

T H E
AMERICAN PREACHER;

OR,

COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE

MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

OF

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

VOLUME III.

ELIZABETH-TOWN, (NEW-JERSEY)

PRINTED BY SHEPARD KOLLOCK, FOR THE EDITORS,
WHO HOLD THE PRIVILEGE OF COPY-RIGHT.

M.DCC.XCI.

S E R M O N L I V .

*The COMPONENT PARTS of CHRIST'S CHURCH,
and the ADVANTAGES of UNION.*

B Y

N A T H A N K E R , A . M .

Minister of a Presbyterian Congregation, at Goshen, State of New-York.

EPHESIANS IV. 15, 16.

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.

THE church of Christ, in various places of the New Testament, is spoken of as one body, of which Christ is the head: and in no place is the union of the church more strongly expressed than in the passage we are now about to consider.

For in the 11th verse, Paul sayeth, that Christ gave some, apostles: and some, prophets: and some,

evangelists: and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

That is, Christ hath given to the church, here called his body, the officers before mentioned, that by means of their ministrations, it might have an increase of light, love, faith and joy in God in all holy obedience, and might not be like children, easily imposed upon and carried away with erroneous doctrines: *But speaking the truth in love, might grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.*

“ Here is a manifest allusion to the human body, which is composed of different joints and members, knit together by various ligaments, and furnished with nerves, tendons, and vessels of communication to and from every part of the body; which by these means is nourished, actuated and invigorated, and arrives to its full strength and stature.”*

* Dr. Guise in Loc.

The plain sense of the text appears to be this, that we Christians, speaking the truth in love, should seek after an increase in knowledge and grace, and then grow up in union with Christ the head; from whom, or rather by whom the whole body, being orderly and firmly united together, every one in his proper place, by the assistance which every part thus united, gives to the whole, according to the effectual operation of the holy spirit, in the measure in which it is given, to every part or member, maketh or obtaineth increase unto the edifying of itself in love.

This truth we are taught in the passage, and this we shall particularly attend to, to wit, That the church consisteth of a variety of parts, and that a union ought to be sought after between those parts. Here I shall,

I. Briefly consider the parts of which the whole is constituted.

II. Shew how these parts are united so as to constitute one body.

III. Mention some of the most important ends answered by this union: which I trust will illustrate the truth that union ought to be sought after by the parts or members.

I. I am briefly to consider the parts of which the whole church is constituted.

Here it will be natural to observe, *first*, That Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who was

made flesh, and dwelt among us, is the head of the church.

Secondly, The parts of which the church or body of Christ is instituted are, in a large view, all those sanctified spirits of just men made perfect, who are in glory, together with all the churches of Jesus Christ upon earth.

Agreeably to this, the apostle to the Hebrews, when enumerating their particular advantages as Christians, saying that *they were come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.*

So also Paul sayeth, that *God hath made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him.*

Thus we have taken a comprehensive view of the church or body of Jesus Christ; part of which is in heaven, and part on earth.

We shall now proceed to take a more minute survey of the individual members, or smaller component parts of the churches of Christ upon earth; or shew who they are.

Here I am led to speak of a matter, concerning which, many great and good men have differed.

Some suppose that it is the design of Christ, that none should be admitted into the church but those who are the subjects of regenerating grace, and make a profession of their belief of gospel truths, and give credible evidence of their gracious state, and their children.

Such plead, that the ordinances of the gospel are seals of the covenant between God and gracious souls; and that when unregenerate persons come to their ordinances, they set the seal to a blank.

That all unregenerate men are enemies to God and holiness; and as holiness is required prior to coming to ordinances, they cannot come for want of an essentially necessary pre-requisite.

Such think this is taught in the gospel, by the treatment he met with, who appeared at the marriage-feast without a wedding garment.

As also by the instruction of Philip to the Eunuch, who said *See here is water: What doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and immediately he was baptized.*

In short, such take it for granted, that there ought to be in this world, as far as possible, a se-

paration kept up between the regenerate and unregenerate.

Others suppose, that all those ought to be admitted into the church with their children, whether regenerate or unregenerate, who do profess a belief of the essential truths of religion, and that they believe it their duty to comply with all the divine requisitions: That whenever they shall maintain heretical opinions, or in their external deportment, shall walk contrary to the rules of the gospel, they ought, by the church, to be reprov'd and admonish'd, and if found irreclaimable, suspended and finally cast out.

These think that the ordinances of the gospel are seals of God's covenant of promise, in which he manifesteth his gracious intentions, makes overtures and promises, and sets his seal to those promises, then assuring us of their validity, and calling upon us, in this state of probation, where means are necessary, to attend to those overtures and firm-sealed promises.

And, in this view, such think God's covenant with Abraham is called a covenant of promise.

These think that unregenerate men may be considered and treated as members of Christ's church on earth, as they conceive infant baptism of divine appointment—that observation and experience evinceth that the posterity of believers are not all regenerate, and suppose there is no example or di-

rection in God's word for casting a person out of the church for other crimes, than heresy or overt acts of wickedness.

In a word, that there are many members in Christ's church on earth, who never were designed for membership in heaven—that they are taught this by being directed to let the tares grow among the wheat; also, in the parable of the foolish and wise virgins; likewise, where, by our Lord, the gospel is compared to a great net, which caught of the fishes, good and bad.

As also, by the threatening to the branches, in Christ the vine, which bring not forth good fruit; and by the Jews being informed, that they were broken off the good olive by unbelief, which sheweth, that though they had not regeneration and saving faith, yet they had enjoyed a standing in the church.

Many truly valuable and spiritual members of Christ's church there have been, and still are, who think thus differently respecting admission of members; and the wise, candid and liberal, in either scheme, are ready to acknowledge difficulties in the plan they have adopted; and there are but few who think these differences in sentiment a sufficient reason for breaking Christian or ministerial communion; especially, as all agree, that God requireth of all, supreme love to himself, and repentance and faith in Christ, and that without these, none, however otherwise qualified, can perform

any duty acceptably; and these exercises are what Christians and individuals are frequently exhorted to, and without which they must finally be lost.

Having dwelt so long upon the diversity of sentiment, may be considered rather as a digression, and, therefore, I shall conclude this head, at once, by observing, that those professors, I have been describing, and their children are the individual members of whom the churches of Christ on earth are composed.

I now proceed to show,

II. How these parts are united, so as to constitute one body.

Here I think it would be proper,

First, To consider the union that subsists between the members, and Christ the head. And,

Secondly, The union that taketh place between the members themselves.

I. With respect to the union between the members and Christ the head, the following things are predicable, viz.

That it is of divine appointment that they who understand and believe the truths of the gospel, and make credible profession thereof, being baptized, shall be considered as sustaining a connexion to Christ the head of the church, that is, such a connexion as constituteth membership.

2. That all those who have not only the above-mentioned union, but have received of his spirit, and are made holy, and so are become the children of God by faith in Christ, are united with him in affection and interest. These are made partakers of the divine nature, are become one with Christ, even as he is one with the Father.

The former union I consider as dissolvable; and, therefore, Christ saith, *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.*

The latter I consider as an indissoluble union, and agreeably to this Christ affirms, *He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and I will manifest myself to him. And having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*

I proceed now,

2. To consider that union that subsisteth, or ought to subsist, between the members themselves.

Paul, to the Corinthians, hath these memorable words, *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, that there be no division among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.*

So also, Phil. iii. 16. *Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.* And Phil. ii. 1, 2. *If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-*

minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

From these, and many passages of the same nature, I am led to conclude, that it is of divine appointment that they, who agree understandingly to make substantially the same profession of essential gospel-truths, shall consider themselves as members of the one catholic church of Jesus Christ, though they may reside in different branches of the church, and at a great distance. So that a common profession or confession of faith is the visible mean by which Christians become united.

3. They who are thus united, if they have received of the same holy spirit, by which their hearts are formed after the divine image; as they will most certainly love the Lord Jesus Christ supremely, so they will love one another as brethren; be united in affection.

Thus I have endeavored to shew how the parts of Christ's church are united so as to form one body.

III. I shall now proceed to consider some of the most important ends answered by such an union; which will illustrate this truth, that union ought to be sought after by the various parts or branches of the church.

1. Such an union is a compliance with the design of Christ, the head of the church, expressed by his apostles in sundry places, but particularly

in the passage before-mentioned. 1 Cor. i. 10. *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. And, Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things. And, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord—of one mind. And, Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.* And the apostle affirms, that the body is not *one* member, but *many*. So that this is an undoubted truth, that the church is the body of Christ, and that that body consisteth of many members. And these members being exhorted to union, and to avoid schisms, sheweth that union is a compliance with the design of Christ, expressed by his apostles.

2. Such a union in profession, interest and affection doth greatly excite Christian endeavors to promote the good of the Church.

The welfare of the church is to be promoted, especially by the regular preaching of the word, which supposeth the receiving of the word preached—the administration and receiving of divine ordinances—the exercise of discipline and submission thereto. Pastors or teachers in the church supposeth there are some to be taught. Administration of ordinances supposeth there are some to whom the ordinances are to be administered. And rules supposeth there are some to be ruled;

accordingly, Christians are exhorted to *obey them who have the rule over them.*

And thus every member in his proper place, and according to the measure of the gifts he hath received, is, with care and attention, to seek the good of the whole.

Agreeably to this doctrine, Paul tell us, *That the eye can not say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor, and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: But God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked; that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

3. Such an union in profession, interest and affection, which will powerfully dispose every member in his proper place, to do his duty, and submit to Christian counsels, admonitions, &c. will cause the church to be, indeed, like a city set upon an hill that cannot be hid; and thus beholders will be led to a conviction of their sin, and an acknowledgement of the truth.

4. Such an union among individuals, and particular branches of the general church, is most likely to guard against error; and we are to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. It also provides most effectually for the reproof and admonition of all the members and officers of the church.

Those who sin are to be rebuked before all; officers as well as members.

Paul directs Timothy that he should not receive an accusation against an elder, but before two or three witnesses.

5. The church being provided with proper officers, such union in profession, interest and affection, provides for the instruction of the ignorant, the support and comfort of the weak, the reclaiming of offenders of every character, the rejection of the obstinate, the restraining of the corruptions of many, who will never be eternally saved, the forming of the elect for eternal life, and promoting God's glory.

A few inferences, among the many that might be drawn together with a word of exhortation, shall conclude the discourse.

1. If the church of Christ, in a large view, consisteth of all the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven, and all professors and their children on earth; then in our addresses to the throne of grace, for our fellow-christians, we ought to extend our

ideas; and we ought also particularly to remember, that one great end to be sought after, while enjoying membership here, is preparation for membership in the church above.

2. If those *parts* of the church are united by a common confession to Christ the head, so that by profession before men they are entitled to membership; then much care is necessary in giving instructions to the ignorant, that they may make an understanding profession; and if the holy spirit be necessary to form the members of the church to holiness, in order to constitute an indissoluble union to Christ the head; then all church members may see the propriety of examining themselves, whether they have obtained the spirit of Christ, as that they are *one with him*.

3. If those who have agreed to make the same confession of the essential doctrines of religion, and have received of the same spirit to form their hearts after the divine image, are *the one body of Jesus Christ*, as Paul saith, *there is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism*; and if the valuable ends, that I have mentioned, are *most* likely to be answered by union, then we may infer the strong obligations that all are under to endeavor the edification of the church, and to preserve the unity of it.

4. We may, from the whole, infer, that those who break Christian and ministerial communion

with those who, they acknowledge, hold the essentials of religion, and whom they believe to be real Christians, are guilty of schism in Christ's church.

To conclude, Study the things that make for peace; endeavor to *keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*

Do all in your power to promote the best interest of Christ's church.

Remember there is no member so weak or inconsiderable, but that it is necessary to the completion of the body.

And O, my hearers! rest not satisfied with that union to Christ which is dissolvable; the Jews of old prided themselves in their external privileges, and covenant relation to God, but were broken off the good olive by unbelief: *Thou standest by faith; be not high-minded but fear.*

O! be not satisfied until you have good evidence your hearts are renewed by the spirit of Christ, and you become one with him, never to be separated; and he, as your gloriously ascended head, grants you the effectual operations of his holy spirit working in you, and causing you to make increase in knowledge, love, repentance, faith, and holy obedience, to your own spiritual edification; and by the effectual workings of his spirit, causeth you to be really serviceable to the edifying of the body of Christ in love.

As you expect on the Lord's-day approaching, to commune together at the Lord's table, remember part of the church is in heaven; Christ the head is there, and a blessed company of those who have been cleansed by his blood and spirit; part of the church is on earth, with Christ and the members of his body: On earth you are now to hold communion; as one great end of this communion is, to prepare you to enter among the blessed, the general assembly in heaven.—Be diligent in seeking communion with Christ, that so from him as your living head, you may derive those communications which are necessary to form you more and more after the divine image, and to render you useful in the spiritual edification of his body.

