses or diverges from their own, men are most apt and willing to perceive its heavenward direction. And often out of those very compliances for which they beg, on which they insist, men will shape the sharpest stigma for the Christian name. Fear not then to adorn the doctrine by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts; for the world well knows that the doctrine itself denies them. The religion you profess denies them. They are condemned in this Bible, and from this pulpit; they are disowned at this sacramental table; the questionable pleasures of the age, the age itself understands to be repugnant to the gospel of Christ. Believe it, follower of Jesus! when we assure you, that while hailing your accession to its follies, the world will note you as recreant to its faith. Whatever praise it shall bestow on your accommodating practice, will be given at the expense of the uncompromising doctrine you profess. The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his lord! It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. And, on the other hand, how often is it found, that those who object to the Christian's walk as ungracious and austere, are the first to detect the absence of that consistency which should adorn the doctrine he professes!

The denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, is followed in the apostle's enumeration of the graces that recommend religion, by those which are more positive : "That we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." These duties comprehend all obligations toward ourselves, our neighbors, and God. To live soberly, is to observe a wise moderation in thought, speech, and behavior ; maintaining a well-balanced mind, a mind so much and so constantly affected by the serious matters of religion, that it shall be swayed by no intemperate passion or inordinate desire ; expressing itself in "sound speech, that can not be condemned ;" in an upright and edifying conversation ; and in conduct which, by its blameless, harmless, and benevolent tenor, shall become the gospel of Christ. And is this "sober living" an ornament of but doubtful value and importance to that religion which is first pure, then peaceable and gentle? So the frivolity of some, and the harshness, and the intemperate zeal of others who profess it would seem to argue. But not so teaches this doctrine of salvation as it "hath appeared to all men," for it leads them to expect in every follower of Jesus "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."—To live righteously in this present world, is to observe a strict and equal justice, according to the principles, not of the world but of the gospel ; rendering to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor ; and love, which is the fulfilling of the law, to all. We say, to observe a strict and equal justice, but not according to the principles of the world, where selfishness the most intense, if only careful to discharge monied obligations, may hug its treasures, and snatch the uttermost farthing from its lawful debtor. "I say unto you, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." No, my brethren, the justice that would adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, must use other weights and balances, than those of mammon's worshippers. Its tribute must be measured according to the shekel of the sanctuary. It must call the Samaritan its neighbor, and the Gentile its creditor, and all Christ's suffering poor its mother and sister and brethren, to whom it owes all that it can pay of helpful kindness and sympathetic love. To live righteously is to own and fulfill our liabilities, not only the tradesman whose products we consume, and the State whose protection we enjoy, but to the widow and the fatherless, the missionary and the heathen, "who can not recompense us ; for then shall we be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." And is this "righteous living" an ornament of doubtful beauty and value, to that religion which "before God and the Father is this—to visit the

fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world." So thinks the avarice that grasps at gain, and then grudgingly doles out its petty contribution. But not so teaches the doctrine of grace and salvation, as it hath appeared to all men, leading them to expect of the follower of Jesus that as freely he hath received, so freely shall he give.— And to live godly in this present world, is to maintain a close and faithful walk with that unseen Redeemer, whose image, reflected upon the soul in habitual prayer and communion, and study of his word, shall more and more shine forth as the divine and glorious ornament wherewith his doctrine is adorned, in the character and conduct of his disciple.

We have sought by these considerations to show that the chief work of every Christian is to honor the truth by a life corresponding with its precepts. We have spoken of religion as the doctrine embraced by the people of God, preached by his ministers, and professed by his individual followers; and in each light we have seen that it requires the illustration and recommendation of a godly life. How the doctrine may be adorned, we have gathered from the apostle's own amplification of the text; First, negatively, by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts; and then, positively, by sober, righteous, and godly living. We close with a few remarks in application of this subject. And first:

(1.) The duty of adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, rests equally upon all disciples. It was indeed to a particular class of persons that the exhortation of the text was addressed. That class, however, was not the wise, the rich, the mighty, but the least gifted, the most abased in the social scale. It was with reference to the downtrodden slaves of the Roman Empire, that Paul wrote thus to Titus: "Exhort them to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." What the poor, obscure bondman could do for his religion, adorning it by a patient silence, and a cheerful obedience, and a simple fidelity, the favored Christian, in a free and prosperous land, dare not refuse. The Spirit and the Providence of God address various special calls to his servants; bidding some go preach the gospel, and others take the oversight of the churches; distributing to one the gift of exhortation, to another the gift of prayer; appointing these their places among the sweet singers of the congregation and those among the teachers of the young. The call to such offices and functions each intelligent Christian must determine by the light of God's word, the intimations of his spirit, the evidence of appro-

private gifts and talents, and the force of circumstances. No man may be urged against his own conclusions from these various marks, to take up any such special work for Christ. "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" (1 Cor. xii, 29.) These are particular duties; but there is a duty that is universal; and that is, in whatever calling or station, to adorn the doctrine, to honor religion, as the creed, the preaching, the profession; to honor, embellish, recommend it, by a consistent life, by a sober, righteous and godly life; by this first and chiefly, whatever else we do for Christ! Are you at a loss what to do for Christ? Live for him; honor him; profess the doctrine of God your Saviour, and then adorn it. You may have other work assigned you, but for this you need await no special indication; it is not more the work of the most gifted and noted, than your own.

(2.) Again, this duty knows no discouragement or hindrance. The doctrine is to be adorned "in all things." The Christian slave, wrongfully accused, yet "answering not again," robbed of his freedom, yet "not purloining;" serving the froward, yet "showing all good fidelity;" suffering for well-doing, yet "taking it patiently:" In that abasement and obscurity and crucifixion, proving the matchless power of the blessed gospel of Christ, to chasten and sanctify and comfort.—Oh! how bright a star in the Redeemer's hand! how precious a jewel in his crown! (Rev. i, 20.) But there is no situation where the disciple is not equally called, by consistent, sober, righteous, godly living, to "prove the doctrine all divine." Is your experience peculiar, greatly differing from that of other disciples? Then is it for you to exemplify, in fresh and singular ways, the efficacy and sufficiency of religion. Or is yours the common lot, presenting no salient points of trial or privilege to the general observation? Then is it yours to add one more agreeing instance of the same grace of God our Saviour which hath appeared to all men. But every life is new; and it is given to every Christian to work out a new and valuable demonstration of the power of godliness in all things.

(3.) Lastly, the service which can thus be rendered by every Christian, in every sphere of life, is the most effectual service that any Christian can render to religion. It is a great honor to preach the gospel, and with the living voice to persuade and beseech men, that they would be reconciled to God. It is a great honor to stand for the defence of the gospel, and by means of the pen and the press to explain and vindicate its doctrines. It is a blessed and a glorious thing to profess religion, and to stand up once before the great congregation and take the solemn vows of a follower and soldier of Jesus. But it is a greater

privilege and service to spend the life, while preaching, defending, or only professing the doctrine, in adorning it with those heavenly graces which are the fruits of the spirit and the ornaments of the gospel.

“Thus shall we best proclaim abroad
The honors of our Saviour God,
When his salvation reigns within,
And grace subdues the power of sin.”

Christian, will you strive to do it? Friends and hearers, will you not begin to do it? Come, let us seek to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may reflect and exalt and glorify the grace of God our Saviour?

SERMON XXVII.

WORKING IN GOD'S VINEYARD.

“Son, go work to-day in my Vineyard.”—MAT. xxi : 28.

IN this passage our Saviour imparts to his disciples important and valuable practical instructions.

Men have their vineyards, by the cultivation of which they try to promote their own wealth and gratification. God also, has his vineyard, by the cultivation of which he seeks to advance the honor of his name, the glory of his kingdom, and the gratification of his own feelings. Men have their workmen; God has his. Some men train their own sons to labor in and cultivate their vineyards. God employs his sons to cultivate his. To all he utters the command, “Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.”

1. “Son.” We are all his off-spring.” He is the father of our spirits, as well as the former of our bodies. My hearers, do you use the language of the Lord's Prayer? Do you say, “Our Father?” Do you own God as your Father? An acknowledgment of such a relationship implies a feeling of obligation, such as a son is under to his father. Do you possess a feeling of reverence for God, and an obedient spirit to him? Are you ready to say, “Father, what wilt thou have me to do?” If so, here what he says :

2. “Son, go into my vineyard.” He said this when you were a little child, just old enough to understand the meaning of a father's command. Did you then obey him, and enter his vineyard? If not, he has repeated the same direction every day and hour