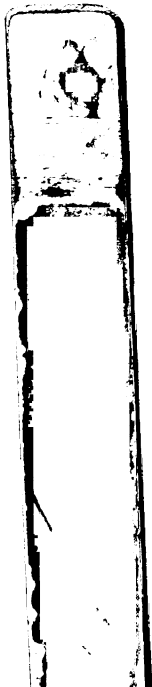

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A
S E R M O N

O N

I P E T. chapter IV. verse 14.



BY THE

Rev. Mr. WALTER SELTON.



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S E R M O N

O N

I. Pet. iv. 14.

*If any Man speak, let him speak as the oracles
of God.*

A Precept like this of St. Peter, St. Paul also has given us; commanding, that if any man *prophecy*, he should do it *according to the proportion* or analogy of faith, as it is termed, i. e. according to the general tenor of scripture; interpreting one passage so, as not to contradict another; but that there may be a perfect harmony, and agreement throughout the whole. Perhaps there may be this difference in the design of the words of the two apostles: St. Paul's words may have more immediate reference to public preachers; St. Peter's seem to concern all christians in general. *If any man speak*, i. e. of the things of God; of the doctrine of christianity, whether he be a public preacher or a private christian, *let him speak as the oracles of God.*

In discoursing upon these words, I shall consider how the oracles of God, the holy scriptures speak, that we may know how we also ought to speak of the things of God; and that as to *matter, manner* and *design*.

I. As to *matter*: 1. These sacred oracles speak, that we are all by nature *fallen sinners*; that we are evil branches of an evil root, and in our *flesh*, in this corrupt, fallen nature, *there dwells no manner of thing that is good*, Rom. vii. 18. Whatsoever we may boast of, as being born in a christian country, we are *by nature children of Wrath*, even as others, Eph. ii. 3. *For there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*; of that glorious image of God in which man was at first created; Rom. iii. 22, 23. Thou that fanciest thyself so very righteous and very good, this is thy condition by nature. And notwithstanding all thy prayers, duties, and good works, so called, thou art still, while thou art out of Christ, and Christ out of thee, as vile as the vilest, an heir of hell and endless wrath. This is likewise expressly declared in the oracles of God: for it is written, *If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his*; and *they that are in the flesh cannot please God*, Rom. viii. 8, 9. Which words intimate to us, that some men are not in Christ, nor Christ in them, in a saving manner. A truth elsewhere most expressly declared in the oracles of God. Therein we are taught, that some, notwithstanding the redemption that there is in Jesus Christ, are *alienated from the life of God*; *enemies to him in their mind*, by wicked works, far off from him, as to the matter of salvation; yea, *without Christ and without God in the world*, Eph. ii. 12, 13.—iv. 18. Coloss. i. 21. These oracles of truth likewise tell us, who are in Christ, or have his spirit, and who are in the flesh and consequently have not his spirit. They tell us, *If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature*; or *there is a new creation in his soul*, 2 Cor. v. 17. He has the *mind that was in Christ*. *The fruits of the spirit are found in him, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, or fidelity, meekness, temperance*; all holy and heavenly tempers and affections, Gal. v. 22, 23. If then these fruits be not found in a man, he is not in Christ, nor Christ in him. From these oracles we learn moreover, that

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those that are after, or in the flesh, do mind, *σπουδῆς* study, set their affections upon the things of the flesh, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like, Rom. viii. 5. Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. So that while thou art unholy in heart or life, and delightest in thy evil ways, thou art out of Christ; thou art in the flesh; a carnal, unregenerate sinner, and therefore an heir of hell.

2. The oracles of God say that we must repent; that God commandeth all men every where to repent, Acts xvii. 30. And they moreover teach us, that repentance is not only a change of Judgment—a notion in the head different to what a man had before, but a conviction in the heart, that he is a fallen sinner, in the miserable condition just now mentioned; that all the threatenings in the law of God are justly his due; in short, that he is lost and undone for ever without Christ: St. Paul describes his repentance thus; *I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died*, Rom. vii. 9. and this made him groan out—*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* v. 24. Repenting David says, *I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me*, Psal. li. 3. and so sharp was the conviction, that he compares it to *breaking the bones*, v. 8. and this anguish of spirit made him pray, that God would *wash him thoroughly from his wickedness, and cleanse him from his sin*: that he would *create in him a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him*; and promises to testify the sincerity of his repentance by his future obedience to God's law, v. 2, 10, 12, 14, 15. So says God of penitent Paul, *behold he prayeth*, Acts ix. 11.

3. The oracles of God speak, that *by grace we are saved through faith*, Eph. ii. 8. That we are *saved or justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. That a man is justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law.* And that to him that *worketh not*, who hath never done what the law

law of God required—not one truly good work in all his life—but believeth on him that justifieth—not the good, not the righteous—but *the ungodly*; him that till that moment is ungodly, and cannot be otherwise—*his faith is counted to him for righteousness*, Rom. iii. 24, 28.—iv. 5. They speak that we are justified or saved from the misery of a guilty conscience, only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Rom. v. 1. *who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification*; and that freely, v. 15, 16. without any merit, any good thing in us to deserve it, Luke xvii. 10. And this saving, justifying faith is therein declared to be, *faith of the operation of God*, Coloss. ii. 12. Not such an assent, as we yield to any common report: for that is no more than a notion or opinion floating in the brain: but this is a deep, inward conviction of that soul-reviving truth, *the son of God loved me, and gave himself for me*, Gal. ii. 20. A living, saving principle wrought in the heart — *for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*, Rom. x. 10. We hear a common report, and perhaps a strange one; yet if credible we believe it, because there is nothing *within us, nor without us* to oppose our yielding assent to it. But it is not so with regard to the gospel report. The matter is strange and mysterious in itself, and to carnal reason incredible. *The natural man cannot receive the things of the spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*, 1 Cor. ii. 14. An unawakened sinner's own proud nature will not submit to renounce all its fancied goodness, and trust in Christ alone for salvation. And the world and the devil never fail to build up such in their *self-righteousness*. The awakened sinner, that sees in the light of God, Eph. v. 14, his own *wilfulness and nothingness*, can hardly be brought to believe, that Christ will save such a sinner as he. And the devil will never fail to urge a man to despair, when he can no longer persuade him to presume. And with a tempted soul it will avail but little oftentimes to say, it is God's word and not man's, why do you not then be-

believe it? For the tempter will come, as he did at first to Eve, with his, *Yea, HATH God said?* Is it God's word? Is it his report? Are you sure of it? And when a sinner in such a case is, like Peter, tost on the waves of temptation, no power of his own; none but the hand of Christ can hold him up and keep him from sinking into the gulph of despair.

4. The oracles of God constantly speak, *that they who have believed, must be careful to maintain good works*, Tit. iii. 4. *that true saving faith works by love*, Gal. v. 6. and is fruitful in good works. That such a faith as does not produce good works, is no more than a *dead and a devilish* faith, James ii. 14, 17, 19. *Yea, and that not believers only, but unbelievers also, as John Baptist taught the Pharisees and Sadducees—the bigots and deists of his day—even these must bring forth fruits meet for repentance*, Matt. iii. 8. *that such must shake off their sins, and amend their ways, and their doings, and thus evidence their desire to flee from the wrath to come, and obtain eternal life. Our blessed Lord, speaking on the mount to a mixt multitude—to his believing disciples, and a vast concourse of people beside, who as yet believed not, earnestly presses upon them, the duties of piety and charity—of religious actions towards God, and merciful actions towards men: and tells them, not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord—that makes a bare profession of faith in me, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father, which is in heaven*, Matt. vii. 21. Again, preaching to an unbeliever, who had been covetous and unmerciful, and that desired to know, how he should obtain eternal life, he says, *sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross and follow me*, Mark x. 12. But Peter, preaching to Cornelius, who, on the contrary, was a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway, Acts x. 20. declares, *that in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*, v. 35. And having no

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occasion to bid him to observe the outward duties of religion, he being strict therein before, he preaches to him *remission of sins*, through Faith in Jesus Christ: that point of doctrine being most proper for him and his family, *v. 43*. So to the three thousand that were *pricked to the heart* by his first sermon, and enquired of him, and the rest of the apostles, *men and brethren, what shall we do?* He answered, *repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, Acts ii. 37, 38*. Whereby he does not mean the *bible—the written word*—as some wild dreamers would have us believe, who affirm there is no spirit but the word; but he means grace of every kind, such as faith and love, and all the holy fruits springing therefrom: for so we find this phrase explained by Peter himself afterwards, speaking of Cornelius and his family; *God which knoweth the hearts, bear them witness; giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us Jews, and them Gentiles; purifying their hearts by faith, Acts xv. 8, 9*. And that we may not be at a loss what to do and what to avoid, we are directed to consult the oracles of God, *Isa. viii. 20*. wherein we learn, that *all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17*. For though the written word be not the spirit of God, it was dictated by that unerring and powerful spirit, and is attended with it, to all such as come to it in sincerity and humility, and is *a lamp unto their feet, and a light unto their paths*, as well as unto David's, *Psa. cxv. cv*. Well were it therefore for every one, if they would take heed to this word, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn; and the day-star, which is Christ, arise in their hearts, *2 Pet. i. 19*.

The oracles of God then direct unbelievers to work, as if they were working for life: and direct believers also to work, because they have life: yet at
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the same time they direct, both the one and the other, to make no more account of their works, in point of merit, than if they did not work at all—*when we have done, supposing it possible, all those things which are commanded us, still to say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do; and no more, Luke xvii. 10. yea, to count all but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord—to count them but dung, that we may win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, Phil. iii. 8; 9.* Moreover, as hinted before, from these lively oracles, we learn, that we must be holy in heart, as well as in life: for *God hath chosen us in Christ, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love, Ephes. i. 4.* that we must have the true *circumcision of the heart, Rom. ii. 29, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, Deut. xxx. 6. Matt. xxii. 37, 39.* that we must be *renewed in the spirit of our mind, Ephes. iv. 23. sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God, Phil. i. 10, 11.* that the same mind must be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus, *Phil. ii. 5. Matt. xi. 25.* Wherefore they bid us to *follow after holiness, without which, no man shall see the Lord, Heb. xii. 14.* which does not mean imputed holiness, as some would persuade us; for as believers, the Hebrews, to whom these words were written, had that already: but it means holiness imparted and implanted, according to that word of the apostle, *while we with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord, 2 Cor. iii. 18.* I say by the spirit of the Lord; for,

5. The oracles of God speak, that it is God by his spirit that works this, and all our other good works in us, *Isa. xxvi. 12.* It is the Lord; by his spirit, that opens our hearts, as he did Lydia's, to attend to the things.

things that are spoken in his word, Acts xvi. 14. It is his light alone that shews us our darkness, ignorance, sinfulness, misery and helplessness. It is God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, that shines in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, John xvi. 9. 2 Cor. iv. 6. Tis he that gives repentance, faith, love, and every divine grace and heavenly temper and disposition. For Christ was exalted to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance unto his people, and forgiveness of sins, Acts v. 31. Unto us it is given, in the behalf of Christ, to believe on him, as well as to suffer for his sake, Phil. i. 29. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of Glory, gives us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, that we may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power, to usward, who believe according to the working—not of our own will, and at our own pleasure, observe—but of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, Ephes. i. 17, 19, 20. Without Christ we can do nothing, John xv. 5. It is he, who is God over all, blessed for ever, that works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, Phil. ii. 13. In a word, every good and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning, James i. 17. Accordingly the oracles of God speak, that we must wait for a power from on high, to enable us to do the least good, even to think a good thought: for all our sufficiency is of God, 2 Cor. iii. 5. Therein we are bid and encouraged to wait upon the Lord. Jacob says, I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord, Gen. xlix. 18. And David, I waited patiently for the Lord, till he inclined his ear unto me, and heard my calling, Psa. xl. 1. Jeremiah tells us, the Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord, Lam. iii. 25, 26. Paul waited three days after he was convinced of sin, and did neither eat nor drink, before

fore Ananias went to him, that *he might receive remission of sins*, Acts 9.

The oracles of God also tell us in what manner we must wait; *In the way of thy judgments, or ordinances, O Lord, have we waited for thee*, says the prophet Isaiah xxvi. 8. And again, *thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness*—that willingly and earnestly perseveres in the way of duty—*those that remember thee in thy ways*, cap. lxiv. 5. Paul waited for the remission of his sins in fasting and prayer. So did David for deliverance from his guilty fears, long before. The same way the prophet Joel bids the sinners of his day wait, Joel ii. 12. So Peter bids the sinners, whom his word had alarmed, to wait for remission of sins in the way of duty, particularly in the ordinance of baptism, which was always administered with solemn and earnest prayer. And indeed of all means of obtaining remission of sins—present salvation from the guilt and power of sin, prayer is the most efficacious. Wherefore the oracles of God direct us to use prayer more than any other means, to this end; they direct the unbeliever to *repent of his wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps it may be forgiven him*, Acts viii. 22. And if believers sin? as who does not, till he be fully renewed in the image of God; such, as well as others, are directed to pray, that their *sins may be forgiven them; to confess their faults one to another, and pray one for another, that they may be healed*—have their wounded conscience made whole again, James v. 15, 16. So our blessed Lord himself directs and commands all the multitudes, *believers and unbelievers*, that heard him preach; and in them all such at this day, to pray, *forgive us our debts, or trespasses, as we forgive our debtors, or them that trespass against us*, Matt. vi. 12. And moreover, in order to encourage us to pray, and to animate our faith and expectation of a gracious answer to our prayer, he has directed us, one and all, even those who have made themselves chil-

children of the devil by imitation, as well as those who are children of God by adoption and grace, to address him under the endearing and encouraging title of a *Father*; giving us thereby to understand, that though we have heretofore been rebellious children, he will acknowledge us for his children still; yea, and *even as a father pitieth his own children, forgiving their past follies and offences, even so the Lord pitieth them that fear him*, and will yet receive them graciously, if with the prodigal, they humbly return unto him, and with true repentance cast themselves on the multitude of his mercies, Psa. ciii. 13. Luke xv. 20. So then we, as well as the apostles, must *not depart from Jerusalem*—from the means of Grace, but *wait therein for the promise of the Father*—for all the grace he hath promised in Christ Jesus, and we stand in need of. And whoever does thus wait, shall not lose his labour: for *he hath not said to the seed of Jacob*—to any soul that wrestles with him by prayer and supplication,——*seek ye me in vain*, Isa. xlv. 19. Every such wrestling Jacob shall be a prevailing Israel. Wherefore, *tarry thou the Lord's leisure, be strong, and he shall stablish thy heart*, Psa. xxvii. 14. *For the vision is for an appointed time*—when it shall serve best to advance the glory of God, and answer all the purpose of his grace——*but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry, a moment longer than is for thy good, and God's glory*, Hab. ii. 3. None, I say, that ever seek the Lord aright in his appointed ways, shall seek in vain, For,

6. The oracles of God declare, *that whosoever calleth on the name of the Lord, shall be saved*, Acts ii. 21. For that *with him there is no respect of persons; but in every nation, consequently in every body of people professing the name of Christ, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*, Acts x. 34, 35. For it is the word of Christ, the saviour of sinners, *whosoever, let him be called what* he

he will ; let him belong to whatever party, or body of people he will ; even though he should be as singular, as particular, and as stiff in the observance of some indifferent matters, as the Rechabites among the Jews ; if he shall *do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother*, Matt. xii. 50. He hath shewed us, that his spirit is not confined to any place or nation, sect or party whatsoever. If any man, says he, *shall say unto you, lo here is Christ or there*, confined to this or that society, — *believe it not : behold he is in the desert*—in a popish hermitage—*go not forth : behold he is in the secret chambers* — in some private or particular society of men, and confined there, — *believe it not*. Go not after, nor follow such teachers, says he, Matt. xxiv. 23, 26. Advising us moreover, that all such are *false prophets*, and as such warning us particularly to *beware of them*, vii. 15. On the contrary, he has declared, *that where two or three are gathered together in his name ; whether to pray unto him, to praise him, to* ~~keep~~ ^{hear} *his word, or to join in any other of his ordinances, if they come with a sincere heart ; there he is in the midst of them*, xviii. 20. So speak the oracles of God as to matter. Not that they speak nothing more : for they speak of many other things, which demand our most serious attention, but which time will not permit me to enumerate. For your particular information concerning those matters therefore, I must advise and exhort you to a constant and diligent study of the holy scriptures themselves. For want of time also, I shall be brief touching the *manner* wherein, and the *design* for which the oracles of God speak. To proceed then,

II. As to the *manner*, the oracles of God speak *simply and honestly*—without any art, *shuffling, cutting or disguise*. They declare the *truth*—the *plain truth*—and as *nothing but the truth*, so *all the truth*, and to *all men*. They *shun not*, like the inspired writers of them, *to declare the whole counsel of God*, so far as it concerns us to know, Acts xx. 27. The spi-

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rit of God in his word is not backward to exhort men, even unbelievers, to *love* and to *good works*, for fear they should trust in their works. Nor does he speak of faith and leave out repentance: but his constant word is, *repent and believe the gospel*, Mark i. 15. And so far is he from leaving out practical holiness, or making faith to supercede it, that it bids us *walk as Christ also walked*, 1 John ii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 21. *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world*; and as I said before, I cannot say too often, *wills that they which have believed in God should be zealous of good works; careful to maintain them*, Titus ii. 12, 14.—
iii. 8.

III. And as to the *design*, the oracles of God speak for no other, than to promote the glory of God in the salvation of the souls of men. The scriptures speak not for the sake of making *divisions* among the true members of Christ; much less for the sake of keeping up a *party*, or promoting a *bigotted, party spirit*, or a *party zeal* for *forms, modes, ceremonies, customs*, or any other external things, among professors of christianity. As *the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned*, 1 Tim. i. 5. so this is all that the oracles of God aim at. They do not aim nor tend to make one doom me to hell, because I worship God in a place called a *church*, and by a *prescribed form* of prayer: nor to make me doom another to hell, because he worships in a place called a *meeting-house*, and by an *extemporal* prayer. But their sole aim is to make us *love one another as Christ also loved us*, Ephes. v. 2. *to inspire us with that charity or love, which beareth, or rather, as ἀγαπᾷ means, covereth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things*, 1 Cor. xiii. 7. 'Tis true, they condemn obstinate and impenitent sinners of every kind, all formal hypocrites and unbelievers; how specious soever their outward behaviour be, and how good soever it appear in their own or the world's

world's esteem ; but they give no one room to condemn another merely for not thinking just as he does, or not complying to him in non-essential and indifferent matters ; but rather require us to bear with one another's weakness, wherever charity demands it, and those sacred oracles themselves do not forbid it, Rom. xiv.—xv. 1. So speak the oracles of God, and so ought every man to speak touching the things of God, whether in public teaching or private conversation.

Now to make some use farther of what hath been said,

1. Seeing it is incontestable that the oracles of God, which declare his mind and judgment, which is in every case according to truth, speak on this wise ; then it is as incontestable, that many in our day do not speak as the oracles of God, nor according to truth. It is plain that they do not speak as the oracles of God, nor truly, who boast of the dignity of the natural man since the fall ; and who would persuade men that their state by nature is not so bad as David, Paul, and other inspired writers represent it. That man must be wilfully and obstinately blind, who will not acknowledge himself a fallen creature, when he sees a heart within his own breast full of all evil tempers and vile affections, and which his own reason must tell him, could not proceed from the hands of an infinitely holy, wise and good God. And it is as plain they do not speak as the oracles of God, who cry up the dignity of man on account of the redemption that is in Jesus Christ ; as if every man therefore was possess'd of Christ by virtue of that redemption, as naturally as he is of sin by virtue of Adams fall, impiously and blasphemously telling us, " that a man's will is *Christ in him*, and is his God or his devil ; his *heaven* or his bell." Whereas, notwithstanding *by one righteousness, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life* ; yet some there are still, who by sin are separated from God, Isa. lix. 2. and as to his saying

saving grace, *are without Christ, and without God in the world.*

Again, they do not speak as the oracles of God, who laugh at repentance, and cry with a sneer, "What, you cannot come to Christ till you have repented; as if he could not save you without repentance." Nay, but the question is not, whether he can; but whether he will save any without repentance or no? And it is plain he will not; seeing *he commands all men every where to repent.* Neither do they speak as those sacred oracles, who make repentance to be nothing more than "a change of judgment or opinion," or "the having right notions of the doctrine of Christ." For many a drunkard, adulterer, and open, notorious sinner of other kinds has a right notion and opinion of the truths of christianity. But will you dare to assert that such as these have repented?

Yet, again, they speak contrary to the oracles of God, who say, "We are justified by our works;" as do they also, who say, "We are justified by faith and works together;" or that "we are justified by such a faith, as does not produce holiness of heart and life"—by a mere opinion or notion of faith in the head, without the root of the matter in the heart. But they speak agreeable to them, as has been seen before, who say with the church of England, that "we are justified, or accounted righteous before God, *only* for the merit of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and *not* for our own works or deservings; and yet that good works do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith: insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit."

And do they speak any more agreeable to those oracles of truth, who say, "Faith is *not* the gift of God?" but that a man may savingly believe the gospel just when he will, as easily as he can believe any other

other report? By no means: for as they who thus speak; readily allow, every natural man is a spiritually dead man; and till he is quickened by the power of God, he can no more believe, nor exercise any other grace which he has not, than a naturally dead man can hear or speak, or perform any other actions of a living man.

Again further, they speak contrary to the oracles of God; who decry good works — who set them entirely aside, as a matter they have no concern with; crying, “ Don’t preach of good works to me; I have nothing to do with the law: God knew man could never keep his law, and therefore never designed he should. What would you have me go to church then as you do, and mock God to his face, saying, Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law:” impiously pronouncing these solemn, scriptural petitions with grimace, and in a ludicrous, jeering tone. Do not these cavillers know, or will they not consider who hath said, *If ye love me, keep my commandments*, John xiv. 15. That if God never designed we should keep his law, he designed we should break it; and that then, all manner of wickedness becomes, not only no sin, but our duty — that then the law cannot convince of sin — yea, that then there is no law at all: for every law is made to be kept, and is in its very nature binding to obedience, or it is no law. Do they not know, or will they not consider, that the unerring Spirit of God taught David to pray in the words used by our church, and appointed them to be left upon record, as proper for us to use at all times. And how directly opposite to the sacred oracles do they speak, who deny these glorious truths and excellent blessings promised to every believer, that God will *circumcise their heart, to love the Lord with all their hearts*; and that he will *take away the heart of stone, and give an heart of flesh*,

and write his laws in the inward parts, Deut. xxx, 6. Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Jer. xxxi. 33. Consequently they speak different from those oracles of truth, who being unholy in heart and life, proud, boasters, heady, bigotted, despisers of all good men, that are not of their sect or party, do yet pretend to have faith in Christ, and without any warrant from God's word, presumptuously boast, " Let me die when I will, I am sure of going to heaven." Whereas if the word of God be true, and these pretended *self-made* believers die in this state, they are as sure to go to hell as the devil himself.

And do not they speak contrary to the oracles of God, who blasphemously assert, " there is no spirit but the written word." Yea verily. For in them we read, *God is a Spirit*, John iv. 24. If then there is no spirit but the word, there is no other God. Wherefore these blasphemers instead of a *popish wooden or breadden god*, have made them one of *paper and ink*, which is even more despicable than the popish one.

Again it is plain, they speak not as the oracles of God, who attribute any power to themselves to do any, the least good without the help of the divine Spirit. The speech of such men is as inconsistent with the word of God, as the prayers of those men are inconsistent with their principles, who expect God " to cleanse the thoughts of their hearts by the " inspiration of his holy spirit; and that he would not " take his holy spirit from them; when at the same time, they deny there is any such thing now as inspiration or receiving the holy spirit.

Yet further, they also speak inconsistent with the oracles of God, who say " we must not pray for repentance or pardon of sin, much less address God " under the character of a father, unless we are true " believers in Christ; nor wait for a power to believe or do any other good; because it is written, " *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.*"

True

True! the gospel time and day, is the accepted time and day of salvation, and so will be till doomsday; but this does not prove that every soul that hears the gospel may believe it in that particular day or hour, wherein they hear it; or that we must not wait in the ways of God, till we receive the promises of the father. And so long as there is a Bible, and Christ's sermon on the Mount is written therein, we must maintain it right to sue to God for repentance and forgiveness of sins; yea, and address him as our father; seeing he is the *father of spirits*; yea, *of the spirits of all flesh*; and we have all one father, one God that created us; yea, *the Lord is our father that hath bought us also*, Heb. xiii. 9. Num. xvi. 22. Mat. ii. 10. Deut. xxxii. 6. Thus is God the father of us all without distinction; and we are his children, though we are *rebellious* children; *Isai. i. 2*. And we must maintain it, that those speak not as the oracles of God, who tell us without distinction, "that their sins are forgiving, and that therefore they should not mock God, by praying for that which he hath done for them already, and that now they have nothing to do but to praise him." The apostle Peter and James, and all other holy men of old, and God himself, did not think it mockery to pray for pardon of sins; nay, for when he by the mouth of Ezekiel had promised to save his people from their sins and sinful nature, Ezek. xxxvi. 25, &c. he says, *I will yet for this be enquired of* אֲשֶׁר אֲשֶׁר I will be required, sued to, *by the house of Israel to do it for them*, ver. 37. And if wiser men in their own eyes, than God himself and all his prophets and apostles, had not told us it were mockery of God; we could never have once supposed it. We can only allow, till the scriptures are altered, that the sins of all are only *virtually* forgiven; but not *actually*, till a man by faith apprehends and applies that pardon to his own soul, which is purchased for him by Christ, and offered to him in the gospel. Small comfort is it therefore

fore to impenitent and unbelieving sinners, that all their sins are *thus* forgiven; seeing that notwithstanding this, *the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God. Seeing only be that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned,* Pf. v. 17. Mark xvi. 16.

Neither do they speak as the oracles of God, who wisely, or rather *wildly*, tell you, "If you are a christian, you have fellowship;" which *cant language* with them means, you join their society; become one of their sect or party. For in what chapter or verse of the Bible is this written? Where do we read that Christ is confined to any particular congregation of men? All christians, we know, have fellowship with the father and the son, through the spirit, 1 John i. 3. and with one another in love, John xv. 17. But not necessarily in outward œconomy or discipline, the oracles of God no where confine Christ to one society or party of people; but rather declares those that do so, to be so far *false prophets*. Nor do they speak as those sacred oracles, who *artfully conceal* any part of God's truth, or *jesuitically wrest, pervert, and twist* it to make it speak as they would have it, suiting their doctrine to their own *fancy*, the *prevailing taste* of the times, or the *corrupt nature* of men; nor yet they who endeavour by all the *trickish, fraudulent, and crafty* speeches and *sophisms*, they can possibly invent, to root *bigottry* in their disciples and followers, to keep up a *narrow, unchristian, party spirit* among them; condemning all as hypocrites and reprobates, that do not "have fellowship," as their *cant phrase* is, or join with them and think in all points just as they do. All who speak the things here mentioned, in such a manner and for such ends, it is plain and evident from the express words of scripture before quoted, and from the general tenor of it, do not speak as those oracles of God. But if his word be true, they are found *liars* unto God, they do greatly *err*, not *knowing*—or greatly *sin*, not *regarding* the scriptures—and many per-

perhaps *not knowing the power of God*, to say the least and the best that can be said of such, *They go on deceiving, and being deceived*, 2 Tim. iii. 13. May the Lord open their eyes, and turn their hearts, that they may no longer *follow cunningly devised fables*———nor *walk in craftiness, handling the word of God deceitfully*———*but by manifestation of the truth, commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

2. Seeing we know how the oracles of God speak, let us beware, that we speak no otherwise; lest we come under the cōdemnation of those, that *corrupt the word of God*; that having no more than a *feigned faith*, a faith of their own operation and not of God's, — *turn aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law*; I should have said to use their cant “pure “gospel,” *understanding neither what they say, or whereof they affirm*, 1 Tim. i. 6, 7. Let us *speak the things that become sound doctrine*, Tit. ii. 1. The whole counsel of God, as occasion offers.———All that God in his oracles speaks; in the same manner, and to the same end.

3. Above all, let it be our earnest endeavour, to *believe and do*, what is spoken and commanded in the oracles of God; remembering the word of our Lord, *If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them*, John xiii. 17. And be not discouraged, that you have no help in yourself to do any good thing; for God hath *laid help for you, upon one that is mighty, even Jesus Christ*, Pf. lxxxix. 19. *He is able and will save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him*, Heb. vii. 25. *His spirit will help your infirmities*, Rom. viii. 26. He is gone forth into the world. *Wherever two or three are met in the name of Christ, he, by his spirit, is in the midst of them, and his power is present to heal, all that have need and desire to be healed, of their spiritual weaknesses and infirmities.* Wait in his ways, like the impotent man, at the pool of Bethesda, for the moving of the waters, John v. and the Lord according to his promise, will meet those, that remember him in his ways, and bless them, in his own time, and after

after his own manner. Thus it is written, *Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment. Blessed are all they that wait for him, Isaiah xxx. 18.* Observe here is waiting on both sides. God waits upon man; amazing condescension! till man waits upon God: and then he has mercy upon him.

Wait upon God therefore now, while he waits upon thee. Suffer his spirit by the ministry and means of his word, to convince thee, that thou art a *fallen sinner*; by nature a *child of perdition*. Be convinced that hell is thy portion, if thou diest impenitent and in unbelief. Let the *commandment come home* to thy heart. Thou hast broken the law of God in thought, word and deed. Thou wert born a child of wrath, and hast made thyself many a hundred fold more so by actual sins; by drunkenness perhaps, by covetousness, pride, anger, envy and evil speaking; by adultery and uncleanness; by lying and swearing; sabbath breaking and profaness; and a thousand other crimes. Wherefore the law of God condemns thee. Feel the sentence of death in thyself. And lost and undone as thou art, know, I say, that thou canst not help thyself. Thou canst not atone for one sin: not so much as for one evil thought; even though thou wert to fast and pray, and weep till doomsday. Nay shouldst thou *give all thy goods to feed the poor, and thy body to be burned for religion*, all this would not appease the wrath of thy offended God; nor wash out one sinful stain from thy polluted guilty soul.

Nothing but the blood of Christ, the immaculate *Lamb of God* can take away the sin of the world. Nothing but his all-atoning merit can make amends for our demerit. He hath fulfilled the law which thou hadst broken, in thy stead, and hath perfectly satisfied for thy offences. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, Acts xiii. 38. and by him*

him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses, ver. 39. Know that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto his ministers the word of reconciliation, 2 Cor. v. 19. Now then every true minister of the gospel is an ambassador for Christ, as though God did beseech you by them. And if I may be thought worthy to be ranked in that venerable order of men; I, who am less than the least of all, pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. Since God is reconciled to you by the death of his son, be ye reconciled to God. Lay down your arms of rebellion. Forsake your sins. Turn to the Lord with a true penitent heart, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Believe in him who hath loved you, and given himself for you. Know that God hath made him to be sin, i. e. according to the Hebrew idiom, a sin offering for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, ver. 21. The worst and vilest sinner that will but turn to God, will be accepted of him through Christ. For Christ hath satisfied God's justice; and he asks no more now for your justification, than that you believe in him. Faith takes the pardon, which Christ hath purchased for you. A general act of grace is past for all mankind. It only remains for you to believe, and by faith to apprehend your part in the purchased benefit. Believe only in the Lord Jesus Christ therefore, and thou shalt be saved, — saved from the guilt, from the power, and if you persevere in faith unto the end, saved also from the future punishment of sin.

Dost thou believe? Go thy way and sin no more wilfully. Let thy faith work by love. Evidence thy love by thy ready, willing, universal obedience, in all possible things to the will of God. Shew thy faith by thy works. And pray, with the apostles, Lord, increase my faith. Enable me to believe more heartily, more firmly, that I may love thee more and serve thee better!

Yea,

Yea, and "seeing that we are set in the midst of
 "so many and great dangers, that by reason of the
 "frailty of our nature, we cannot yet always stand
 "upright:" Pray for "strength and protection to sup-
 "port you in all dangers, and carry you through all
 "temptations." Yea, seeing we are not yet free
 from inbred corruption, but, as it were, "tied and
 "bound with the chains of our sins," pray that,
 "the pitifulness of God's great mercy may loose
 "you." Seeing that we are often guilty of slips and
 failings in our duty, *Come boldly to the throne of grace,*
that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time
of need, Heb. iv. 16. According to this command
 of the apostle, pray in the words of our church,
 "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts
 * to keep thy laws."

Love God, and all mankind for his sake. Con-
 demn none, but whom God's word condemns, i. e.
Hypocrites, unbelievers, and impenitent sinners. Neither
 fix these characters upon any professor, till you have
 sufficient grounds for it. Condemn none for such,
 merely for not thinking or speaking just as you would
 have them, whether they ought to do it or no. Say
 as Christ does, *whoever shall do the will of my Father*
which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and
mother, Matt. xii. 46. Abhor bigotry, party spirit, &c.
 just as you would the devil. For so much of this spi-
 rit, as is found in any man, so much of the devil is in
 him. And till it is cast out of him, let him talk of
faith and assurance of heaven, as much as he will, he
 will never come there, 1 John iii. 14, 15.—iv. 8, 20.
 Nothing can come there but *perfect love.* But *perfect*
love and *bigotry,* are as irreconcilable as heaven and
 hell. Get therefore that love which never fails; that so
dwelling in love, ye may dwell in heaven——dwell in
 God here, and to all eternity. Amen.

F I N I S.



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