

CHRIST ALL IN ALL

The 1854 Inaugural Address of William Swan Plumer
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VENERABLE DIRECTORS AND TRUSTEES OF THE WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY — MEMBERS OF THE SYNODS OF PITTSBURGH, ALLEGHENY AND WHEELING, AND OTHER RESPECTED HEARERS:

You are entitled to full information concerning the doctrines and principles of those charged with conducting the studies of the rising ministry, in the Seminary established among you by our General Assembly. In the time allotted to this service, it is impossible to present satisfactory views of the whole field of theological inquiry. It would, doubtless, gratify many, if such a topic should be discussed as would indicate the general course of instruction pursued in the department of Didactic Theology. Such a theme is not wanting. In theology are many truths, the clear avowal of any one of which commonly indicates one's views on the whole circle of doctrinal teaching.

The great central truth of the religion of sinners relates to the person, character, work, sufferings and offices of Jesus Christ. As a man is sound or corrupt here, so is he elsewhere. Both now and in the last day, the great question in determining character is the same — what think ye of Christ? On this subject the controversy is of long standing. It goes back to the first two men ever born. Cain and Abel did not agree on this point. There the strife began, and it has never ceased. The reproach of Christ, in the days of Moses, was the hardest thing to be borne in the profession of the true religion (Hebrews 11:26). When the Messiah was born, the strife was resumed with more warmth than ever. The wise men brought their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh; but when Herod heard of his birth, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him, and he sought the young child to destroy him. And when Christ first became a public teacher, some said, He is a good man; others, He deceiveth the people. One party worshiped him; the other crucified him. And when he was on the cross

the spectators were divided — some looking on with unutterable grief, others wagging their heads and deriding him. Even the thieves, who were crucified with him, were not of one mind; one resisting him, the other calling him Lord. On the day of Pentecost the controversy was revived with great vigor, and with great advantage to the cause of truth, and it has been kept up ever since. All the friends of God have been on one side, and all his enemies on the other — if not openly, yet secretly; if not by profession, yet in practice. For eighteen hundred years a large portion of all the heresies that have arisen have related to the person or work of Christ. Infidelity is most bitter against Christ, while piety feeds upon the truth, of which he is the sum. Some men scoff, others admire and adore. Some obey, others cry, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” In no age has wickedness been more bold than in the present. It attacks all that is precious in the character of the author of eternal salvation. In these circumstances, it is right that you should know what sentiments are to emanate from the chair of Didactic Theology. To do full justice to such a subject in an hour will not be expected, but enough may be said to remove all doubts as to the tenor of the instruction given.

Jesus Christ is a wonderful, glorious person. To look away from self and man to Christ, is to lay hold on everlasting life. If men would be safe, let them flee to him. When he is in the ascendant, the night flies away, and the morning comes — a morning without clouds. His names and titles are as important as they are significant. Every one of them is as ointment poured forth. His lips drop as the honey-comb — honey and milk are under his tongue, and the smell of his garments is like the smell of Lebanon. His people sit under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet to their taste.

To them he is altogether lovely. He is their Advocate, the angel of the covenant, the author and finisher of faith. He is as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, the alpha and the omega, the Beloved, the shepherd and bishop of souls, the bread of life, the bundle of myrrh, the bridegroom, the bright and morning star, the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.

He is their Creator, captain, counselor, covenant, cornerstone, covert from the tempest, a cluster of camphor, and chiefest among ten thousand. He is to

them as the Dew, the door into the fold, a diadem, a daysman, a day-star, a deliverer, and the desire of all nations, ranks and generations of pious men.

In their eyes he is the Elect Emmanuel, the everlasting Father, and eternal life. He is a Fountain of living waters to thirsty souls, of joy to troubled ones, of life to dying ones. He is the foundation on which his people, with safety, build their hopes of heaven. He is the father of eternity, the fir-tree under whose shadow the saints rejoice, the first and the last, the first fruits, the first-born among many brethren, and the first begotten from the dead.

To his chosen he is as the most fine Gold, a guide, a governor, a glorious Lord, God, the true God over all, God blessed forever. He is Head of the church, the help, the hope, the husband, the heritage, the habitation of his people. He is the horn of their salvation. He rides upon the heavens by his name, JAH. He is the Jehovah of armies, the Inheritance, Judge and King of his people. He is their Light, their life, their leader, their law-giver, their atoning lamb, the lily of the valley, the lion of the tribe of Judah.

He is the Man Christ Jesus, the master, the mediator, the minister of the true sanctuary which the Lord pitched, and not man. He is the mighty God of Isaiah, the morning-star of John, the Michael of Daniel, the Melchizedek of David and Paul, and the Messiah of all the prophets. He is the Only-begotten of the Father — full of grace and truth. He is both the root and the offspring of David. He is the Peace, the prince, the priest, the prophet, the purified, the potentate, the propitiation, the physician, the plant of renown, the power of God, the passover of all saints. He is a polished shaft in the quiver of God.

He is the Rock, the refuge, the ruler, the ransom, the refiner, the redeemer, the righteousness and the resurrection of all humble souls. He is the rose of Sharon. He is the Seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the seed of David, the Son of God, the son of man, the strength, the shield, the surety, the shepherd, the Shiloh, the sacrifice, the sanctuary, the salvation, the sanctification, and the sun of righteousness of all believers.

He is that holy thing that was born of Mary. He is the Truth, the treasure, the teacher, the temple, the tree of life, the great testator of his church. He is the Way, the well of salvation, the word of God, the wisdom of God, the faithful witness, the wonderful.

His person is one; but his natures are two. He is both human and divine, finite and infinite, created and uncreated. He was before Abraham, though not born till for ages the patriarch had slept with his fathers. He was dead, and is alive forevermore. On earth he had nowhere to lay his head, yet he disposes of all diadems. He has the arm of a God, and the heart of a brother. To him all tongues shall confess and all knees bow; yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. None loves like him, none pities like him, none saves like him. It is not surprising that such a person lives and reigns in the hearts of his people. No marvel that the virgins love him, and the saints praise him, and the martyrs die for him, and the sorrowing long for him, and the penitent pour out their tears before him, and the humble trust in him, and the believing lay fast hold of him. His frown shakes the heavens, his smile gives life, his presence converts dungeons into palaces, his blood cleanses from all sin, his righteousness is the white robe of the redeemed.

If men would be safe, or wise, or holy, or happy, or useful, or victorious — let them look to Jesus, let them look to none else, let them walk in him, abide in him, glory in him, and count as loss all things beside. You may look at the law till the spirit of bondage overwhelms you with terrors and torments. You may go about to establish your own righteousness till you can boast and perish like a Pharisee. You may weep till the fountain of your tears has gone dry, you may have all gifts, understand all mysteries, bestow all your goods to feed the poor, yield your body to be burned; but all these things will not atone for sin, will do nothing towards regaining the lost favor of God, will not make you meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. None but Christ, none but Christ, none but Christ, has been the cry of the faithful witnesses of all ages, when truth has triumphed, when oracles were struck dumb, when sinners were converted, when saints rejoiced, when the word of God mightily grew and prevailed.

True piety begins, continues and is perfected by our union with Christ. We are cleansed through his blood, we are clothed in his righteousness, we are purified by his Spirit — we meet the demands of the law of this day of grace, when we walk as he walked, and have the same mind that was in him.

In proportion as men are truly pious, they make him the foundation and top-stone, the sum and substance and center of all their hopes and rejoicings.