

# ORIGINAL SERMONS;

BY

**Presbyterian Ministers,**

IN

**THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY.**

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Now, I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same things, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

PAUL.

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# SERMON I.\*

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## METHODS OF PEACE.

Let us follow after the things that make for peace. ROM. xiv. 19.

HISTORY, tradition, observation and experience, all announce that this world is a "vast scene of strife." That irrational animals, under the influence of ungovernable instincts, should torment and destroy each other; or, that hopeless fiends should revel in eternal discord, is no matter of surprise—but that rational creatures, preserved in a condition of hope, exposed to everlasting despair, capable of intellectual improvement and social happiness, children of the same family, all looking forward to death and after death the judgment, should, under the influence of pride, prejudice, passion, ambition or avarice, make this world a scene of contention, rapine and blood, is a picture of degeneracy, at the sight of which angels may wonder, and men should weep.

If animosity and strife were *only* found among those "who say unto God, depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways"—if *none* but the avowed sons of Belial were engaged in "*hatred, variance, emulations, wrath and strife*"—there would be less cause for surprise and regret. But, what language can de-

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scribe the affecting scenes, where the professed subjects of the Prince of peace display their hostile banners, and silence the voice of friendship and the accents of love by the clangor of passion and the din of discord; where the experience of age is silenced by the clamor of youth, and the meekness of wisdom scorned as imbecility—where pre-eminence is sought by novelty, and multitudes turned from the “old paths” by innovation; where the true ministers of God are constrained to engage in theological debate with men who corrupt the word of God; where all the panoply of heaven is buckled on to defend the church against those who subvert the souls of men by substituting a vain philosophy for the gospel of Christ.

How painful was the task imposed on the apostles and elders when they were constrained to leave their several fields of delightful and useful labor, and assemble at Jerusalem, not to contend with infidel Jews nor with Pagan philosophers, not to push their united force against the common and avowed enemies of the cross of Christ; but to dispute with professing Christians—to measure the weapons of theological warfare with the professed ministers of Jesus Christ—to contend earnestly with men who had gone out from among themselves, troubling the churches and subverting souls with uncommanded words!

How affecting was the premonition given by the apostle Paul to the elders of the church of Ephesus, assembled at Miletus—“Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations—and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, and

have taught you publicly, and from house to house—wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare to you all the counsel of God. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers—to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of yourselves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears!”

In scenes of strife and debate, in scenes of resistance, striving even unto blood, the apostles resembled the prophets. The disciples were like their master, and the servants as their Lord. The reason is plain. Truth and falsehood often meet, and never agree. Every man therefore who wishes to preserve a “good conscience,” must “war a good warfare.” He must not for a moment, nor in the slightest degree, favor that “*monster of modern philosophy*, THE INNOCENCE OF ERROR. He must detect it; pursue it; hunt it down; urge it over the precipice: but permit those who started with it to disentangle themselves and save their lives,” if they can. To accomplish these objects, to remedy evils of such magnitude, to wipe disgrace from the church of God, to cultivate peace by the promotion of purity, the ministers of reconciliation point to the Prince of peace, his precepts, his example. They say to all, “Brethren, whatsoever things are *true, honest, just, lovely* and of *good report*, think on these things.” They say to all,

as in our text, "follow after the things that make for peace."

To this exhortation, brethren, I affectionately invite your attention, while I endeavor to direct your hearts into the love of God, and your feet in the paths of peace. And may the Holy Spirit of truth, grace, and peace descend into every heart, and crown this labor with his smiles and benediction.

The term peace is very significant. It signifies respite from war, quiet from disturbances, exemption from tumults, rest from commotions, reconciliation of differences, suppression of evil passions, freedom from dangerous errors; all foretastes of the highest state of peace, heavenly rest.

My text speaks of peace in general. Were I to descend to particulars, I might recommend spiritual peace, which consists in deliverance from sin, by which we are at enmity with God; social peace, which is a state of mutual agreement and confidence; ecclesiastical peace, which is a freedom from contentions in the church, and exemption from persecution.

On these I cannot now enlarge. The same process which advances peace in general, will promote every kind of peace to which I have alluded.

In pointing out several steps which we may take in following after the things that make for peace, I observe,

1. Every one, who desires to promote peace, must take special care to be himself a good man.

Bad men, in church and state, are like "the troubled sea that cannot rest." From goodness only can we expect the fruits of goodness. The principal characteristics of a good man are love and humility. Love to

God, love to his neighbor, love to his enemies, fills the heart of a good man. The knowledge of what he is, and what he ought to be, a view of his own meanness and the Saviour's merit, a sense of his own vileness by a discovery of the glory of God, a deep conviction of sin and a hope of mercy through the blood of the cross, brings him to the dust, clothes him with humility. He sits at the feet of Jesus, who was meek and lowly in heart. He follows the example of Jesus, who made himself of no reputation.

Too often, my brethren, there is a pernicious distinction made between goodness and greatness. The idea that many form of goodness is low and degrading. To express low thoughts of one, of whom a low opinion is formed, it is not unusual to say, he is a good, well-meaning man. Publish in any of our churches the name of an unknown minister of Jesus Christ, and what do you immediately hear? "Is he a great man?" "Is he a great speaker?" "Shall we be much entertained?" Does not this prove that there is an invidious distinction between goodness and greatness? Ought not persons rather to ask, is he a good man? Is he an evangelical preacher? Shall we be edified in love, comforted in hope, and conducted in the way of truth and peace, by his preaching? Ministers of the gospel are in great danger of being led astray by this popular error. The applause of men, the splendor of distinctions, the sound of titles, too often captivate their hearts; and in their efforts to become great men, they sometimes lose sight of goodness. Such great men frequently disdain to tread in the plain and beaten path of evangelical truth. To reject old systems, to invent new plans, to be the leader of a sect, to soar on the

wings of fancy or sit on the summit of popular applause, are the purposes for which they trim the midnight lamp. "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." But in proportion as reputation is acquired by the sacrifice of goodness, peace is destroyed. Contention, strife, and division, are the concomitants of such greatness. In the opinion of the Lord of glory, the humble man is the great man. "To this man will I look," saith Jehovah, "even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." It is by cultivating meekness and lowliness of heart that men "follow after the things that make for peace." And let the gilded aspirants who float on the breath of popularity and glitter in the sparks of their own kindling, know that the path of their brightness shall end in darkness, when the humble shall be crowned with a halo of glory. The happy spirits that adore and burn before the throne of the Supreme, are humble. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that would be chief among you let him be servant of all."

2. He who would follow the things that make for peace must, as far as possible, think favorably of the sentiments and conduct of others. I admit that those who are taught of God cannot think favorably of dangerous errors, of evil devices. This is plainly impossible. The idea of a man of common sense and common honesty thinking well of others contrary to evidence, is palpably absurd. But the sons of peace will be more careful to extract the beam than pull out the mote. Every one ought to know that the Lord seeth not as man seeth. Jesus Christ has said, "Judge not from appearance, but judge righteous judgment. A thou-



sand circumstances may influence the opinions and conduct of others, which we can neither know, understand nor appreciate. In all doubtful cases our judgment should be suspended till an opportunity be afforded for a full and impartial investigation. One of the most amiable traits in the portrait of charity is, that she "thinketh no evil." It often happens, that good men who have the same benevolent ends in view differ about the ways and means of accomplishing their designs. In such cases mutual forbearance and candid explanation are indispensable for the promotion of peace. Were men at all times swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath, at all times disposed to bear each other's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ, which is love; at all times vigilant and active in following the example of *him* who pities our weakness, helps our infirmities, and forgives our sins, strife would come to an end, and peace universally prevail. Those who believe that God has opened their own eyes, and restored their souls, and made them to walk in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake, ought to feel compassion and exercise forbearance, and hold out the hand of assistance to such as are still under the power of darkness. The sympathies of piety incline us to pity the children of affliction. We hasten to save with a friendly hand those who are exposed to peril, and we experience a gratification in administering to the necessities of the wretched. But who are more the children of affliction than those who are blinded by the God of this world? Who are in more imminent danger than the dead in trespasses and sins? Who are more wretched than the deluded wanderers from God, from heaven, from hope? And shall we pass such with disdain? Shall we repel

them by reproach? Shall we take the attitude of self-righteousness, and despise others? Let us remember the rock whence we were hewn, the hole of the pit whence we were digged, and become the promoters of peace by being gentle towards all men.

3. He who follows after the things that make for peace, must possess and cherish a forgiving temper. In this world of strife every one meets with enemies. However unexceptionable his conduct, however pure his motives, however sound his faith, he will meet with the strife of tongues, and feel the darts of malevolence. To abstain from retaliation, to take joyfully the spoiling of goods, to be patient under reproach, to bless when cursed, to do good when injured, to forgive as he hopes to be forgiven, are labors of love reserved for those *only* who follow after the things that make for peace.

Do you tell me that if your enemies would repent, if they would humble themselves at your feet, if they would confess their faults and redress the wrongs they have done, then you would forgive them; then you would ask the Father of mercies to bless them; then you would cherish them with feelings of benevolence? Let me tell you that for this desirable change of heart and life you must not wait. While they remain your enemies you must do them good, and thus be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect; for "he causeth his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain upon the just and unjust." If you indulge a hostile temper and delay forgiveness till your enemies fall at your feet, till they repair damages and solicit the hand of reconciliation, you do not then forgive an enemy; you embrace a friend. And if you love those

only who love you, you do no more to promote peace than publicans and sinners, and even the most malicious hypocrites.

4. He who would follow after the things that make for peace, must engage in controversy with the meekness of wisdom. The discussion of subjects on which men differ in opinion, is unavoidable. Men of great self-denial, of hopeful piety, of high literary attainments, have taken different views of the same subjects, and been conducted to different conclusions by their investigations. This is not at all surprising, where men "know only in part," and "see through a glass darkly." There is, however, an immutable difference between truth and error, an infallible standard of right and wrong, a correct mode of interpretation. But this difference cannot be perceived, this standard is never reached, this mode will never be adopted where pride, prejudice, passion and love of pre-eminence reign in the hearts of men. Those who enter the list of controversy for the promotion of peace will never indulge in declamation, nor raise the tone of dictation. To the law and testimony they will make their appeal. To promote party interests, to maintain obstinately favorite plans, to strive for victory more than truth, must be always considered unworthy motives in Christian disputation. To garble sentiments, distort principles, misrepresent arguments, is a departure from courtesy and candor. Nor can it subserve the cause of truth nor promote peace, for men to expose their opponents to hatred by alleging their opinions to have been held by bad men. Are we bound to discard a proposition, as false, because wicked men have held the truth in unrighteousness? Could we expose to the greatest odium

whole communities by calling them Papists, Heretics, Calvinists, Arminians, Hopkinsians, or Unitarians, would this settle the important questions concerning the supremacy of the Pope, the doctrines of election, falling from grace, God's being the author of sin, or the divinity of Christ? These, and other points of dispute, if ever decided, will be settled by a very different process, and he who fancies that truth and peace are promoted by names of disgrace, is as far from the ways of wisdom as he who imagines that hatred is the cause of love. We are warranted in saying that the holy scriptures are given by inspiration of God. They are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. To them we should appeal, as an infallible standard.

The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Therefore many of them believed. Let every one who enters the list of controversy advance with diffidence in himself, confidence in Christ, candor and affection towards his opponents, having for his grand object the glory of God in the advancement of truth and peace. Every man who enters upon theological discussion should think and speak systematically. But as all systems formed by human device are imperfect, Christian theologians must form their system by the oracles of God. The man who examines these oracles, in order to know what to believe and what to do, and holds himself in readiness to add or retrench as the light of God's word requires, is in the way of truth, a promoter of peace, a fair candidate for usefulness and glory.

5. They who follow the things that make for peace, must maintain against all opposition the purity of the church.

The purity of the church consists in sound doctrine, correct discipline, and a deportment becoming the gospel. All men, except fools and maniacs, will have some religion, which they either now profess or intend to profess hereafter. We profess Christianity, giving it preference, from education or choice, to Paganism, Judaism, Mahometanism or Deism. Also, from education or choice, out of about 800 sects of professed Christians, we have selected that particular branch of Presbyterianism now known in North America by the name of General Assembly Presbyterians. Every denomination of Christians makes an appeal, more or less direct, to the Bible. Every Christian sect must say what the Bible teaches, and on this interpretation they must risk their salvation. They have a right, under their responsibility to God, to interpret his word, and to adopt their own mode of explanation. Here their right of explanation ends. Their creed, once expressed—that is, their explanation of what the Bible teaches men to believe and do—once adopted as a system of truth, is their philosophy of the facts of the Bible, and further explanation by them is inadmissible unless they intend to change their creed. Admit them to explain the Bible and thereby form a creed; then admit them to explain their creed; and then admit them to explain that explanation; and you have three creeds instead of one; nay more, you may have twenty creeds under one denomination, and every new expositor may call the explanation of his predecessor or cotemporary stale and worthless.

Such a license as this, would destroy all Christian confidence, distract all Christian societies, and put an end to the legitimate use of creeds and confessions. I say, then, a Confession of Faith, once formed, expresses, according to the views of the framers and adopters, if they be honest men, what the word of God teaches, and men make and adopt a confession at the hazard of their souls. If men see their creed is wrong, let them make a better, but let them deny the former and not profess to retain it while they make a new system by philosophizing on the facts contained in the old one. When we speak then of sound doctrine, or a form of sound words, we mean the system of doctrine taught in the holy scriptures, expressed in the language of our Confession of Faith. If there be any subject on which the confession has said nothing, on that subject brethren of the same denomination may be allowed kindly to differ in opinion, but on every subject on which the Confession has spoken, they are bound to speak the same things, to mind the same, that there be no division among you. He then who corrupts the Christian creed of the society to which he belongs, corrupts the word of God, on the supposition that the society holds the truth. He who perverts the Confession of Faith of his own church perverts the doctrines of the Bible. He who wrests it wrests the scriptures to his own destruction. If a confession be wrong, leave it, and say in another, what ought to be believed and practised; but wo to that man who says it is right, and yet perverts it. I speak not this unadvisedly. There is no sin, except the sin against the Holy Ghost, so great, as that of preaching "another gospel, which is not another." It would draw down the curse of God

upon an angel from heaven. Wo to that society which frames or adopts an erroneous creed, and wo to that man who professes one creed and preaches another. He may possess the most splendid talents; he may wear the brightest crown of human applause: but it were better for him had he never been born.

Discipline stands intimately connected with doctrine. I am aware that church discipline is treated with levity, and sometimes even with scorn. The censures of an ecclesiastical court are considered by many as mere scarecrows to terrify the weak and ignorant. What ideas have we of a kingdom? Is not Jesus Christ our king? Is he not set upon the holy hill of Zion? Has not an inspired apostle said to the subjects of this kingdom, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls as they that must give account?" Can there be a kingdom without laws, without penalties, without officers, without subordination? The officers in the kingdom of our Lord do not watch for men's bodies, to imprison or torture them; nor for their estates, to confiscate them: *they watch for their souls*, and of their vigilance and fidelity they must give account. The king of Zion has given them power, whether it be believed or disbelieved; not merely the power of teaching, exhorting, warning, reproving, and rebuking; but of suspending and excommunicating the ignorant and scandalous. And what they bind on earth is bound in heaven. The king ratifies every just decision. And wo to that man who treats the discipline of Christ's house with indifference! But discipline should be exercised to promote peace—exercised with prudence, patience, tenderness, affection, deliberation, solemnity, and without partiality.

The promotion of the glory of God, in the salvation of men, by preserving the peace and purity of the church, is the blessed end of discipline. And that discipline will promote the greatest degree of peace which is exercised with the greatest degree of love. Let the strong bear the infirmities of the weak. Let the spiritual restore the tempted. And let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor.

But let discipline be neglected, because the task is arduous, painful, and unpopular; let false teachers be encouraged, because there is an 'elective affinity' for error; let conformity to the world be indulged on the plea of mental cultivation, polite accomplishment, or innocent amusement; let a lax church open its doors and become an asylum for the offenders of a church more strict; let a multitude of small churches be organized in the neighborhood of each other, to gratify discontented minorities, or answer party purposes: and there is an end to peace. The waters of the troubled deep cannot be more agitated by a tempest than will such a corrupt society be disturbed by discord, debate, wrath, strife, heresies, and even tumults.

6. Those who follow the things that make for peace must support the Bible cause. The Bible is God's book. From it we learn our origin and our end. It is designed by its author as the grand instrument of peace. Bible Societies wear a peculiar aspect; an aspect which it is impossible for Satan, with all his artifice, to imitate, pervert, or destroy. Union, purity, and peace form a threefold cord not easily broken. Sacrifices have been perverted, signs and wonders imitated, the Urim and Thummim counterfeited. Missionary Societies, Tract Societies, Education Societies,



Theological Seminaries, and Sabbath Schools, though excellent institutions, may be, and some of them already have been made, the unwilling instruments of propagating the most fatal errors. And what good institution on earth has not been perverted or contaminated by men of corrupt minds? I answer, Bible Societies. These cannot be imitated, perverted, nor overthrown by Satan and his ministers, transformed into an angel of light and ministers of righteousness. Bible Societies, pure in their principles, benevolent in their designs—simple, sublime, and powerful in their operations, are accomplishing by means what was once done by miracle—the communication of the wonderful works of God, to every man in his own tongue wherein he was born. They have done more for the promotion of peace in eighteen years, than was done before for eighteen centuries. They form a point of union for the philanthropist, the patriot, the philosopher, and the Christian. A place where they can all meet without light having fellowship with darkness, or Christ holding concord with Belial. They form an unfurled banner, inscribed with love, around which all Christians can assemble in peace. They form a deep-rooted, towering, and flourishing tree, whose branches spread over every clime, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Ye lovers of order, ye friends of peace, ye promoters of righteousness, cherish this lovely tree. Sit together under its shadow; partake of its pleasant fruits. O how I long to see the happy day when the peace of God shall reign in every heart, and the nations and churches learn war no more. Come, thou blessed Prince of peace, and cherish this lovely tree.

Here shed the lustre of thy fame;  
Diffuse thy grace abroad;  
Let distant nations learn thy name,  
And own their sovereign Lord.

II. After what has been said, I have time to say but little with regard to the motives which should excite us to follow after the things that make for peace. There are however three leading motives which must operate powerfully upon the heart of every good man. The love of Christ, the command of Christ, the blessing of Christ. Who can resist the Saviour's love? Who can trifle with the Saviour's injunction? Who can slight the Saviour's blessing?

Dear brethren, many of you are called in a particular manner to be ministers of reconciliation, messengers of peace. It is your honor and felicity to pray men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. In order to fulfil your ministry, in order to promote peace, you must buy the truth, and sell it not. You must strive to know, and not shun to declare, "all the counsel of God."

There are times when no voice should be silent, no hand idle among the friends of orthodox principles. They are bound by all that is dear in time, and all that is solemn and glorious in eternity, at the hazard of reproach, and losses, and persecutions, to "display a banner of truth." Many corrupt the doctrines of the gospel at the fountain head, and offer to perishing souls a vain theory, and the mischiefs arising are greatly increased by a zeal and liberality "not according to knowledge." Some esteem the external order of the house of God a matter of no importance, and hence are continually intruding into our churches novelty and innovation. Such a state of things with an intempe-

rate pursuit of wealth—the relaxation of social ties—the violence of political ferment—with the approach of those fearful days which are coming upon the earth, must grieve the godly, ensnare the unwary, stumble the blind, multiply the profane, and instead of promoting peace, spread discord, confusion, and every evil work. And, brethren, will any of you hasten on this work of desolation? Will any of you slumber on till the midnight cry awake you? Awake, arise, commence this hour to follow the things that make for peace; and who can tell what an extent of ruin you may, by the blessing of God, avert from your own souls, your families, your country, and from the church of God? The means of success are placed at your disposal. The subjects of faith “once delivered to the saints,” and the primitive practice of Christians, call for your unwavering attention, not only on account of their intrinsic value, but because they derive a new interest from “the signs of the times.” The precious, uncorrupted truth of the gospel must be maintained, vindicated, and urged upon the consciences of men. The ignorant must be instructed, the timid encouraged, the lukewarm stimulated, the unsound and incorrigible cut off. All must be taught to view, in a juster light than has been common, the nature, value, and importance of the Redeemer’s institutions, which are placed in the church, and must be conducted by the church; for his kingdom is not of this world. All must be put on their guard against the many “Antichrists,” which, in various shapes, are abroad in the world. They must be cautioned against those “swelling words of vanity” and “fair speeches of craft,” by which they are in danger of being led in the paths of delusion. The foundation.

of saving truth, the comely order of Zion, the costly privileges of the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood, must be explored and practiced, and possessed, and enjoyed. Men must be taught in meekness and wisdom to give a "reason of the hope that is in themselves," and a reason for their opposition to the errors of others. They must be led to a better knowledge of the holy scriptures, and be persuaded to resort to those instructors who will "feed them with knowledge and understanding;" to exert themselves in the use of suitable means to procure a ministry of able and faithful men, who will "rightly divide the word of truth," "taking heed unto themselves and to the doctrine," that they may both save themselves and them who hear them; and in fine, they must consider Christian families as the nurseries of the church on earth, as the church on earth is the nursery of the church in heaven; and thus be brought to bring up youth in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord:" and then we shall have peace; then all will speak the same things, and there will be no divisions among you. "The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever."