

111
THE FAITH OF FORMER TIMES.

~~~~~  
A

S E R M O N ,

BY DANIEL DANA, D. D.,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IN NEWBURYPORT.

~~~~~  
BOSTON:
PRESS OF CROCKER AND BREWSTER,
47, Washington-street.
1848.

PREFATORY REMARKS.

THIS discourse was first delivered, Aug. 1, 1847—the hundredth anniversary of the South Church in Ipswich, the author's native place. It has been subsequently preached, with some omissions and variations, in several pulpits. By the advice and request of judicious friends, it is now submitted to the public.

The author will not be surprised if his free remarks shall subject him to animadversion. Should error be pointed out, he will willingly stand corrected. Should the formidable charge of *obsolete philosophy*, or of *stereotyped theology* be suggested, he will bear it with all patience; simply remarking, however, that he consciously adopts no philosophy, but that of the Bible, and common sense; no theology which disagrees with that of Owen, Flavel, Watts, Doddridge, and other writers long endeared to the hearts of Christians.

He is aware that many of his ministerial and Christian brethren, who, in their candor, may believe him honest, may yet view him as prematurely and needlessly alarmed. But he must seriously remind them of what they know already; that the greatest errors which have ever wasted the Church, have entered it by a secret, silent, unannounced process. Evils such as these, if opposed only when full-blown, or when they have borne their noxious fruits, are opposed too late. They must, if possible, be crushed in the bud—in the earliest germ.

Without fear he puts the question, whether, in some modern modes of explaining human depravity, atonement, regeneration, etc., there are not found the seminal principles of gross and fundamental error.

Never did the writer cherish a more ardent desire to live in perfect friendship with all who love and preach the gospel of his Saviour. But the interests of truth are paramount; and his obligations to maintain it, supreme. He is willing that this discourse should be considered as his dying testimony to *the truth as it is in Jesus*.

S E R M O N .

HEBREWS xiii, 7.

————— *Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*

IN this passage, the Apostle, having previously exhorted the Hebrew converts to remember their *spiritual guides*, or *teachers*—obviously referring to those who were *deceased*—proceeds to enjoin them to *follow their faith*; and this, in view of the *end of their conversation*.

The instruction of the text, if somewhat *generalized*, seems to be this: that, would we be united to the company of departed saints, and share in their felicities, we must *follow their faith*.

The term *faith*, as found in the Scriptures, will be found to have at least a *twofold* meaning. It sometimes intends that cardinal grace of the Christian, by which he welcomes and trusts the Saviour, and, being indissolubly united to him, partakes in all the everlasting blessings of his gospel. At other times, faith intends that great system of *doctrines* revealed in the Scriptures, which have been embraced by the pious of every age, as the basis of their hopes, and the guide of their lives.

It can scarcely be doubted that the injunction of the text embraces faith in both these aspects. Would we follow the pious to their heaven, we must have a faith like theirs, in its *nature*, its *influence*, its *effects*; a faith that conquers sin, that subdues temptation, that purifies the heart, that operates in love to God, and love to man. Let this never be forgotten,

A faith that consists in a mere speculative belief of the truth, saves none. Thousands have possessed it, and yet have perished—perished with aggravated perdition.

Still, it may be the fact, that the injunction before us has an emphatic reference to faith in the *other* sense. The Apostle, you know, was much in the habit of bringing out the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel; of expatiating, not only on their evidence, but their infinite importance; not only on the imperious duty of receiving them, and holding them fast, but on the indescribable guilt and danger of rejecting them, or swerving from them. These were his favorite topics. It was then perfectly natural, that, addressing himself to the Hebrew converts, whom he knew to be peculiarly exposed to repudiate the pure doctrines of the gospel, or to depart from them, he should give them instruction and warning on this very point. It was natural that, in bidding them *follow the faith* of departed ministers, he should be anxious to have them believe, love, cherish, obey and defend the very same doctrines which those ministers taught; doctrines which, while they preached them to others, they cordially believed for themselves; doctrines which nourished their hearts, sustained their hopes, brightened their dying hours, and now constitute the burden of their everlasting songs.

Permit me, my beloved friends, to be the humble echo of the great Apostle on this momentous topic. Permit me, this day, affectionately to entreat you to *follow the faith of the pious of former days*; in other words, to cherish and hold fast those doctrines which are plain and prominent in the Scriptures, and which have been preached and professed in the churches of New England, from the earliest time.

That I may ensure myself to be perfectly understood on a subject of this infinite moment, I must briefly specify, and briefly explain, some of the doctrines to which I refer. I say *some* of them; for to specify, and especially to explain them all, would be the work of a year, rather than an hour. It is likewise a fact, that the gospel system, though rich in a variety of precious truths, rests on a few leading principles, as its grand and supporting basis. If these leading principles be intelligently received, and affectionately cherished, the whole system is maintained. If these principles are repudiated, or given up, the whole system is rejected, or is lost.

Let us, then, begin at the beginning; in other words, with *the native and entire depravity of man*. This doctrine our pious fathers viewed as lying at the basis of the gospel; as

pervading its whole structure; and as giving form, complexion, and vitality, to experimental and practical religion. They believed, with the Scriptures, that *the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. And with the Scriptures they believed that this awful malady was not contracted, or superinduced; but, being transmitted from the first fallen parent, is innate and connate, in the case of every human being. They did not conceive that infants are destitute of moral character; or that dispositions *leading* to sin are *sinless* dispositions; or that the difference of character between unfallen Adam and his fallen posterity, is a difference in degree, and not in nature; or that mankind universally rush into sin without a corresponding universal propensity. No; these fond and baseless theories are of modern invention. Our pious fathers were strangers to them. They knew, indeed, that human pride and false philosophy had their scores of objections against the humbling doctrine of native depravity. But what was this, in the face of a *Thus saith the Lord*? What was this, in the face of every day's observation, and every day's sad experience? They felt, likewise, that this doctrine of native depravity was as important in its influence, as indisputably clear in its evidence. They considered every defection here, as an undermining of the grand principles of doctrinal, experimental, and practical religion. This was plain, sober sense, as well as sound orthodoxy. Let us follow them in this path; and let us consider every other path as leading to inextricable and fatal error.

Another doctrine dear to our pious fathers, was that of *spiritual renovation*; or, in their own plain phrase, borrowed from the words of the Saviour himself, *the new birth*. They had heard the Saviour assert, emphatically and repeatedly, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And they believed him. They had heard him declare to the most strict and sober of men, "Marvel not that I said, *Ye must be born again*." And they ceased to wonder at the thing. They saw the change characterized in Scripture as *a resurrection—a new creation—a passing from death to life—a participation of a new and divine nature*. Not suspecting that these phrases were without meaning, they believed that the change indicated by them was great indeed; a change of *heart*, and not a mere change of *purpose*; the introduction of new and divine principles into the soul, and not a mere modification of *self-love*. A change of this last kind they would have viewed as a meagre, wretched thing; and the hope, and the religion

built on it, as false, and fatally delusive. They did not, indeed, hold that every subject of the divine change in view, could accurately ascertain its precise time, and manner, and circumstances. But the change itself they viewed as a great and infinitely important reality; a reality never to be dispensed with, in a religious hope, and a religious profession.

And to what source did they ascribe the change, when actually wrought? To the power of moral suasion? To the efficacy of human resolution, or the energy of human effort? No; not at all. They ascribed it to the power of God; to the same almighty agency which created the heavens; which commanded light from darkness, and order from chaos. They did not view the change as strictly *miraculous*. It interfered with none of the laws of the human mind. It infringed no liberty of human thought, or volition, or action. Still, they viewed it, not as the work of the creature, but of God. How absurd, indeed, to suppose that there is any thing in the depraved heart of man, that should make war upon itself. How still more absurd the idea that depravity should transmute itself to holiness, or hatred to love.

Hence these good men believed that the grace of God, whenever it found its way to a human heart, came in pure *sovereignty*. In other words, its motives were derived, not from the creature, but from the Creator himself. But this sovereignty was not that capricious, arbitrary, unrelenting thing which thousands imagine. It was a sovereignty of *love*; of condescending and infinite compassion. So far from driving sinners to despair, it opened the only door of hope. If depraved and guilty creatures can expect nothing from God, but on the ground of some *claim* which they can offer, their case is wretched indeed. But if his grace is *sovereign*; if it is the simple out-flowing of his own heart, then there is hope; hope for the guiltiest, hope for the most abandoned. The man who has gone peculiar and horrid lengths in sin, may yet be reclaimed and saved. The guilty being who has stood it out to fourscore, against the mercy and the invitations of heaven, needs not utterly despair.

While our fathers held that conversion was unqualifiedly and entirely the gift of God, they held, too, that there was *encouragement* to the awakened sinner, indeed to every class of sinners, to *seek* this infinite mercy. They held that prayer, that the serious reading and hearing of the word, that a diligent and persevering attention to the means of grace generally, was the indispensable duty of all who had souls to be saved, and were not

willing to lose them. They held that in this way, thousands have found mercy, and that thousands more will find it. Still they believed that salvation was *all of grace*. They believed that every saved sinner would ultimately ascribe his awakening, his conviction, his conversion, his faith, his repentance, his sanctification—in a word, his whole salvation, from beginning to end, to the free and superabounding mercy of God.

Of course, those good men had some fixed and definite views respecting the *divine decrees*. How could it be otherwise? They were not cast on a *fatherless world*. They believed in a *providence*, particular as well as general; a providence extending to every being, object and event in this lower world. If, then, God governs the world, he governs it according to a plan; and this plan must have been arranged, in all its particulars, from eternity. If otherwise, how can God be immutable? How can he be immutable, if he does any thing to-day, which he did not purpose to do, from eternity?

And this eternal plan and purpose must doubtless have had special reference to the eternal states of men. Accordingly, the Scripture declares expressly of the saved, that they were “chosen of God in Christ, that they should be holy, and without blame, before him in love;” and that God did “from the beginning choose them to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.” Here, then, let all our inquiries and objections cease. God has spoken. The eternal election of his people is a declared and undeniable fact. So our pious fathers believed; and they believed it on the simple authority of God. Nor did they see any thing *discouraging* in the doctrine. They believed that the door of heaven was as open; that the universal invitations of the gospel were as sincere; that the encouragement to seek salvation was as great; and that the probability that every true and earnest seeker would be a happy finder, was as strong, as though there were no decree at all. Yes, and even stronger. Let us believe with them in all these points. It is certainly safe. If, after all, the subject should appear to any of us encompassed with inexplicable mystery—and to some pious minds it may—let us, at least, resolve with our beloved poet:

But O my soul, if truth so bright
Should dazzle and confound thy sight,
Yet still his written will obey,
And wait the great decisive day.

There is another great doctrine of the gospel, which was peculiarly dear to our pious fathers, and which, though not to

be omitted, must be touched with all possible brevity. I refer to the *atonement of Christ*. According to a modern theory of this doctrine, the sufferings and death of Christ were a kind of *symbolical transaction*, designed to display the holiness of God, and the evil of sin, and to open the way for the sinner's pardon; but still involving no satisfaction of the claims of the divine law on transgressors, and making their pardon a real departure from the regular course of the divine law and justice. The other theory views the sufferings of Christ as strictly *vicarious*; as meeting all the demands of the divine law and justice; and, of course, as making the pardon and salvation of believing sinners, a display of the righteousness of God, not less than of his mercy. The *latter* view of the atonement, I need not say, was maintained in the churches of our country in its earliest and best days. And which of the two theories is most agreeable to the Bible—which is most fitted to answer the anxious inquiries of the awakened mind, and to fill the hearts of Christians with hope, confidence, gratitude, and joy, you will judge for yourselves.*

I might have mentioned one or two other points in the belief of our fathers; and these of fundamental importance. Yet for want of time, they must be barely hinted. The doctrine of *justification by faith*, through the imputed righteousness of Christ, is a doctrine which they cordially embraced, and uniformly maintained. With the great Luther, they viewed it as *the article of a standing or falling church*. The doctrine, likewise, of *the future endless punishment of the wicked*, they considered as most plainly and abundantly taught in the Sacred Oracles. And they considered its rejection as not only subversive of piety, but as opening the way to every species of error, and of practical wickedness; of course, as awfully destructive to the souls of men.

I have thus stated to you, my beloved friends, what was the faith of the pious of former times; and I have exhorted you to *follow* this faith; in other words, to receive, cherish and maintain the same views, substantially, of the doctrines of the gospel.

Give me leave, on this interesting subject, to offer a few reasons. And let me say,—

First. This faith of our pious fathers was the result of deep, deliberate and prayerful *investigation*. Those good men were

* See note A.

not, as some have injuriously supposed, the dupes of bigotry and prejudice. Nor were they the tame and complying followers of every religious guide. No; they had a mind of their own. They had a simple, ardent love of *truth*. *They sought it as silver, and searched for it, as for hidden treasures*. And they sought it at its *home*—the Bible. They familiarized their minds with the Sacred Volume. They richly stored their memories with its great fundamental principles. These principles they employed as a standard, a test, by which to try all doctrines, and thus were secured from fundamental error. For, be it remembered, they *studied the Bible on their knees*. Distrusting their own understandings, they sought light from the *Father of lights*. And he who gives liberally to all, gave liberally to them.

Next to the Bible, those good men consulted, in their searches after truth, the best of *human* productions; particularly, the writings of the puritans and non-conformists; of Hall and Reynolds; of Owen, Bates, Baxter, Howe and Flavel. Who needs be told that theirs was the *golden age* of theology? Who needs be told that these writers plunged into the very depths of Scripture, and brought forth the truths of God in all their purity, their lustre, their harmony, their beauty, and their practical effect. It was safe to follow such guides; not indeed implicitly and blindly, but with a generous confidence. In familiarizing themselves with their pages, our fathers found their minds instructed, their consciences quickened, their souls nourished, and their hopes of heaven confirmed. They found, too, a safe and salutary guide for their whole temper and practice. This furnishes

A second argument for following the faith of our fathers. The views which they entertained of scriptural doctrines were eminently purifying and practical. They gave birth and nourishment to a *religion* the best which the world has seen since apostolic times. Here I would speak with caution. I would shun the weakness attributed by Horace to the old man; that of fondly eulogizing the times that are past. I do not believe that in our time, piety is extinct; that pure religion has taken its flight from the world. It is my happiness to know great numbers of Christians, and of ministers, whose characters would be approved by the Apostles, and by the Saviour himself. I admit, too, that among the saints of past days, there was a great mixture, and a great variety of attainment; and not only so, but that the very best of them, deeply conscious of their own defects, would have blushed at their own praise. But

after all these admissions, may it not be maintained, that in a great portion of those fathers, there was a depth, an eminence, a *finish* of piety, which constitutes at once the example and reproof of the present age?—They gave days and nights to the study of the Bible. They attributed more importance, and devoted more time, to *secret prayer*, than is common at the present day. They *remembered the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*. All its employments, its reading, and its conversation bore the stamp of heaven. They had their *Sabbath schools*, too, of the best kind; schools in which parents were the teachers, and in which the truths and precepts of religion were poured into attentive minds, from warm and overflowing hearts. They were strangers to those various *amusements* in which many professors of the present day indulge; and had they been offered, it would have been to them, much less a self-denial to *abstain*, than to indulge; for their hearts were occupied with greater and nobler objects. They were strangers, too, to those various *associations* for promoting reformation and improvement at home, and for evangelizing the wide world, in which Christians are now engaged. These associations are a kind of modern invention. But their hearts eagerly grasped at the same sublime objects; and were they now alive, they would doubtless seek their accomplishment with the same zeal, and with equal wisdom; though not always, perhaps, through the same modes and measures. In a word; those good men were examples of all the *human* virtues. Their hearts glowed with benevolence. Their faces shone with benignity. They intensely loved their fellow-Christians. They loved mankind. They loved their enemies. They could overcome evil with good. They were ready to every good word and work. They were anxious, each in his humble sphere, that the world should be the better for his having lived in it.

It is generally admitted that the best test of truth is its moral and practical influence. The purest, strictest orthodoxy, swimming solitarily in the head, is a worthless thing. But we may safely and profitably *follow the faith* of those whose religious views and principles have produced the substantial fruits of eminent piety and virtue—have rendered them the consistent, devoted friends of God and man.

Again; let us follow their faith, *considering the end of their conversation*. Here is a sublime and inspiring idea. Who can doubt that those who, while here, sat at the feet of Jesus, received his instructions, imbibed and exhibited his spirit, and bore his lovely image, are now in his immediate and beatific

presence? Who can doubt that those who walked with him in this wilderness, are walking with him in glory? Who can doubt that those who shone with his light on earth, are now shining with the brightness of the firmament in other worlds? And how are their minds penetrated, and filled, and enraptured with those truths which began to dawn upon them here. How are they strengthened to gaze at those mysteries which here were too dazzling for their feeble sight. And what do they think of their conflicts in their Saviour's cause; of the power which gave them the victory, and of the crown of glory which they now wear? Do they not look down with interest on their fellow-saints on earth, assuring them that with *them*, too, the conflict will soon be past, and the victory won?

My brethren; these are no fictions of the mind, but solid truths; divine realities. Let us open our hearts to their inspiring influence. Let them arm us with courage for the Christian conflict. Let us follow the faith of those departed saints, and we shall soon share their felicities, and unite in their everlasting songs.

Superadded to these sublime motives, there are still other considerations which should stimulate our zeal and fidelity. From the truths which our fathers loved, and which—suffer me to say—they now love more than ever, there have been *great and lamentable defections*. Who that looks over the state of our churches, can doubt it? Are not the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel less understood, less prized, less cherished, and (must it be added?) less preached, than in the days that are past? Do not many Christian professors content themselves with very superficial views of these doctrines, while, at the same time, their bearings are scarcely perceived, and their practical influence little felt? Are there not churches, with orthodox creeds, many of whose members would be disgusted with a distinct and lucid exhibition from the desk, of the very doctrines to which they have given their solemn assent? Is there not another class of hearers, who, with a kind of rabid appetite for what is new and startling, declare their *contempt* even for the undisputed truths of the gospel, as stale, uninteresting, worn-out things?

One fact there is, which conclusively proves the *indifference*, at least, of many professing Christians to the doctrines of the gospel. When a new preacher has appeared in a place, the remarks of private circles are generally confined—to what? His talents, his powers of thought, and reasoning, and imagination, his delivery; perhaps to his person, his dress, his voice,

his air, his attitude. The old-fashioned question, Did he preach the gospel; did he declare the truth?—is not so much as mooted.

If a church is vacant, and a young man is presented as a candidate for its suffrages, what is the point on which these suffrages often turn? Is it his faithfully declaring the simple, heart-searching, soul-humbling truths of the gospel? Alas, not at all. Too often, no demand is made for any thing of the kind. If, on a single Sabbath, or perhaps in a single sermon, he appears to possess talent, and power, and eloquence, the point is settled, and he receives the charge of undying souls. Will it be denied that this is a frequent case?

Will it be denied, that scores of sermons are preached, in which the old-fashioned phrases, *depravity, regeneration, conversion, atonement*, are carefully retained, while not a single doctrine is inculcated, which answers to these well known and long current phrases? Yet no new religion is intended to be introduced. Nothing but a new *philosophy* of religion. The form and features remain. Yes, they remain. Nothing at all is wanting, but the heart, and the soul.*

Still, in one point, there is, in many instances, an acknowledged novelty in the modern teaching. It inculcates, confessedly, a new species of religion—a religion built on *self-love*—a religion animated throughout by self-love. Yes; this religion, unknown to the Bible, unknown to our pious fathers, proscribed by the great Edwards as the very essence of delusion, and the direct road to ruin, is now very extensively taught as the true religion.

I will offer no farther evidence, at present, of a sad defection in our religious community, from the doctrines held sacred and precious by our fathers. But faithfulness to the subject, to myself, and to you, my beloved hearers, constrains me to declare that *we are in danger of still greater and more alarming defections still*. Of this, the proof is but too easy.

The road of error, as of vice, is *down-hill*. It has been already stated that, in our times, words have assumed a new meaning; that new and erroneous doctrines are inculcated under the garb of old and accredited phrases. If this be the fact, how obvious is it, that our churches may be led to adopt a new creed, and a new religion, without so much as *suspecting* it. In respect to dangerous and destructive error, they may find themselves at the bottom of the hill, before they

have consciously commenced a descent. Look back, my hearers, at the state of religious belief in our churches, as it was thirty years since; contemplate what it is at present; and then, if you have the courage for it, ask what it will too probably be in thirty years to come. Long before that time, many of your heads, like my own, will lie in dust. But can we bear the thought, that these regions, once the abode of truth and piety, shall become the scenes of overspreading, overwhelming error, and irreligion, and vice? Shall these churches, once beautified and blest with the Saviour's image, and the Saviour's presence, be abandoned by heaven, and become the bane, not the blessing, of our beloved country?

Look at Germany; the birth-place of Luther; the cradle of the Reformation; the abode, for ages, of great and pious ministers, of pure churches, of truth-loving and ardent Christians. Who would not have hoped that this distinguished country would have continued, for many an auspicious century, the blessing of Europe, the light of the world, the champion of pure and primitive Christianity?

And what is Germany now? The seat of learning, of science, of philosophy, of metaphysics, of boundless investigation and discussion, of religious theories without number, of expositions of Scripture without end—the seat of every thing, in short, but truth, and reason, and common sense. If there is a country on earth, in which philosophy, breaking away from the Bible, has pre-eminently displayed its weakness and folly, it is Germany. If there is a spot on the globe which has been a *radiating point of darkness* and error; of false religion, false and corrupting morality, and universal skepticism, it is Germany.

With truth it may be said, that there is not a doctrine of the Bible, from its first to its last page, which has not been, by scores of its learned men, distorted, denied, vilified, and held up to the public scorn. With equal truth it may be said, that there is not an error which has infected the church, from its earliest birth till now, which has not been gravely defended by scores of its clergy; men who have even put to the blush the absurdities of former ages, by still greater absurdities of their own invention.

But can there be any danger of such awful degeneracy and corruption among ourselves?—My brethren, let us not shut our eyes. There is real and great danger. The very writings which have been described have already found admission to our country, have received a wide circulation, and are eagerly de-

* See note B.

voured by thousands of readers. The minds of multitudes of theological students have come into contact with them; and not a few have imbibed the sweet poison. Others, it may be hoped, have remained uncontaminated. But is there no danger in breathing infected air?

It is often suggested that many German writers, possessed of fine powers and great learning, exhibit likewise a portion of orthodoxy, together with the substantial of piety. It is said, likewise, that in the case of many of these writers, there is a great retrocession from errors which have long prevailed in that country. Let these facts be admitted, and let them be rejoiced in. But the question still arises: Is the dimness of twilight to be preferred to the splendor of day? Or must we gravely plunge into twilight, in order to reach that day which shone upon us long before a single ray of light from modern Germany had dawned upon our land?*

It cannot be denied that in the best of the writers referred to, there are generally found notions too indistinct and vacillating, of essential gospel doctrines. We may give them the praise, of great and varied learning; of refined thought; often of tender, and apparently pious sentiment. But for clear and accurate statements of Christian doctrine, we ordinarily look to them in vain. Generally, too, they are indecisive, at best, in regard to the proper and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. And here, in this very spot, is found the baneful and productive source of most of the errors and heresies which prevail throughout our country. The minds of our people have broken loose from the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. And what is the consequence? Truths, doctrines, which beam from their pages with overpowering light, are by thousands doubted, or disbelieved, or ridiculed, or set at defiance.

And what, my hearers, if the same experiment which has been made in Germany, should be repeated in our own country? What if our Theological Seminaries, (and I say it with grief, it is in theological seminaries that error and heresy have been apt to commence their deleterious course,) what, I say, if our Theological Seminaries should become scenes of heresy—fountains of error—schools in which every thing shall be taught, rather than the pure, unadulterated doctrines of the gospel?—Most of these seminaries, it is believed, are furnished with scriptural and orthodox creeds.† But what if their in-

* See note C. † See note D.

structors should turn their back on those creeds? What if, by a strange hallucination, they should think it right to inculcate doctrines essentially diverse from those which they have solemnly professed to believe, and promised to teach? And what if their pupils should come forth to the churches, surcharged with learned error, with false philosophy, false metaphysics, false theology; and teaching every thing but the pure doctrines of the word of God? What hope could we then indulge for our country, for the Church of God, for the souls of men, for the cause of pure religion?*

We advance, then, to a new thought. *Unless we return to the faith of our fathers, the pure faith of the gospel, the interests of vital and practical piety must languish and die.* Truth and piety have a natural connection. God has joined them. Every attempt to separate them must be at once impious and abortive. There is a *world* of instruction in our Saviour's prayer, *Sanctify them through thy truth.* It is the truth, and not error, that sanctifies. Wherever, by an individual, or a church, or a community, the truth is unknown, or forgotten, or disregarded, or trampled down, *there*, as surely as night follows day, a countless host of evils will enter. Insensibility, worldliness, impiety, neglect of God, of Christ, of prayer, of the soul, of eternity, will soon make themselves manifest.

The reasons of this may be easily assigned. If God has distinctly declared to his ministers, what doctrines they shall deliver, and these doctrines are actually preached, it may be hoped that he will sanction and seal such preaching by the accompanying influences of his Holy Spirit. This is natural. And this is ordinarily the fact. Rarely is the gospel preached in its purity, without some saving effect. But what if the gospel be withheld? Or what if it be mixed and corrupted?—and all human mixtures are corruptions. Can a blessing be expected in such a case? Will the Most High solemnly prescribe to his ministers the doctrines they shall preach, and will he sanction, by the influences of his Holy Spirit, doctrines materially diverse. It would be wonderful indeed if he did.

The matter may be considered in another view. The doctrines we have briefly detailed to-day, exhibit man not only as a sinner, but as in himself, wholly lost, undone and helpless. They lay him at the footstool of sovereign mercy. Without

* See note E.

the interpositions of that mercy, he is undone—undone forever. These, my dear hearers, are the doctrines which break the slumbers of the human intellect, and lay a strong grasp on the inmost heart. All other doctrines are feeble and inefficient. We may preach our own fancies, and our hearers may be amused. But they will be neither sanctified nor saved. They will not even be greatly interested or alarmed. Human depravity, human pride and stupidity, strong in their intrenchments, will laugh at our puny assaults. While the pure doctrines of the gospel, simply delivered, will, by the grace of heaven, arouse the conscience, subdue the heart, and save the soul.

That religion, at the present day, is deplorably sunk; that a great portion of Christian professors seem half asleep; and that conversions have become great rarities—these things are generally confessed. The *causes* of this lamentable state of things are sometimes inquired for. And is it not strange, that in assigning these causes, the *principal* cause is so often overlooked?—I mean a prevailing and increasing neglect of the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel. How vague and superficial, not to say, how perverse and false, are the views of thousands of professing Christians on this subject. In an age of boasted illumination, every thing engrosses attention, every thing is investigated and understood, excepting that only for which we were made, and on which our eternity depends. If this awful defect is to be traced to ministers; if, in the pulpit, the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel are rarely introduced, or imperfectly developed, or feebly enforced, then is our guilt great indeed; and awful will be our account before our final Judge. And great is the guilt of our hearers, if they turn in disgust from these doctrines when delivered; or give them no marked attention; or suffer them soon to fade from their minds; or prefer to them the generalities which flatter, or the novelties which amuse, or the errors which destroy.

On one point, I must be indulged a free remark. Much is said and preached, in our day, on the subject of men's *natural ability*. And the object probably is, to deprive them of all excuse for neglecting their souls and religion. But many hearers, not comprehending the philosophical distinction, turn from it in disgust, and from whatever of gospel truth may be connected with it. Many others accept the *flattering unction*; and learning that they can *change their own hearts*, if they please, resolve to do this disagreeable work *when* they please; that is, at a future time; a time that, with most, never comes.

Thus, by a philosophical subtilty, not to say, a gross error, the soul is lost.

On the whole, we may set it down as an unquestionable truth, that until we return to the faith of our fathers; to the pure, unsophisticated doctrines of the gospel, little can be hoped in favor of religion. Indeed, of the real religion which remains among us, a great portion is the fruit of those old-fashioned, neglected doctrines; and not of the superficial and modish opinions, which have usurped their place. We have been living, in short, on the fair inheritance which our fathers have left us, and have done little, too little, to recruit and perpetuate it. Yet what of evil may we not anticipate, if it shall continue to waste away? The new doctrines have hard and hopeless work, in conflicting with the *ordinary* depravity of the human heart. What then will they do in these times, when all minds are afloat; when infidelity, skepticism, and gigantic error rush in like a flood; and when an ocean of worldliness and fashionable vice threatens to engulf our whole community?

Yet, blessed be God! there is a *remnant*. There are a *few names in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments*. Let them stand up, an unbroken phalanx, under the banners of their Saviour. Let them feel their strength; for God is their strength. Let them unite their counsels, their efforts, and their prayers, in defence of God's eternal truth, and in opposition to abounding error and sin. Let no means be left untried, by which pure religion may be resuscitated and advanced. Let this be done, and we need not despair. Let this be done, and HOPE, like lightning in midnight, will arise in our darkness, and shed its reviving beams around us. God himself will prosper, by his omnipotence, a cause so signally his own. The divine Saviour will revisit and cheer his mourning churches. The Holy Spirit will descend, and shed his richest influences around us. The solitary places of our Zion shall be made glad, and our spiritual wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

NOTES.

Note A. Page 10.

The doctrine of *atonement* is so fundamental in the gospel, and so vital in religion, that every mistake respecting it must be viewed as full of evil and danger. Painful, therefore, as the subject is, I feel it a duty to expand, somewhat, the brief statement which has been made. Strange as it may seem, it has been contended that the sufferings of Christ involved no infliction of the penalty of the law. On the contrary, they were a *substitute* for this infliction. The satisfaction made by those sufferings, was made, not to the *distributive* justice of God, but to his *general* justice. His distributive justice, as expressed in the law, has received no satisfaction at all. And this representation, so repulsive, is supported by another, still more repulsive; namely, that though God is bound to fulfil his *promises*, he is not bound to execute his *threatenings*.

Could it only be said that these views have no support from Scripture, this were surely sufficient for their refutation. But more than this is true. The Scripture indignantly frowns upon them. The great Apostle rejects them with horror. Having explained the mode of the sinner's pardon and justification through the atonement and righteousness of Christ, he puts the question: "Do we then *make void* the law through faith?" And he replies: "God forbid; yea, we *establish* the law."

But let us listen to the Saviour himself, who certainly understood the design of his interposition and advent. "Think not," he says, "that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." His atonement, then, was not a *substitute* for the execution of the law. His obedience and sufferings were, in substance, a fulfilment of its precept, and its penalty. They opened the way for our salvation, not, as has been strangely said, by leaving the claims of the law forever unsatisfied, but in perfect accordance with the immutable principles and demands of the divine law and justice.

The theory in view is as unnatural and unphilosophical, as it is unscriptural. It represents the sufferings of Christ—to whom it denies the character of a *Surety*—as exhibiting to the universe the infinite evil of sin, and God's unalterable determination to punish it. Men

and angels are to be taught to revere the law, and expect the infliction of its penalty upon every transgressor. And how is this lesson inculcated? By inflicting unparalleled sufferings on one who never transgressed the law, but perfectly obeyed it—on a Being of spotless innocence, and divine dignity. In this way we are to learn that God is the immutable friend of righteousness, and the enemy of nothing but sin!

Another objection presses on this theory, and that of the most appalling nature. If the Most High, though bound to fulfil his promises, is not bound to execute his threatenings, where is the evidence that the impenitent sinner will be finally punished, especially that he will be punished everlastingly? On this theory, may he not hope, and confidently expect, final impunity and salvation? On this theory, are not the holiness and justice of God effectually abolished? Is not his truth denied? Is not his law abrogated? Does not Christ himself become the *minister of sin*?

Note B. Page 14.

There is a question naturally arising to the thoughtful mind, and which surely claims a reply. Why is it, that in *religion*, there should be admitted, a vagueness, an ambiguity of language, which in most other cases, is deemed inadmissible? The advocate in a judicial court, for instance, is required to use words in a precise sense, avoiding all that is ambiguous, or equivocal. Pursuing a contrary course, he is deemed a driveller, or perhaps condemned to silence. Shall the temporal interests of mankind be thus scrupulously guarded, and shall the concerns of the undying soul be trifled with? When did the GREAT TEACHER utter himself, but in terms of crystalline clearness? Shall those who teach in his name, envelope themselves and their hearers in obscurity? Shall they, instead of leading their hearers into the broad light of gospel day, involve them in the endless labyrinths of spurious metaphysics, and of a theology divorced from the Bible? Is there not in the English language, an *affluence* which furnishes to every idea an appropriate expression? Shall clear and intelligible instruction be given on every subject but that which is infinitely the most momentous of all?

Note C. Page 16.

In my remarks on modern German writers, it is not my wish to exclude a single particle of light beaming, from any source, on the Sacred Scriptures. To many of these writers I readily concede the praise of much labor and learning, in the departments of history, geography, languages, criticism, etc. Still, if in the eager pursuit of these species of knowledge, our young men, the hope of the churches, should be insensibly beguiled of the simplicity of gospel truth, the loss would be great and irreparable indeed. And is there no danger

in the case? Are these not facts which justify the most painful apprehensions? When young and incautious minds are brought into frequent contact with writers of much learning and much power, but yielding little deference to the authority of God's word, is it not natural is it not almost inevitable, that their faith should be insensibly shaken?

But on this subject, I wish not to enlarge. I would, however, simply suggest, as arising out of it, two inquiries, not wholly unworthy of attention. Is not the value and importance of German religious literature apt to be overrated? Are not its advantages often gained at a disproportionate expense?

Indeed, when we find one of the most admired of German writers (Neander) gravely speaking of *new intellectual necessities as developed by the German mind*; and when it is considered that one of these intellectual necessities is that of *distinguishing what is divine from what is human in the gospel record*, must not the Christians of America take the alarm? Who can tell how soon the *intellectual necessities of the German mind* may demand the exclusion of *every thing divine* from the gospel record? Indeed, this is already the fact, if we may judge from the writings of a great proportion of German theologians. Nor will it be denied that numbers of young men in our own country, once promising and hopefully pious, once apparently destined to shine as Christian ministers, have, by familiarity with these writings, been plunged in the vortex of skepticism and infidelity.

Note D. Page 16.

I have no bigoted attachment to creeds. Nor will I contend that the man who has taken a lengthened creed, should be trammelled by all the *minutiae* which it may embrace. But no one will deny that such an one is bound to adhere to those articles which, according to the verdict of common sense, belong to the class of first and fundamental principles. Least of all may it be expected that those who have themselves solemnly assented to a creed, and perhaps repeatedly, will treat the subject of creeds with reproach and contempt.

Note E. Page 17.

Should an apology be thought necessary for my free suggestions respecting theological seminaries, my apology, or rather my *justification*, is at hand. The same apprehensions were entertained and freely expressed, twenty years since, by the venerable and lamented Dr. Porter. In a sermon, preached at the dedication of the Chapel erected for the use of the Theological Seminary in Andover, he utters his thoughts and feelings in these terms:

"We must not imagine that this Institution is free from danger, because it is the object of our own affections and vigilance. While we view its prosperity with cheering anticipations, let us 'rejoice with

trembling.' That the utmost latitude of inquiry should be encouraged here, is essential to our main business. The students must of course be familiar with *error*, in all its forms; error as defended by its ablest champions; error as concealed by the subtlety of scholastic refinement, and associated with all the attractions of genius and erudition. Besides, every human heart is 'deceitful above all things.' Where then is our certainty of exemption from the dangers that await us? In the strength of our own powers? In the elevated motives of our Founders? In the safeguards of our constitution? Where are *other seminaries*, which wisdom encompassed with its precautions, and piety consecrated to Christ and the Church? Have we forgotten—can we forget the awful lesson furnished to Christendom, from the school of Doddridge?—from the schools of Scotland, of Geneva, and of Germany? No, brethren, we are not safe, without the presence of God. If he withdraws, the spirit of piety will decline here. Instructors and students will neglect their closets. The pure word of God will be adulterated by unhallowed and adventurous speculations; and this fountain will diffuse streams of pollution and death. And is it possible that a day may come, when these lecture-rooms, and this library, will be converted into instruments of hostility to the truth? When these avenues will be trodden by feet that are strangers to the way of holiness? And this Chapel and this Pulpit be occupied by men who 'deny the Lord that bought them?' Our bosoms throb at the thought, that it is possible. But, *should* such a day come, the friend of Jesus, instead of lingering with delight, as he passes this hill of Zion, will cast a weeping eye at this Institution, the offspring of faith and prayer, forsaken of heaven. The graves of its Benefactors will testify against it. The winds that sweep over these rocks and groves, will testify against it. The prayers, and vows, and tears of this day, will testify against it: and God will inscribe, in broad characters, on the walls of this Temple, THE GLORY IS DEPARTED."

It will not be contended that Dr. Porter was a gloomy bigot; a prophet only of evil. He uttered, on this occasion, the words of truth and soberness; the natural apprehensions of an enlightened mind, and a heart awake to the interests and the dangers of a cherished Seminary.

In another part of the same discourse, there is a short passage, full of significance.

"The Professors of this Institution," he says, "assent to the creed of its Founders, not as a ceremony of induction into office; not because it was, substantially, the creed of the great Reformers, and of the New England fathers; but because, in their view, it accords with the word of God. They are at perfect liberty to renounce these opinions, and embrace others; but in that case, they are bound, as honest and honorable men, to relinquish their present station."

The last suggestion of this passage was worthy of the tender conscience, and the noble heart of Dr. Porter. It must find a response of approbation in every reflecting mind.

The question whether a Professor in a Theological Seminary is bound to conform his instructions to the creed he has taken, and the solemn promises he has made, is a question of easy solution. The obligation of a witness in a legal court, to declare the truth, which he has solemnly sworn to declare, is not plainer or stronger. He owes it to himself, as he would maintain the character of an honest and good man. He owes it to the Founders, by whose bounty he is supported,