

THE  
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Communications.

*Divine Punishment.*

The candid inquirer after truth, must see at once the difference in opinion that exists among those who claim the same general name—that of Christian. To search after truth, and embrace it when found, should be the earnest desire and employment of all who assume the name of Christ. In these days of modern improvements in Christianity, when *doubt* holds her leaden sceptre over both reason and revelation, when truth is left unsought, when by bold assertion and critical dexterity it is evaded or concealed; it would appear necessary for those who have embraced Christ, the king of truth, not to act like Pilate the Roman governor, who, when Jesus Christ stood before him, accused of perverting the word of God, asked, what is truth? But waited not to hear the answer from the lips of the God of truth.

As it appears to comport with the design of the Presbyterian Magazine, as exhibited by the prospectus of that work—one of the conductors, as time and opportunity may offer, intends to avail himself of this channel, to state some scriptural truths which seem to be controverted by some. This shall be done without either the desire or design of exciting controversy, but only to establish believers in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in the essential doctrines of the gospel.

VOL. I.

We would inquire, in what character God punishes sin. That God is a sovereign is verified in every page of inspiration, and the great volume of *nature* attests this fact. His dominion is universal and illimitable. In all his works *greatness* in conjunction with *goodness*, strikes our view, and wherever we see the parent, we behold also the legislator. Jehovah is a benefactor in whom we have reason to rejoice, whose purposes are gracious, whose *law* is the plan of our happiness. Every good and perfect gift comes down from him. But the hand that confers them we cannot see. Mysterious obscurity rests upon his essence. And further than he reveals himself we cannot know him.

Now as he is a sovereign, it does not appear from nature or revelation, that God uniformly acts as a sovereign; for many of his works must be attributed to him under another relation. He is revealed to us, under the endearing title of father—as a king—frequently as an unlimited sovereign—and often as a judge and ruler.

To assign all to God under one relation, or give to him under a wrong relation, those things which belong to him in another, is to confound the truths of the word of God. This leads to many mistakes, and occasions errors of the grossest kind. How necessary is it, that we have correct apprehensions of the true character of him, who claims our worship, and of that part of his character in which he

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and then deny the necessity of any atonement by Jesus Christ, for sin, as the substitute and surety of sinners. But the necessity of punishment, and that of atonement and satisfaction made by Jesus Christ, as God man mediator, can be maintained and defended by other reasons. It is admitted by some of those who assert, that God punishes as a sovereign lord, who is injured and demands the punishment; that there are cases, in which the party injured cannot omit to take vengeance, that is, when his honour is affected. Now the least sin dishonours God, who is absolutely perfect. But can we, or dare we, measure the perfect dealings of the perfect Jehovah, by that standard which sinful man assumes for his mode of judging and acting towards his fellow creature man? It is assumed among men of this cast, that the right of punishment belongs to the person injured, and by parity of reasoning, to God, as injured or insulted by sin. This they take for granted, while it yet remains to be proved, that man executes, or can execute proper punishment on his fellow: besides it is not correct to say, that the right of punishment, among men, belongs to the party injured as such.

For the wrong done gives no greater right to the injured, than in proportion to the wrong done him; that is, to simple reparation, which is very different from punishment. It follows, that punishment with men, concerns the ruler and judge as such; therefore when properly viewed, can be ascribed to God under no relation, but that of a ruler and judge. That the right to punish sin or for sin, belongs to God; that he is dishonoured by sin as a law-giver, is admitted on both sides. But under what character or relation God punishes, whether as an absolute sovereign, the party injured, and having a right to demand punishment—or whether only as a ruler and a judge, is the point in dis-

pute. The former is asserted by our opponents—the latter is maintained by all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, into whose hand all judgment is committed, and who will judge a righteous judgment.

G. C. P.

### *Thoughts on Lay Preaching.*

The Christian world, in the present auspicious period, exhibits a system of operations which is characterized by singularity as well as by importance. The apathy of years is shaken off; an unprecedented impulse has been given to hitherto slumbering energies; and a feeling has been transfused through the community, which affords a promise of glorious events. Christian ingenuity has devised and Christian exertion is executing multifarious and magnificent plans for the diffusion of gospel truth. Whatever has a tendency to accomplish prophecy, by the enlargement of the Mediator's kingdom, is now become deeply interesting to believers, and finds in them powerful advocates; all appear prepared, to proffer their aid and enlist their resources on the side of God against the mighty.

The spirit that breathes through all these active and diversified operations, we exceedingly applaud, as well becoming the Christian character; and we should regret, in any measure, to lower the tone which has been imparted, or to subtract from the efficiency of the force, which has been engaged. We love to see combined and individual exertions, where the glory of Christ is the aim.

Yet we do believe, that there may be an agency exerted with the purest intentions to spread the gospel, and which may appear sanctified by its success, which is nevertheless contrary to scripture authority, and therefore to be discountenanced.

Such an agency, in our apprehension, is *Lay Preaching*.

We are aware that the ground, upon which we tread, is delicate; yet we are equally aware, that through false delicacy, it has too long remained undisputed. We have not the slightest desire to curtail the prerogatives of our lay-brethren, whom we cordially acknowledge as fellow labourers with us, in the gospel of Jesus Christ; yet we have some reason to fear their overstepping a proper boundary. We do not institute this as a criminal charge; but we do esteem it an effect of indiscreet zeal.

There can be no doubt, that many who are included under the denomination of lay preachers, are influenced by the holy desire of contributing their exertions, to the mass already employed, for the diffusion of truth; yet is it not possible that their ardour may betray itself under an unwarrantable aspect? We think it is possible; we apprehend it is certain, that it has thus appeared.

It is not our intention to enter into an elaborate examination of this question, but merely to offer a few considerations, by way of arousing more general attention to the subject.

By a peculiar and happy arrangement of Providence, every man has a particular sphere assigned him, in which he may lawfully and effectually labour in the cause of the gospel. There is no individual, however lowly his station, or however limited his influence and unpretending his talents, who does not possess a certain power of promoting the spiritual interests of his fellow men. But whilst this is true on the one hand, it is equally true on the other, that if a man trespass beyond his proper sphere, his movements become eccentric, and have a tendency to introduce disorder through the whole system. This is universally true; but in a very particular manner it is true, in relation to the affairs of the church of Christ. If the order of civil society depends upon variety in office; much more do the

peace and order of the church depend upon every man operating in his own sphere:—if all civilians cannot be governors or judges, all Christians cannot be preachers.

That governmental policy would be miserable and ruinous, which would permit all men without distinction to occupy its offices of trust and responsibility; and equally indiscreet would be the policy of a church, which should throw open a door for the admission of all Christians to the functions of the ministry, without an inquiry into their qualifications—their prudence, their piety, their aptness to teach.

If it would be improper then for a church to give such an extensive warrant; it is certainly improper for individuals to act, as if on the assumption, that such a warrant had been given.

The ministry is an ordinance of God; this is a fact, denied only by schismatics. This institution is connected with every circumstance of solemnity and responsibility; it is an established means of God for the conversion of sinners, and hence its duties are not lightly to be infringed.

The authority to exercise the functions of this office can only be communicated by those who already possess that authority. The apostles who received an extraordinary call to the ministry, did, by a particular ceremony, communicate ministerial authority to those who were to take part with them in the work; and it is by an imitation of their example, that a regular succession of gospel ministers has been preserved in the church. None but the lawless and disorderly will deny that a succession in the ministry is to be preserved in this way; that ministers of the gospel *alone* have authority to admit others to be co-workers with them, to the whole extent of ministerial duty. Who would not shudder to see an individual administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, who had not received authority by an ecclesi-

astical act? Yet it is somewhat strange, that many who would consider the act of administering the sacraments without proper authority, as a violation of an ordinance of God, an infringement of ecclesiastical order, and as a procedure highly dangerous to the church of Christ; do not hesitate to assume the office of public teachers, although this is a principal and peculiar duty of the gospel minister. The commission is, *preach*—then *baptize*; preaching has the precedence; it is intended for the conversion of sinners; the sacraments are principally designed for their strengthening and consolation after they have become Christians; and hence more seems to depend on the one than on the other. If then, all men may preach without ecclesiastical authority, why not baptize? Surely if our feelings justify us in doing the one, they should not be alarmed in proceeding a little further.

In our opinion, the one is as much an infringement of the peculiar functions of the ministry, as the other would be, and manifests as much looseness of principle.

Every intelligent Christian will acknowledge, that the prosperity of the church essentially depends upon the ability of its teachers. This ability consists not merely in piety, but in an "aptness to teach." A minister of the gospel should possess peculiar qualifications; he should have natural talents, and these properly cultivated by education.

All acknowledge the necessity of an apprenticeship, before a man can be fitted for the professional duties of an ordinary mechanical employment; and will we deny the necessity of an appropriate education to fit men for preaching the gospel? The thought is dishonour to that gospel.

The deeply important doctrines of this system are not to be declared by every novice who imagines he possesses ability to teach. Human literature is essential to a faithful

and edifying ministry, and this fact has been abundantly corroborated by the past experience of the church. We ask then, who are to judge whether an individual possesses qualifications for a teacher in the church of Christ? Certainly not himself; for his judgment would be partial; but unquestionably those, who are recommended by their experience in the discharge of the duties of the holy office.

This plain truth, however, is denied by lay preachers, who take the liberty of judging for themselves, and who most generally judge ignorantly.

We willingly concede, that there are some, who, preaching without authority, are nevertheless calculated by their talents to do much service to the body of Christ in the regular ministry; but this very circumstance is an aggravation of their trespass; for they thereby manifest marked contempt of ecclesiastical discipline, through which a proper authority might be obtained. They do more; they establish a precedent highly dangerous; they encourage others who are deficient in every necessary acquirement, to follow in their footsteps, who, by way of apology for their deficiencies, decry a learned ministry, and endeavour to bring it into contempt.

Ignorance of every thing calculated to add honour to the sacred office, in connexion with a species of religious wild fire, are the only furniture of multitudes who presume to bear the hallowed ark. Many esteem it their duty to become self-constituted public teachers, when totally unable to account for the impression they have received; they have a vague notion that they have received a call, although that call has no foundation in reason. Now we say that the man who urges his spiritual call to preach, when destitute of necessary human learning, is a fanatic, and is to be avoided as a disturber of the church of Christ. We are not, at the pre-

sent day, to calculate upon an extraordinary and miraculous effusion of the Spirit: but if in the ministry, we would not cherish a presumptuous hope of success, we must give ourselves wholly to these things. A blessing can reasonably be expected only upon a proper application of human exertion. Many, however, in a very bad sense, would draw the bow at a venture, and calculate largely upon an assistance from God, which God has never promised.

Lay preaching has a further tendency to diffuse the most erroneous notions respecting the nature of the gospel ministry. There is a great mass of ignorance in the world, and no inconsiderable portion manifested even by many pious, well intentioned persons. They judge chiefly from the appearance of things, and inquire not into their reasons. Among such, lay preaching is generally confined, and as commonly produces on their minds the impression, that any individual is invested with a right to preach, who possesses what they style a *gift*; that is, a ready utterance, no matter how undigested, crude, and even false, his sentiments.

This is dangerous, inasmuch as it levels the barrier, which the scripture interposes, between the regularly constituted ministry, and that class who should be only hearers; as it throws open the floodgates of error, ignorance and schism; and finally as it tends to excite among the unenlightened, an utter disrespect for God's own ordinance.

Such consequences are to be deprecated by every lover of the cause of Christ; for in proportion as the respect which is due to the ministry is obliterated, its success is affected.

These remarks are not the result of a mere *esprit du corps*, but of a solid conviction that vital godliness is endangered by the practice opposed.

The ministry, however, is not the only sufferer. A great proportion of those who obtrude themselves

upon the world as religious teachers, as far as our knowledge extends, are youth, whose piety we have no reason to question, but whose prudence and good sense we altogether question; and these hazard much by their conduct.

Let us instance a youth, whose religious sensibilities have been considerably excited; yet whose means of improvement in general literature, have been limited; commencing, perhaps, from a conviction of duty, the practice we are combating: let us view him, flattered by the applause of the ignorant, among whom he makes his first essay, and whose admiration is easily won, and we ask, is he not in danger of contemplating himself with inordinate self-complacency? Will he not soon imagine, that in every respect, he is accomplished for the work? And having thus deceived himself, will he not proceed more confidently in his expositions of the word of God, however wide of the truth, and thus deceive others?

This may be expected; for as knowledge tends to humble a man, ignorance inflates him with self-conceit.

The evil ends not here; he institutes a comparison favourable to himself, in which he imagines, that independently of study, he excels those "who labour in word and doctrine;" and thus his ardour having betrayed him into ambition, his ambition excites in him presumption.

But to all this it may be replied, God has given his seal of approbation to this practice, by blessing it to the conversion of souls. Let us for a moment grant, that the good effects of it have been manifested in numberless instances; does this fact afford a just and infallible criterion by which to decide upon the legality of the means employed? As a general rule, does the end justify the instrument? Who will hazard the assertion? God, who acts as a sovereign, frequently employs a reprobate instrument in the accom-

plishment of his purposes. An ungodly minister may be eminently useful; but do the effects produced by his ministry, sanctify his instrumentality?

Now it can be demonstrated, although *we* may not have produced conviction, that lay preaching is an instrumentality directly opposed to an ordinance of God, and consequently is radically illegal; so that the supposed good effects resulting from it can never alter its character.

But we assume higher ground. We deny the good effects so strenuously pleaded. Let it be understood, we speak in the general, not denying that there have been instances of permanent good from this instrumentality. Lay preachers, as it was before intimated, and as any man knows, who has any knowledge of the subject, are generally illiterate, and as such, they may rant and declaim, but they will not bear a message of intelligence. And if there be no knowledge in the preacher, there will be none among hearers, who depend on his ministrations for instruction in righteousness. The amount then of their labour is this; they arouse the feelings and leave the mind under its original obscurity; or in other words, they give their sanction to that foul and libellous maxim, that "ignorance is the mother of devotion;" or encourage a notion equally dangerous, and one which almost invariably accompanies this kind of preaching; that religion consists in mere animal excitement. Here then is the effect; the passions of ignorant people aroused. But mark the result; when the gust of passion is spent, as it soon must be, the imagined good impression is obliterated; however apparently beautiful the blossom, the plant having no root withereth away.

Hence the excitements thus produced are generally attended with lapses, so deep, so fatal and so public, as vitally to affect the best interests of the gospel.

We hope we shall not be under-

stood as intimating, that strong feeling is inconsistent with true religion; since nothing is more repugnant to our views. We think if a man ever has deep and powerful feeling, he should manifest it on a subject which involves the life of his soul. But we say, that such feeling, when unattended by illumination of mind, and a correct understanding of the terms of the gospel, is no genuine evidence of true piety. High animal excitement, or a strong motion of the affections, when alone, may produce an enthusiast, but cannot make a man an ornament to the gospel.

From the whole, let this general remark be made, that Christians in private life should do no more than preach by their example, and by a conversation becoming the gospel; and that they who are styled elders by virtue of the sanctity of the office to which they have been solemnly ordained, and candidates for the ministry\* by way of anticipation, may, on suitable occasions, more publicly exhort; provided they avoid authoritative explications of scripture in any thing like regular sermonizing, and an address which might induce their hearers to suppose that they taught "as having authority."

If this rule be observed, the consequences we deprecate may be avoided, and the church, whose interests, as a sacred charge, are in so great a degree entrusted to men, will be preserved from a flood of disorder, ignorance, and false feeling in religion.

W. M. E.

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### *On Christ's speaking in Parables.*

Though the men of highest rank among the Jews had aspersed the character of our Lord, they had not been able to prevent a large attendance on his public ministrations. A great concourse stood before him, on the occasion to which

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\* Those who are actually engaged in the study are intended.