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A
SERMON

PREACHED IN THE
SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALBANY,

JULY 13, 1856,

THE SABBATH MORNING IMMEDIATELY SUCCEEDING THE INTERMENT OF

JOHN I. BOYD,

AND

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL.

Buell
BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.,
MINISTER OF THE SAID CHURCH.

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SERMON.

PSALM, XXV, 21.

LET INTEGRITY AND UPRIGHTNESS PRESERVE ME.

It is lamentable that prosperity often retards our spiritual growth. Our Christian graces are always liable to suffer from too constant contact with the world; and never is the danger so great as when the world turns toward us its brightest side. Hence it is to be reckoned not as severity, but as mercy, in our Heavenly Father, when, by sundering some tender tie, or blasting some cherished hope, he recalls us to a sense of our dependance and duty. What a striking instance of this was David! He said in his prosperity that he should never be moved. But when afflictions came thronging upon him, and the troubles of his heart were enlarged, he had no longer any confidence in an arm of flesh, but cast himself directly on the only arm that could sustain him; and while he besought the Lord to keep him and

deliver him, he found a rich source of comfort in the consciousness of his own sincerity.

“Let mine integrity and uprightness,” says he, “preserve me.”

What are we to understand by *integrity*, or *uprightness*? And what is the *preservation* which this quality is fitted to secure?

Integrity and *uprightness* are here used as synonymous terms; the former literally denoting *soundness*, the latter *ereclness of posture*; and both figuratively signifying *moral rectitude*. And yet this definition cannot apply to man in his present state without qualification; for there is no man whose actions, intentions, feelings, are all conformed to the perfect standard of God's law, as were those of our first parents before the fall. In the present state of human nature, every man who has not experienced a renovation by the Holy Spirit, is habitually a wanderer from God; and even those who have been renewed, render but a miserably imperfect obedience. Even such a man as David had constant occasion to mourn over his iniquities; and Paul, eminent as he was for Christian attainments, complained of a law in his members warring against the law of his

mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. Neither David nor Paul then was upright in the same sense that Adam was, in the state of primeval rectitude. It is only in a modified sense that this word can be considered as describing the characters of even the best men, in the present imperfect state.

What then are the *elements* of Christian integrity?

It has its beginning in a *correct moral discernment*; in that state of the mind that renders it susceptible of clear perceptions of right and wrong. No doubt it is much easier, in most cases, to know the right than to do it; and yet such is the influence of depravity on our whole moral constitution, that we are exceedingly prone to err even in our moral judgments. There is the influence of prejudice, of passion, of example, of supposed self-interest, which operates to bring a film over the eye of the mind, or at least so far to impair the moral vision, that its views become distorted and false. Hence we read of those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness. Hence we find the great Apostle declaring, in reference to him-

self, before his conversion,—“I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” And we witness substantially the same thing every day. There are some who, by a long course of flagrant vice, seem to have lost all moral discernment,—their consciences being absolutely seared; while there are others, of whose general character we may hope favourably, who yet become strangely blinded in respect to some particular subject, and perhaps are carried far away from the path of duty, while they imagine that they have not forsaken it at all. But, inasmuch as man is a moral agent, he is responsible for this state of mind by which he is misled; he is bound to resist all those influences by which his discernment of truth and duty is liable to be impaired. And it is only in proportion as one *does* resist them, that he can be said to be upright. It can never be an apology for doing wrong, that a man *thinks* he is doing right, so long as God has given him the power of judging correctly, and he has voluntarily sacrificed that power to the indulgence of depravity. I re-

peat then, integrity has its beginning in a correct moral discernment.

But this is only its beginning; for it implies also a disposition to *act* in accordance with right views, or to carry out correct moral judgments into the life. It is no uncommon thing for persons to fly in the face of their own honest convictions. With a full knowledge of the right, urged by the influence of some evil propensity, they plunge deeply, irrecoverably, into the wrong. And then again, there are many who are convinced where the path of duty lies, and who even seem to walk in it, and yet, it is only a constrained obedience which they render: it is merely a tribute to conscience; and it is only because they dare not, that they do not, openly walk in the way of the ungodly and sit in the scoffer's seat. But the upright man, while he sincerely desires to know what his duty is, desires *as* sincerely to *do* it. And, in the performance of the external act, he is governed not merely by a regard to his own conscience, but by a filial reverence for the Divine authority, a cordial approbation and love of moral rectitude. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—is a prayer that is

often breathed forth from his heart and lips; and he walks habitually in the light that shines upon his path in answer to this prayer.

You perceive that the *Scripture* meaning of the word *integrity* is far more comprehensive than the meaning which common use gives to it. We are accustomed to speak of a man as possessing uprightness or integrity, if he is honest in his dealings with his fellow men; if, in his worldly transactions, he is above all unfair and dishonourable dealing, and moves along in a plain and open path, even though in all this he is governed by considerations that reach not beyond this present world. But integrity, in the scriptural sense, while it includes the conduct just referred to, includes also, as its main spring, a practical recognition of the Divine authority; and it implies moreover, a sincere desire and constant aim to do our *whole* duty;—our duty to God as well as man; our duty in every relation and every condition. This is the quality which David contemplates when he says,—“Let mine integrity and uprightness preserve me.”
And what is this preservation?

Integrity will not unfrequently preserve a

man from great *worldly embarrassments and difficulties*. In the ordinary affairs of life, men most frequently make shipwreck of their integrity, with a view to escape or relieve themselves from some temporary embarrassment; but the result always shows the folly of the expedient; for while, in most cases, it signally fails in respect to the end it is designed to accomplish, it usually brings with it a train of other difficulties, far more serious than those which it is intended to avert. See this illustrated every day in commercial life. An individual perhaps finds that, in consequence of some unexpected change in the times, or some unseasonable extension of his business, or some indiscreet speculation, or from some other cause, he is likely to become seriously embarrassed,—perhaps is even threatened with absolute poverty; and in this emergency he casts around him for some expedient of relief; and he resolves that he will borrow money of his neighbour, who is ignorant of his circumstances; or, by some false pretences or other, will endeavour to retrieve his sinking fortune. Possibly he succeeds in his immediate object;—for God sometimes permits temporary suc-

cess to fraudulent transactions ; but it is more than probable that his object is lost with his labour, and that, in the attempt to practise fraud upon others, he consummates his own ruin. And then too he quickly discovers that he is surrounded with other and more appalling difficulties : his good name is gone, and no one is ready to come to his aid. Possibly he has the alternative of flying before the hand of justice, or finding his home within the walls of a prison. Now look at the man who, in similar circumstances, holds fast his integrity. *His* case too has become an urgent one ; but he takes counsel from an enlightened conscience as to what he ought to do, and then calmly and fearlessly does it. He resolves that, if need be, he will sacrifice his property to the last farthing, rather than be found in even a doubtful position as to moral rectitude ; and he goes honestly and industriously to work, resolved to do the best for himself that he can in consistency with a due regard to the rights of his fellow men. He may lose every thing,—and yet *not* every thing, for he keeps his character. The world may pity his misfortunes, but they will honour his integrity ;

and it will be strange indeed if there are not those who will cheerfully stand forth as his benefactors. In his poverty, he can still hold up his head, and look his neighbour in the face, and his neighbour will greet him with as cordial respect and kindness as ever. Be it so that he has to begin the world anew; yet under what advantages does he begin it, in consideration of his having held fast his integrity! Who has not heard it said a thousand times—"That man deserves well of his fellow men; for though he once failed for a large amount, yet he recovered himself, and never rested satisfied till he had paid the uttermost farthing." I say then, if you would be preserved from worldly embarrassment, or find your way out of it in the easiest manner, hold fast your integrity, even in the most trying circumstances.

Closely connected with the preceding remark is another—that integrity will preserve us, far more than any thing else, from the *reproaches* of our fellow men.

Not that the upright man will *always* escape reproach; for he is sometimes reproached not only in spite of his integrity, but on account

of it; though it usually happens, in such cases, that, sooner or later, the world do him justice, and at least practically condemn themselves for having maligned him. But, in all ordinary cases, you will find that the upright man has the respect and esteem of the world; but the deceitful and double dealing man, never. And this results from the order of things which God has established,—from the very constitution which God has given us. It is not at our option whether we shall award our respect to the good man, and regard with disapprobation the bad man—we do it as a matter of course—*every* man does it, till his conscience has become absolutely seared, even though his *heart* may be fully set in him to do evil. You have known the upright man sometimes temporarily subjected to great reproach, and perhaps overwhelmed with the bitterest calumnies; but you have said to yourself—“It is only a passing cloud, which will be succeeded by a bright and enduring sunshine. That man has nothing to fear; for he walks by a perfect rule, and there is that in integrity which sooner or later will make itself respected.” And, on the other hand,

you have sometimes seen the double minded, disingenuous pretender, for a season riding triumphantly on the wave of public favour, and his name has been emblazoned as the name of a patriot, or a philanthropist, or a saint; but have you not said to yourself,—“It is not according to the order of God’s providence that it should always be so; for that man is *destitute* of integrity; and the world, sooner or later, will probably know it, and will measure out to him a righteous retribution.” Men who lack integrity and endeavour to carry their ends by fraudulent management, generally suppose that, in their great wisdom, they pass themselves off for honest men; but in this they are egregiously deceived. They generally pass for what they really are, and nothing more; and if they could hear all the remarks of which they are the subjects in the course of a single week, they would be surprised to find to how little purpose they had worn the mask. There is but one way in which you can permanently sustain the reputation of an honest man; and that is by *being* an honest man.

Again: Integrity will save us from the power

of an *accusing conscience*. Every man knows, or has known, in his own experience, the feeling of remorse; or the exercise of a guilty conscience. The bitterest agonies that are experienced, or ever can be experienced, on earth, result from it; and no doubt too it will constitute a primary element in the future misery of the lost. But conscience is a witness for integrity; a witness against duplicity and fraud. To the upright man it speaks in a tone of approbation; to the deceitful man it utters the language of rebuke and terror. Wouldst thou then have a conscience void of offence, and be saved the terrible necessity of escaping from thyself in order to be at peace? Then hold fast thine integrity. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

And finally, integrity will preserve its possessor *from the anticipation of future evil, and to a future and eternal life*.

It will preserve him from the apprehension of evil in the *present* life. Suppose an individual to practise a system of fraud successfully, in the sense of not being detected; suppose he has taken some advantage of his neighbour by which he has greatly increased his fortune;

and he is sure that neither the individual whom he has wronged, or any other human being, has any suspicion of the fraud; yet do you believe that he has no painful apprehensions that something may hereafter occur which will bring out the secret of his dishonesty, and brand him before the world as a knave? Men of this character are never easy: they not only fear *real* evils, but often *imaginary* ones also; and the enjoyment of the present is greatly marred, often entirely destroyed, by the anticipations of the future. The upright man, on the contrary,—the man who can lay his hand upon his heart and humbly appeal to God for his sincerity, may contemplate the future without apprehension; for, though he knows afflictions must await him, he knows also that the guardianship of a gracious Providence is pledged to him, and he is sure that nothing will happen but will ultimately be made to enhance his highest interest.

But it were well, if all the evil which the want of integrity involves, were confined to the present world; but the most fearful calamities are reserved to *another* state of existence. It is no easy thing to reject the doctrine of

future retribution; and the reason is that God has constituted men with a witness to the truth of it in their own bosoms; and that witness cannot easily be silenced. The man who lacks integrity then, in all ordinary cases, is harassed with painful apprehensions in respect to his condition in the next world—apprehensions which are authorized by every thing in the Bible, and which will just as certainly be realized as that Jehovah is a God of truth. But from these distressing terrors and the incomparably more distressing reality, the upright man is preserved. He may indeed sometimes fear that he is a self-deceiver; but just in proportion as he has evidence of his integrity in the sight of God, has he evidence of his title to the Heavenly inheritance. And his integrity will preserve him to that inheritance. Not that it will be the price of it, or the ground on which it will be bestowed; but it will constitute the indispensable qualification for receiving and enjoying it. Yes, integrity, in the Scripture sense of the word, constitutes the very substance of the Christian character: the truly upright man is the truly

good man; and his integrity shall preserve him unto everlasting life.

In the direction which I have thus given to your thoughts, I have had in my eye two striking examples of integrity, which have now become the more impressive from being associated in our minds with the solemnities of death. The first in the order of departure was Mr. Boyd,—whose transition from this to the next world was so sudden that no eye but the All-Seeing witnessed it. Two weeks ago to-day, I saw him sitting in yonder pew, where I have seen him constantly for nearly twenty-seven years,—listening to the preaching of the Gospel, doubtless with as little apprehension that that was his last visit to the house of God, as any of you feel in respect to your attendance here this morning. The greater part of the week passed, and he was walking about the streets with elastic step and buoyant spirits, and greeting his friends with his usual familiar and cheerful aspect. On Friday morning, he took the boat for New-York, and the evening found him among his friends,—complaining indeed of slight indisposition, but still appearing cheerful and

happy; and when he went to his chamber, it was evidently without the least suspicion that Death was lurking there to arrest him. Of the rest of his earthly history nothing is known, except what may be inferred from the fact that when his friends expected him to greet them in the morning, they found themselves in the presence of his prostrate and lifeless body, in circumstances to indicate that he had fallen dead in the act of putting on his apparel. And thus, instead of their enjoying his expected visit, it devolved upon them to dress his body for the coffin, and send it back into a circle of relatives, already deeply schooled in bereavement,*—that it might be looked at for the last time, and then be sent on to its final resting place.

In respect to the character of Mr. Boyd and the influences under which it was formed, it cannot be necessary that I should enter into any details. You all know that he belonged to a family which has long been honoured for intelligence, stability; and reverence for Divine

* Several members of the family who have died elsewhere, have been brought hither for burial, within a few years; the last of whom was a son of Dr. James P. Boyd, a young man of great intellectual and Christian promise, who died suddenly a few weeks ago, while a student of the Theological Seminary at Princeton.

institutions; and his venerable father, whom some of us remember, as also his excellent brother, whose memory is still more fresh, held the office of elder for many years in the church from which our own is an offshoot. Accustomed, as he was, from his earliest developments, to breathe a religious atmosphere, he was always a punctual attendant on the means of grace, and ready by his general influence to help forward the cause of truth and virtue. It was not, however, till the spring of 1831,—nearly two years after the commencement of my ministry here, and during a season of special attention to religion, that he made a public profession of his faith. A few years since, as some of you may remember, he was the subject of a dangerous and protracted illness, from which, for a time, his friends had but faint hope of his recovery; and, during that period, it appeared to me that he received a fresh baptism of spiritual influence, which made him a better Christian during the rest of his life. He was so constitutionally averse to every thing like cant, or display, or noisy demonstration of any kind, in religion, that it is not certain but that he

fell into the opposite error, and was really less communicative in regard to his own views and feelings, than would have been most for his advantage as well as that of his Christian friends; but I feel bound to say that I am a witness that his reserve *sometimes* yielded, and that I have heard him speak of his own spiritual condition and prospects, not only with decided interest, but with deep emotion.

But the most striking feature of his character, as it seems to me, was the uniformity and stability with which he adhered to his convictions of right. Naturally averse to change, and uncommonly fixed and resolute in his purposes, he revered the ancient landmarks, and was little tolerant of any effort that was made to remove them. The religion of the Assembly's Catechism, as it was that to which he was born, was that also in which he lived and died; and any thing that should have been offered him as a substitute for it, he would have rejected, as well from hereditary impulse as sober conviction.

I must say a word of the relations that our departed friend sustained to this church. He was one of the little band who participated in

its original establishment; and from an early period of its history, till within the last few years, he has held the office of Trustee, discharging its duties with the utmost conscientiousness and fidelity. At several different periods, when a special effort has been necessary to improve the financial condition of the church, the object has been accomplished chiefly through the joint instrumentality of himself and another honoured member of the Board,* who traversed the city for many days together, before they could announce that their work was done. And I cannot forbear to state, as a circumstance most pleasantly associated in my recollections, that it was from the hands of our departed friend that I received the call to become your pastor; and my first introduction here was in connection with his kind and courteous attentions. I may add also that, from that time till the day of his death, I have found him a firm and faithful friend,—always interested, as I have had reason to believe, in whatever seemed likely to promote my comfort or usefulness.

* Alexander Marvin, Esq.

It was while I was standing beside the coffin of our friend, at the close of the funeral solemnities, that it was whispered in my ear that there was another dwelling at which I might stop on my way home,—where the voice of Christian sympathy and prayer would be doubly welcome, because death had not been satisfied with finding in that family a single victim. But a few days before, when they were daily expecting to welcome back a beloved son and brother,—a young man of the most amiable disposition and noble and generous bearing, from whom they had been separated for nearly six years,—the tidings came that death had found him on his homeward journey,—and thus, instead of affectionate greetings, there were bitter sobs and flowing tears.* And the aged and venerable father,—himself the subject of a consuming malady, and bending towards the grave, must hear these tidings too,—must have a subject of strange and agonizing interest presented to his thoughts, to take along with him in

Mr. Alexander Campbell, a professional engineer, who had been engaged in constructing several railroads in South America, had embarked for New-Orleans, on his way, to Albany was attacked with a fever, which after a few days, terminated fatally, and was committed to an ocean grave. He died at the age of thirty seven, greatly lamented.

connection with bodily decay and suffering, down to the valley of death. I saw him just after he knew that he was bereaved, and when his heart was bleeding most freely; but his whole appearance indicated a spirit of unqualified submission to his Heavenly Father's will. It was only for a few days that that burden rested upon his spirit. The disease of which he had long been the subject, not improbably accelerated in its operation by his bereavement, quickly did its work; and, amidst the most devoted attentions which conjugal and filial love could render, he languished until he put off the mortal to put on immortality.

The character of Mr. Campbell was manifest and unmistakable. A Scotchman by birth and education, he had those strong, excellent traits, which marked his nationality. He was always true to his own convictions, and never took counsel of expediency where the path of duty was plain. He was incapable of guile—no one who knew him ever suspected him of being a party to any thing allied to disingenuousness or duplicity. At the same time, he was quiet, and prudent, and conciliatory, in

all his intercourse, and I believe rarely, if ever, made an enemy. During much the greater part of his life, after he came to this country, he held an important office in the State;* and so uniformly faithful and honourable was he in the discharge of its duties, that even political partizanship, whose tender mercies are proverbially cruel, evidently paused and faltered in the act of making him an object of proscription. In his Christian character he was uniformly exemplary; and while an elder in this church, as he was for several years, he shrunk from no duty which his office imposed upon him. I have lived too long by the side of him not to know that, in his family, he was a model at once of dignity and affection; and that his character, as the head of a household, was such as to inspire confidence, reverence, and love. In short, he sustained every relation, whether public or private, in such a manner as to reflect honour upon his Christian profession.

I do not forget, my friends, that I am speaking of a man, who, for many years past,

* He was appointed Deputy Secretary of State in 1812, was superseded in 1849; was reappointed in 1852; and resigned the office the next year.

has not been connected with our church; but surely that is no reason why I may not render a tribute to his memory, especially as the most hearty mourners for his death are our fellow worshippers. May the God of all consolation abide with them in their desolate dwelling; and though the husband and the father, the son and the brother, can never come to them again, may there always be a gracious presence there, that shall foreshadow that glorious world, into which neither affliction, nor death, nor sin,—the prolific parent of both,—can ever enter.

The almost simultaneous removal of two individuals from the midst of us, thus honoured for their integrity, while it may be legitimately deplored as a calamity, ought to come to each of us with the force of a Divine admonition to exhibit in our own characters the same noble quality by which they were distinguished. I would commend such examples especially to the young,—the generation into whose hands the great interests of society are now rapidly passing. I counsel you, my young friends, to honour the memories of those whose integrity and uprightness have

preserved them during a long life; and not only to honour their memories, but to imitate their example. I counsel you to guard against the slightest departures from duty,—the least approach to trifling with conscience. If you yield in a single instance,—if you deliberately do an act, which you know and feel to be wrong, you can have no assurance that it will not be the first of a series of acts, that may brand you as an outcast from society; an outcast from God, and Hope, and Heaven. No matter then what the temptation may be, resist it as you regard your reputation, safety, and prosperity on earth, or your highest interests beyond the grave. Remember that the greatest earthly good is purchased at a higher price than you can afford to pay, if it costs you the least deviation from principle, the least sacrifice of integrity. But if you form and adhere to the purpose of always obeying the voice of God, whether it comes to you from the depths of your own bosom, or from his Holy Word; if you allow no false principles of expediency to control you, and surrender yourselves to the guidance of that wisdom that cometh down from above; if, instead of

inquiring what worldly policy dictates, you inquire only what is right; you may well afford to dismiss all fear in respect to the future; for the very constitution of God's providence, as well as the whole tenor of His word, bears ample testimony to your safety. But remember that it is no spurious integrity that will secure to you these blessings—it must be an integrity involving a reliance on the merits of Christ, and formed by a combination of the graces of the Spirit. Such an integrity I pray you to cultivate. Cultivate it as a means of making you happy. Cultivate it as a tribute to parental love. Cultivate it as an act of obedience to Him who has a right to command, and who is able both to reward and to punish.

I cannot close without adverting to the relation which the recent dispensations of Providence bear to our history as a congregation. Oh how impressively they force upon us that significant inquiry,—“The fathers, where are they?” I look around for the men who were active in forming this church and were interested in its earliest fortunes, and I believe not half a dozen representatives of

that little enterprising band now remain. I look around for those who were immediately concerned in my own settlement, and from whom I received the first welcome to this field of ministerial labour; and alas, they have fallen one by one, till I find myself standing in the presence of almost another congregation. And the few remaining links that connect the present with the past will soon be broken. The energies that time has already begun to palsy, death will quickly extinguish. Nay, it will be but a little while before the funeral of even the youngest person present will have been attended, and every member of this congregation, as I see it now before me, will have gone to mingle in eternal scenes. I exhort you, I beseech you, one and all, work while the day lasts. You especially upon whom the shadows of age are beginning to fall, and who have but a little time left either to serve God and your generation, or to secure your own immortal interests, I call upon you to be up and doing. However you may have been employed hitherto, let your last days be sacred to the great purpose for which life was given. Let not this vain world cheat you out

of the incorruptible inheritance. Delay not till to-morrow; for your life is almost spent, and to-morrow's sun may go down upon your open grave.