

D. Dana

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*Mr. George W. Fisher*  
Have the Churches the presence of Christ?

*with the greatest regard  
from the Author*

A

# SERMON,

ADDRESSED TO THE

## PRESBYTERY OF LONDONDERRY.

AT THEIR SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING,

BEDFORD, (N. H.), APRIL 30, 1851.

BY DANIEL DANA, D. D.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE PRESBYTERY.

NEWBURYPORT:  
MOSES H. SARGENT,  
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*Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.* [Matthew, 9, 15.]

My dear and reverend brethren will readily agree with me on the importance of turning these periodical assemblages to the best practical account. As seasons of mutual intercourse, and sympathy, and encouragement, they are delightful. As occasions for the transaction of ecclesiastical affairs, they are important. There is still another view in which they are deeply interesting. They invite us to contemplate the state and progress of piety, and to inquire into the condition and aspects of spiritual religion in our churches. And here, on this vital point, there is obviously one question which absorbs all the rest. Do our churches at large enjoy the presence of their Savior? If so, all is well. Let them be thankful and rejoice. If, on the other hand, this presence is withdrawn,



and *so far* as it is withdrawn, they have reason for humiliation and grief.

Such is obviously the instruction of the text. And it will be in perfect keeping with this instruction, to apply it to the *spiritual*, rather than the corporeal presence of the Savior.

Such is my present object. I would bring to my ministerial and Christian brethren the momentous question: Do our churches, and the churches generally, enjoy the spiritual presence of the Savior.

To discuss this question, and especially to decide it, is a most momentous affair, and involves no common responsibility. Yet it is a responsibility from which I dare not shrink. So soon to bid a last farewell to my dear brethren, I am willing to leave behind me my most serious views of the most serious of subjects.

With reference, then, to the great question before us, it may be stated that the presence of Christ with his churches will ordinarily manifest itself in frequent and powerful revivals of piety. It may be said, indeed, that this presence, uniformly enjoyed, will preserve religion in such a state of constant vigor, as to preclude those special interpositions called revivals. But this theory is unsupported by facts. From the earliest era of Christianity, few, very few, have been the churches

which have preserved, for a long period, the spirit and power of religion. The purest and best have had their declines; and when they have not become extinct, they have owed their prolonged existence, and their prosperity, to occasional visitations of the Divine Comforter.

Such has been the experience of the churches of New England. They have had their sad and awful declensions. But their Savior has not wholly forsaken them. By the occasional visitations of his Spirit, he has rekindled the half extinguished flame of piety, and bid them live. Such were his gracious interpositions, more than a century since, through the preaching of Edwards, of Whitefield, and other distinguished men. To similar interpositions in subsequent time, our churches owe, in no small degree, their present existence.

But where are we now? How rare have been, of late, these precious occurrences. We bless God that they are not utterly unknown. Yet from a great majority of our churches, has not the Savior awfully withdrawn? Are not the influences of his Spirit deplorably withheld? Are not our spiritual heavens as brass, the earth as iron, and the rain, powder and dust?

And what is the consequence? Even apparent conversions are few, and real conversions fewer

still. Multitudes of our churches are diminished, and are still diminishing in numbers. Is it not remarkable, my hearers, that when the standard of religion is obviously depressed, and examinations for church-membership more superficial than formerly, so few, so very few, come forth as candidates? When we consider that of these few, so small is the proportion of youth, and especially of young *men*, do we not anxiously inquire, what is to become of our churches, and of religion itself, in the next age?

And what is to become of the ministry? When candidates for the sacred office are scarcely sufficient to supply the vacancies at home, who shall break the bread of life in our new settlements so rapidly multiplying? Who shall go forth to the ends of the earth, and tell its countless, perishing millions, of a crucified Redeemer?

But we have, thronging around us, other evidences that the Savior has, at least comparatively withdrawn. With pain and grief of heart, I advert to that *low state of religion* in our community, which living Christians confess and lament, and which gives joy and triumph to a careless world.

Has not the *Sabbath* lost much of its reverence, even in the eyes of Christian professors? Where is the abstinence from secular cares and employments, from worldly conversation, from reading

not religious, and from needless visiting, which once marked the day of God? Are the places of Christians in the sanctuary uniformly filled? Is the stated prayer-meeting, is the sacramental lecture conscientiously attended? Is the worship of the sanctuary marked with deep seriousness, with pious delight, with profound reverence?

I advert, with inexpressible reluctance, to a practice which increasingly prevails in our cities, and from which, I pray God, that our country congregations may keep themselves pure. I refer to the custom of *sitting in prayer*; a custom sanctioned neither by piety nor decorum; a custom which would almost seem to say that we have worshipped our Maker with too much reverence in former time, and may now approach, on terms of greater familiarity, the High and Holy One whom prostrate angels adore. Many pious persons have doubtless been insensibly betrayed into the habit. But it must be hoped that, on consideration, they will abandon it; or at least, that their example will prove as little contagious as possible.

Most of our churches, I trust, maintain the habit and form of monthly prayer for the conversion of the world. What a season of delight to the spiritual Christian. To cherish compassion for a dying world; to unite his prayers with the inter-

cession of the Savior, for its conversion; to listen to the actual triumphs of his mercy among the perishing; to anticipate the universal gathering of the lost race into his arms; and actively to *bear a part* in accomplishing the sublime design—what wonderful privileges are these. Are they embraced with ardor, are they enjoyed with delight, by all who hear the Christian name? Alas! the story is often but too significantly told by the almost deserted monthly concert.

What shall we say to this fact, that real Christians so often walk habitually in darkness? Have they not the same Bible to enlighten them, the same Savior to comfort them, the same Holy Spirit to witness their adoption, that ancient saints were favored with? Holy, happy men! They could speak the language of assured confidence. “We know in whom we have believed.” “We know that we have passed from death to life.” “We know that when this earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” If Christians at the present day, as is too often the case, want this confidence, and these heavenly consolations, the fault, generally, must all be their own. And how much do they lose by it. How much does religion lose by it. How much does the world, dying around them, lose by it.

Christians often meet each other in the social circle, and can converse freely on the topics nearest their hearts. And what are the topics which ordinarily engross them? Are they the love and the loveliness of their Savior, the wonders of redemption, the worth of human souls, the methods to be used for their conversion, the miseries of the perishing heathen, the aspects of religion in the world, the glories of that heaven on which they are bordering? Many Christians, it may be hoped, delight to pour out their hearts to each other on these and kindred topics. And many, it is to be feared, pass them, amid their mutual interviews, in the most astonishing silence.

Christians are ordained by the Savior to be the *light of the world*; and not only its light but its *salt*. They are to diffuse a healthful savor through the mass. In a word, it is the design of Heaven that the church should instamp its character on the world, and thus reclaim it to the proper and original design of its creation. But it is a serious question, whether a process the very reverse of this, is not going on in our community. Is not the world communicating its stamp, its image, its spirit to the church? Is not the line which separates the two, becoming, from year to year, less and less distinct? And is there no danger lest it be wholly effaced? Do not Christian professors



adopt the same projects, and embark in the same schemes, as worldly men, and too often with the same ardor, and in the use of the same unlawful or questionable means? Are they not almost equally attracted by the honors and distinctions of the world? Do they not obsequiously yield to the laws and caprices of the tyrant Fashion, to the neglect of the plain injunctions of conscience and the Bible? Are not various forms of dissipation and amusement, which were once considered as excluded and renounced by a profession of religion, now familiarly introduced into the bosom of Christian families? In a word, may not the men of the world, the irreligious, with too much reason say to many Christian professors, "You may believe what you please, and you may profess what you please. But you give us the countenance of your example. With this we are content; and shall consider you, with all your pretensions, as substantially on our side."

Having thus exhibited some of the defects and departures of Christian professors, it would be improper to pass in silence that which is the principal cause of all. If, as has been truly said, "*apostasy* begins at the closet-door," so do all important deviations from the Christian spirit and practice. We cannot, indeed, follow the professor to his closet; but we can sometimes discern with cer-

tainty those things in his spirit and walk, from which a truly devout and praying spirit would have effectually secured him. Adopting this rule of judgment, we can scarcely doubt that many professors at the present day, have much less of the spirit of prayer than most of their predecessors. The closet has less of their time, and less, too, of their hearts. Its duties, if not wholly omitted, are performed superficially; perhaps in much haste. In their performance, the soul has little sense of its wants, little communion with the Savior, little enjoyment of God. In short, too many professors deprive themselves, in a greater or less degree, of that which is the principal instrument of holy living. And it must be confessed, there is much in the state of the times, to promote this evil. The world has assumed new phases, and arrayed itself in new attractions. The improvements, in science and art have been wonderful. The sources of wealth have multiplied. The modes of acquisition have multiplied. The materials of enjoyment have multiplied. Novelty without end have pressed themselves on the public attention. Political strife and animosity have raged with unusual violence, and even good men have been too often drawn into the vortex. If, in these circumstances, professors of religion have had strong motives to be familiar with their

closets, they have likewise had strong *temptations* to forsake, or to visit them heartlessly. But these temptations, unless resisted, have been fatal to their souls. Can it be sufficiently lamented that thousands in the community should fall into these snares, and fall to rise no more ?

I have thus specified, with great freedom, certain points which indicate a low state of religion in great numbers of our churches, and which indicate, of course, that the Savior's presence is not enjoyed among them. But I fear that the evil is not even yet searched to the bottom. One of its principal sources is yet to be explored.

All genuine religion is built on truth. The church is built on truth. The sublime honor which her great Head has conferred on her, is that of being *the pillar and ground of the truth*. It is by asserting, maintaining and defending the pure doctrines of the gospel, that she vindicates her own character, and secures her prosperity. If faithful in this point, she may hope for the presence and smiles of her Savior. If unfaithful, she may expect him to frown, and to withdraw. In inquiring, then, as to the presence of Christ with his churches, we naturally inquire in what degree the distinguishing doctrines of his gospel are maintained by them, and in what degree relinquished. And this is the present question.

The gospel, in common with all other systems, has certain first and fundamental truths on which the whole structure rests as its basis. If these truths are maintained in their purity and power, the building stands. If they are relinquished, or adulterated, it falls to ruin.

From these cardinal principles, I shall select a few; and from the nature of the case, a few are sufficient.

Our race is in a destroyed state, and sin is the destructive malady. If the malady is to be reached and cured, it must be first understood. An essential mistake here is like that of the physician who should apply to one malady the medicine suited only to another.

The doctrine received and maintained in the New England churches from the first, and I may say, the doctrine of the Bible, is simply this: that every individual of the human family is the subject of a *sinful depravity*; that this depravity is *native*, and derived from him who is the father of the race, and its covenant head; that apart from the redemption of Christ, it subjects every human being to the displeasure of a holy God, and to everlasting misery in the world to come.

The doctrine which is recently inculcated, and is extensively pervading our churches, is this: that all sin consists in action; that the idea of a

nature proper sinful is absurd; that every human being commences existence substantially as did Adam; that each forms for himself his own character; and that no one is subject to divine displeasure and condemnation, till they are incurred by actual, voluntary transgression of known law.

The New England doctrine has been, from the first, that human beings, thus depraved and lost, must owe their recovery to the sovereign power and grace of God; that regeneration is purely and simply the work of the Holy Spirit; that it implies the production of a new nature, or the infusion of new and spiritual and holy principles into the heart—principles from which proceed under divine influence, the holy acts of the subsequent life.

The new doctrine denies entirely the existence of holy principles and dispositions, as distinct from holy acts. It asserts that as the holiness of Adam did not exist when he came from the hand of the Creator, but commenced with his own holy volitions and actions, so it is with human beings now. They become holy, not by the act of their Creator, but simply by their own voluntary choice; in other words, by the right use of their own free agency. Thus the glory of their conversion, that greatest of all blessings, that turning point of their immortal destiny, is transferred from God to themselves.

I am compelled to add, that with this sad mis-

take respecting the *Author* of regeneration, there is often connected an equal mistake respecting its very *nature*. The sinner is viewed, not as passing through a painful process of *conviction*—conviction of sin, of guilt, of just exposure to divine wrath, of helplessness, of dependence on sovereign mercy, (all this is dispensed with,) but as coolly comparing the happiness to be found in God, with that to be found in the world, and as making his choice accordingly. Here is a religion of *pure self-love*; for it is obvious, from the bare statement, that self-love, and that simply, is its spring, its source, its foundation. Concerning this religion, I shall make but two remarks, each distressing in the extreme. First; it is the very religion embraced by thousands at the present time. Secondly; it is a religion which never yet carried a soul to heaven, and never will. Must it not then be said, where are the JEREMIAHS to exclaim, O that our heads were waters, and our eyes fountains of tears, that we might weep over the triumphs of fatal error—error issuing forth from pulpits, and from seminaries of theology, infecting the churches, and leading immortal souls to ruin.

The great divines of New England, it is well known, laid much stress on the doctrine of the *atonement*. In common with enlightened Christ-



ians of every age, they received it as the grand peculiarity of the gospel, and the only foundation of human hope. They viewed it as strictly a propitiatory sacrifice to the divine justice. They viewed the obedience and sufferings of Christ as meeting all the demands of God on the sinner, and as constituting a substantial fulfilment, in behalf of the believer, both of the precept and the penalty of the divine law.

By the modern theory, these views are altogether repudiated. It represents the atonement as a mere symbolical transaction—an exhibition—a striking display, indeed, of divine benevolence, and a powerful dissuasive from sin; but no proper compliance with the demands of the divine law, and justice. On the contrary, in the case of every pardoned sinner, the law of God is rather dispensed with, than maintained and fulfilled.\*

I have no pleasure in protracting these remarks. But there is one point farther, too important to be omitted. The new theory inculcates the most extravagant notions respecting *human ability*. Sinners are able, at any moment, by a simple resolution, to change their own hearts, to repent, to believe, to make their own salvation sure. Now, whatever a plausible philosophy may utter in sup-

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\* The *subject* of this discourse, and its *occasion*, impelled the writer to repeat the substance of some thoughts which are found in a sermon published by him, some years since, on "the faith of former times."

port of these opinions, they directly contradict reason and common sense. They are repudiated by the experience of every human being, and emphatically, by the experience of Christians. And who can deny that so far as admitted, they cherish in sinners that self-sufficiency and self-dependence which have proved the ruin of thousands?

95 My hearers will now judge whether the errors which have been brought to view are of small importance or not. It is often suggested that the two theories are not so flagrantly opposed, but that a little candor and liberality might reconcile them; and that to denounce the modern opinions as heretical, savors of a blind and bigoted attachment to old and long established creeds. But this is dwelling on the mere surface of the subject. The two theories have almost no point of mutual contact. Nor can I easily doubt that the generality of my hearers perceive at once, that if the one theory be true, the other must necessarily be false; that if the one agree with the Bible, the other must be anti-scriptural, unfounded and dangerous.

There are certain *tests* by which some of the excellent old divines recommend that all doctrines should be tried. They are such as these: Does the doctrine proposed humble the sinner? Does it exalt the Savior? Does it promote practical holiness?

Taking this safe and wholesome ground, let me propose a few questions.

If, in the full belief of the entire depravity of human nature, thousands of sinners have remained unhumbled, is the doctrine likely to humble them, which neutralizes, if it does not absolutely deny, that depravity?

Again: Does that doctrine exalt the Savior, which takes his work out of his hands—which leaves him little or nothing to do, either in bearing men's sins, or in subduing their hearts, and strengthening them to holy obedience?

And again: Does that doctrine tend to promote holiness, which keeps the sinner ignorant of the extent of his depravity, and thus precludes him from taking the first step in genuine, evangelical obedience? Does the doctrine which discards *in-bred, in-dwelling* corruption, tend to make Christians more humble, more watchful, more holy, or less so?

To some, it may appear strange and incomprehensible, that views so plainly anti-evangelical as those which have been detailed, should obtain such favor and currency as have been actually witnessed. I am unwilling to close the discussion without offering a few thoughts on the subject.

The new theory, I cannot but apprehend, is to

be traced, often, to loose views of the inspiration of Scripture. On the topics mentioned, the Bible certainly speaks a language perfectly explicit and intelligible. Brought to its test, the errors described vanish at once into thin air. But what is this, to those who deny or doubt the infallibility of Scripture.

Is such denial, and are such doubts, rarities in our community? No, my hearers, they are not. They spring in luxuriance on every side. They have already usurped (I grieve to say it) some of our pulpits. They threaten to overwhelm the land like a flood. So far as they prevail, they uproot every thing, they destroy every thing. In their baleful march, they trample down every thing sacred and precious. And be assured, they will least spare those doctrines which are the dearest to Christian hearts, and the most powerful supports of religion in the world.

But many who in terms confess the inspiration and authority of the Bible, give it the most disrespectful treatment. Not humble enough to receive cordially its heart-harrowing, soul-humbling doctrines, they institute a quarrel against them. Determined to abide by a favorite system of their own, they wrest the Scriptures into conformity to it. And alas! nothing is easier. Let the mind be once blinded by pride, prejudice or false phi-

losophy, and it can work wonders with the Bible itself. No text so plain, but it can be perverted to speak a new language. No doctrine so solemnly and explicitly revealed, but it can be explained away.

Truth compels me to say that there is a spirit in the age, extremely unfavorable to the reception of gospel doctrines in their simplicity. Nothing, now, is to be taken for granted. Nothing is to be received as established truth. The wisdom of ages gone by is to pass for nothing. Every thing is to be investigated anew; and we are the selected instruments for the investigation. My brethren; the Bible may not be approached in this spirit. To such arrogance and self-sufficiency, it makes no revelations. It is a sealed book. While to the humble, the docile, the child-like, it spontaneously and richly unfolds its choicest mysteries. O could our great men, our admired men, our ambitious *young* men come, in humility and self-distrust, to the feet of Jesus. He would teach them more in one hour, than they have learned in years of bold and self-complacent investigation.

There is another thought which must not be suppressed. Within the last thirty years, our theological *dialect* has undergone a strange metamorphosis. Words, whose meaning was definitely and well understood in years past, are now em-

ployed only in an allied, perhaps a contrary sense. It is a fact, that in the very *same terms* which were formerly employed, the very opposite doctrines are now taught. Nor is it a fact less curious, that from the same sermon, different hearers carry away different, perhaps opposite ideas. Without bringing the charge of direct dishonesty, we may yet safely say, that such modes of instruction are of all modes most undesirable. Hearers may think they are advancing in knowledge, when in fact their movement is retrograde. Inquirers after knowledge may be going in quest of disappointment. Christian hearers may find their ears filled, while their minds are starved. Others may be *ever learning, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth.*

This equivocal use of words, I must declare, is a tremendous evil. But is it a *necessary* evil? Is not the English language sufficiently affluent to afford an appropriate term for every idea? In legal courts, it is well known, the pleader is required to use words in a simple, well understood, and definite sense. Shall such accuracy be required in the trifling affairs of time, and when some petty interest is at stake; and shall gross inaccuracy and confusion be admitted where the soul's eternal well-being is concerned. and where a single mistake may be irremediably fatal?



Let it not appear strange, if I suggest that the recent defections in the church from Bible truth have done much to spread the spirit of scepticism and infidelity through the community. Indeed, this is their direct and obvious tendency. These defections take it for granted that the Bible has remained for eighteen centuries, a sealed book; that the great body of the Christian church, from its first existence till now, has grossly misunderstood and perverted it; and even that the Reformation of the sixteenth century, instead of bringing an accession of light, was but a plunge into deeper darkness. And if the modern views be correct, who sees not that the venerated writers of the last two centuries, Owen, Howe, Flavel, Scott, Edwards, Bellamy, Dwight, have been pouring into the minds of millions, error and delusion, instead of sober truth, and substantial religion? But the very idea of all this is most pernicious. It perplexes inquiring minds. It subverts the faith of the unestablished. It furnishes food to the caviller, and triumph to the infidel. And it lands millions of minds on the shores of unbelief and atheism.

With these suggestions, the present state of things in our country entirely accords. Never was there a period in which the general mind was so vacant of all religious belief. Never a period in which the truths of revelation have so much

lost their influence on the community at large.— It is too plain to admit a doubt, that thousands, not to say millions, in various regions of our country, have absolutely brought themselves to the conclusion that the Bible is a fiction, and eternity a dream; that the present world is all, and the world to come, nothing.

Lest my apprehensions on this subject should appear too hasty, or too sombre, I feel myself impelled to quote some remarks from a highly respectable British periodical; begging my hearers to determine for themselves, during the reading, how far the state of religion and of infidelity in our own country, resembles that in the parent nation.

“There is coming upon the church,” says the writer, “a current of doubt, deeper far, and darker than ever swelled against her before—a current strong in learning, crested with genius, strenuous, yet calm in progress. It seems the last grand trial of the truth of our faith. Against the battlements of Zion, a motley throng have gathered themselves together in array. Atheists, pantheists, doubters, open foes, secret foes, and *bewildered friends* of Christianity, are in the field. \* \* \* \* \* Their purposes are various; in this, however, they all agree, that historical Christianity ought to go down before advancing civilization.”

To these remarks, another able British writer adds his sanction. "To the dangers of the crisis thus graphically portrayed, we are not," he says, "insensible. But we are more alarmed on account of 'bewildered friends,' than open enemies. We are above all eager to resist that species of theology, so popular among scholars and men of learning, which is based on intellect, rather than on the teachings of the Holy Spirit; which strives to reduce Christianity to the level of human philosophy, and pursues its researches by the same lights which guide the bootless speculations of the metaphysician."

Pardon me, my hearers, if, to fortify my suggestions still farther, I add a quotation from a respectable Journal of our own, its Editor not being a professor of religion, but a very acute observer. "It is evident," he says, "that in our own State (he is an inhabitant of Massachusetts) deism, pure and unadulterated—the deism of the school of Paine and Voltaire, refined and sublimated into an inviting and intoxicating compound, after having overthrown almost every Unitarian pulpit, has made inroads into the sects which have taken pride in calling themselves *evangelical*, but among many of whose preachers, there remains nothing but the name; the spirit having departed, and its place supplied by the work of men's hands. It

is," he adds, "a time of peril to the New England church. She must cut herself loose from the whole band of moral reformers, and self-constituted philanthropists, who put themselves in the place of the Almighty, or she will make shipwreck of herself; and while a portion of her followers will perish in the dark whirlpool of infidelity, the survivors will be driven to take refuge in the conservatism of the Roman church, and thus the Protestant Reformation will be found to have been a premature development, of which the world was not worthy."

It appears, then, that in the opinion of careful observers, both in Great Britain, and our own country, a new scene presents itself, and new phenomena are manifest. Christian nations as we have been, we harbor in our bosoms multitudes of restless and uncompromising enemies of Christianity; some in open and avowed hostility; others artfully corrupting, and secretly undermining the system. Judge, then, my hearers, whether this is the time for the real friends of religion to slumber in security; to put off their armor; to parley with the insidious and inveterate foe. Should they not watch with sleepless vigilance? Should they not oppose to the arts of the enemy, an honest, open, fearless avowal of their principles; and to his malicious assaults, all the power

of Christian benevolence, and Christian courage? O let them put on the whole armor of God, the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the breast-plate of righteousness, and let their feet be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Thus armed, they need not fear a defeat. Thus armed, they may humbly hope to triumph; for Omnipotence is on their side.

My dear ministerial brethren,

It would have given me unspeakable delight, if, standing in this place, this day, I could have congratulated you and myself on a prosperous state of religion, and the churches. But truth and faithfulness are of paramount obligation; and I should be a strange being indeed, if, standing so near the bar of my final Judge, I did not feel their binding force. As the result of long and anxious inquiry and observation, I have felt myself bound to bring to you the momentous question, Is the Savior with us, and with our churches, or is he not? And I have been compelled to lay before you various and mournful evidence that he is withdrawn. It is not my wish, however, to deal in sweeping censures, or unqualified reproofs. I doubt not that in some of your spheres of duty and of influence, you witness and enjoy the gracious presence and blessing of your heavenly Master. You bear faithful testimony to his truth; and op-

pose, not without success, the arts and encroachments of fatal error. In other instances, you labor faithfully amid much discouragement, determined to be pure from the blood of all men, and not counting life dear, so that you may fulfil your holy ministry. But doubtless we all feel and mourn great deficiencies, and none with more reason than my unworthy self. And it deserves serious consideration, whether, in a crisis like this, new means and new efforts are not demanded of us by our great Lord and Master, in support of his truth, and for the promotion of his cause. If the enemy comes in like a flood, must we not, with new ardor and courage, erect the standard against him? If the slumber of the unconverted around us is deep beyond parallel, must we not call to them with a louder voice? If even Christians are half asleep, must we not address them in the most thrilling tones of reproof and expostulation? If errors of every name and form abound, must we not ceaselessly and perseveringly oppose them? If they are artful, must we not pluck off the mask, and expose their hideous deformity?— If they are bold and violent, must we not fearlessly denounce against them the terrors of the Lord? Must we not, in such a day as this, continually call back our hearers to *the first principles of gospel truth*, assuring them that if these are lost, all



is lost, and they are undone? Amid these great duties and difficulties, how much do we need the co-operating efforts of our brethren of the laity. They will suffer me a word.

My beloved Christian friends,

Indulge me in proposing a few questions which embrace objects of the very deepest moment.— Can you not recall a period when the truths of God's word, the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, were better understood, were more simply embraced, more tenderly cherished, more familiarly meditated, and more vigorously defended, than they have been in later time? Had Christians any doubts as to the Inspiration of the Scriptures; as to the entire native depravity of man; as to the sovereign and exclusive agency of the Holy Spirit in regeneration; as to the atonement, as a full satisfaction to the offended law and justice of God; as to the entire impotence of sinners to effect their own conversion? Were not sermons expected to exhibit a clear and full development of these doctrines; and were they not valued in proportion as this was done? Did not vacant churches appreciate their candidates rather on the ground of their gospel orthodoxy, than their talents, their learning, their eloquence, or any other attraction; and did they not expect of them a distinct avowal of their theological views, as an

essential condition of receiving their suffrages ?

Suffer me to inquire farther : In the greatly altered state of things which exists of late, are Christians more humble, more holy, more prayerful, more observant of the Sabbath, more conscientious in duty at large, more separate from the world, more free from its follies and vices? Must not a negative answer be given to most of these questions ?

Now it will not be contended that the bare co-existence of two events, or facts, furnishes conclusive evidence of their mutual relation ; especially of their relation as cause and effect. But in the present case, there is a strong presumption that such is the real fact ; a presumption supported by weighty reasons.

First ; it is *truth*, and not error, which is Heaven's ordained instrument of sanctifying and saving the souls of men. The Savior has charged his ministers to preach the pure, naked doctrines of the gospel, as they would alarm a careless world, and advance the holiness and comfort of his people. And he has manifested what these doctrines are, with a crystalline clearness. Can it, then, be for a moment supposed that the Savior would enjoin one set of doctrines to be preached, and that he will give his blessing to a different or contrary set of doctrines ? The very thought would be absurd, not to say impious.

Indeed the very nature of the case points to the same conclusion. The new doctrines are feeble and inefficient. They neither awaken the conscience, nor rouse the sensibilities, nor sanctify and save the soul. They do not strip the sinner of his pride, his self-righteousness, his self-sufficiency. They do not lay him prostrate, dependent and self-despairing at the feet of Jesus—the only spot, the only attitude in which a sinner can find mercy.

It may be propounded as an *axiom* in religion, that defective views of native depravity will ever involve defective views of the atonement of Christ, of the renewing and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and of the *grace* of God in human salvation. Nor can the religious teacher who materially errs on this fundamental point, give sound instruction on the nature of conversion, on repentance, or faith, or the Christian graces at large.

On the whole, there is reason, pressing reason, to apprehend that in many of our churches, the Holy Spirit has been grieved, and the Savior constrained to withdraw his gracious presence and blessing. And if Christ be withdrawn, where are we? What calamity so great could possibly befall us? In this case, what can avail our fulness of spiritual privileges, our Sabbaths, our sermons, our assemblings for prayer? Must they not all

prove barren—barren of awakening and saving influence for sinners ; of holiness and comfort for Christians ?

Is there not, then, a loud and imperious call on ministers and private Christians to awake from every degree of slumber, to search their hearts and lives, and inquire for the Achan in the camp? Is there not a call to cry mightily and unitedly to the Savior, imploring his return, and putting away whatever tends to prevent that gracious return? Should we not all rally round the standard of the pure gospel, and unite in efforts to arrest that torrent of error, of infidelity and ungodliness which threatens to overwhelm our land, and even to sweep away our churches? Shall not the very defections from gospel truth, and the bold opposition to it, arm us with new zeal to defend and diffuse it in every possible way ?

The religious aspect of the times is confessedly alarming. But it affords no reason for despair. "The Lord can clear the darkest skies." As the thickest darkness of the night is thought immediately to precede the dawn, our deep and disheartening gloom may soon be succeeded by the rising day. The portentous cloud that overhangs us may soon be gilded with the heavenly bow of promise. In ancient and in modern times, God has often manifested surprising mercy at the mo-

ment when his people were beginning to despair.

It is remarkable that among all the seven churches of Asia, that which was most guilty and offensive in the eyes of the Savior, was the church at Laodicea. Yet this very church is addressed by him in language more compassionate, more melting, and more encouraging too, than any of its sister churches. Let me close my discourse with these thrilling accents of the Savior's compassion, and with his closing monition; only supplicating that these wonderful words of Jesus may penetrate all our hearts, and awaken their tenderest sensibilities.

To this guilty, slumbering, lukewarm church, he says: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me, gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that that thou mayest see." "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

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