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Book

THE

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER:

OR,

SERMONS

ON

PLAIN & PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY SOME OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL,
RESIDING IN THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

VOL. I.

Edited by

George S. Woodhall
1813

Woodhall
Editor

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray *you* in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God....2 Cor. v. 20.

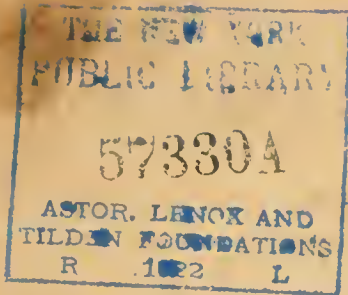
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ZIX



District of New-Jersey, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the thirty-first day of March, in the thirty-seventh year of the Independence of the United States of America, George S. Woodhull and Isaac V. Brown, of the said district, have deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

“The New-Jersey Preacher, or Sermons on plain and practical subjects. By some of the ministers of the gospel residing in the State of New-Jersey. Vol. I. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.— 2 Cor. v. 20.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to the act, entitled, “An act supplementary to an act, entitled an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical, and other prints.”

ROBERT BOGGS,

Clerk of the District of New-Jersey.

SERMON I.

FAITH THE PRINCIPLE OF A HOLY LIFE.

1 Cor. xiii. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three—

And now abideth *faith*.

BY SAMUEL S. SMITH, D.D. L.L.D.

and spirit of his system, his instructions may appear dark, and we perceive no adequate motive to apply them for the regulation of our own conduct. We may have perfect confidence in the skill of some eminent artist who analyzes with judgment the principles of his art; we may admire the talents of a distinguished scholar who declaims with elegance on the beauties of any classic work, and points out with accuracy the grounds of the pleasure they afford us; but, for want of knowledge, or of taste, we may not distinctly comprehend his meaning, or perceive the beauties which he endeavours in vain to point out to us. In the cases which I have supposed, we may yield entire credit to the judgment, integrity, or skill of the teacher or the artist; we may have full *faith* in the wisdom and truth of the man, but, through defect of cultivated understanding, or of liberal taste, his principles, his doctrines, the beauty of his examples, cannot strictly be said to be the objects of our belief, because they are not justly apprehended, they are not seen in their proper light, nor perceived in their true nature.

To apply these remarks to our present subject.—A genuine and practical faith in the gospel, which is that alone after which we seek, consists not merely in acknowledging the scriptures to be the word of God, in confessing the divine authority and heavenly mission of the apostles, the prophets, or of Christ himself, all which may be nothing more than an hereditary opinion, a pious prejudice of education; but it implies, as still more essential to it, a clear perception of the *spiritual nature*, beauty and perfection of the *doctrines* which they teach, especially as they regard the glory of God, the system of our redemption, and the duties, and immortal hopes of man; and a profound persuasion, not only of their truth,

but of their infinite importance to our everlasting peace and happiness. These doctrines, therefore, as far as they are within the comprehension of the human mind, are not received with genuine faith, but in proportion as they are in their true nature understood; and truly understood they cannot be but in proportion as the heart perceives their spiritual excellence and perfection, and with a holy and divine taste, relishes their beauty. For the *excellence of virtue*, the loveliness of genuine piety—the *beauty of holiness* is part of its idea. Here, then, we begin to discern the practical and moral influence of a sincere faith. For, what the heart understands and loves, must govern the practice. Perceiving, by this gracious principle, the beauty of holiness, the divine excellence of the evangelic doctrine, the believer is led by the sweet and irresistible attraction of a renewed taste, to *delight in the law of God after the inward man*; and to derive his chief pleasures from the study of its heavenly truths, and conformity of heart to its holy precepts. Here we begin, also, to discern the dependence of faith on the good dispositions of the heart.

By the understanding we judge of speculative truth; yet, on all moral subjects, the convictions of the understanding are greatly influenced by the state of the affections. But it is the heart alone, profoundly touched by the spirit of grace, which creates those lively and affecting conceptions of the beauty of divine things, and the perfection of the system of the gospel, which form the essence of a practical faith, the active and operative principle of a holy life. Hence hath the apostle said, *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*. And Philip replied to the eunuch who desired to be baptized, —*if thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest*.

Will it be demanded, if we do not, by this representation, require the regeneration of the heart, the cultivation of a divine and holy taste, as a prerequisite to faith, of which change, however, faith is acknowledged to be the only genuine cause? No; degenerate as human nature is, it still so far possesses ideas of moral excellence, so far approves, with the mind, the perfection of the divine law, and consents to it, that it is good, even when, by the law of sin which is in his flesh, he violates it, as, under the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, co-operating with his holy word, to be a sufficient foundation of this understanding, operative and sanctifying faith, of which we speak, in its first and incipient state. And when once this holy illumination, this divine taste exists in the weakest and most imperfect degree, it prepares the soul under the culture of the same word, and the continued influence of the same spirit, to receive every doctrine of the gospel with a fuller conviction, to perceive increasing beauties in the system of grace, and to feel with augmented force the obligation of the whole law of holiness.

But in treating of the moral and sanctifying influence of faith, we must add to that spiritual understanding of the doctrines of the gospel, and that divine taste of their beauty, which it implies, these powerful motives, also, to duty, to evangelic obedience, and universal holiness which it draws from celestial and eternal things. For, *it is, saith the apostle, the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* It penetrates the veil which covers them from mortal eyes, and presents them to the devout mind with a certain ineffable and spiritual sensation; especially the glory of God, the infinite love of the Redeemer, the final judgment of the

universe, the everlasting retributions of the righteous and the wicked. But, on these divine subjects, and the respective influence of each, both on devotion and on practice, your time does not now permit me to dilate. Your faith, believer, renders it unnecessary. The conceptions of faith in the heart of a humble and sincere disciple, far outgo all that the feeble powers of language could convey.

Let us, then, briefly review the principles which we have hitherto laid down. Faith, consists in the first place, and in its most general idea, in receiving the sacred scriptures as containing the gracious revelation of the will of God for our instruction in righteousness, and our eternal salvation. It consists, in the next place, not only in the belief of the divine authority and direction under which the scriptures have been communicated to the world, but in a clear and spiritual understanding of the nature and perception of the excellence and perfection of their holy doctrines. Thirdly, in a strong impression on the heart, of those high motives to practical piety and virtue, which religion has drawn from the glory of God, from the redemption of the cross, and the retributions of eternity. And, finally, in a profound persuasion of the personal, and everlasting concern which we have in these precious, these glorious, and these awful truths.

What moral system, then, or institute of religion, has ever laid such a foundation for purity of heart and sanctity of life, and for attaining ultimately the perfection of our nature, as the christian religion, resting, as it does, on the doctrine of a sincere faith in the Redeemer of the world. Here we behold the infinite purity and perfection of the divine nature, and are assimilated to it

by the powerful influence of a holy love ; we behold the excellence and beauty of the law of holiness, and are led to obedience by the delightful attractions of a divine taste, and the sweet constraints of a renewed nature ; we behold the love of the ever-blessed Redeemer extending salvation to a guilty world through his own sufferings, and the believing penitent from the depth of his affliction on the account of his sins, looking up to Heaven for mercy, is led to embrace the cross with an ecstasy of gratitude ; we behold the glorious rewards of life and immortality, purchased by the death, confirmed by the resurrection of the Saviour, and shining in every promise of the gospel, and the *spirit of holiness* becomes raised by the view, to its highest *tone*.

Assemble all these objects of faith in one view ; receive them as the infallible truths of God, not with a vague unmeaning assent, the fruit, merely, of custom and example, but with a profound conviction, arising from reflection, from examination, and from the holy influence of prayer, aided by the concurrent illumination of the Eternal Spirit, and what principles or what motives drawn from any other source, can be compared with those of the gospel, for their purity, their efficacy, and their persuasive power on the heart ? These considerations naturally lead to the second topic of this discourse ; the illustration of the excellence of this grace. Previously, however, to entering directly on this branch of the subject, permit me to take notice of some common definitions, or representations of faith, the coincidence of which with the views hitherto presented to you may not immediately appear.

Faith, in the holy scriptures is sometimes characterised by one of its principal acts ; *Abraham* is said to

have believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, because he trusted implicitly in the divine promise, in opposition to the most untoward events, and of appearances which might have discouraged the strongest hopes. Such confidence could have existed only in a heart prepared to receive with submissive duty and obedience every word of God.

Sometimes it is characterised by one of its principal objects; *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*, said the apostle to the jailor. And, in another place, descending to an idea still more particular, he says; *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* The doctrine of the resurrection of the Saviour is so intimately involved with the accomplishment of the atonement, and with the truth of all the promises and hopes of religion, that sincerely to receive it, in all its relations and consequences, is to embrace the whole gospel.

The pious and learned compilers of our catechism have chosen to describe it by one of its essential and inseparable fruits; *receiving and resting upon Christ alone for salvation.* Desirous of giving some single criterion of this grace which would be least liable to be mistaken by a believer himself in judging of his own spiritual state, they have fixed on this self renunciation, this absolute dependence of the penitent sinner on the grace and merits of the Saviour as one that is most certain, because one to which the pride and self-complacency of man most reluctantly submits: one to which he never does submit, till the sense of his own depravity and guilt; till the purity, the holiness and justice of the divine law; till the grace and all-sufficiency of the right-

eousness and power of the Redeemer; in a word, till the whole gospel has taken full possession of his soul.

II. But returning to the views already given of the grace of faith, permit me now to add a few reflections to illustrate its excellence as a principle of moral conduct, which will justify the high rank which the apostle has assigned to it, along with hope and charity in the christian system.

The enemies of the gospel who delight in disingenuous representations of its spirit, and its institutions, affect to consider the command *to believe* as an address to the credulity of mankind and as substituting faith in the room of good morals and a life of virtue. Oh! falsehood, embittered by malignity! Does not the gospel invite, does it not require the most rigorous investigation into its pretensions? And is it not the crime of unbelievers that they do not apply themselves, with seriousness and faithfulness, to this great and interesting enquiry? Instead of being designed, as they falsely and wickedly assert, as a substitute for morals, is it not true, on the other hand, that it is the purity, which they esteem the unnecessary rigor, of the morality of the gospel, that is the genuine source of all their hostility to it? Is it not the very ground on which the sacred writer extols this grace, not that it stands in the room of a virtuous and holy practice, but that it is the proper spring of all true virtue, and the most efficient principle of a holy life?

In entering on this subject, let me lay it down as an established maxim in morals, that right principles when truly understood and heartily believed, will ever be followed by rectitude of conduct. False principles, on the other hand, tend to vitiate the fountain of virtue and piety in the heart; and in the practice of life to lead

to many departures from the path of duty. What, then, is evangelic faith? Is it not the reception, on the authority of a divine and infallible teacher, and on the renewed taste of a mind enlightened by divine truth, of the purest principles of practical virtue, of the holiest law of universal duty, which have ever been prescribed to mankind? It is subjecting the soul to the influence of the sublimest and most powerful motives of holiness which even the wisdom of God has ever devised for the regeneration of the world. The laws of morals as they have been discovered merely by reason, or have been prescribed in the systems of the wisest of men who have not drawn them from the fountains of inspiration, are susceptible of so much disputation, are so doubtful in their limits, and liable in their application to so many exceptions and modifications in favour of each man's peculiar inclinations and passions, that they form a most uncertain and fallacious rule of duty. It is, besides, a rule as feeble in its authority, as it is defective in its prescriptions, being liable to be changed, or set aside by every caprice of self-love, or impulse of ungoverned passion. But every thing in the law of Christ is clear and luminous as the eternal law of truth from which it emanates. Here are no enfeebling doubts, no uncertain reasonings which may make the law too often speak the language of a corrupted heart. All is defined and enjoined by the awful and infallible authority of Almighty God. Where, then, let me again ask, can there be found, in all the systems of human wisdom, such a basis of morality as in that faith which is the practical principle of the gospel of Christ? Shame on those scoffers, then—shame on those pretended sages! who affect to represent the faith of the gospel as a weak and superstitious credulity, unconnected

with genuine piety or purity of morals. Is it not the whole purpose of the doctrine of the Saviour to bring sinners to repentance; to lead the penitent to unfeigned holiness of life, and thereby to conduct them, finally, to the immortal perfection of their nature in the heavenly state? And where shall we find means so wisely and admirably adapted to this end? Has any philosophy, the candid unbeliever himself being judge, taught so pure and excellent a system, derived it from so sublime a source, enjoined it by sanctions so weighty and important; or added to it the force of obligations, and the persuasion of motives so transcendent in their nature, and fitted to interest all the best powers of the soul?

Let us attend, then, to the effects of these principles and these motives on the life and character of the real christian: motives and principles which habitually govern him in private and in public, in all the transactions of his soul with God, and in all his intercourse with the world. What fervent and supreme love of God! what a deep sense of obligation for redeeming mercy! what dutiful submission to the divine will! what a holy fear of offending! what cautious circumspection in shunning the scenes or the incentives of temptation! what constant vigilance against the frailties of the heart, and the surprises of the passions! And in his commerce with mankind, what justice! what sincerity! what truth! what meekness and humility of mind! never arrogant to give offence, always ready to forgive! what warm and active benevolence; ever prompt to do good to others as a common family of brethren, and mingling, with an amiable sympathy, in all their joys and griefs! Such is the portrait of a child of faith. With the highest reason, therefore, does the apostle rank this grace in dignity and ex-

cellence, along with hope, and that divine charity which is the fulfilling of the law, far above miracles and prophecy, and the knowledge of mysteries and languages, (and all those external aids of religion which served in the beginning for its establishment and extension in the world, but were afterwards to pass away), not because it implicitly receives the gospel, as its enemies pretend, without examination, but because it most effectually promotes the end of all true religion, the virtue and moral perfection of man. The proper end of religion is to deliver mankind from the dominion of sin and death, and to make them heirs of life and immortality by restoring them to the primitive purity and holiness of their nature. And faith, which leads through hope to perfect love, is the precious instrument by which she accomplishes this great design.

The preceding illustrations of the nature and effects of a sincere and evangelic faith, considered as a principle of practical holiness, will vindicate the high place which it holds in the catalogue of christian graces, and the superlative value which is set upon it in the christian system. *It works by love, and purifies the heart.* Its genuine offspring is the supreme love of God through Christ, and the universal love of human kind. It is the commencement of that pure and heavenly spirit of charity, which, unfolded and ripened in the regions of immortal love, will be the consummation of that *grace wherein we now stand.*

If such are the fruits of a sincere faith in the gospel of the Redeemer, whence is it that we so often see in the manners of christians so little of the distinguishing spirit and character of the disciples of Christ? Alas! is it not because our faith is merely a habit of assent springing

from general custom and example, and not from a heart deeply penetrated with the truths which concern our everlasting salvation? Is it not because the ordinary faith of christians consists rather in not having called in question, through a useful prejudice of education, the divine authority of the sacred scriptures, than in having embraced them with an enlightened conviction of their excellence and glory, and a profound persuasion of our own eternal interest in the incarnation, the death and resurrection of the ever-blessed Redeemer, who is their principal subject. This is that *historical faith*, to use the language of casuists, which fills our churches with nominal christians, but never creates sincere disciples; which replenishes the garden of God with trees which only put forth leaves and blossoms, but, blasted with a fatal barrenness, never produce a holy fruit.

But, if the evidence of the gospel is so luminous as justly to command the assent of the world, and the excellence of faith is so transcendent as a principle of holiness, whence is it that there are so many doubtful christians, so many open and avowed unbelievers? The answer to these questions is, unhappily, too palpable; it is, saith our blessed Saviour, because *they hate the light, neither will they come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved*. The gospel, making war upon their passions, and their vices, and proscribing their dearest pleasures, awakens against itself every prejudice of pride and self-love; rouses into hostility the passions it would subdue, and makes every pleasure an enemy to the truth.

Finally, christians, let us in the conclusion briefly review the topics whence we may exalt, with the apostle, the superior excellence of this grace, and derive from them some grounds on which we may try the sincerity

of our own faith. The sole purpose at which it aims is to promote holiness of life, and through the road of holiness, to lead the humble believer to a state of heavenly perfection. And where shall we find such admirable means to enlighten, regenerate and sanctify the heart? Faith unfolds in its genuine spirit, the sacred volume of inspiration, that precious fountain of divine wisdom. Faith erects in the view of the believer, the cross stained with the blood of the atonement, loaded with the sacrifice of our sins. And, in this blessed symbol of our salvation, we behold all that can convince and bring to unfeigned contrition the sinner; all that can inspire hope in the bosom of the penitent; all that can win the believer to obedience and love; all that can elevate the soul above the corrupting influence of the world. Not only does faith erect the cross, all-powerful to conquer sin, in the view of the believer, but is able, likewise, in some measure, to draw aside the veil which covers from our feeble vision the glorious and the awful mysteries of eternity. It penetrates to the throne of God, and beholds in their fountain that infinite power, and wisdom, and love which pervade the universe. It contemplates the mansions of everlasting rest and peace, of light and of joy, and assists the soul to raise her hopes, and desires and pursuits to that celestial purity which reigns in the kingdom and the immediate presence of God. Often it casts its view downwards into *the lake that burns with fire*, into the everlasting prisons of divine justice, and thence derives new motives to diligence in duty; new power to urge the soul farther from the confines of sin; to break the force of the passions, and destroy the seductive charms of temptation.—Yes, in whatever view you consider this fundamental grace of the gospel, it will

be found to be the most efficacious, as it is undoubtedly the most pure and sublime principle of a holy life.

Try the sincerity of your faith, then, by this test. What humility, what repentance, what contrition for sin, what fervent devotion, what love, ardent and supreme to him who comprehends all perfection in his own existence, what profound gratitude to him who became incarnate, and died for our salvation; and in the intercourse of society what integrity and uprightness, what purity of life and manners, what simplicity of heart, what candour, what benevolence, what meekness of temper, what readiness to forgive offences against ourselves as we hope to be forgiven of God, will distinguish the genuine power of faith in the heart of a true believer; from all those false and defective principles of piety, that dishonour religion in the pretended disciples of Christ! Christians! if your faith bear these decisive tests of sincerity, adore the grace by which it hath been wrought in your hearts. Open your souls more and more to its divine illuminations, till it give place, at length, to immediate vision, and be lost in the blessed light of heaven, and till hope, the child of faith, *enter with you into that within the veil.* AMEN.