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Evidence of Human Depravity.

HISTORY and observation afford abundant evidence of the truth of the scripture account of the depravity of human nature. They are an unexceptionable comment on the sacred text. God has pleased, in the progress of time, to place men in a great variety of situations, calculated, in various degrees, to bring out to view their true character; and he will continue to vary those situations, in future, until it is as fully disclosed as the nature of the divine government requires. Thus, not only individuals, for the period of their lives, but the whole race as such, from the fall to Christ's second coming, are in a state of probation. During this period the heart of man will be fully proved; and it will appear, from fact and experience, that it is *deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. God will be found to be true, but every man a liar.*

To attain the ends of this trial and probation of human nature, fully, a long period of time seems necessary, and during its progress, a certain degree of order among men is requisite; for, without this,

the race of man itself would be exterminated, and no opportunity would remain for the dispensations of divine mercy. Hence the necessity of great and powerful restraints on the lusts and passions of men. In providing these, at different times, and in degrees suited to the course of events fixed in the divine counsels, the power, wisdom and goodness of God are wonderfully displayed. In viewing the character of man, however, under the operation of such restraints we are apt to form conclusions too much in his favor; for by means of them, no doubt, much wickedness is prevented, and a semblance of goodness is often exhibited; still, as they produce their effect by laying a force upon, and not by changing the inclinations of the heart, they ought to be laid wholly out of the question, in forming an estimate of the human character. In proportion as these are withdrawn, the naked human heart appears. And in order to discover it to the view of finite minds, God is pleased, from time to time, to withdraw those restraints, as far as the state of things will admit.

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in the bestowment of favors, would be less visible. Where there are no punishments, pardons will be less valued, and their nature and worth ill understood.

Besides, no view of things like that, which best shows the eternal God to be moved purely by the goodness of his own nature, to the recovery of sinners, and which attributes the whole and every part of their salvation to the mere mercy and grace of God, as their cause, is so fitted eternally to bind the heart in humble obedience and love, and raise it to high and delightful admiration of the glory of God as it shines in the face of Christ. No other scheme of doctrine lays the sinner so low in his own view, and so absorbs and swallows up his whole soul in love. Here a foundation is laid for the greatest nearness to God, and the highest felicity in the enjoyment of him.

To set aside the Scripture doctrine of particular Election, obscures the whole system of gospel grace, and casts a shade upon it. It takes away the only ground of hope from impenitent sinners, and renders it utterly uncertain whether any will ever be saved. It obscures the lustre and glory of divine mercy, and leaves the issue of the present state of things at the utmost uncertainty—depriving us of the evidence, that a good, worthy of *infinite love*, and answerable to the glorious displays which are made of divine power, wisdom and mercy, in the creation, government, and redemption of the world, will ever be accomplished.

On the best manner of preaching the gospel.

THE revelation of saving mercy to sinners, through Jesus

Christ, is well termed gospel, or good news. It may be summed up in the concise declaration, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."* It is more fully expressed in the divine testimony, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."† But in whatever form of words it is summarily expressed, a proper explanation will shew that it involves many most interesting and important truths, relating to God, his perfections, character, government, and grace;—relating to man, as a creature and subject of God, and as a sinner against him;—relating to Jesus Christ, in his wonderful person, the union of his divine and human natures, his mediatorial character, offices, and work;—relating to the application of redemption by the agency of the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of sinners, in his renewing and sanctifying influences, by which they are made willing in the days of God's power; are brought to repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ; and thus become the subjects of pardoning grace, and are kept by the power of God, through faith to salvation.

It pleased God in the riches of his mercy to sinful man, to inspire a number of chosen witnesses, to commit to writing, the system of Christian truth, as far as was requisite for the communication of saving knowledge, and thus to furnish the world with the sacred scriptures, which are able to make us wise to salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus.

That nothing might be wanting, in point of means, he hath graciously instituted the preaching of the

* 1 Timothy, i. 15. † John iii. 16.

gospel, and appointed an order of men, in the Christian church, to address their fellow-sinners, on the great concerns of religion, and the world to come; to explain and inculcate the truths, duties, and prospects opened in the gospel; to proclaim, from the scriptures, the glad tidings of salvation to penitent, believing sinners through the atonement of Christ; and to warn the impenitent and unbelieving of the wrath to come.

So important, so glorious and awful are the effects of this ministry, that the apostle, when speaking of himself and his fellow labourers says, "We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in those who are saved, and in those who perish. To the one we are a savor of death unto death, and to the other of life unto life;" and adds (in which every serious preacher of the gospel will join him.) "*Who is sufficient for these things?*"*

The preceding observations tend to shew the importance and solemnity of the Christian ministry, as it respects the preachers of the gospel, and those who hear them, and are a sufficient apology for this attempt to suggest a few thoughts on the best manner of preaching the gospel.

The writer is sensible of his inability to treat the subject as he could wish. But he hopes, through divine assistance, to offer something which may be useful, at least, to young ministers; and that, although he may suggest nothing new to the more experienced, he may be instrumental of "stirring up their pure minds by way of remembrance."

The following particulars appear to belong to the best manner of preaching the gospel.

I. The Christian minister must preach the gospel *truly*.

This is to preach it as it is revealed in the holy scriptures, without any perversion. God is, indeed, able to bring sinners to the saving knowledge of himself, under the most corrupt teachers. But this is not his ordinary way; neither is corrupt and false teaching an instituted mean of grace and salvation, or adapted to the benefit of the hearers, but the contrary, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing *by the word of God.*"†

If preaching be the proper mean of salvation to the hearers, it is by the exhibition of divine truth to their understandings and hearts, thus they are "begotten through the gospel," and the "pastors after God's heart feed them with knowledge and understanding." This shews us that public, authorized preachers of the gospel should be men of superior knowledge, in Christianity, such as are "able to teach others;" and excludes from the sacred office, the weak and ignorant, and shows that they are not called of God, to this work, whatever their own opinion may be of their ability and their call.

It is equally manifest that heretical teachers are not to be encouraged, whatever abilities they may possess. These do not *make manifest the mystery of Christ as they ought to speak or testify the truth as it is in Jesus*. Especially if their heresy respect any of the principal doctrines of the gospel. In that case, the apostle Paul represents them as preaching another gospel, and denounceth against them the divine malediction.‡

This naturally excites the enquiry, what are those essential truths of Christianity which must be de-

* 2 Corinthians, ii. 16.

† Rom. x. 17. ‡ Gal. i. 8, 9.

clared if the preacher would, in any good measure, speak as he ought?

To this it may be replied, that the Christian system is connected in all its parts. These may be compared to so many links of a great chain let down from heaven. None of these truths can be denied or obscured without injury to the Christian system.

Some are, however, more important and fundamental than others. These may be differently stated and enumerated by different persons, who equally regard divine truth.

To the writer, the following truths seem to be the most essential, in the foundation of Christianity, viz.

The being, perfections, and unity of God, and his infinitely perfect mode of existence, as a Triune Deity. The truth and divinity of the holy scriptures, of the old and new testament. The divinity and atonement of Christ: The justification of penitent, believing sinners, through his mediatorial righteousness. The total depravity of man, in consequence of the original lapse. The supernatural change of heart, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, in those who believe to the saving of the soul, the sovereignty and freedom of divine grace, in the salvation of sinners, displayed in time, according to the eternal purpose of God.

The nature and necessity of Christian holiness, and its unfailing connection with the faith of the gospel, in those who are saved. And the retributions of eternity, to the righteous and the wicked.

The preacher who enters deeply into these important truths of the gospel, will not, it may be hoped, essentially pervert any other;

and the hearer whose principles and manners are formed on them, will "go on in grace, and in the knowledge, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

II The Christian minister must preach the gospel *plainly*.

This implies that he present to his hearers the truths of Christianity, in language, easy to be understood by them, that instead of using ambiguity of language, or general and indeterminate assertions, he make it a leading object, next to preaching the simple truths of the gospel, to do it in a manner adapted to the capacity of his hearers, that they may understand him. With the apostle Paul, he will prefer speaking "five words, in the church, with his understanding, that he may edify others, to ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."* He must not only avoid that studied ambiguity by which unfaithful teachers aim at escaping the offence of the cross, and seek to please carnal hearers, but he must study that plainness of address which will render his meaning intelligible to his common hearers, that they may be instructed, convinced and edified.

Cutting is the reproof of the apostle in the passage just mentioned, to the preacher who is more concerned to commend himself to his hearers, as an able, learned, or eloquent man, than to commend the truth as it is in Jesus. But most of all doth the awful censure fall on the faithless timeserver, who hides himself under general and ambiguous language, to avoid the truth. Such may well be ranked with "false apostles, and deceitful workers, who by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple †

* 1 Cor. xiv. 19. † Rom. xvi. 18. and 2 Cor xi. 13.

III. The Christian minister must preach the gospel *demonstratively*.

His preaching should be "in the demonstration of the spirit, and of power,"† as distinguished from the enticing words of human wisdom, that the faith of his hearers "may not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God." For this purpose he needs a deep and extensive acquaintance with the Christian system—much and well chosen reading—and much study and prayer, that his views of truth may be clear, and his reasoning, conclusive; and that not merely, to the man of science, and the well studied divine; but to his attentive and serious hearers of common capacity. These constitute the great body of those who hear him, and among these he must look for his principal success. His arguments must therefore be both conclusive and plain. To this end, much depends on the connexion of the parts of his discourse, and the due arrangement of his thoughts.

Nothing is here mentioned touching the manner of speaking most conducive to success. Books of oratory are common, and may be consulted with advantage. Among these, professor Blair's lectures, and Dr. Fordyce's art of preaching deserve particular notice.

After all, to the preacher possessed of proper abilities and information, and who feels the weight and importance of divine things, the subject will inspire an ardor and pathos, more adapted to impress the truth on the minds of his hearers, and affect their hearts, than all the accomplishments of art, without it.

The leading truths of religion already named, must be often

clearly stated and urged, and the whole system of Christian truth and duty, connected with them, must be brought into view.

Divine truth, existing in the mind and resting on its mere evidence, is instrumental, through the divine blessing, to convince and convert the sinner; to detect the hypocrite; and to edify the true Christian. It is no less adapted to stop the mouths of gain-sayers, to silence unruly and vain talkers, and bring them to the acknowledgement of the truth. Not indeed without a powerful divine agency attending the word of truth.

Without this Paul may plant and Apollos water, in vain. But this affords no just objection against the use of divinely instituted means, or the least ground to expect that agency in the neglect of them.

IV. The Christian minister must preach the gospel *boldly*. Thus the apostle Paul requested the prayers of the Ephesians, that he might "open his mouth *boldly*, to make known the mystery of the gospel—that therein he might speak *boldly*, as he ought to speak."*—This boldness is essential to the right performance of his duty, as a preacher of the gospel, in distinction from a governing concern to please men, or obtain the approbation of the most respectable hearers, (however desirable when the fruit of fidelity.)

The fear of man must never shut his mouth, from declaring the whole counsel of God, in the most clear, solemn and demonstrative manner. He must keep back nothing, profitable to them, even whether they will hear or forbear, remembering that he is the steward of God, and to him he must shortly give an account.

† 1. Cor. ii. 4.

* Ephes. vi. 19, 20.

This boldness however, is widely different from that self-sufficiency and overbearing authority which have been, in some instances mistaken for it, and by which evil men have done much hurt to the cause of God and the souls of their hearers. The former is the result of deep impressions of the presence and authority of God, the worth of souls, the preciousness of gospel truth and the importance of eternity. The latter indicates the absence of all these, and shews a mind puffed up with religious pride and self-conceit. The boldness dictated and inspired by the gospel is that freedom of thought and expression which results from proper views of spiritual and divine objects. These fill the mind with impressions of their infinite importance, and lay the creature low before God, and thus deliver him from the fear of man by filling him with the fear of God.

V. The Christian minister must preach the gospel with *humility*.

With this, indeed, he must do all things; it is an essential branch of genuine Christianity. But it is peculiarly important in preaching the gospel.

Humility results from right views of the divine character and government, and of our own character and state. "I have heard of thee," said an eminent saint, "by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* Such was the effect of a clear display of the divine fulness to holy Job, and such will it ever be, to a heart prepared to embrace divine truth. The preacher, deeply impressed with a sense of his own exceeding unworthiness, is prepared to speak honor-

ably of God and Christ, and to address his hearers in a manner adapted to impress their minds, and persuade them to consider their latter end; and thus he "commends the truth to their consciences in the sight of God."

VI. The Christian minister must preach the gospel in the spirit of *kindness*.

The pious and benevolent preacher, in his preparations for the public solemnities, will contemplate the worth of the soul of man, the malignity of sin, the awfulness of divine wrath, the importance of eternity, and the wonderful love and grace of God, revealed in the gospel, and brought to us through Jesus Christ. All these subjects and especially the last, will prepare him to feel the most tender benevolence to perishing sinners. He will therefore address them from the fulness of his heart, with ardent longing for their salvation. Numerous and weighty are the motives to the kindest address to the souls of his hearers. We add in the last place,

VII. The Christian minister must preach the gospel with *solemnity*.

This remark results from all which have preceded. The truths to be proclaimed are exceedingly solemn and weighty, as they respect the great things of God, and his wonderful love and grace to guilty man; they are solemn as they relate to the wonderful work of redemption by the obedience and death of our Lord Jesus Christ; and as they respect the joys and sorrows of departed souls—the glorious and dreadful realities of the future and eternal state, and as they respect the final condition of the preacher and his hearers, which will be decided forever, by the abuse or improvement of this

* Job xlii. 5, 6.

momentary state, for "Behold now is the accepted time. Behold now is the day of salvation."

The faithful watchman will preserve his own soul, and may hope for the salvation of some, at least, of his hearers, even all who receive the truth in love, and fly for refuge to the hope set before them. But the people of the unfaithful minister, who were not warned by him it is much to be feared, will die in their sins, but their blood will be required at his hand.

How solemn and weighty is the ministerial charge! May all who take it on them feel its importance, and be qualified for its duties; and may the chief shepherd and bishop of souls assist them in their arduous work, and crown their labours with abundant success!

PHILANDER.

An attempt to distinguish such exercises as are the result of genuine religion, from such as are false.

1st. **T**RUE religion implies *self-acquaintance*, or a thorough conviction of the total depravity and ruin of human nature; and is the fruit of a *new taste*, which takes a decided part against *self-exaltation*, in favor of the divine perfections and government; while that counterfeit religion, which is self-delusive presupposes ignorance of the human heart, consequently is entirely destitute of *humility*, which flows from nothing but *self-acquaintance*. The divine law, has never come with power to the conscience, so that the subject is yet *alive* to himself, and *dead* to all proper views of God; and those affections which he exercises are toward an *imaginary* being, an *idol-God of his own creating*.

2d. The true Christian, while

he entertains the most heart-felt loathing of his own original character, beholds, with ineffable complacency, the character of God, as forming a most perfect *contrast* with his own. He is pained while his thoughts turn on himself as so vile and loathsome, but his heart is filled with exhilarating joy when he adverts to the transporting idea, that *infinite perfection fills the universe!* And that all this sin and evil, shall be over-ruled, and its natural tendency so counteracted, as that infinite good shall be the glorious result. His soul is revived, his heart leaps within him; that he is encircled by *such a God*; and he with unspeakable delight yields himself to be disposed of according to the dictates of this infinite perfection. While the fondly deceived and warm-hearted hypocrite, is delighted too, with the character of *his God*, (for there are "lords many.") He has gotten the idea which is inwrought into the constitution of the heart, that we are offenders. He therefore feels himself exposed to the resentment of an angry God; he is told that there is a door of relief opened for such in the gospel; and exclaims "*what marvellous—what astonishing goodness* that thus appears to rescue from this infinite threatened evil!" While his soul melts with grateful affection toward *his deliverer and benefactor*.

3d. The true saint possesses a large, capacious benevolence, and embraces the *universe in his bosom*. His language is, "let the lord govern, and make such arrangements as will issue in the highest possible good of his kingdom; let me be an happy instrument of promoting this blessed interest, be disposed of in that very way, that will best answer that most benevolent purpose: *here is my happiness, in this*