

*Mr Daniel White,
from his friend,
Wm.*

MR. SPRAGUE'S SERMON

At the Ordination of

THE REV. JOHN P. CLEVELAND.

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The Gospel the Wisdom of God.

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SERMON

PREACHED AT SALEM, FEBRUARY 14, 1827,

AT THE ORDINATION OF

THE REV. JOHN P. CLEAVELAND,

AS PASTOR

OF THE TABERNACLE CHURCH.

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SERMON.



1 CORINTHIANS, II. 7.

BUT WE SPEAK THE WISDOM OF GOD.

THERE is, perhaps, no feature of the gospel, at which the pride of man is more inclined to revolt, than its perfect simplicity. With all its grandeur of design, and all its extent of provision, it claims, as its basis, the single fact, that Jesus Christ died as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Now, there is in the unsanctified heart a spirit of lofty aspiring, which desires to be treated with, even in the affair of salvation, in a more honorable manner ; just as a certain leper, in ancient times, preferred some splendid remedy to the simple process of washing in Jordan. When christianity first announced its claims to the world, this spirit was distinctly visible in the opposition which it had to encounter from the prevailing systems of heathen philosophy. The

Apostle, in endeavoring to correct some errors into which the Corinthian church had fallen, from the fondness which some of their teachers had for the refinements of reasoning and eloquence, places these in striking contrast to the simple doctrine of the cross ; and in our text, he dignifies the latter with the sublime appellation of the WISDOM OF GOD.

By WISDOM, in its most general acceptation, we understand *knowledge accompanied with a disposition to make a right use of it*. As an attribute of the divine nature, it is *omniscience directed by infinite benevolence*.

When the Apostle, in our text, styles the gospel *the wisdom of God*, I hardly need say that he does not mean to intimate that this is the only instance in which this attribute has ever been displayed ; for Wisdom lifteth up her voice in every part of the creation. From the seraph that burns before the throne, through all the grades of animated nature, down to the insect that glitters for an hour ; from the immense globe which we occupy, through all the combinations of matter, down to the mote which is visible only to a microscopic eye, there is nothing—however vast—however minute, on which the Creator has not

left the traces of his wisdom. The meaning of the Apostle, then, obviously, is, that the gospel is the brightest exhibition of divine wisdom ; that it gives us a higher view of *the only wise God* than any thing, either in the natural or moral world, which has ever been made known to us.

With this explanation of the passage, I shall endeavor to illustrate and establish the proposition, that **THE GOSPEL IS THE WISDOM OF GOD** : and I shall pursue this design by showing, First, that *the gospel accomplishes the noblest purposes by the best means* ; and Secondly, that *it accomplishes many, and apparently opposite purposes, by simple, and apparently improbable means.*

I. THE GOSPEL ACCOMPLISHES THE NOBLEST PURPOSES BY THE BEST MEANS.

The grand **PURPOSES** to which I refer, are *the glory of God, and the happiness of the intelligent creation.* The **MEANS** employed for their accomplishment, is, in general, *the mediation of the Son of God* ; comprehending all that he is, and all that he does, in his prophetic, priestly and regal offices : Or, that our view of it may be still more simple, we may consider the glory and efficacy of the whole scheme, as centered in his *atonement sacrifice.*

When I assert that this was the *best* means which could be employed, I would speak with a degree of reverence becoming so exalted a subject. To say, as some have said, that the scheme of redemption which the gospel reveals, was the only *possible* one, seems to me to be limiting the Holy One; and yet the fact that this has been adopted, proves that it was the *best*—certainly that there was *none better*, within the range of infinite intelligence. But although we are unable to trace this scheme in all its connexions, there is manifest, even to our limited apprehension, a wonderful adaptation of means employed, to ends to be accomplished. Particularly,

1. The gospel, or the scheme of Christ's mediation, which is the substance of the gospel, is admirably fitted TO PROMOTE THE DIVINE GLORY; or to make an illustrious exhibition of God's moral perfections.

It accomplishes this object better than it could have been accomplished, *by an unconditional and absolute pardon*, which should have been merely an act of God's sovereignty. Man, in becoming a sinner, broke in upon the order of the universe, and committed an act, which, in the eye of the divine law, was a capital offence against God's

moral kingdom. If, then, this offence is to be pardoned *unconditionally*, how will the Almighty Sovereign vindicate his moral character, in the view of the intelligent creation? What will become of his justice, if he can see his law shamelessly trampled upon, and never lift an arm in its vindication? What will become of his holiness, if he makes no distinction in his government between virtue and vice, and extends his protection alike to the good and the bad? And must not his faithfulness too fall in the general wreck, if he does nothing to guard the sanctions of his violated law?

I maintain, then, that the unconditional forgiveness of sin, by a simple act of divine sovereignty, must, according to all rational views of the divine government, have been derogatory to the character of God; and that there was a moral necessity, growing out of the nature of his administration, for some public declaration of his views of the evil of sin. If this scheme of unconditional pardon displays the *mercy* of God, it is mercy at war with *justice* and *holiness*. But in the death of Christ, as our ransom, the character of God, as a moral governor, stands completely vindicated. His justice is exhibited in the regard which he has shown for

the honor of his law ; for while he reverses its condemning sentence, in respect to the penitent, it is in view of the fact, that Christ has borne their sins in his own body upon the tree. His holiness is proclaimed in the fact, that sin was, in his estimation, so great an evil, as to require the death of his Son to expiate it ; and in this additional fact, that the same scheme by which the sinner is pardoned, has a mighty, instrumental influence in making him holy. And who will deny that over the whole plan, mercy sheds her condensed and most attractive radiance ; mercy, not merely in saving those who deserve to perish, but in saving them at an expense, which the infinite mind alone can estimate ?

I observe, farther, that the mediation of Christ illustrates the moral character of God more perfectly, than *if the sentence of the law had taken effect in the person of the transgressors*. In this case, justice would have had its course, in the same manner that it has, in respect to the rebel angels ; and not a murmur of disapprobation would have been heard through the universe. So also would his holiness have been exhibited in a manner, which would have placed his character forever beyond the reach of suspicion. But these

attributes, as we have already seen, are not less gloriously manifested in the cross of Christ;—nay, I venture to say that there is not a point in the universe—not even amidst the interminable fires of hell, where they are seen in such ample illustration. But this scheme of absolute and universal condemnation, though it might proclaim the justice and holiness of God, does not, you perceive, like that of which the death of Christ is the prominent feature, make provision for the exercise of mercy. The one leaves the sinner to the strict exactions of justice; the other, in a way perfectly consistent with the claims of justice, provides for his salvation; and in doing so, develops one of the loveliest attributes of Jehovah;—an attribute, which, so far as we know, has never been displayed to the universe, except through the mediation of Christ.

I observe, once more, that the scheme of redemption disclosed in the gospel, reflects a brighter lustre upon the moral character of God, than would have resulted *from man's retaining his original rectitude*. If man had not fallen, we may suppose that the dispensations of God towards him, would have been substantially the same with those, which have been experienced

by other holy beings, who have kept their first estate; and of course, there would have been no field, at least, on this earth, for the triumphs of redemption, or the exhibition of mercy. To this event, therefore, so far as we know, is to be referred an entirely new exhibition of the divine character; a dispensation which harmoniously mingles all the moral perfections of God, and which probably extends its influence to every part of the creation. In this view, it is surely no rash conclusion to assert, that the mediation of Christ presents a much brighter manifestation of divine glory, than could have been effected by the perseverance of the whole family of man in original holiness.

2. The other grand purpose, which the scheme of Christ's mediation is admirably fitted to accomplish, is **THE HAPPINESS OF THE INTELLIGENT CREATION.**

In respect to **THOSE WHOSE REDEMPTION THIS SCHEME IS DESIGNED TO EFFECT**, there are several considerations which render it probable that they will attain a much higher degree of happiness, under the mediatorial dispensation, than could have resulted from their confirmation in original holiness.

This appears, in the first place, from the acknowledged fact, that *we never learn the value of our blessings, in any way, so effectually, as by being deprived of them.* If redeemed souls had not fallen, they could never have placed that high practical estimate upon the blessings of immortality, which results from having known, in their own experience, the misery of their loss; any more than the man from whose cheek the flush of health has never yet faded, can estimate the value of that blessing, by contrasting with it the lingering agonies of a sick bed. But very different is the case of those, who, in attaining to the joys of immortality, are redeemed from all the ruins of the fall. They know the value of the immortal soul, from having felt the immense danger of its loss. They know how to appreciate the joys of perfect holiness, from having known the miseries of a life of sin; and the friendship of their Maker, from having been exposed to his righteous displeasure. Must not a new thrill of joy pervade the breast of the glorified saint, when, from the heights of Mount Zion above, encircled with the splendours of heaven, and mingling in the praises of redemption, he looks back to the rock from which he was hewn, and downward upon the

abyss from whose verge he was snatched ; when he contrasts what his situation once was, much more what it might have been, with those incorruptible glories, in the midst of which he is to rejoice forever ?

Again : The gospel scheme of redemption *constitutes some new and most interesting relations*, which must greatly enhance the happiness of the saved. In any situation, indeed, we should have been the creatures of God ; and should have had resting upon us the obligations of *children*. But our sins alone have given us the character of *prodigal* children ; and it is in the mediation of Christ alone, that God manifests himself as a *forgiving* father. Here, then, originates one most endearing relation ;—a relation through which the paternal character of God is exhibited in its highest loveliness. But this is not all. There is a relation of inconceivable tenderness and interest constituted between the soul and its Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ ; and another, between the soul and its Sanctifier, the Holy Spirit ; the one having endured the agonies of the cross to purchase his redemption ; the other, having exerted his gracious energies to render that redemption effectual. These relations must, of course, ex-

cite corresponding affections in the breast of the redeemed sinner ; and thus, they become a spring of the purest joy. Is there any feeling that ever pervades the soul more delightful than gratitude ? But who does not perceive that the relations of which we have spoken, are fitted to keep this in habitual exercise ? Even here, where the soul is partially under the dominion of sin, what christian cannot testify that he finds in the exercise of a grateful disposition, a joy which the world knoweth not of ? Much more pure and complete must that joy be, which results from the exercise of the same disposition, in a state of perfect sanctification. It would require the eloquence of an angel to describe the rapture of the redeemed, when they fall down before the throne with such language as this ; *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.*

Moreover, the happiness of the redeemed is increased by the mediation of Christ, inasmuch as *it opens before them a field of the most enlarged and delightful contemplation.* In the whole range of the divine administration, there is, so

far as we know, no other theatre on which the soul may expatiate amidst such an infinity of glories, and yet find the field of its contemplation forever widening before it. Nor let it be supposed that this is a subject of lofty speculation merely; for while it rouses to action the noblest powers of the intellect, it quickens into exercise the finest sensibilities of the heart: and thus it exerts an ennobling and refining influence on the whole man; rendering still more deep and indelible the image of Jehovah, and carrying him rapidly forward in the career of wisdom and virtue. Can we doubt, then, that those who are the subjects of redeeming mercy, will be happier than if they had never fallen, since the method of their recovery has supplied them with a new theme of contemplation, which is fitted, above every other, to awaken an ever increasing interest and joy?

But it is not enough to say that the mediation of Christ is admirably adapted to promote the happiness of those, for whose salvation it was especially designed; for there are HIGHER ORDERS OF BEING, who, though not personally interested in it as a scheme of redemption, nevertheless regard it with the deepest interest, as an exhibition of the divine glory. The Apostle, in writing

to the Ephesians, represents it as one design of the gospel, that *unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God*. And the gospel is said by another Apostle, to comprehend things which *the angels desire to look into*. In accordance with this inspired declaration, they have manifested the most intense interest in every stage of the work of redemption. When our Saviour was born, it was by them that the event was proclaimed to the wondering shepherds, and celebrated in an anthem of praise. It was by them that he was assisted in his temptations, and strengthened for his agony. While he was a tenant of the sepulchre, they watched around it; and when he arose, they were the first to announce the tidings of his resurrection. They were present to grace the triumph of his ascension into heaven; and they are still present with his people, as ministering spirits, to aid them in their conflicts, and help forward the work of their salvation. And such is their admiration of God's grace, that in the Revelation of Saint John, they are represented as joining in the song of redemption. *I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, saying, with a loud voice, worthy*

is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and honor, and glory and blessing. What higher testimony than this could we have, that the mediation of Christ has a mighty influence in increasing the happiness of angels ?

So far I have proceeded upon the unequivocal declarations of God's word : but if I may be allowed, to linger, for a moment, in the regions of conjecture, I would say that it is, by no means, improbable that the mediatorial dispensation is revealed, with all its gracious influences, IN MANY PARTS OF JEHOVAH'S BOUNDLESS EMPIRE, OF WHICH WE HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE. Philosophy, you know, has made it probable, that the remotest planet that twinkles in the sky, is a world ; and the whole number of planets which adorn the canopy of heaven, so many worlds, which are peopled with life and intelligence, and in which the vast designs of Jehovah are constantly going forward. What then, though the inhabitants of these worlds may not need to be washed, and justified, and sanctified, who can tell but that the scheme of our redemption has been revealed to them, as a marvellous exhibition of the divine glory ? With respect to all upon which the Bible is silent, I assert nothing except in the way of

conjecture : and yet when I look out upon the expanse of heaven, and think how probable it is that every planet contains a mighty population of immortals ; and when I lose myself in the magnificence and boundlessness of the plan by which our own world is redeemed, I cannot resist the impression that there is too much of divinity in it, not to require the whole field of immensity for its illustration.

II. Thus you have my first argument in proof of the general proposition that the gospel is the wisdom of God ;—viz. that it accomplishes the noblest purposes by the best means : in other words, that the mediation of Christ, of which his death is the distinguishing feature, is admirably adapted to promote the glory of God, and the happiness of the intelligent creation. I proceed now to the other argument proposed, which is, that the gospel ACCOMPLISHES MANY AND APPARENTLY OPPOSITE PURPOSES, BY SIMPLE AND APPARENTLY IMPROBABLE MEANS.

It accomplishes MANY purposes.

Look, for instance, at the work of *man's redemption* ; and see how the various parts of it are accomplished by the death of Christ. Man,

as a rebel against God's government, has become subject to his righteous displeasure. He is guilty, and needs to be pardoned ; and pardon he must have, or suffer the full penalty of the law which he has violated. Now then, in the blood of the Lord Jesus, is found the pardon he needs. By its mysterious operations, it reverses the condemning sentence, and sends peace to the troubled conscience. But more than this, the sinner is polluted, and he needs sanctification. He is labouring under a moral disease, which must be arrested, or else pardon itself could be no blessing : and for this also, there is a remedy in the death of Christ. Though it is by the influence of the Spirit that this work is immediately performed, yet that influence is the purchase of the Redeemer's death, and one of the blessed effects of his mediation. Moreover, the believer in Jesus has, in consequence of having been a sinner, to become a tenant of the grave ; and if no plan of redemption had been devised, he must either have slumbered there forever, or have come forth to the resurrection of damnation. But here again, there is a mysterious provision in the death of Christ for the redemption of his body. In yielding himself to the power of death, he gained

a victory over the monster in behalf of all his followers; and the opening of the tomb of Joseph was a public pledge that every sepulchre in which his disciples sleep shall hereafter be opened by his almighty hand; and his ascension to the mediatorial throne was another pledge that they shall ere long mount up in robes of immortality, to the habitation of their Redeemer's glory. So true is it, that the death of Christ answers all the purposes which are included in man's salvation.

But there are *other* purposes still, which the same event has brought into a full and glorious accomplishment. It fulfilled a train of inspired predictions, which reached back to the fall of man. It brought to a close the ancient dispensation, and poured a flood of light over its splendid and burdensome ritual, by showing from what it derived all its significance, and all its efficacy. It presented an example of perfect submission to the will of God, amidst sufferings which are unrivalled in the annals of wo. It was a public and most ample vindication of the moral character of God; for it exhibited the inflexibility of his justice, not less than the mildness of his mercy. It was a decisive victory gained over the powers of

darkness ;—the consummation of a contest which they had been carrying on against the cause of righteousness for ages. It exerted an influence in heaven, earth and hell ; in awakening the interest and joy of angels ; in kindling hope in the breast of fallen man ; and in throwing a deeper shade of horror over the prospects of the lost.

But not only does the gospel accomplish *many* purposes, but some of them would, to human view, have seemed IN OPPOSITION TO EACH OTHER.

This is true, especially, of *the manifestation of God's justice*, and *the manifestation of his mercy*, in the redemption of man. When the news of man's apostacy was first published in heaven, probably the highest angel anticipated no other doom for him, than the execution of the penalty which God had threatened. And why? Because, for aught they could perceive, the pardon of sin must sap the pillars of the divine government : they could discover no way in which mercy and truth could meet together ; in which God could be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly. But in the death of Christ, there is a full solution of this problem. Justice and mercy are exhibited as perfectly consistent ; and each has

the most full and glorious illustration which has ever been witnessed by the universe.

Again : You may see the same thing exemplified in the fact that, *while the gospel makes provision for the pardon of sin, it has a powerful tendency to awaken and cherish hatred of sin.* On the one hand, it blots out the condemning sentence of the law, and gives to the sinner the assurance of a free forgiveness ; and on the other, instead of being the minister of unrighteousness, it proclaims war with every sinful affection that is lodged in the heart. I refer not here to the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, which is always active in the believer's sanctification, and which is part of the purchase of Christ's death ; but to the fact that the gospel, considered as a system addressed to the intellect and the affections, presents the strongest motives to a life of holiness. For where, I ask, is there such a demonstration of the evil of sin, as is seen in the cross of Christ ? When does the law of God appear invested with so much majesty ; when does the character of God appear arrayed in so much purity, as when the Son of God is seen dying to vindicate the honors of the one, and to harmonize the perfections of the other ? And is

there not in this commingled exhibition of justice, and holiness, and faithfulness, and mercy, an appeal to every affection and faculty of the soul in aid of a holy life? Is the christian susceptible of fear? Will he not then shrink from sin, when he contemplates the sufferings of the Saviour for its expiation, and asks, *if these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* Is there a principle of gratitude in his heart? Will not this lead him to crucify his unholy affections, seeing that, by the indulgence of them, he crucifies afresh that Saviour who died that he might be forgiven? Is he susceptible of a moral impression from the objects with which he is conversant? Where then is he brought so much within the atmosphere of perfect purity, where so likely to be changed into the divine image from glory to glory, as at the cross of Christ, around which cluster the brightest moral glories of the Godhead? And what appears so rational, is exactly accordant with experience. Ask the christian whence he obtains the weapons with which he is most successful in his spiritual conflict, and he will tell you that they are drawn from the cross. Ask him when he finds the progress of his sanctification most rapid, or the

consolations of divine grace most abundant, and he will tell you that it is when he is enabled to gain the most direct and spiritual views of the cross. In the exulting language of the Apostle, he will say, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.* Thus, you perceive, that the gospel has solved the problem, how the sinner can be pardoned, and yet be made to abhor sin as the worst of evils.

But, if the purposes which the gospel accomplishes, are very numerous, and if some of them were apparently irreconcilable, THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY ARE ACCOMPLISHED, IS THE MOST SIMPLE, AND WOULD HAVE SEEMED, OF ALL OTHERS, THE MOST IMPROBABLE.

What more simple fact can be presented to the mind, than that of *dying on the cross*? And yet this is the fact which has been instrumental of such a mighty change in the moral kingdom of Jehovah. From the scene of Christ's crucifixion, which was carried forward by mortal hands, and was visible to mortal eyes, and seemed substantially the same which had been witnessed a thousand times before, there went forth an influ-

ence which, we have reason to believe, is felt in every world, and will extend through infinite duration. And what created mind could have shot a thought into this mystery, before it was revealed? Who in heaven or on earth would have suspected, without a revelation of the fact, that the fountain of infinite mercy was to pour forth its living streams through such a channel? But now that the mystery is revealed, we discover in it a simplicity, a fitness, a grandeur, which distinguish it from all the works of men, and I may add, from all the other works of God. No wonder that *the angels desire to look into it*; for we who only *see through a glass darkly*, can discover in it the riches of infinite wisdom.

Having now completed the argument by which I proposed to show that the gospel is the wisdom of God; viz.—that it accomplishes the noblest purposes by the best means, and many and apparently opposite purposes, by simple and apparently improbable means; I shall conclude the discourse with a few reflections.

1. And, first, we learn from this subject that *the gospel possesses inherent evidence of its own divinity*. I well know that human reason, in the

height of her arrogance and folly, has sometimes attempted to trample the gospel in the dust ; and has pretended to raise upon its ruins other systems, better adapted to the exigences of our condition, and clothed with a higher degree of moral beauty. But I also know that whenever an attempt has been made to apply these systems to the actual wants of man, reason, with all her boastings, has shown herself a blind guide, and a miserable comforter. But what reason could not do, in that she was weak and imperfect, the gospel *can* do,—*has* done ; and thus proves itself of heavenly origin. Unlike the systems of infidel philosophy, it bears the test of actual experiment ; and there is not a want or a wo, to which human nature is subject, for which it does not, in some way, make provision. And more than this, it extends its influence, probably, through the whole of Jehovah's empire. Tell me not that this system is earthborn ; and that it originated in a mighty effort of some mighty human mind. It were as much beyond the power of any human intellect to devise it, as it is beyond the power of any human arm to reach out into immensity, and arrest the revolutions of the planets. But if, after all, you discover no glory in this gospel, and think you

have no need of it, then, I would say to you, go back, and hold a season of honest communion with your own heart: for once, let the cares of the world be suspended, and the clamors of the world be hushed; let conscience report an honest verdict upon your condition; and let your thoughts wander over that world of retribution, of which, even natural religion, if properly consulted, must give you some gloomy forebodings; and then return and say whether you are not prepared to welcome the gospel, as an authorized messenger of mercy from heaven.

2. Our subject *exposes the objection which has sometimes been made to the gospel, that it is inconsistent with the discoveries of modern astronomy*;—that, admitting immensity to be peopled with worlds, it supposes ours to have attracted the divine regards in a degree altogether disproportioned to its importance. If ours be the only fallen world within Jehovah's empire—and scripture has told us nothing to the contrary—then it is the only one which has required any divine interposition: and is it any reflection upon the wisdom of God that he should open the fountain of salvation, where alone it was needed? And tell me, presumptuous mortal, who hast learned

thus to question the wisdom of the Highest, who taught thee to limit the influence of Christ's mediation to that world, which has assumed the attitude of rebellion ; or even to the principalities and powers in heavenly places ; and why may it not operate by a thousand nameless influences, in myriads of other worlds, and wherever the creatures of God are found ? Ah, thou hast turned thy back upon the teachings of heavenly wisdom, and hast been sitting at the feet of a blind and proud philosophy ; choosing rather to walk in the light of a glimmering taper, than in the brightness of the meridian sun.

3. In the light of our subject, we may perceive that *it is no objection to the gospel, that it involves truths which, in some of their connexions and bearings, we cannot comprehend.* What is there of all the works of God which may not suggest inquiries, which would completely baffle the powers of the most exalted human intellect ? Ask the philosopher how the atom is wafted in the breeze, and you give him a problem, at which he will be dumb ; or he will speak only to confess his ignorance. With the fact he is familiar ; and some of its more superficial phenomena, he can explain : but concerning the nature of that invis-

ble agency which is employed, he knows as little as a child. And so it is in respect to the revelation of God. Whatever truths are necessary to our salvation, are written with a sun-beam; but probably each of them involves a mass of unrevealed truth, adapted to a higher maturity of the faculties, and capable of being contemplated only in the bright light of heavenly glory. Does any one say, then, that he cannot receive the truths which are revealed in God's word, because he is permitted to know but in part? I answer, that man, to be consistent, must turn skeptic on every subject; and must even discredit the report of his senses, because they tell him of things which it falls not within the province of his reason fully to explain. Would you arraign the wisdom of an artificer, who should produce a piece of mechanism, which might be applied to the most important purposes, and which was uniform and certain in its results, only because you could not comprehend the construction of it? Would you not rather consider it an evidence of superior wisdom, that while the results were plain, and the general principle simple, there was much curious and ingenious workmanship, which you could not comprehend? Why, then, will you

adopt a different principle, in judging of the revelation of God? Why travel off into the regions of conjecture, and return laden with contradictions and absurdities, and palm them all upon the Bible?

4. In view of our subject, *we may hail with joy and confidence the prospect of the universal triumph of the gospel.* We have seen that it is a system which adapts itself to all the circumstances of human nature; that it is fitted, at once, to invigorate the intellect, to purify the heart, and to renovate the whole character. Does the sinner, stung by remorse, inquire whether his offences can be pardoned; or oppressed with pollution, does he ask whether his heart can be renovated; or conflicting with trouble, does he look out for some refuge to which he may retire; or struggling in death, does he feel the need of an Almighty arm to rest upon? All these distressing exigences the gospel meets, and meets fully. Well may it be hailed as the best news that was ever published in this revolted world. And, brethren, how transporting the reflection that this gospel shall ere long go forth to bless the whole family of man; that, instead of here and there a green spot on this earth, it shall every

where be clothed with moral verdure ; that the sun, in his circuit through the heavens, shall not visit a single region, or shine on a single hamlet, which is not cheered by the brighter beams of the Sun of Righteousness !

But, do you look over the empire of paganism, and tell me that this bright vision is illusive ; that that cloud, charged with blackness and horror, which stretches itself over the nations, will never break away ? Ah, that is the suggestion of an infidel heart. There is that in the very nature of the gospel which constitutes the pledge of its universal extension : like the air we breathe, God designed that it should be free to the whole world ; and his own veracity is pledged to this result. Moreover, there are a thousand voices from amidst the operations of Providence, announcing the approach of that period when this blessed result shall be realized. The angel having the everlasting gospel, has not only begun his flight, but is rapidly advancing towards mid-heaven. I pity the deluded mortal, who dares to lift his puny hand in opposition to the great cause of evangelizing the world ; for with tenfold brighter prospect of success, might an insect attempt to confine a giant's arm by weaving a web around

it, than he to arrest the progress of the gospel, even if his efforts were combined with those of every other enemy of the cross under heaven.

5. Our subject suggests *an important direction in regard to the preaching of the gospel: it should be preached in its naked simplicity.* Nothing must be added to it; for the wisdom of the Highest has devised it. Nothing must be taken from it; for all which it contains, was, in the view of infinite wisdom, necessary to the purposes for which it was given. What though some of its doctrines are humbling to the pride of the intellect, or the pride of the heart? What though some of its precepts point to the rugged path of conflict and self-denial? Not one of these doctrines or precepts can the christian minister omit, or even disguise, without doing homage to his own wisdom, and pouring contempt on the wisdom of God. It is for him to approach the Bible, with an humble and teachable temper, and ascertain what God hath spoken; and then to exert all the energies which God hath given him, in pressing home his message upon the understandings, and consciences and hearts of his hearers. And if he do this, even though great personal sacrifices and sufferings should follow in the train of his fidelity, the

purposes of his ministry will be answered ; but if he do any thing else in place of this, even though his path through life should be strewed with flowers, his ministry will only serve to accumulate upon him the blood of his people.

To you, my Brother, about to be consecrated to the sacred office—our subject presents considerations, which are fitted, at once, to impress you with your responsibility, and to sustain you under its weight ; to make you rejoice, but to chasten your joy with solicitude. The object for which you are hereafter to labor is the most interesting, the most momentous, for which the heart of man ever beat ; an object which has drawn towards it the most intense regards of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; which has awakened eager curiosity, and kindled sublime joy in the breasts of angels ; an object, in comparison with which, the mightiest concerns of human empire seem trifling as the sports of children : it is nothing less than the glory of God in the accomplishment of the eternal purposes of mercy in the salvation of men. What, then, though to a thoughtless world, your office should seem of little moment ? It does involve interests which infinitely outrun human thought : it must tell

loudly on the destinies of the eternal world. No matter then how deep the impression which you gain of your responsibility ; no matter how often you employ yourself in tracing out the influence of your ministry on the retributions of your people ; no matter how much you feel the need of wrapping yourself in the strength of the All-sufficient God ; there is enough in the office which you are to hold to justify it all.

But with all this weight of responsibility, my Brother, there is much to minister to your encouragement ; for though the object for which you are to labor involves such amazing interests, yet He who calls you to the work, furnishes you with means which will be adequate to its accomplishment. It is the simple gospel of Christ. This is a weapon with which you may boldly encounter the very fortresses of irreligion ; for though it is simple, it is powerful ; it was invented by infinite wisdom, and tempered by omnipotence. Use this weapon, then, with confidence, looking up to Jehovah your strength to give you success. Remember that it is not by the charm of a fascinating oratory, nor by the bright speculations of an inventive intellect, that the purposes of your ministry are to be answered ; but I repeat it—by a

plain exhibition of that gospel which is the wisdom of God. Moreover, it is the *whole* gospel, and not merely a *part* of it ; it is the gospel exhibited *in its due proportions*, and not *disjointed* and *deformed*, from which you are to look for the accomplishment of these purposes. Preach the gospel, then, in all its fulness and glory ; in all the richness of its provision, and all the terror of its denunciations. What though it may be a stumbling block to some, and foolishness to others ? Preach it faithfully, and the result will show, both to you and to them, that it is the power of God. Preach it faithfully, and whether they feel its renovating influence themselves, or only witness it in others, you will be able to command their testimony to your fidelity, another day.

It is a reflection which may well minister to your joy, that, in pursuing the objects of your profession, you will, of course, be so much employed in studying that glorious gospel which you are to preach ; that thus you will breathe a purer atmosphere, and have more constant access to the fountain of living waters, than most of those around you. Let the effect of these sacred studies reach beyond the intellect ; let it be felt in the heart, and manifested in the life. It will

greatly assist the influence of your public ministrations, if your people can see in you the bright and living exemplification of the truths you preach ; if, while they receive the word at your lips, they can also learn their duty from your life. Go forth then, my Brother, in the spirit of the gospel, and from the combined influence of faithful preaching, and holy living, you may expect a most happy result. May the success which has attended your earliest labors, prove the harbinger of a train of blessings to be extended through your ministry. May Jehovah spread over you the wing of his protection ; and sustain you by the power of his grace ; and guide you by the spirit of wisdom. May your name diffuse a sweet savor in this congregation, when you shall have finished your work, and shall be slumbering in the dust : and may these immortal souls who now welcome you as their spiritual guide, heap blessings upon you at the judgment, as being, under God, their everlasting benefactor.

Once more : our subject teaches us, not only how the gospel should be preached, but *how it should be heard*. If it is to be preached in its naked simplicity, because it is the production of infinite wisdom, for the same reason it is to be

heard *with docility and meekness*. Not that it is the duty of any to receive without examination what is preached; but being once satisfied that the doctrines delivered by the living preacher are the same with those contained in the written word, there is no other question to be settled, in order to establish their claim to a cordial belief. That man then, who comes to the sanctuary, to indulge a cavilling spirit, comes to arraign the wisdom of God. The man who comes determined to receive only those truths which are grateful to him, comes to arraign the wisdom of God. The man who comes to doze away his hour in a state of mental inaction, or he who comes merely for an intellectual repast, pours contempt upon the wisdom of God. If the gospel be faithfully preached, it is not man that speaks, but God: though you hear the sound of a human voice, yet that voice is only employed by Jehovah, as a medium for communicating his message. Hearer of the gospel, thou art in solemn circumstances! Hear as for thy life; for in the message which is delivered, are bound up the elements of the soul's salvation.

Brethren and friends of this church and congregation—This day repairs the breach recently

made in the removal of your beloved pastor, by giving you another, who, we believe, also brings to your service the full vigor of his faculties and affections. In this most sacred relation which is now to be constituted between you and him, there are involved duties, on *your* part, with which the success of his ministry must be most intimately connected. Of these duties you are to have an exposition in a separate address. Suffer me simply to remind you that the system of truth, which, we trust, will here be proclaimed, is the wisdom of God ; and as such, demands your most earnest and devout attention. You cannot reject it—you cannot be indifferent to it, without putting your souls in fearful jeopardy. Though it should come home to your hearts like a two edged sword, and should pierce to the very seat of thought and feeling, it will be your wisdom to welcome it still ; for it wounds, but to heal ; it kills, but to make alive. Encourage your minister to preach the gospel faithfully and boldly, by opening your ears, and your hearts to its reception. It has almost passed into a proverb, that good hearers make good preachers. May the experience of *your* minister furnish a practical illustration of

this truth ; that thus, while *his* heart is encouraged by the manner in which you receive his message, *your* preparation for heaven may be rapidly advancing under his ministry.

I doubt not, my friends, that, amidst all the grateful circumstances of this occasion, there are many warm and tender recollections pressing upon you ; and that with the thanksgivings you send up for the cheering prospects which open before you *this* day, you mingle other sentiments of gratitude for the tokens of divine goodness which have descended upon you in days that are *past*. I cannot forget that I am standing in the place where, for a series of years, stood one of the most able and faithful ministers of New-England ; a man who lived pre-eminently for the benefit of his fellow men ; and whose name will be associated by generations to come, with all that is great and good in the greatest and best of causes. You have never wept over his grave, for his grave is far away in the wilderness ; but his memory you have embalmed, and some of you look forward with joyful hope to a meeting with him in heaven. Of another and more recent ministry which you have been permitted to enjoy, I may not, and need not speak : enough, that its

record is in your hearts. But in view both of the past and of the present, suffer me to remind you that *unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.* Better perish any where else, than on ground which has been consecrated by the breathings of devotion, and the triumphs of the cross. Better perish in any other circumstances, than with the sounds of salvation vibrating on your ear, and an ocean of mercy rolling at your feet.

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NOTE.

The TABERNACLE CHURCH was organized in 1735, and has been continued under the care of the following Pastors :

- Rev. Samuel Fisk, installed 1736, dismissed 1745.
“ Dudley Leavitt, ordained 1745, died 1762.
“ John Huntington, ordained 1763, died 1766.
“ Nathaniel Whitaker, installed 1769, dismissed 1783.
“ Joshua Spalding, installed 1785, dismissed 1802.
“ Samuel Worcester, installed 1803, died 1821, (at Brainerd, a Western Missionary Station.)
“ Elias Cornelius, installed 1819, as associate Pastor with Rev. Doctor Worcester ; dismissed 1826, to become Secretary of the American Education Society.
“ John P. Cleaveland, ordained 1827.

The other performances, on the occasion which produced the foregoing Sermon, were as follows :

- Introductory Prayer by Rev. Rodney G. Dennis, Topsfield.
Consecrating Prayer by Rev. Daniel Dana, D. D. Newburyport.
Charge to the Pastor by Rev. Brown Emerson, Salem.
Righthand of Fellowship by Rev. Leonard Withington, Newbury.
Charge to the People by Rev. Luther F. Dimmick, Newburyport.
Concluding Prayer by Rev. Moses C. Searle, Grafton.