

THE LIVING PULPIT,

OR

EIGHTEEN SERMONS

BY EMINENT LIVING DIVINES

OF

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

WITH

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE EDITOR,

BY GEO. W. BETHUNE, D. D.

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THE GOOD MAN.

BY

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“ He was a good man.”—ACTS xi. 24, first clause.

THIS was said of Barnabas. He was a Levite, of the country of Cyprus. Some suppose he was one of the seventy disciples, whom our Lord sent out to preach the Gospel; but of this we have no certain evidence. He introduced Paul to the apostles and disciples at Jerusalem, and assured them of his conversion. He was afterwards, for several years, the companion of Paul in his travels, and his fellow labourer in the gospel ministry; and he was with him, as a delegate from the Syrian churches to the famous Council at Jerusalem. There was finally a dissension between him and Paul, about taking Mark with them on a missionary tour, and they separated, and Barnabas went to Cyprus, and we hear no more of him.

At the time, in the history of Barnabas, when the testimony in the text was given of him, he was at Antioch, in Syria, whither he had been sent by the church of Jerusalem, on hearing of a special work of grace in that city. When Barnabas came

to Antioch, "and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." Our text is given as a reason why he was glad at the prosperity of the religion he witnessed, and why he exhorted the new converts as he did; "for he was a good man." The term *good* here expresses the whole religious character of the real Christian. In this sense the term will be understood in the ensuing discourse, the object of which will be

To give the *character* of the *good man*, or real *Christian*, and

1. The good man has had his *heart changed*. No person, however amiable in the sight of men his natural temper may be, has naturally a heart that is good in the sight of God, or in the sense in which the word is applied to men in the Scriptures. In his natural state every person is "dead in trespasses and sins." Eph. ii. 1. He "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them." 1 Cor. ii. 14. He is carnal, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," or carnal. John iii. 6. And "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. viii. 7. Such, according to the Word of God, is the native character of all men, and such was once the character of every one who is now a good man.

But, by the special operations of the Holy Spirit, the naturally corrupt heart of him who is now a good man has been changed. He has been "renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created him." Col. iii. 10. And "after God," or

after his image, he has been "created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. iv. 24. He has had imparted to him, by the Holy Spirit, a temper of conformity to the image and will of God. This change every good man or true Christian has experienced; for we read, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." John iii. 3, 5, 7. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. v. 17. The time and manner of this change may be different in different persons, and in some it may be more marked than in others; but the change itself every good man, without exception, has experienced; and in vain do any lay claim to the character of a good man if they are strangers to regeneration.

2. The good man has *come to Christ by faith*, and has placed his reliance for pardon and acceptance with God solely on his merits. With Paul, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, he has believed in Jesus Christ, that he might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law." Gal. ii. 16. Sensible of his sinfulness, guilt, and deserved condemnation, and that he has no righteousness of his own to merit forgiveness and acceptance with God, and approving of the way of salvation through Christ, he has renounced his own righteousness, and cordially accepted Christ as the Lord his righteousness; and on his merits alone he relies

for justification. Christ is the good man's all in the article of justification.

He is his all, too, in the article of sanctification. He feels that he is, of himself, unable to subdue his corruptions, and do his duty, and lead a life of holiness before God, and that Christ alone is the believer's life. He therefore relies on him, by his Spirit, to mortify sin within him; to impart, preserve, and quicken grace; to strengthen him to resist temptations, and do his duty; and to keep him, through faith, unto final salvation. He is sensible that without Christ he "can do nothing," and therefore he relies on him for every thing.

3. The good man is a *true penitent for sin*. He has been convinced of sin, and felt himself to be a sinner; he has been convinced of the odious and evil nature of sin, and of his desert of the wrath of God for his sins, and that God would be just in punishing him; he has sorrowed on account of his sins, been self-abased before God, and, with contrition of heart, made confession to him; and he has, with hatred of sin, turned from it unto God. This is repentance unto life, and every good man has exercised it; for our Saviour declared, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Luke xiii. 3. And the good man not only repented, when he first became pious, but he still repents. He is sensible that sin still cleaves to him, and dwells in him, and that his best services are marked with imperfection and sin. Sin is still odious and evil in his sight; he still feels that he deserves the wrath of God for his sins; he still mourns that he ever sinned against God, and still sins, and comes short of his

duty; and he still confesses his sins to God, and hates them more and more.

4. The good man is, in general, correct in the *articles of his faith*. It is an incorrect and dangerous sentiment, that it is a matter of indifference what a man believes if his life be good, for the Word of God requires us to believe the truth he has revealed, as well as do what he has commanded; and the doctrines of the gospel have such an intimate influence on the temper and practice, that it is very doubtful whether a man's life ever be really good, when his faith, in regard to the great doctrines of religion, is wrong. There are some doctrines which are fundamental in the Christian system! The belief of such doctrines is essential to the character of the good man. These doctrines are such as the following: the depravity and ruined state of man; salvation only through Christ; that he is a divine person, God equal with the Father; that he made atonement for sin, which is the only just foundation of a sinner's reconciliation with God; justification only by faith in him; regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Spirit; also a divine person, and the necessity of holiness of heart and life. These doctrines good men of all denominations believe, though they may differ on some points of less importance.

The good man, whatever name he may bear, takes the Scriptures implicitly as the rule of his faith. He does not set up his reason, or inclination, above the Word of God; he desires to know what the truth of God is, and as far as he knows, he believes what God has revealed; though he may not be able fully

to explain or comprehend it, and though it may be contrary to his preconceived opinions, and humbling to his pride.

5. The good man *leads a holy life*. If the heart be good, the outward conduct will also be good. "A good man, out of the good treasury of the heart, bringeth forth good things." Matt. xii. 35. The good man faithfully endeavours to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man; "he does justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with God." Mic. vi. 8. And, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, he lives soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Titus ii. 12. He takes the Word of God implicitly as his rule of conduct; he reads and searches it, that he may know the will of his heavenly master; and he follows its directions, however self-denying and unfashionable they may be; whatever sacrifices they may require him to make, and to whatever opposition and trials they may expose him. He does not part with some sins while he retains others, but renounces all sin. Though a sin may have been to him as dear as a right hand, he cuts it off; or a right eye, he plucks it out. He does not desire to reconcile the service of God with that of Mammon, and endeavour to serve both; but the Lord is his only master. He gives him an undivided heart, and he makes every pursuit, even that of the world, subservient to his service. He faithfully endeavours to know his duty, and when he knows it, to perform it, whether it be to God, his fellow men, or himself.

In the performance of the *duties* which he owes more immediately to *God*, he engages habitually, and with delight in his worship. He reads and searches

the Scriptures; he meditates upon them; "his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Psa. i. 2. With David he can say, "I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." Psa. xxvi. 8. And he is stately seen at the house of God, in the seasons of public worship. He is not willingly a half day worshipper on the Sabbath. The tabernacles of the Lord are amiable to him; and when he is necessarily kept from the house of God, he feels it to be a privation and affliction. He loves to meet with the people of God, for his worship, on other days beside the Sabbath; and when other duties will permit, he embraces the opportunity. He delights to renew his covenant with God at his table, and obey the command of his Saviour, "Do this in remembrance of me." He is not ashamed to own before the world, that he is a disciple of Christ; on the contrary, he glories in it. He loves the Sabbath; it is to him the best day in all the seven. He is not seen travelling on this sacred day, or riding, or walking for pleasure, or engaging in secular business, or spending its hours in idleness. The Sabbath is not a weariness to him, but he esteems it a "delight, the holy of the Lord, and honourable," and he remembers it to keep it holy.

He lives a life of prayer; and he prays, not merely because he feels it to be a duty, to which he is driven by conscience, but because he loves to pray. His affections are engaged in prayer, and he presents to his Heavenly Father the sincere and earnest desires of his heart; and when in prayer his affections are languid, and he does not meet his God, he is dis-

satisfied with himself, and mourns. He is daily in his closet engaged in secret prayer, at least morning and evening. Is he the head of a family? He is the priest in his own house; and there, with his collected family, he daily offers the morning and the evening sacrifice. Instead of allowing prayer to give way to worldly business, when they seem to interfere, he makes worldly business yield to prayer. It is with him a settled rule, that whatever is neglected, prayer must not be, in its stated seasons. Follow the good man to his daily occupations, and could you witness what passes in his heart, you would find his thoughts frequently going out after God, and fixing on divine things, and devout ejaculations ascending to heaven. In short, the good man engages with delight in all the ordinances of divine worship.

In the performance of the *duties* he owes his *fellow men*, the good man is equally faithful. In his conduct towards them he follows the rule laid down by his divine Master: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Matt. vii. 12. He is strictly honest and just in all his dealings; and if he has any thing that belongs to another, when he discovers it he restores it, or makes restitution.

And he not only does justly, but he also loves and practices mercy. He has pity on the poor. According to the Word of God, "a good man showeth favour, and lendeth; he hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor." Psa. cxii. 5, 9. He feels also for the spiritual necessities and miseries of others, at home and abroad, and is ready, by his prayers, labours, and contributions, to do them spiritual

good. He is a kind and obliging neighbour; he sympathizes with the distressed; he rejoices in the prosperity of others, and grieves at their adversity; "he rejoices with them that do rejoice, and weeps with them that weep." Rom. xii. 15.

He is tender of the good name of others; he is no slanderer nor tale-bearer; he "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;" he bridles his tongue, and suffers it not to be used to the injury of others. When variances arise, between him and others, he readily becomes reconciled, and forgives them who have injured him. According to apostolic injunctions, "Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings," 1 Pet. ii. 1, he "puts on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing, and forgiving one another." Col. iii. 12, 13. The peace of God rules in his heart, and he even loves his enemies with a love of benevolence, desiring their good, and disposed to assist them when distressed or in need. According to the command of his divine Master, he "blesses them that curse him, does good to them that hate him, and prays for them which despitefully use and persecute him." Matt. v. 44.

He faithfully performs the duties of his stations and relations in life. Is he a magistrate, high or low? he discharges his official duties in the fear of God, and with impartiality according to law and justice. Is he a private citizen? he respects the laws of his country, and is subject to every ordinance of man which does not interfere with the rights of con-

science for conscience sake. He "renders to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour." Rom. xiii. 7. Is he a husband? he loves his wife, and is not bitter against her. Col. iii. 19. Is the Christian a wife? she reverences her husband, Eph. v. 33, and submits herself unto him as is fit in the Lord. Col. iii. 18. Is the good man a parent? he loves his children, and trains them up in the way they should go. Is he a child? he honours and obeys his parents in the Lord. Is he a pastor? he loves the souls of his people, and watches for them as one who must give account, and labours diligently for their spiritual good. And is the good man one of the flock? he esteems his pastor "very highly in love for his work's sake."

With respect to *himself*, the good man denies himself sinful gratifications. He is sober, temperate, and chaste. He "keeps under his body, and brings it into subjection;" he "mortifies his members, which are upon the earth," and he "crucifies the flesh, with the affections and lusts;" he stands aloof from the fashionable vices of the world. You will not find the good man at the gaming table, in the ball room, or at the theatre. The Word of God directs him, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Col. iii. 17. And, under the influence of this and similar instructions, he stands aloof from these places and amusements. He is "not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of his mind;" he comes out from the people of the world, and is separate; he con-

fesses himself a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, and that he desires a better country, even a heavenly. His conversation is in heaven, and his affections are there, set on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Such are the temper and conduct of the good man, as described in the Word of God.

It is true he is not a perfect man; for in many things he offends, and comes short of his duty, and his best services are imperfect. But this grieves him, and causes him to complain with the apostle Paul, "The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me. I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death." Rom. vii. 19, &c. The good man is not satisfied, as some professors appear to be, with just so much religion as they think will gain them admission into heaven. He delights in the service of God, and he desires greater conformity to him, more zeal in his service, to glorify him more, and to enjoy more intimate communion with him. And he cannot rest satisfied with present attainments as long as he comes short of perfection in holiness, which will be as long as he continues in the body. He, therefore, with Paul, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Phil. iii. 13, 14.

Such is the character of the good man, as drawn by the unerring pen of inspiration.

Who of us possess this character? Each one ought to ask himself, is this my character? Are any ready to say, the description is too highly wrought? my character will not stand the test? In reply, I ask, is the description more highly wrought than the Word of God authorizes and requires? In most of the description, the language, and in a considerable part of it, the very words of Scripture have been used; and by the Scriptures we must be tried, and if our character does not correspond to the character of the good man as there drawn, in vain do we hope that we are the people of God.

Some who profess religion will probably, in view of this discourse, say, either the description which has been given of the good man is not correct, or we have deceived ourselves. It would not be strange if the latter part of this alternative were true, with respect to some professors; for, doubtless, many profess religion who are strangers to its reality. Our Lord said, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matt. vii. 14. He called his flock, to whom it is the "Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom," a "little flock." Luke xii. 32. And he declared that in the day of account, many will say to him, "Lord, Lord," claiming a relation to him as his people—to whom he will say, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matt. vii. 23.

The Scriptures are complete and fixed. Nothing can be added to them or taken from them. Many desire, and endeavour to persuade themselves, that

they are less strict than they appear to be, in their obvious meaning; or, at least, that their strict letter related only to primitive times—but this is a great and dangerous mistake. The way to heaven is the same now that it was in the time of the Scripture saints; and if we ever get to heaven, we must tread in the steps of those ancient worthies, who, through faith and patience, inherited the promises. We must come up to the scriptural standard of true piety, in its plain and obvious meaning. The Scriptures cannot be changed or relaxed, to come down to our desires or practice, as to the way to heaven. Let us make sure work in the great business of our salvation. The interests of our immortal souls are at stake, and to make a mistake in regard to such interests, would be inexpressibly dreadful.

The Word of God declares, that “the righteous are scarcely,” or with difficulty, “saved”—and if this be so, “where,” as the sacred writer adds, “shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” If the good man alone can enter heaven—and it is so difficult, as we have seen, to be really a good man; and if many who profess to have this character, and manifest something of it, are deceived, and will fail at last—where shall those appear who have no pretensions to scriptural piety, manifest nothing of it, and care for none of these things? That they are in the way to perdition is as clear as a sunbeam. Let such be alarmed at their state, and while they are yet prisoners of hope be induced, without delay, to flee from the wrath to come; and to flee by faith to Christ, the only Saviour, and enter into the narrow way of life, in which the good man walks.

And let all who entertain a hope that they possess true religion, and are in the way to heaven, carefully and frequently examine themselves, and bring their character to the test of God's unerring word. And while they examine themselves, let them offer the prayer of the Psalmist, "Let me not be ashamed of my hope. Lord, search me, and try me, and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Amen.