

SERMONS AND ESSAYS

BY THE

TENNENTS

AND THEIR CONTEMPORARIES,

COMPILED FOR THE BOARD.

by S. D. Alexander.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS volume of discourses owes its present form to the Rev. A. Alexander, by whom most of them were selected, and it was intended as a supplement to the "Log College."*

The biographical notices are extracted from that work, and are intended simply to introduce the authors to those who have not read their full biographies.

It was the desire of the compiler to have given a specimen of the writings of the Rev. William Tennent, Sen., but he has not been able to obtain one, and probably there is not one in existence; as Dr. Alexander, in his biography of him, says, "Mr. Tennent, as far as we know, never published anything."

S. D. A.

FREEHOLD, N. J.

* Published by the Board of Publication.

JOHN BLAIR.

THE REV. JOHN BLAIR was a younger brother of the Rev. Samuel Blair. He was an alumnus of the Log College, and as a theologian, was not inferior to any man in the Presbyterian church, in his day. He was first settled in Pennsylvania, at Big Spring, (now Newville,) in the Cumberland valley, in the vicinity of Carlisle; but by reason of the hostile incursions of the Indians, his people were obliged to leave their rude habitations on the frontier, and to retreat into the more densely populated part of the colony. Mr. Blair, it would seem, never returned to the place whence he had been driven by the invasion of the savages, but upon the decease of his brother Samuel, he received and accepted a call to be his successor at Fagg's Manor, and that not only as pastor of the church, but also as teacher of the school which his brother had instituted in that place. In this important station he continued for nine years, and though not equal to his brother as an impressive preacher, as a scholar and as a theologian he was not inferior.

After the death of Dr. Finley, Mr. Blair was elected professor of theology, in the College of New Jersey, which appointment he accepted, and was at the same time elected vice-president, and until the arrival of Dr. Witherspoon, performed all the duties of president. The funds of the college not being adequate to support a professor of theology, distinct from the president; and it being known that Dr. Witherspoon was an orthodox and eminent theologian, who could consistently with his other duties teach theology, Mr. Blair judged it would be expedient for him to resign. Upon this, he re-

ceived a call to settle as pastor of a Presbyterian congregation in Wallkill, Orange Co., New York. Here he continued to labour in the duties of the ministry, until he was called away from the field by death, which occurred Dec. 8, 1771, when he was not more than fifty-one or fifty two years of age.

“John Blair was a judicious and persuasive preacher, and through his exertions, sinners were converted and the children of God edified. Fully convinced of the truth of the doctrine of grace, he addressed immortal souls with that warmth and power, which left a witness in every bosom. Though he sometimes wrote his sermons in full, yet his common mode of preaching, was by short notes, comprising the general outlines. His labours were too abundant to admit of more, and no more was necessary to a mind so richly stored with the great truths of religion. For his large family he amassed no fortune, but he left them what was infinitely better, a religious education, a holy example, and prayers which have been remarkably answered. His disposition was uncommonly patient, placid, benevolent, disinterested and cheerful. He was too mild to indulge bitterness or severity, and he thought that the truth required little else but to be fairly stated and properly understood. Those who could not relish the savour of his piety, loved him as an amiable, and revered him as a great man. Though no bigot, he firmly believed that the Presbyterian form of government is most scriptural, and the most favourable to religion and happiness.

“In his last sickness, he imparted his advice to the congregation, and represented to his family the necessity of an interest in Christ. A few nights before he died, he said, ‘Directly, I am going to glory! My Master calls me, I must be gone.’”

AN ESSAY
ON THE MEANS OF GRACE.

BY THE REV. JOHN BLAIR.

I. THE great God stands in no need of means in order to accomplish his purposes. He could, if he pleased, cause all events he sees meet to effect, to come to pass in the same way he caused the world at first to exist, viz: by the word of his power or sovereign act of his will; yet it does not at all derogate from his efficiency, but rather serves to illustrate his power, to use means, and appoint a connection between them and the end in view, both in the natural and moral world: yet such a connection as always depends upon the divine pleasure. Means are effectual or ineffectual, as he affords or withholds his concurrence—particularly, in the administration of his moral government, he deals with the subjects thereof in a way suited to their rational natures, and uses means of a moral nature in carrying on the interests of religion in our degenerate world. To this purpose, he has given his holy word, appointed a gospel ministry and ordinances of worship, such as the sacraments of the New Testament, praise and prayer.

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II. These, divines commonly call means, not of instruction only, but of grace; the reason is, because it is in the use of these means, the Holy Spirit ordinarily communicates or bestows grace on sinners, and builds up his children in holiness, until he brings them safe home to glory. Now, whatever can be considered as a mean in reference to an end, must have some tendency to, and, in its own way, have influence upon, or concur in attaining it; for that which has no such tendency or influence, has no manner of connection with the existence or accomplishment of the end, and, consequently, is no means of it at all. If, therefore, these ordinances are means of grace, they must have a tendency to, and, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, concurrence in, the regeneration and conversion of sinners, and thence forward, in carrying on the work of grace in them. As all ordinances of worship are but various manners of administrating the word of God, it is especially to be considered as a mean for these purposes.

III. That we may see with what propriety these are called means of grace, let us attend to what we find ascribed to, or predicated of, the word in the Bible; which only can be said of it considered as an instrument or means, and not as an efficient cause, which it cannot be. The conviction of sinners is ascribed to it, "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Rom. iii. 20. Peter's hearers, upon hearing his discourse, wherein he proved from the scriptures of the Old Testament, that Jesus whom they had crucified was the true Messiah, "were pricked in their hearts." Acts ii. 37. By this, God distinguishes his word

delivered by the true prophets, from that delivered by the false, viz: this, that his "word is like a fire, and like a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces." Jer. xxiii. 29. "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Heb. iv. 12. It kills the legal pride of sinners, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." Gal. ii. 19. I have already taken notice in my observations on regeneration, that Christians are said to be "born again," "begotten," and "made partakers of the divine nature," (1 Pet. i. 23, James i. 18, 2 Pet. i. 4,) by the word of God; to which I would add Ps. xix. 7, 8, where the word under the terms "Law," "Testimony," "Commandments," is said "to convert the soul," "make wise the simple," and "enlighten the eyes;" all which terms plainly express the saving change wrought in regeneration. This change is an inscription of the divine law upon the heart. Jer. xxxi. 33. All these expressions signify much more than merely instructing the speculative understanding. They must import the concurrence of the word as a mean or instrument in the hand of the Holy Spirit, both in the preparatory work of conviction, and also in effecting the saving change in regeneration. It is unnecessary to recite the many passages which represent the word and ordinances as means of quickening, supporting, comforting, sanctifying, perfecting and strengthening of God's people. I would only observe, that the efficacy

of the word for these purposes, depends upon the presence and immediate agency of the Holy Spirit in the heart; which as really takes place in these instances, as in the regeneration of a sinner, and the latter as easily admits the use of means as the former.

IV. The efficacy of the means of grace lies not in any intrinsic virtue in themselves, nor depends upon the power or will of those who attend upon them; for the effect to be produced is supernatural, to which sinners are by nature entirely averse, and destitute of a true discernment of the excellency of the truths and weight of the arguments proposed in the word; but they are rendered effectual to the attainment of the end by the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon them, and his energy in them; they are means in the Spirit's hand, rather than the creature's. And sinners are to attend upon them in that view, that they may be in the way in which the Spirit meets with such and works upon them, like the poor impotent people who lay at the pool, waiting for the descent of the angel to trouble the waters. John iii. 4. With respect to creature agents, the application or use of means depends upon them; but the causality itself, or energy of means in order to the end, is not in their power, nor depends upon their will. Hence, they often fail of success in the use of the best adapted means; but when this divine agent condescends to use means, he causes their efficacy, and makes them effectual when, and with respect to whom, he pleases. I say, condescends to use means; for the very circumstance I have mentioned shows he needs them not; he could do

immediately whatsoever he pleases; when, therefore, he is pleased to make use of means, it is in order to the more easy discovery of himself to his creatures. Hence it follows, that the great God is not the less an efficient for his using means, nor the less displays his power in accomplishing the end by them.

V. Yet, notwithstanding, there is an aptness and tendency in the means in order to the end in view, otherwise they would not be properly means. Those things which have no aptness or tendency to the attainment of the end can have no sort of influence upon it; the existence of the end has no kind of connection with them, and, consequently, they are no means at all of its existence. Now, the aptness or tendency of the word of God to reduce sinners to the obedience of Christ lies in, 1st. The clearness of representation, whereby divine truths are set before the mind. Divine truths are clothed in the most plain and intelligible language their sublime nature will allow of; they are descriptively expressed, so as not only to declare their nature, but also to describe their true influence, and the impressions they should make upon the heart. They are also illustrated by the most familiar similitudes. 2d. In the interesting manner in which these sacred truths are urged, or the weight of the arguments with which they are pressed home. 3d. In the awful authority and great majesty with which they are delivered, whence they bind and affect the conscience; they are set before us with a "thus saith the Lord or Jehovah," our rightful Sovereign, with whom is terrible majesty, "and your God," who has

a covenant claim upon his professing people. Hence, then, when the Holy Spirit takes the word in his hand, and makes application of it to the heart, it is most apt and fit as a mean to instruct the mind and inform the conscience, and thus to convince and awaken the sinner; to lay restraints upon men, and repress, or in some measure restrain, even the natural enmity of the awakened sinner: and when the Holy Spirit effectually opens the sinner's eyes, and makes him understand divine truths as they are represented in the word, they have a most apt tendency, by way of argument, to persuade and determine the will, and to promote the life and exercise of all the graces of the Holy Spirit in true Christians.*

I have said that when the word is so effectually applied to the conscience as to convince the sinner, it is a means of repressing or restraining his natural enmity. As this will probably in a particular manner be called in question, I beg leave to offer a few thoughts further upon it. I do not at all suppose the sinner's enmity is in this case subdued; for then he would be regenerated, which is contrary to the supposition. The wickedness of men may be, yea, in many instances is, restrained, when its governing power is not all broken. Hence, those who were clean escaped from them who live in error, and escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, may be allured through the lusts of the flesh,

* I would here refer the reader to what I have said in the sixth Observation on Regeneration, concerning the instrumentality of the word therein.

and much wantonness, and be again entangled; yea, it too often proves to be the case, that, "according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that is washed, to her wallowing in the mire." 2 Pet. ii. 18—22. The acting of the sinner's enmity is, indeed, more direct against God and spiritual objects, thus brought near and set in view before him by conviction, and this, no doubt, is a great aggravation of those exercises of enmity; yet it will by no means follow that enmity, as an evil principle in the heart, is more prevalent, or has, in this case, acquired a greater degree of power. The power of this, as well as every other evil habit, lies in the sway and dominion it has in the heart. Enmity reigns in the heart ever while it is destitute of true love to God; but yet the more peaceably it possesses the heart, and the more fully it has its consent, the more powerful it is. While the sinner is in a state of security, though he does not feel so explicit opposition to God in his heart, as being more out of view; yet it is the same principle of enmity that carries him on in casting God's law behind his back, in neglecting the divine service, and giving a loose rein to his corruptions, while he despises, and perhaps derides, strict religion. His enmity lords it over him without control, and hardens his heart against reproof and conviction. It is unmolested in its sway, and carries the sinner headlong whichever way it directs; and he justifies himself in all this, and refuses to take blame to himself; but the awakened sinner, while conviction is borne home upon the conscience, confesses the just authority over him, that

he has most unjustly trampled upon it, and violated his law. Though he has no holy acquiescence in, or choice of, the divine government, yet he has a rational conviction that it is rightful, and that he deserves punishment for contradicting it; that he feels his heart averse, greatly alarms him, and convinces him of the existence of enmity in his heart. Instead of spurning at his convictions, trampling them under foot, and casting them off, which would be the case if enmity acquired strength in proportion to his convictions, he cherishes them, and is afraid of falling back into security again. Though he feels risings of heart, yea, some sinners make some attempts to shake off their convictions, with whom they are too powerful, and are increased till they break their stout spirits, as they give up their struggles to stifle them, and become afraid lest they should leave them again to fall into a hardened state; yet this is so far from proving the increase of enmity as to strength or prevalence, that, in reality, it proves the restraint of it by the authority of God's law in the conscience, and convincing influences of the Holy Spirit. Upon a discovery of the exceeding depravity and wickedness of his heart, the sinner, upon some principle, wishes his heart was changed. True, he does not choose holiness or turning to God in itself considered, for that he does not, is one main thing that fills his conscience with so much guilt; yet he earnestly desires there was such a heart in him, as did see the beauty of holiness, and truly choose it. He desires this, indeed, upon no higher principle, than a regard to his own happiness. This, where there is no

higher, is not a holy principle, nor is this sort of desire of grace such as denotes true grace in the heart; yet it is not, in itself, a wicked principle. That this respect to his own happiness does not regard holiness as an ingredient in it, and is not subordinate to, and under the influence of, a higher and more noble principle, is his crime; but that it is in him, and has influence upon him, is not. Surely, the sinner's enmity is not as prevalent and unrestrained, when he is thus anxiously solicitous to obtain heart-changing grace, even on this principle, as when he utterly disregarded the matter, and justified himself in refusing to return.

When it is said, that the awakened sinner still continues to reject Christ, and hate God with all his heart, the meaning must either be, that, under all his convictions, the sinner exerts himself to the utmost with all his might in opposition to them; that he the more pours contempt on the gospel, and stoutly resolves to reject Jesus Christ, that he casts about to find out how he may bear himself up in a determined opposition to the gospel overtures of salvation, and the more he is convinced, the more maliciously does he oppose, and impudently justify himself in refusing, Christ and his redemption, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, which would argue the increase of enmity with a witness; and then, the proposition is not true, yea, notoriously contrary to fact. Or else the meaning must only be, that notwithstanding all his convictions, and increase of light, his enmity is not at all subdued, but if present restraints were removed, it would return to its old

stubborn stoutness in the way of sin; and all the faculties and powers of the soul are still under the reigning power of that hateful principle; and then I have no controversy with any man about it. But this is no way inconsistent with what I have said, unless we say, that to lay restraint upon the lusts and corruptions of men, is inconsistent with their dominion in the heart; or else, that they have as great a degree of power under restraints, as when most unrestrained; neither of which will any man in the due use of his reason assert, for that would destroy all ideas of different degrees of wickedness. The sinner's convictions awaken his attention to those glorious objects, God, and his Son Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation through him; and thereby the actings of his natural enmity are more direct and explicit, which doubtless more aggravates them as particular acts, and exposes the malignity of that hateful principle. Yet that very discovery, and the sinner's condemning himself for it, and cries to God for deliverance from it, show that it has not as quiet possession of the heart, and as prevalent energy in it as formerly. Now it is from the principles, good or bad, which have the governing prevalence in the heart, that persons have their character, especially in the eye of the heart-searching God; if, then, under solemn convictions by the authority of God's law, and the convincing influences of the Holy Spirit, the sinner's natural enmity be restrained, it will follow, that the awakened sinner's character is not, on the whole, rendered more vile and odious in the sight of God, than it was in the days of his security and con-

tented course of sin against him.* Can it be imagined, that the sinner's enmity has as strong an energy in him, when brought to break off from his course of external sins, as when he pursued them with greediness? When he earnestly attends to the duties of religion, as when he neglected them with scorn and contempt, or trifled with them in a listless formality? And when he eagerly seeks the company of God's people, asking their advice, as when he hated to be near them, could not bear their conversation, but took delight in the company of the profane and ungodly? But to return.

That the means of grace have a tendency to the conviction and conversion of sinners, as well as the edification of God's people, appears by the expostulations God uses with them in his word, as utterly inexcusable and perverse in continuing impenitents after all the pains he has taken upon them, and means used with them. In the fifth chapter of Isaiah from the beginning, the Lord represents the abundant provision he had made for their fruitfulness, in point of means and advantages which he had afforded

* It will by no means follow, that awakened sinners are, in a degree, accepted of God, on account of their being less sinful than they were in the days of their security; for the divine law still condemns them as falling short, infinitely short of its demands; and their less sinfulness makes no atonement for the smallest past transgression. It only follows that, in their present case, they merit a less degree of disapprobation and punishment; *i. e.*, they are less offensive; and this we must admit, or else deny different degrees of wickedness; or assert that the lowest degree of wickedness is as offensive, and disapproved in as high a degree, as the greatest.

them. "What could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Isa. v. 4. "But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you; but they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and imaginations of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck; they did worse than their fathers. Therefore, thou shalt speak all these words unto them, but they will not hearken unto thee; thou shalt also call unto them, but they will not answer thee; but thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction. Truth is perished and cut off from their mouth. Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places, for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath." Jer. vii. 23—29. Here we see their disobedience to, and abuse of, the means he had used with them, was the reason why they were so peculiarly the people of God's wrath, and of the sad issue of their case. If it be said, the instruction they got from the word is sufficient to render impenitent sinners inexcusable, I answer, either this light and instruc-

tion has a tendency to their conversion, (and if this be admitted, the matter is fairly given up,) or it has no such tendency at all; and then how does it at all render them inexcusable in continuing impenitent and unconverted?

The conversion of sinners to God is the great scope of the means of grace; this the word of God calls for at their hands, commands and presses it with the greatest importunity. It is needless to recite authorities for this to such as are acquainted with their Bible, since we might quote a greater part of that sacred book to this purpose. Therefore it is, that the gospel ministry is called the ministry of reconciliation, and it is the business of gospel ministers to pray sinners in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. Yet

VI. There is no certain or infallible connection between the most diligent and earnest attendance on the means of grace that unregenerate sinners are capable of, and their obtaining the saving grace of God. This issue of the matter is entirely from the sovereign mercy of God. If we suppose a certain necessary connection in this case, it must arise either from the nature of the thing, viz: some constitution or law of nature, or from some promise and positive appointment of God to that purpose; but in the case before us, there is no such connection in either way. Not the former; for the means of grace are positive institutions, and don't fall under the laws of nature; nor do they operate by way of influence upon God to move him to show mercy, but are means whereby the blessed God deals with sinners, and works effectually on whom he

pleases; their efficacy depends upon his blessing and energy. In this view he has appointed means, and requires fallen man to attend upon them. Guilty sinners lie at mercy upon which they have no claim, but it lies in the breast of God as a Sovereign, of his own grace, to show mercy or not as he pleases; and, therefore, according to his sovereign pleasure, he renders the means of grace effectual or not; and as to the latter part of connection, viz: by promise or positive appointment, there is not the smallest evidence of it in the word of God; if there be, let any one show it who thinks he can. I must confess I have not met with one such promise in all the book of God. As to such passages as Luke xi. 9 and Matt. vii. 7, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you," there the conduct of God as Father towards his children is plainly spoken of; and, therefore, asking, seeking, and knocking in faith, asking, &c., in a gracious manner is intended; and they are the children of God who are spoken of. So the moral efficacy of the means of grace terminated on God to move him to give grace, (the very mention of which shows the absurdity of the supposition,) or the sinner's use of them were at all the ground or reason of his showing mercy; then, indeed, the very appointment of means would imply a promise of success, or something equal to it, in the required use of them; but this is so far from being the case, that, on the contrary, the tendency of the means to the end lies in their moral influence upon the consciences and hearts of sinners. Yet whatever aptness to such an influ-

ence there is in the means of grace, such is the blindness, deadness, enmity and prejudice of poor sinners, that until the Holy Spirit accompany them with his presence and energy, no such influence will effectually take place in their hearts. Now, he works in or by these means as a Sovereign; hence, he strives with many only in such a way as that he suffers them still to resist, until in just resentment he forsakes them. But with respect to the vessels of mercy, he prosecutes his gracious design, until by the "rod of his strength" (the word of his grace), he irresistibly conquers, "and rules in the midst of his enemies." Psa. cx. 2.

Therefore sinners are to use the means of grace as creatures lying at mercy, seeking pure grace, which depends on the mighty energy of the Holy Spirit; but they can find no claim to grace on their most diligent use of said means. It is enough to engage sinners to the use of means, that God has appointed them as such, has required their attendance upon them; there is an aptness in the means themselves and a proper tendency, and it is by these means the Holy Spirit works; in this way he meets with perishing creatures in mercy, and they cannot expect the grace of God in the neglect of his institutions. While there is a "*may be* the Lord will be gracious," (Amos v. 15,) or, "*who knoweth* if the Lord will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?" (Joel ii. 14,) sinners will be utterly inexcusable in neglecting them, and justly charged with choosing their own destruction.

VII. From what has been said it will follow, as a con-

elusion on the whole, that all sinners, when the gospel comes, are under the most indispensable obligations to attend the means of grace. The design of their institution, as mediums of the Spirit's dealing with their souls about their eternal interests, lays them under bonds of gratitude. For why, shall the offended majesty of heaven thus seek after rebellious sinners? Would it not then be the basest ingratitude to treat him with neglect? The gracious authority of God binds their consciences; he requires their attendance upon his ordinances; their very institution implies such a requisition, and it will be a disobedience, highly criminal, to neglect them.

We also hence see what grounds of encouragement sinners have, for their attendance on the means of grace; they have not the assurance of a promise that they shall be successful; the great God has come under no such engagement; they have no ground of present peace and security from their most diligent and earnest use of them. Such apprehensions would lead to, and support, a self-righteous spirit, and be an abuse of the means of grace. They have great reason of deepest anxiety lest they fail of the grace of God, and provoke the Holy Spirit to forsake them. Yet they have sufficient motives from the aforesaid design of their institution; their moral aptness and tendency, whereby they are adapted to our rational natures and the Spirit's operations, and suited to affect the hearts of men in a moral way. It is the stated way of the Spirit's dealing with the souls of men; by his word and ordinances he strives with sinners, and by the same means

he accomplishes his special work of grace; and in this way there is the only probability of meeting with mercy. In the continued neglect of God's ordinances there is certain destruction, but in waiting on God in this way there is a peradventure the Lord may have mercy. The Holy Spirit has rendered the means of grace effectual to multitudes, and how knows each sinner but, of his rich grace, he may effectually reach him?

Hence, also, we may see that ministers of the gospel not only may, with safety and propriety, but are bound, in duty, to urge unregenerate sinners, as well as others, to a diligent use and improvement of the means of grace, and in that way to seek unto God for regenerating grace. If the preceding view of the matter be kept up, such exhortations can have no tendency to settle people in a legal dependence on the means, nor promote security nor carnal confidence. Yea, it is highly incumbent on the ministers of Christ to give particular directions to poor sinners in order to their improvement of the means, in such a manner as has the most likely tendency, and wherewith it is most probable the Holy Spirit may concur for their conversion to God. Certainly, a mere external attendance upon the administration of ordinances, while the heart is secure and careless, is not likely to answer any good end. Undoubtedly, such have need to be directed so to attend to the word of God as to compare themselves therewith, to examine themselves, and enter into a serious consideration of their own state and character, and lay to heart the danger they are in. Awakened sinners are inclined to seek shelter in the

duties of religion, and to expect healing and relief to their consciences from their earnest use of means. These need to be warned of that dangerous rock, and be directed to such a view of God's law as may more deeply convince them of their utter depravity, and slay them dead to the law. Gal. ii. 19. Their attention to the overtures of the gospel should be urged. Our safe path lies between two dangerous extremes, viz: of those who only try to convince men of their unregenerate state, call upon them to embrace Jesus Christ, and then leave them under all their perplexing exercises and distresses, without any counsel or direction; and thus their various temptations, discouragements, and despondencies are overlooked, and no assistance is administered when they most need it. It is a matter of great consequence into what hands poor, convinced sinners fall; an unskilful treatment of them is vastly injurious. The other extreme is of those who direct sinners to duties and attendance on the means of grace in such a legal manner as to encourage their dependence upon them; such lead poor creatures to think they can do something to recommend themselves to God; their utter insufficiency in themselves is never fairly opened up. On the contrary, they are told if they will do their part, God will do his; and thus they are made to believe there is a certain connection between their own best endeavours and the saving grace of God; that if they *do what they can*, God will do the rest. Thus the nature and design of the means is misrepresented. They are considered as means which sinners use with God in order to prevail with him, rather than

means whereby he deals with them, in order to call them back again to himself, and renders them irresistibly efficacious for that purpose when he pleases. The first of these extremes tends to make sinners neglect all attempts to perform the duties of religion, or if they give their presence at ordinances, yet make no essay to strive with their own hearts, as being altogether in vain, without any tendency to promote their good, and not required of them in their present circumstances. While this doctrine is believed, Satan is not much afraid of damage to his interest from all their convictions of being in an unregenerate state; for the consequence is, they quench the Spirit. If convictions startle them, they, upon this principle, make no attempt to cherish their convictions, easily fall asleep again, and lie still in careless indolence. By the latter extreme, the striving of sinners is turned into a wrong channel, and they are directed to the use of means upon principles entirely wrong. The directions they get, send them to the law for life, and settle them upon a righteousness of their own. Both the extremes are injurious to the interests of religion, and destructive to the souls of men. Both are to be avoided; the ministers of the gospel are to endeavour the conviction and awakening of sinners, and when there are any awakenings they are to attend and cherish them, and by prudent, seasonable and evangelical counsel to direct their way, and point out the method of salvation to them. They have sufficient encouragement to such a conduct upon this principle, that however dead, miserable and helpless sinners are, yet it

is by such views and impressions as evangelical counsels and directions tend to, that the Holy Spirit carries on his work in the souls of men; and therefore, when he concurs, they shall be rendered effectual. May the God of all grace teach his servants how to negotiate the treaty of peace and reconciliation, and make them abundantly wise to win souls to Jesus Christ! Amen.