

SERMON

ON THE SUBJECT OF

THE UNION OF CHRISTIANS FOR THE CONVERSION OF
THE WORLD.

DELIVERED IN MADISON, IA., APRIL 20, 1834,

BY REV. ANDREW WYLIE,

PRESIDENT OF INDIANA COLLEGE.

PRINTED BY
J. LODGE & E. PATRICK,
MADISON.
1834.

MADISON, APRIL 21, 1834.

President Andrew Wyllie,

SIR:—Public feeling in this town calls for the publication of a sermon, delivered by you in the Protestant Methodist Church on yesterday in the afternoon, on the all engrossing subject of a “union of the christians for the conversion of the world.”

The undersigned believing that much good might result from the publication of the sermon referred to, and if properly appreciated, might tend to produce harmony in the churches of Christ, and be edifying and instructive to non-professors, respectfully solicit a copy thereof for publication.

Your friends,

MILTON STAPP,
WM. G. WHARTON,
H. WATTS.

Messrs. Milton Stapp, Wm. G. Wharton, and H. Watts.

GENTLEMEN:—I should not have consented to the publication of the following discourse, sensible as I am that, owing to its brevity compared with the magnitude of the subject, it is peculiarly liable to misconstruction; had it not been for certain events which have taken place since you heard it delivered. I refer, particularly, to the adoption, by the last General Assembly, of the principle of “Elective Affinity”—which, being interpreted, means Repulsive Antipathy—and an “Act and Testimony” adopted by a minority of the Assembly. I am one of those whose names are recorded in opposition to the former of these measures; though I did not think it important or necessary to unite with those who solemnly and formally protested against it. The “Act and Testimony” I regret and deplore; though I love and respect many of those whose names are subscribed to it—all of them, I trust, my brethren in Christ, one of them, a brother literally.

I feel strongly opposed to both these measures, as divisive, and to the latter, as tending to shake the confidence of the churches in the soundness of the highest, and as I most firmly believe, the most incorruptible and enlightened Judicature of the Presbyterian church. It is not, and it is its glory that it claims not to be, infallible. In some matters of policy it may have erred. In the one just mentioned I believe it has. And there is something of party spirit in it; but not to such a degree as to prevent the impartial exercise of discipline in all points wherein are concerned “the weightier matters of the law.” On all important questions a majority of all parties in the Assembly may be expected, notwithstanding minor differences, to be united in favor of truth and righteousness. Till the whole body of the Presbyterian church become corrupt, how can it be otherwise? The General Assembly is a court made up of judges delegated from

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JOHN XVII. 20, 21.

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou Father art in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

Christianity is unspeakably superior to any other form of religion that ever has been known in the world. Its excellence, it is true, can be fully and properly understood by those only who have felt its power. But its effects upon the life and conduct may be manifest to all. And though it is probable that the individuals possessing the essence and reality of Christianity may not amount to a moiety of the entire population in countries nominally Christian; yet, such is the beneficial influence exerted by these upon the general mass, that, if any impartial observer will compare the state and character of these countries with those of Pagan and Mahometan nations, he must see at once, the immense superiority of the former. This superiority, it would be unphilosophical to ascribe to any other cause than the superior excellence of the christian religion.

This single consideration is sufficient to justify, in the eyes of every philanthropist, all the efforts that the churches are now making in the missionary cause. But the zeal of the sincere christian in this cause is sustained by still higher considerations. He looks upon the great mass of the population of the heathen world as out of the way of salvation, and to be brought into it by the blessing of God upon human endeavors. For him, therefore, to make no efforts for the conversion of the world would be inconsistent with his christian character and profession. All this, however, has been so often repeated and seems to be so generally understood, as to render any further remarks of this nature altogether superfluous on the present occasion.

Our text will lead us to take a view of this general subject which it is believed has seldom been taken and which ought to be, on that account and many others, presented to the attention of the christian public. That I shall not be able to do justice to it in the compass of a single discourse, I am fully aware. But it is a view of the subject which has, of late, excited deep and painful feelings in my own mind, feelings which, I think, it would be criminal not to communicate. Al! I can do is to bespeak the candid indulgence of the audience to the thoughts which I have to advance. If they are wrong it would be a great relief to the anguish of my spirit to have them corrected: but if not they ought to be well weighed and regarded.

That they will not seem new to any of you I am bound to suppose. For you are a christian people, and the thoughts which I have to present belong to the very heart and vitals of christianity. But they are connected with some practical matters of great and perplexing difficulty,—May God grant us light to shew us what ought to be done and grace to do it, whatever pain the doing of it may cost us.

In the text the Saviour prays that his followers might be one.

What is the kind of union of which he speaks? A union in nature it cannot be. There is such a union between the Father and the Son, to which the Saviour might seem to refer; for he says, "as thou Father art in me and I in thee;" but yet, he must not be so understood, for in this union no created being can be a partaker.

Union of faith it is not. For the words imply that faith may be where this union does not exist. A mere visible ecclesiastical union it is not. For that may be constituted on principles of secular policy alone, without any thing of religion but the form. An union in grace, or what is known among divines by the terms "mystical union," it is not. For that is a union which, though real, cannot be subjected to the view of the world, as the union here spoken of is plainly supposed to be—"That the world may believe that thou hast sent me." But not to dwell any longer upon negatives, the Saviour must mean a union and harmony among christians in views and affection manifested in the outward conduct so clearly and unequivocally as to attract the notice of the world. And, without this union among christians the conversion of the world is not to be expected. This the text must mean if it means any thing. This indeed is the doctrine of the whole bible. And it is the doctrine of common sense and of all human experience. A house divided against itself cannot stand, and every kingdom divided against itself must come to desolation. When were ever these maxims contradicted, in fact, in one solitary instance in that long and diversified series of things and events which has been the subject of human experience?

Union and strength; disunion and weakness, is the instructive motto inscribed by the hand of nature on all her works. The massive rock which has for ages withstood the shocks of ocean "with all his roaring multitude of waves" owes all its strength to the cohesion of its particles. Take this away and they may be drifted by the tide, and even wafted by the breeze. The rays of light as they fall, each with its separate impulse on the eye, excite not the slightest pain in that tender and delicate organ. Thrown together in a focus they are capable of instantly dissolving the hardest metals. The particles of the electric fluid, when detached, penetrate our bodies, without being either seen or felt. United they form the terrible thunderbolt, that rives the knotted oak. What so gentle as the flakes of falling snow, or the minute drops of rain? Yet when combined the former constitute the thundering avalanche; the latter, the tremendous cataract.

In the affairs of men the same principle is no less conspicuous. How feeble is man in his isolated efforts! How powerful in the joint action of multitudes! No nation was ever so small in its beginning, as not to prosper and grow great, when the spirit of union directed its councils. No nation was ever so great and powerful, as not to become, when infected by the spirit of discord and faction, like "the chaff of the summer threshing floor which the wind carries away." Of this truth in both its parts, the history of the world abounds in examples. Our own history, especially that part of it which relates to the early and successful struggle of the revolution, affords an instance to confirm one part of the truth on which I am insisting—that part I mean which respects the power of union.—God grant that the symptoms of growing disaffection to the Union which have recently appeared may not prove in the issue that we are destined to exhibit to the world an equally mournful lesson in confirmation of the other!

But, it may be thought, that these remarks are inapplicable to religion; for that religion does not depend, like secular affairs, on the power of man, but on the power of God, who is not limited in his operations, as man is, to the laws of nature. To this it may be replied, that we ought to be careful how we refer religion to miracle, lest we be found depending upon God to do what he has not authorised us to expect from him. Even miracle does not entirely supercede the laws of nature. There was supernatural or miraculous darkness at the crucifixion. But *the sun* was not made to radiate that darkness. The dead have been raised. But the dead, *while dead*, were never made to perform vital actions. The Saviour miraculously fed five thousand. But still, it was *by bread and fish* that he fed them. He caused the blind to see and the deaf to hear. But it was by restoring to soundness their defective organs of sight and hearing. He caused "the lame man to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing." But it was by giving life and action to their limbs and vocal powers.

We must not expect that Great and Good Being whom we revere as the author of nature and grace to work *contradictions*, in our favor, either in nature or grace—to give to darkness and death the properties of light and life, or to communicate the tendencies of hatred and discord to love and union, or vice versa. Much less may we indulge those feelings which produce discord, or rather constitute it, under the delusive expectation that God, because he is almighty, will convert the world at any rate. He has told us, both in his written word and in the experience of fifteen centuries, that the union of Christians is a moral means necessary to the conversion of the world. How dare we, then, look for the end without the means? How dare we expect that efforts for the conversion of the world, originating in principles the very opposite to that holy principle which He has ordained and consecrated as the instrument for the conversion of the world, should be owned and blessed of Him for that purpose? Do we expect him to contradict himself!—to falsify

his word!—to set aside the prayer of the Redeemer!—to incorporate the works of the devil among the effective agencies of the kingdom of heaven!

Am I to be referred, in contradiction to all this, to the alledged fact of the rapid diffusion of christianity in our day, which it will be said, has taken place notwithstanding the discord which, it must be granted, still continues to distract and disunite the great body of professing christians? This, I am aware, is touching upon a delicate point. Glowing descriptions are continually presented of the success of missions. And, to call their truth in question would seem like speaking against christianity itself, and by many, be set down to the account of lukewarmness to its interests—or to something worse, if any thing worse can be. But, let us not suffer our wishes to mislead our judgments. It is grateful to the feelings to hear of Zion's prosperity, and to recount the growing numbers of her converts. And we are often found anticipating the employments of Eternity; and, without waiting till He who "writeth up the people" shall exhibit the record of immortality, to look around us and say, "This man and that man was born there." But still, when we come to take an impartial view of the actual state of the world, we meet with facts which may well moderate our notes of triumph.*

What has become of Christianity in Asia Minor? Greece, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, France, Holland, and the north of Africa? Has religion kept pace with the growth and diffusion of our own population? Are the Aborigines of our borders evangelized? Are the two millions and an half of our colored population—Alas! Alas! notwithstanding all that is told us of the progress of Christianity—and I am not now going to call in question the truth of the accounts which are given us on this subject—though, in all the cases which have happened to fall under my own personal no-

*"Prophecy"—and "The signs of the Times"—are favorite themes of reference on occasions when people are to be stirred up to increasing benevolent effort. The object is good: but the means are, at least sometimes questionable. When statements of an opposite character follow each other in close succession:—for instance, when, at one time, we are called upon to hail the opening dawn of the millennial day, and, the next moment, terrified with the prospect of the Catholics taking possession of the land, and depriving us of our civil and religious liberties—the effect is bad. Should the christian religion, as to its influence in the world, be destined to undergo an eclipse—should "THE VINTAGE" of the Apocalypse be yet future, what use might not the skeptics and the scoffers of that time make of the premature predictions of the present day? Let christians be warned, by one of the least among them—by one, however, whose habit it has been, for many years, to study the Bible, not as a theological controversialist, but to find direction in "the good and right way"—to beware of attempting to live by sight and not by faith, and of placing their confidence on numbers—on means—on pecuniary resources—on arts of worldly policy. Let them remember, that, in all past ages of the church, there has ever been the most of real religion where there has been the least vaunting. And let ministers of the gospel remember, that it is "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed" that "shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves."

tice the statement generally has gone a little beyond the fact—yet, granting the truth of all we hear and read on the subject of the extension of Christianity in our day, the undisguised, the humiliating truth is, that less has been done towards the conversion of the world in the present generation by United Christendom,—I mean by divided, distracted christendom,—than was effected by Paul the Apostle of the gentiles, in his own, single, persecuted person. I do not say that less has been done *about* this business, by the aggregate efforts of Christendom than was done by Paul. For I admit there is a good deal of zeal among Christians in relation to this subject—though far from enough—and many societies are organized—and speeches made, and dollars raised, and printing presses employed in furnishing copies of the bible, and tracts, and books for children, to be gratuitously taught on the Lord's day—in short, there is a vast machinery set up and kept in motion, with a direct tendency to, and bearing upon, the desired object. All this is well: and more of this sort of work, I allow, is done by us than was done by Paul. But still, I aver, less is *effected*. We hear a vast multitude employed with pickaxes and levers and blasts of powder, in trying to heave from its base the “stone” which is to smite the image and break it in pieces, and then “become a great mountain and fill the whole earth;” and shouting multitudes send up a perpetual cry of encouragement,—but still—it does not move—it does not grow. With this state of things compare the progress of Christianity in primitive times. The “leaven hid in three measures of meal”—how soon did it ferment the general mass?—how soon did christianity diffuse itself through the greatest part of three continents? The “grain of mustard seed”—How rapid, how noble was its growth! Do we witness any thing similar in modern times? What permanent effects, among the Indians of our neighborhood, have, for instance, followed from the labors of Elliott and Braynard and Mayhew and Edwards, and many more of the like spirit who succeeded them in this field of labor? None! Comparatively none! How is this? With solemn emphasis let each christian hearer propose to himself the question, How is this? “The arm of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear.—Our iniquities have separated between us and our God: Our sins have hid his face from us.” And what among the number of our sins is more prominent, more scandalous and more likely to have produced this effect than the sin of discord among brethren? The spirit of discord has driven the spirit of christian meekness from the church, by whose influence alone it is that the world is to be converted.

The evidence to support the truth of this statement is too strong to be controverted, and too obvious to be unnoticed by any one. But to descant upon it, by a detail of particulars, would be a task for which I have neither time nor inclination. Suffice it merely to say, that the churches of the reformation—I pass by the church of Rome—have become divided and sub-divided, till it has become a burden to the memory to retain their distinctive names and peculiarities; that the

most of their members refuse to unite with any but those of their own sect in any act of religious worship and especially in *that* which was intended, among other purposes, to denote the church's unity, insomuch that its very name has lost its primitive signification, and *communion* is converted into a badge of sectarian difference; that many are restricted by what they call conscience, or by the rules of their discipline, from the enjoyment of gospel ordinances, and even from the reading of religious books, unless they bear the *imprimatur* of sectarian authority; and that, if we regard the spirit which seems to go along with these practices, we shall find it to be characterized by attributes the very opposite of those which adorn that charity which an inspired apostle has pronounced to be the very essence of the christian temper, and the greatest of the christian virtues. In practice many, very many of some sects, and *too* many of all, seem, in fact, to consider the obligation of the precept, "to love one another," as limited, objectively, to those of their respective denominations. Others they feel at liberty to reproach and villify!

And, is it not time for us to ask, "what fruit we have had of those things whereof we ought to be ashamed?" What fruit! Alas! Reproach and scandal have been brought on the christian name. Immortal souls have been caused to stumble. The indignation of a holy God has been enkindled. Hell has been encouraged and enlarged herself. Infidelity has been boldened, and plausibility given to her sophisms. Unsanctified and untalented ambition, under the guise of zeal for the truth, has been ushered, by the spirit of party, into consequence. In the pulpit, and through the press, the poison of asps has been exhibited instead of the bread and the water of life. "They that would learn well, and teach well in religion," says the commentator Henry, "must not affect new-found notions and new-coined phrases, so as to look with contempt upon the knowledge and language of their predecessors. If we must keep to the good old *way*, why should we scorn the good old *words*." And by all these means the progress of real christianity has been clogged and retarded. Take your station in the centre of any church in our land, and look around you, and see how many persons there are of respectable conduct, and who seem not to be destitute of regard to religion—who seem, in fact, almost christians, but who make no profession of Christianity, because as things are managed, they see not how they can make such profession without exposing themselves to the influence of that narrow sectarian spirit, which prevails in a greater or less degree in all the churches of our land. I am not defending their conduct. They do wrong. But this I say, that christians are deeply criminal for throwing this stumbling block in their way.

But enough has been said on the nature of the evil. Let us, before we proceed to enquire for the remedy, pause for a moment and reflect on the doctrine of the text: which as has been already shewn, is clearly this, That while the evil of discord exists in the church, the world cannot be converted.

Whoever, therefore, will not do all he can to remove the evil makes himself responsible for a share in the blame of retarding the conversion of the world: Are any willing to incur this responsibility? I trust in God there is not.

Enquire we, then, what is to be done. That something may, and ought to be done, and that speedily, for the purpose of healing the breaches of Zion, is sufficiently manifest, but what should be done, is the difficulty. The arrogant claim to infallibility, advanced by the church of Rome, and other things belonging to her which are no less objectionable, render it preposterous to think of a return to her communion. To abolish creeds and forms of doctrine and rules of government is equally out of the question. This would only aggravate the evil. The question then returns, 'What is to be done?' This question I shall honestly attempt to answer, in part, not fully; sensible, as I am, of the great difficulties which attend it.

And, in the first place, let me remark, that a rigid mode of interpreting the standards of our church (for it is chiefly in reference to our church that I speak) ought to be avoided. When a person adopts these standards as the confession of his faith, he does not mean, surely, to declare that every word in them is just such as to express the precise truth, and nothing more nor less than the precise truth, in the connexion in which it stands. For this would be to ascribe to them what these standards themselves expressly disclaim,—the authority of an infallible rule of faith and practice. All that he declares by such act, is that he considers the doctrine and government of our church as exhibited in her standards to approach as near to his views of truth as those of any other church. This is the point of light in which the matter is actually considered by all men who are possessed of common sense and have no private or party purposes to serve. The fact of a man's belonging to any particular church does not signify a profession, on his part, of an agreement with that church in every thing. On the principle of perfect agreement no church could be formed. Perfect uniformity in views never did, or can, exist among men; and to attempt to enforce it, is either to produce discord, or encourage hypocrisy. "Let every man be persuaded in his own mind," is the only rule of faith that can be given in some cases. A distinction between essentials and non-essentials exists in fact. Why not allow it in practice? How much truth is necessary to be believed, in order to a credible profession of christianity, is a point not to be determined in the abstract. What may suffice in one case would not in another. Speculative belief ought never to be considered alone, but always in reference to other parts of character.

But in matters relating to practical godliness the case is different. Here no allowance is to be made; nothing scandalous to be connived at. Laxity of discipline, in regard to matters of practical morality, is not unfrequently found connected with a great deal of rigor in regard to speculative orthodoxy. This, I believe, to be the case in some parts of the church at the present time. And, if I am not

greatly mistaken, much of the disturbance which now exists among professing christians may be traced to this source. Persons allow themselves in the practice of speaking disrespectfully of their christian brethren, and by hints and innuendos bringing their orthodoxy or their piety into suspicion. This I have witnessed with unspeakable pain and disgust, in the public performance of some of the most sacred and solemn parts of religious worship. Now, all such conduct is not only indecent but in palpable violation of a plain rule of duty laid down in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew—a rule which forbids us to suggest any thing to the injury of a fellow-christian on any occasion except in attempting, in a regular way, to bring him to repentance for that, whatever it may be, which we deem worthy of censure. This rule is so obviously wise and good, and the evil of neglecting it is so great and manifest, and a disposition to violate it is so clearly opposed not only to christian charity but even to common justice, that the little regard which is paid to it by professing christians generally must be considered as an indication of the low state of practical godliness among them. Corrupt must be that church which suffers, not to say encourages its members to circulate evil reports against their fellow christians, under the miserable pretext of a zeal for orthodoxy. If a church member be thought unsound in the faith, or scandalous in practice, let him be dealt with by all means; but in an orderly way. Let him not be condemned unheard. Let not private members of the church, in their individual capacity, presume to pronounce his sentence. For this is calumny; even if the man is guilty it is calculated only to confirm him in his guilt; and to introduce into the church “confusion and every evil work.”†

†Biblius has been converted by reading the scriptures, and is convinced, by the same means, that he ought to make a profession of christianity. This he cannot do, without attaching himself to some particular church. To what church shall he attach himself? In order to determine this question he has read the published standards of all churches around, and has looked at the character and usages which distinguish them. In his own mind he has made a selection; and accordingly he comes to the session of some particular Presbyterian church, and says “I have examined your Confession of Faith and the character and usages of your church. I think there is something in both not according to the Scriptures; but they come, on the whole, rather nigher to that infallible standard than those of any other church. I will state to you my difficulties without reserve.” I ask, now, on the supposition that the character of Biblius is unexceptionable, should he be admitted? If so; what becomes of your rigid mode of interpreting the “Confession of Faith”? If not; do you not put this book, of human composition, in the place of the Bible?

The opposition which has been made, in our country and in the present century, to Creeds and Confessions, could not have been so successful as it has been, had not creeds and confessions been abused by those who, properly enough, contended for their use, but who were driven, by opposition, as is usual in such cases, into an opposite extreme. Let it be granted, that some private christians, and even that some ministers of the gospel, hold views, in relation to certain unessential points in the creed of our church, a little different from the views of the majority, (or of that

2. Much may be done towards healing the divisions which have taken place in the church by treating with respect the mysteries of religion. Most of the disputes which have distracted the church have related to mysteries. In the scriptures some things are ob-

partly which once was the majority) of their brethren—is it not a deplorable breach of charity to stigmatize them, on this account as guilty of *heresy*, *moral perjury* and the like? Can the violence of feeling which prompts to the use of such horrible terms “work the righteousness of God”? Was it not owing to this violence and want of charity, on the part of the orthodox, as much as to heresy in others, that those divisions took place, several years ago, in the Presbyterian church, which were attended with so much disturbance, and which have been followed by consequences and results that are, at this moment, lamentably conspicuous throughout the vast regions of the south and west? From all that I have seen and heard I think it extremely probable.

Far, very far, indeed, is it from my intention, in these remarks, to plead an apology for innovators, or introducers of heresy, if such there be, in our church, as deserve these names. *Their* apology is, that they differ from their brethren only in words. This, in many cases, may be true. In some, I know it is. *Guilt*, for instance, in the theological language of New-England, means, as it does in common discourse, personal criminality, in other words, moral turpitude—blameworthiness. But, in the language of the old orthodox writers of Scotland and of the continent, it means liability to punishment. In the first sense as every one sees at once, who knows any thing of the Bible or of human life, guilt attaches, inseparably and forever, to the person of the criminal himself and cannot be transferred to a substitute. In the second, it is equally evident that it may be transferred to a substitute. Ability, inability, and many other words have a like ambiguity, which has been pointed out and illustrated a thousand times. Supposing then, that the apology is true, still it is not valid. Why will people use words which they know will mislead some and offend others? Why, especially, will they do so in the pulpit? Will that preacher be “apt to teach” his audience, who cares not how much he shocks their moral feelings? “They that would learn well, and teach well in religion,” says the commentator Henry, “must not affect new-found notions and new coined phrases, so as to look with contempt upon the knowledge and language of their predecessors. If we must keep to the good old way, why should we scorn the good old words.” I cannot suppose that the offence in question can be committed unwittingly—for he must be a novice, indeed, who does not know, that, with the exception of the really learned, who in every congregation are the smallest number, the moral feelings of the people are so intimately associated with words and phrases that they cannot be separated. And is the peace of the church to be disturbed by persons who, in the most solemn circumstances, allow themselves to use such “lightness of speech,” as might lead their audience to conclude they really cared not what they said? They ought to be censured—but not for heresy. Their crime is of a less dangerous, though, of a more contemptible character.

There are also, no doubt, a few preachers in our church who have done something to raise that hue-and-cry of heresy which now fills the air, by a sort of preaching which I know not better how to characterize than by reciting an anecdote which was told me, some years ago, respecting the late Rev. Dr. A. of Mill Creek, Pa. The Dr. made it a rule never to give any opinion publicly respecting any who were or had been his students. But on one occasion he is said to have violated his rule. A young man, whom we may call Profundus, who had not long before, been licensed as a preacher, was uncommonly popular. He was cried up, wherever he went, for his *great depth*! On all occasions the people were extolling Mr. Profundus, for, his *great depth*. Tired with hearing the encomium so often repeated, and vexed at the people for mistaking the unintelligible for the profound, the

scurely intimated; others are incomprehensible; though there is nothing in them unreasonable. The creation; the being of a God; the scheme of Providence; and its relations to human agency, the resurrection of the body; regeneration; and many more things of

Dr. is said on one occasion to have replied, to one who had been repeating the usual remark respecting Mr. P.'s great depth!—speaking in his ordinary Scotch accent, but with unusual tartness: “Great depth! Aye! Great depth! Ye are, maybe, gawing along the road. You see a puddle in the road. But ye canna see the bottom o’t. Not because it is deep, but because it is muddy! So it is with Mr. P. His *great depth* arises from the muddiness of his head!

That there have been given specimens, from the pulpit and the press, of this sort of “depth” in theology is more than likely. That there may be heresy—is also probable, since several good and honest men, who have opportunity to observe, assert that there is—but that there is heresy to the extent which some suppose—heresy of that malignant and powerful kind that needs to excite any great or general alarm—or that there is any call for extraordinary measures of a divisive character, such as some great and good brethren are now resorting to—he cannot believe. There is danger it may be. But if he mistake not it lies in another quarter. Paul in reproving the church at Corinth for their discord and dissensions charges them to the account of a worldly spirit: “Are ye not carnal and walk as men?” Is it not this same spirit, distinguished as it always is, by confidence in the expedients and reliances of a secular policy, which has been for years troubling the church and now threatens to divide it?—that has been managing, or trying to manage, the concerns of religion itself—not its externals only but its vital intrinsic movements—those which belong to the deepest and most mysterious recesses of the heart—the *Most Holy Place* of the soul—secluded, sacred and reserved to the Eye of God and the Hand of God—on the principles of—Political economy? Solemn enquiry is demanded here.

Such as look for danger in no other quarter than that of error in doctrine, and are opposed to a liberal construction of our creed, will ask, “How can two walk together except they be agreed?” They may certainly walk together and yet not have the same creed as to a thousand matters of mere speculation. They may not have the same theory of motion. Yet if they are of one mind as to all that regards *the practical matter*—the journey to be accomplished—they may jog along quite comfortably—arm in arm if they please—though that might not in every case be advisable, as it would hinder the freedom of each others motions—making the same stages, refreshing themselves under the shadow of the same great rock and by draughts from the same flowing fountain, maintaining all the way entire silence on the theory of motion, or discussing it, if they should discuss it, with the utmost freedom and good humor, each allowing his companion to differ in opinion from himself.

But the Book of Discipline is another and quite a different matter. It contains a summary of *rules* by which every church member is pledged to every other and bound by the vows of God, to govern his conduct. Here there can be no latitude, nor allowance to differ. The end of discipline is to reclaim an offending brother, that is, to bring to repentance a church member who has done something which tends to bring scandal upon the church and to cause others to stumble: or, if this fails, to clear the church of the scandal in another way, by cutting off the offending member. Are not these ends of discipline universally almost forgotten among us? If not, why does this hue-and-cry of heresy fill the air? If not, how has it become the fashion for christians to publish their complaints against their brethren in the streets and highways? If not, how is it, that when such offenders are put upon their trial in our church courts the maxims and practices of the civil law are familiarly applied—as if the civil law cared for bringing its subjects to repentance? If not, how is it, that the complainant against such

the like nature, we cannot understand. Many questions have been started respecting them which are best solved by the confession of our ignorance. Such a confession may be mortifying to our pride; but it is better, infinitely better, to make the confession, than, by attempting to solve difficulties too hard for our feeble capacities, to involve ourselves and others in interminable disputation. Take, for instance, a matter which has given rise to no little dispute, discord and mutual crimination among professing Christians—the question concerning the Divine purposes. That the mind of man is free is a fact of which we are conscious. The foreknowledge of God we know to be a truth: for it is clearly revealed, and almost, if not altogether, demonstrable from reason itself. Yet the consistency of these two truths never has been, and it is not difficult to predict that it never will be, made out satisfactorily to the minds of most; perhaps not to any. The proper way to get rid of disputes and difficulties on such subjects is to admit our ignorance and weakness. Yet, such are precisely the subjects which have been the most fruitful of controversy; because on such subjects the pride of intellect loves to shew itself. The pride of intellect! the sure indication of a shallow brain. Science is modest. The mind which is capable of tracing an ample boundary of knowledge is, by doing so, brought in contact, through an extended tract, with the surrounding darkness; and is made sensible of the little which it actually knows, by comparing it with the vast and the profound which it does not know. Ignorance on the other hand, is conceited and presumptuous. Where Locke saw difficulties which he confessed he could not solve, ignorance sees none. Where a greater than Locke stopped short and exclaimed, “O the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God? how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!” ignorance neither hesitates nor falters. It sees not the abyss! And rails at those who do!—Had there been less of this among the teachers of religion, there had been more harmony and peace in the church.

3. Allied to this practice of converting the mysteries of religion into themes of bold and presumptuous speculation is another, which has been no less productive of those evil consequences to the church which we have so much reason to deplore, and for which it is the main object of the present discourse to suggest a remedy. I refer to the practice of attaching too much importance to modes and ceremonies in religion. Judaism was a religion of ceremonies,

offenders, is generally regarded in the contemptible light of a man suing for his character? If not, how is it that he is told, as he always is, when the person arraigned is a low character, “The man is beneath your notice; why do you mind him”? If not:—but I need not proceed. Let professing christians remember that they are solemnly bound not to suffer sin in their neighbor; but to take the proper steps to bring him to repentance, or to remove the scandal of his sin away from the church. Let those whom it concerns beware, lest, in their zeal to maintain the creed of the church, its Book of Discipline be trampled underfoot! Let them remember, what the history of the past abundantly teaches, that there is such a thing as persecuting people into heresy!

whose "beggary elements" have been superseded and set aside by a purer and more spiritual dispensation. The Jewish church is compared by the apostle to a child under the tuition of a pedagogue, to be instructed by authority and by signs addressed to the senses. Under that system every thing was prescribed: nothing left to the discretion of the worshiper. But the genius of christianity is just the reverse. It is simple, spiritual, rational, liberal, practical. It has but two ceremonies, and in neither of these has the mode been prescribed. We are no longer under a pedagogue. Instead of set forms, general directions are given us, which suppose discretion and judgment in those who receive them. "Let all things be done decently and in order" is an instance. Such a precept is not to be found in the whole law of Moses. "Thus saith the Lord" introduces every specific rule in that burdensome ritual. The religion of Christ goes to the heart: settles principles, prescribes purity in the soul, and good works in the life. Whatever has no relation to these it treats with indifference. Yet, a strange disposition still exists to renounce this liberal spirit of the gospel, and to bring the church in bondage again to the yoke of ceremonial observances. With some this has been actually accomplished; and immersion has been put in the place of a new heart and a good life.

In the apostle's days this disposition manifested itself in certain scruples about meats and drinks and days, reputed holy. It was excusable then, when the minds of men were but partially delivered from Jewish ceremonies and pagan superstitions; in an attachment to one or the other of which all had been educated. Yet, we find the apostles treating it with unsparing severity. A sentence pronounced by one of them, in relation to it, deserves to be written in golden capitals on every church in our land, and deeply inscribed on the mind of every christian worshiper: "The Kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

4. It would greatly tend to promote the purity as well as the peace of the church, if her public teachers in all the different denominations should, as with one consent avoid the points of sectarian peculiarity, and, both in their public ministrations and private intercourse among their people, insist more than any of them do on the great matters of personal piety and social duty. The religion of Christ is eminently practical. "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say." Nothing is revealed to us in the Bible simply to be believed. Every thing is in order to practice. And it is worthy of observation that wherever the spirit and power of true piety prevail, there is no disposition to indulge in sectarian disputes, or to magnify sectarian differences, or to cherish sectarian feelings. The convinced sinner whose mind is absorbed in the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" and the experienced christian fighting the good fight of faith, or dying in the triumphs of hope, turn away in disgust from those speculations which inflame the passions of the sectarian zealot. The active philanthropist regards

them not. It is the idle mind that seeks to amuse itself in vain speculation and empty theory. It is pharisaical pride that magnifies the little and neglects and diminishes the great things of religion, and that says to all who are not of its party, "stand by thyself: I am holier than thou." Let us prize the truth. "Let us buy the truth and sell it not." But the truth which does not actually lead to good practice, and, in order to that, to heart purity, is no truth, but a lie, as it exists in the mind of him who *thus* entertains it.

It is lamentable how ignorant the mass of sectarians are on the subject of their duties; and how indifferent also! While they are full of zeal on those points, however insignificant, which divide them from others.

This hideous deformity is, in part, owing to their leaders. They have not been shewn the importance of a good life, nor wherein it consists. The religious taste of many has even been formed to *hate* that kind of instruction which relates to practice. They call it dry preaching,—mere morality. They do not choose to view, too narrowly, the tables of the law. They want, it is true, to be excited: for excitement is pleasant. But a deep sense of the obligations of duty is foreign from their feelings. Let their imaginations be stimulated by glowing description, and their self-complacency be flattered by frequent intimations that they belong to a society of pre-eminent claims to piety and holiness, and they are satisfied. "To keep the heart with all diligence"—"to do justice love mercy and walk humbly with their God," is with them a secondary concern. The first is, the interests of their party.

5. The influence of names has had a great deal to do in supporting the unhallowed cause of division and strife among the churches of the reformation. The several parties have been trained to follow their file leaders—the *great* and *good men* by whom the party was first organized. "I am of Paul and I of Apollos and I of Cephas," is the cry; and to give up one iota of what their distinguished men whom they have almost canonized thought necessary, would be considered as a dishonorable abandonment of their duty to those to whom they are indebted for whatever name and distinction they have gained in the world. This is one of the most odious features upon the detestable visage of the monster we have been describing. It is a species, and not a very refined species, of idolatry. It is calling by the name of master others beside "him who is our Master in heaven." It is placing a sinful mortal on the throne of the Saviour! In this light Paul evidently considers it, when he asks the sectarian Corinthians "was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" With such indignation did this illustrious servant of Jesus Christ treat the idea of having a party of followers called by his name! Has he been imitated in this by the distinguished leaders of modern sectarianism? I trow not. They are dead—the most of them—and I would not detract from their praises. Yet were we as intimately acquainted with the dark side of their character, as the eulogies of their followers have made us to be with the bright side, I doubt

whether we should not see that pride and ambition and obstinacy had something to do in shaping their course, as well as superior piety and zeal for the truth; and if our eyes could follow them to heaven—for we must not doubt they are all there—we should see them occupying a far less exalted station in that happy world than the partiality of their admirers or followers has assigned them. But if they occupy *any place* in heaven, and if pain could reach their glowing bosoms, it would be inflicted by the thought that their names have been made the occasion of rending the church of Christ, and of diverting to themselves a part of that regard which is due to him alone.

The apathy and discouragement which have heretofore existed among christians in relation to this subject must be shaken off. The evils of discord and division have indeed become inveterate. They are the greater on that account. And the reason for great and immediate exertion to have them removed is therefore the more urgent. They are not necessary evils, but the natural consequences of the church's departure from the laws of Christ's kingdom, and the standing and public evidences of her guilt and shame. Their removal must be effected. It may be a work of time. We should therefore begin without delay. Is it too much to expect that sectarian prejudices may be mitigated, if not removed from the minds of the present generation? Is it too much to expect of the professed followers of Him whose religion and example breathe a spirit of "peace and good will to men," that they will in good earnest begin to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem;" that they will, with less reserve than heretofore, mingle their efforts to promote the "common salvation;" that they will cease from all other kind of strife than that of "provoking one another to love and good works;" that they will stigmatize with their disapprobation evil speakers; that they will mark and avoid them that cause division; that they will not allow themselves to call on the world to arbitrate differences in the church, or encourage this practice in others: and in fine, that they will cherish and foster the growth of that heaven-born charity so nobly described by the apostle in a passage (1. Cor. 13th) which has been so often quoted and so seldom exemplified—"Studying the things that make for *peace* and the things whereby one may edify another?" To expect these things of professing christians is no more than to expect that they will be in reality what they appear to be? And is this too much? It is enough, however, to effect, if realized in fact, all that is required in order to make the church in reality one. We want no forced unions. Till the spirit that has been described prevails more than at present, let existing distinctions between sects remain. When it does prevail—prevail decidedly and generally, these distinctions will no longer be seen. They will either melt away or be disregarded.

Erasmus was wont to seek relief from "the vexatious squabbles and peevish controversies" which troubled the church in his day, by burying himself in the works of Cicero. What a burning shame upon the christians of his day was this, that one of their number, and one of the wisest and best of their number too, should be forced, for

sake of his own quiet, to forsake their company, and to consort with a heathen philosopher! Yet, the causes of the discord which then prevailed were vastly more important than any which now exist. What *are* the causes that at present produce alienation and discord among christians? Not one in ten of the litigant parties can tell. In some cases the only cause is a different use of words and phrases, or matters equally trifling.

Yet it is no trifle that the world looks on the scene of discord, and is hardened by the sight into a more stubborn state of unbelief. It is no trifle that God is dishonored and disobeyed—that the Spirit of grace is grieved—that hell is furnished with cause of triumph and enlarges herself to receive her expected prey! O ye who “compass sea and land to make proselytes” to your party, regardless of the honor of the christian name, regardless of the perplexity which your unprofitable disputes occasion to the mind of the simple, of the anguish which they produce in the hearts of the pious, and of the stumbling-blocks that they cast in the way of the heedless—would to Heaven you could see what you are doing, and would desist from a course which is fraught with guilt and misery and ruin to yourselves and others!

Finally: let us avoid a grand mistake on this subject. You will say, “I feel the force of the remarks that have been advanced. And now, I will go and persuade every professing christian, of every different sect and party that I may meet, to lay aside his party feelings and prejudices and come and join himself to our communion.” Aye indeed! That is the mistake against which I would caution you. Your business lies with yourself, in the first place; not with your neighbor. Let each pluck the beam out of his own eye. Look at home! Study the religion of Christ in his doctrine, example, life, death; and then compare your heart and life with its requirements, and lastly make an honest, vigorous, persevering attempt to bring the former up—higher—higher yet—up to the latter. This is what you have to do. And were all who profess the christian name to do this, we should soon see the holy fire of Christian charity burn high and bright, and extend itself on every hand, consuming, or purging off the dross of sectarian impurity and causing the whole church to melt and flow together in love to God and man. And the conversion of the world would speedily follow. Amen!

the ministry and from the laity, and congregated, in the name of Christ, from all parts of the Union. Surely, if there is a body of men on earth, who may be expected to act unbiassed by local or personal causes of dislike or attachment, fear or favor; the General Assembly is that body. Should it be dissolved, every member of the Presbyterian church in the United States would lose the best earthly guardian of his dearest rights and privileges; and every minister, of any standing, in the Presbyterian connexion would lose his best human defence against the envy and malice—which, when they exist in the church, are the more difficult to guard against: because they conduct their attacks under the pretext of friendship—piety—zeal for the truth—and whatever is most sacred.

I am willing, therefore, that the following discourse should go to the public, as the "Testimony" of an humble individual against whatever proceedings, of whatever party, name, or denomination, may tend to distract and disturb the minds of the serious, and to increase the divisions, already too numerous, which separate and distinguish the professed subjects of the Prince of Peace.

I remain, gentlemen, with due sense of the favorable opinion you were pleased to express respecting the sentiments contained in the discourse, the manuscript of which I herewith send you—and with sentiments of high personal respect, your friend and humble serv't.

A. WYLIE.

Bloomington, July, 1824.

ERRATUM.

A sentence embracing about six lines in the body of the 8th page, quoted from the "commentator Henry," should be stricken out. This sentence was inserted there, because at that place, in the manuscript, there was a mark (*) of reference, implying that something should either be brought in there, or serve at the foot of the page as a note. This sentence was found upon a strip of paper, with a like mark (*) of reference showing its adaption to that place and it was brought in there, and the first form, embracing the 8th page, was worked-off. On setting up the note on the 11th page, a place requiring the same sentence was discovered, where it also appears.

We presume that Dr. Wylie either made the mark of reference, in the body of the matter, through mistake or that he intended when he made it to have a note, or an additional observation adapted to that place.
