

SIX LETTERS ON GOSPEL PREACHING.

Originally composed for the use of his Students

By Rev. John Brown (1722-1787).

digitised by Thomas Cotton

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

The Christian religion, to preach which the providence of God, I trust, is bringing you forward, is the religion of *sinful* men. If a preacher's discourse, therefore, be not adapted to render sinful men truly religious, what purpose does it serve, but to mislead and impose on the hearers? I could mention many sermons which might have been useful, had they been addressed to men who were not polluted and guilty before God; men who had no evil heart of unbelief, no hard and stony heart, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; men who were not, nor had been under the law, which is the strength of sin; men who had little or no need of Christ as a justifying and quickening Head, or of his Spirit of grace, supplication, and comfort. But, alas! to us sinful men those sermons are forgers of lies, and physicians of no value. They represent our case falsely, and prescribe remedies which are altogether improper.

The Son of God, who knows human nature infinitely better than any modern preacher can pretend, commanded his apostles to preach the *Gospel*, as glad tidings to every creature, to every sinful man. In this manner an angel preached, that to sinful men was born a *Saviour*, Christ the Lord. The apostle of the Gentiles determined neither to know, nor to make known, any thing among his hearers, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. He declares the faithful saying, which is worthy of all acceptation, to be, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief. He repeatedly says of the man who shall dare to preach another gospel than that which he had preached, "Let him be accursed."

The other inspired apostles, filled with the Holy Ghost, preached it in this manner, that God, having raised up his Son Jesus Christ, sent him to bless them who had murdered him, in turning them from their iniquities, giving them repentance and forgiveness of sin. Not only an apostle, but the sixfold witness of heaven and earth, (1 John, v. 7. 8.), assures us, that this is the record, that God has given to us sinful men, eternal life, and this life is in his Son; and that he who believes not this record, has made God a liar.

These, and many such things in the oracles of God, plainly show, that if divine truths be not exhibited in their true connection with Jehovah's free, sovereign, redeeming grace, and with the person and righteousness of Christ, as their grand centre, the sermon is but an ignorant or wicked attempt to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Nothing is more common, easy, or agreeable to corrupt nature, than to preach a multitude of the precious truths of Christ, in a broken and disjointed manner, without ever preaching the gospel of Christ. If a preacher talks at length¹ on the perfections of God, but does not represent him as in Christ, well pleased for his righteousness sake, as reconciling the world to himself, in giving to men his Son as their all-sufficient Saviour, and himself in him as their God, merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, there is no gospel, no glad tidings to a guilty sinner. As a guilty man, I can only consider his splendid speech² on uncreated and unbounded excellencies, as a tormenting celebration of what I cannot enjoy, nay, as a celebration of the power and peerless majesty of him who is angry with me every day; and so it cannot fail to work enmity against him in my carnal heart. How cruel in a preacher, to attempt to entertain me, a poor guilty sinner, with a representation of the glories of heaven, if it be not held forth as the better country, to which Jesus, the Saviour from sin, is the sole, the new, the living, the open way; as a possession purchased by his blood, and given in his gracious promise to sinful men, and as happiness which consisteth in the everlasting beholding of his glory, and enjoyment of God in him as my all and in all. To discourse to me, who richly deserve the wrath of God, and, as a sinner, am already under his curse, of the tremendous nature, the justice and the perpetual duration of hell fire, without reminding me how Jesus Christ, God in my nature, as the Redeemer of sinful men, was made sin, made a curse for us, bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows, that he might redeem us from the curse of the law, save us from the wrath to come, and obtain eternal redemption for us,—is but to torment me before the time.

That preacher acts only the part of a heathen moralist, who acquaints me with the multitude, the pollution, the absurdity of my vices and indwelling lusts; or with the charms, the profits, the pleasures, the honours, the duty of virtue, or my obligation to it, and who calls me off from the one to the other, without setting before me Jesus Christ, as sent by God to save men from sin, and to sanctify them with his own blood,—Jesus Christ, as having finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, through which, imputed to us, we become dead to, and delivered from the broken covenant of works, which is the strength of sin, and have our inward enmity against God slain by his bleeding love and Almighty Spirit; that, being married to Christ, and created anew in him, and having him dwelling in our hearts by faith, we, in his strength, may bring forth fruit unto God, and walk in newness of life; and that, having the promises, securing our everlasting relation to, and enjoyment of God, we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

That preacher acts but the part of a blaspheming Quaker, who speaks³ concerning the new birth, in its nature, necessity, and excellence; or concerning the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in men's hearts; or concerning the mortification of sin, repentance towards God, or fellowship with him;

¹ *orig.* descant

² *orig.* harangue

³ *orig.* harangues

without representing them⁴ as purchased by the Surety-righteousness of Christ, as the absolutely free and promised gift of God to us, and as the necessary fruits of our union to Jesus Christ, the Lord our righteousness and strength. Without this quickening prophecy over the graves, how can my dead bones live? Without this hearing of faith, how can I receive the Spirit of God? Without an application of God's redeeming love, how can I, who am by nature enmity against him, forsake or crucify my lusts, or turn to him as my Master and joy? How can I walk with him, unless we be agreed through the blood of his Son, and have him for my way?

The man preaches but like a Jesuit, who addresses me on the sufferings and merits of Jesus Christ, and on my duty to believe in him, without instructing me how this Jesus, God in my nature, was divinely made under the law, made sin for us, had our sins charged and punished on him, died for the ungodly, suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us sinners unto God, and make us the righteousness of God in him, or without exhibiting the record of God, that, in his crucified and now exalted Son, there is eternal life for the very chief of sinners among men; and that, as my all-sufficient and my only Saviour, my gracious Husband, my everlasting righteousness, my unfailing strength, and satisfying portion, he is in the gospel, promise, and oath of GOD, given to me as a *sinner*, stout-hearted, and far from righteousness. Such a preacher only tells me, that Christ merited life for me, if I, who cannot cease from sin, do, by my own sincere intentions or good works, recommend myself to his favour; or that Christ merited, that I might merit for myself. The faith which he inculcates is but an airy fancy, having no foundation: a wandering into the wilderness, in which there is no way: nay, it is a presumptuous robbing of God, in attempting to take possession of the blessings of his covenant, without regarding his *giving promise* and *offer* as my warrant.

I am affectionately your's.

LETTER II.

DEAR SIR,

As the manner of preaching, described in the former letter, is totally empty of the gospel, or glad tidings of salvation, so the preacher but perverts and blasphemes the gospel, that doctrine according to godliness, who warmly speaks⁵ on the imputed righteousness of Christ, and his Father's free gift of him for men as their surety and ransom, and to them as their Husband and portion; but who neglects to exhibit him as a Saviour from the power and pollution of sin, manifested to destroy the works of the devil in my heart and life, and to fill their place with implanted habits and exercises of holiness; as the Redeemer from all iniquity, who comes to turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and who has purchased for himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; or who conceals from me how his redeeming love constrains to hate every false way; how his justifying

⁴ that is, the gifts mentioned above.

⁵ *orig. descants*

sentence makes sure, and promotes, my spiritual life of conformity to God; how his dwelling in my heart by faith infallibly determines to, and powerfully produces, holiness in all manner of conversation.

It is not the gospel of Christ, or glad tidings of salvation to sinful men, as such, though the preacher should all his life discourse of the person, natures, and offices of Christ; or of his birth, life, obedience, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, sitting at God's right-hand, intercession, and coming to judgment; or of his merits and purchase:—Unless that the preacher truly state the nature of his surety-undertaking for us, the substitution of himself in our room and stead, as the second Adam:—Unless he truly state his relation to the new covenant of grace, as Mediator, Surety, and Administrator of it; and his relation to sinful men, as their appointed Saviour, offered and given to them in the gracious declarations, promises, and invitations of God; his relation to his people, as their spiritual Head and Husband, as their only righteousness before God their Judge; as the source of their sanctification, by his blood sprinkled on their conscience, to free them from the law, or broken covenant of works, as the strength of sin, and purge their conscience from dead works, to serve the living God; and by himself and his Spirit dwelling in them, as a vital principle of holiness, enabling them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world:—Unless he truly represent the perfect freedom of God's sovereign grace in the offers of the gospel, and show that therein Christ, as a Saviour, Husband, and portion, and eternal life of holiness and happiness, as completely purchased by, and lodged in him, are freely, without any regard to their good resolutions, sincerity, repentance, or good works, as the cause, presented, offered, and urged on men as *sinner*s, even the chief:—Unless he truly represent the state of sinner's justification before God, only through the imputed righteousness of Christ offered in the gospel, and received by faith, uniting their persons to him as their Surety and Husband, who has completely paid their debt to the law, as a broken covenant of works; and show, that no works of theirs, no, not those which some call evangelical, have any influence, as any part or ingredient of the condition and ground of it:—Or if he does not represent faith in its true nature, as a persuasion of the infallible truth of God's record, that there is eternal life in his Son for us lost sinners; as a receiving and resting upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is freely offered to us in the gospel:—If he does not urge our receiving of Christ as the means of renewing our heart; and our living on him by the daily exercise of faith, according to our new-covenant state, as the means of producing good works, and serving God in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life:—If he state not union and communion with Christ, and gracious communications from his fulness, as the foundation of all our holy obedience; and inculcate holiness in heart and practice as a privilege as well as a duty, and as a duty only to be performed by our living on Christ as the Lord our righteousness, our quickening Head, and vital principle dwelling in our heart by faith. In fine, the least neglect to hold forth Christ as God's free gift, and our all in all, in any privilege or duty; or the least recommendation of sincerity, repentance, good purposes, or works, as the ground of our warrant and welcome to receive Jesus Christ as a Saviour; or as a cause or condition of our title to salvation, or a ground of our full possession of it, tends to pervert the glorious gospel.

I am affectionately your's.

LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,

FROM the hints in the two former letters, it will plainly appear, that the doctrines and promises of the gospel may be preached in a *legal* manner; and the precepts of the law in a truly *evangelical* manner. It will appear also, how necessary it is, that an evangelical preacher should have a deep insight into the mystery of Christ, that he may clearly perceive how his person, God-man, is connected with, and influences all his offices, states, and works; and how it is connected with every part of the covenant of grace, and the privileges and duties of believers: how he, in his person, offices, and fulness, pervades, furnishes, and confirms all the promises, and suits all the conditions and necessities of sinful men. The preacher ought clearly to understand the difference and the connection between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and between the law and the gospel; the difference and the harmony between the law as a covenant, and the law as a rule of life; the difference between the gospel strictly taken, and the dispensation of it; and between the making of the covenant of grace, and the administration of it. He ought to have clear knowledge of the order, harmony, and difference of Christ's offices, general and particular; of the difference, harmony, and connection of our justification and sanctification.

Not only real, but also deep experience of these truths, is requisite to enable a preacher clearly to apprehend them. No man can rightly understand the power of indwelling corruptions, who has not savingly felt his own; nor how the law is the strength of sin, till that law be closely applied to his own conscience; nor why the gospel-offer of Christ as a Saviour must be absolutely free, and made to sinners as such, till he himself has had to struggle with sharp and strong convictions. No man can rightly apprehend how the assured belief of full and free salvation through Christ constrains to universal obedience, till God's redeeming love be shed abroad in his heart; nor how much a disposition that doubts and staggers at the promises of eternal life, or which leads a man to recommend himself to God's favour by his good works, tends to hinder the cheerful progress in grace and true virtue, till he himself has experienced the hurt of it.

To obtain such measures of knowledge and experience, it requires so great care and diligence, and is so contrary to the proud and corrupt inclination of the most of preachers, that they rather content themselves with a few pitiful scraps of heathen morality, or a few disjointed and ill-placed fragments of divine truth. Nor when a man has acquired this knowledge, do his cares and labours cease. The misplacing of a single truth, like the misplacing of a single wheel in a clock, may derange the whole sermon, and render it unevangelical.

Though the gospel-preacher make the free grace of God, the imputed righteousness of Christ, and the free and full salvation of men from sin and

misery through him, the principal scope and centre of all his discourses; as he has known and felt, that it is not by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith, that the Spirit of God is received into mens hearts; yet he does not entertain his hearers with these alone, but endeavours conscientiously to declare the whole counsel of God in its proper connection. On the one hand, he exhibits and urges home the moral law as a covenant binding on unregenerate sinners, that they may be driven from under it to Jesus Christ, as the end of the law for righteousness, and as the all-sufficient, the only refuge and Saviour. On the other hand, he will explain and inculcate the law as a rule of perfect holiness, binding on believers, and directing them to walk in Christ, and to walk worthy of him unto all well-pleasing.

In preaching the law as a broken covenant, the aim of the evangelical preacher is, not to persuade sinners to endeavour to observe its precepts, that by their obedience they may be justified before God; but, to convince them, of their guilt, misery, and inability to save themselves, and to drive them from it, to Jesus Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes, that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in them; and to persuade believers to beware of returning to their Egyptian bondage, or of looking back to the flaming Sodom, from which the Lord has mercifully delivered them; but safe under Jesus' shadow, his purple covering of perfect righteousness imputed and applied to them, to admire what he undertook and fulfilled for sinful men, and for them in particular, and influenced by this, to yield to the very utmost sincere and grateful obedience to his easy yoke, the law as the rule of their life. With these objects fully and ever in his view, the preacher ought to exhibit the original making, the contents, and the breach of the law as a covenant of works; and show how, in consequence of that breach, it fixes on every individual sinner. The holiness, equity, goodness, spirituality, and exceeding breadth of its precepts, should be earnestly and clearly displayed, that by the knowledge of their sins, as transgressors of it, every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be convicted or found guilty before the Lord, and filled with shame and confusion of face. The dreadful nature, the justice, the certainty, the eternity, of the punishment annexed by the penalty of this law to the smallest transgression, should be plainly and feelingly represented: that pierced in their hearts, men may see that they have nothing to expect from this broken law, but fiery indignation to devour them, as adversaries of an infinitely holy and omnipotent God.

Under the deepest impression of his own sinfulness, he should explain to his hearers, the foul depravity of their hearts; how they are naturally dead in trespasses and sins, under the reigning power of indwelling lusts; how, while they are in the flesh, or corrupt state, they cannot please God, but their carnal heart will remain [at] enmity against God, and not subject to his law; how from this heart, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, which not only disqualify them for every thing spiritually good, but render them incapable to cease from sin, speaking and doing evil things to the utmost of their power. Affected with these terrors of the Lord, he ought clearly to represent, how the law as a broken covenant is the strength of sin, not merely as a sinner's outrageous heart is by the view and impression of its strict precepts and fearful curses, irritated and

provoked more exceedingly to hate God the Lawgiver, and to work wickedness with redoubled rage, despair, and greediness; but chiefly, as the curse or condemnatory sentence of the broken covenant, lays, by an almighty influence, its sinful subjects under the reigning power and force of sin, as a principal ingredient in that spiritual and eternal death threatened against every transgressor. He should show, from the sacred oracles, how this curse lying on men renders it impossible for them to escape from the dominion of sin, while they remain under the law, and are not yet brought under grace: how it is impossible for them to live to God, or bring forth the fruits of holiness, till they become dead to the law by the body of Christ; how absurd it is, in the highest degree, to attempt any reformation of heart or life before God, while a man continues in a state and way of subjection to that law, which is the strength of sin; nay, how even God's almighty grace does not change our nature, or confer on us any spiritual blessing, but in first translating us from under that broken covenant, by the application of Christ's law-magnifying righteousness to our person and conscience.

LETTER IV.

DEAR SIR,

IT is not enough that the evangelical preacher demonstrate the absolute impossibility of obtaining righteousness by the works of the law; he ought also to show how heinous a sin it is in them that hear the gospel, to seek it, in whole or in part, in that way; as thereby a man stumbles at Jesus Christ, the chief corner-stone; attempts to frustrate the grace of God; disparages the sole high-priesthood of the Saviour; does what in him lies to render his death in vain; and goes about to establish his own righteousness, which is filthy rags, in opposition to the Redeemer's infinitely valuable obedience and suffering, by which he magnified the law and made it honourable.

Moreover, lest sinners should think themselves delivered from the broken law, and married to Christ, when they are not, the preacher must, with the word of the Lord, follow them into, and expel them out of, all the lying refuges of profession, practice, or experience, in which they may think themselves safe, while in truth they have never been spiritually united to Christ's person, or obtained an actual interest in his righteousness. The flaming sword must be turned every way to pierce, vex, and rouse the sinner, and oblige him to flee to the *tree of life*.

Nor is all this aught but an introduction to the preaching of the gospel. By this when closely applied by the Spirit of God, as a spirit of bondage, sinners are alarmed, but not saved. In the glass of the law, they see their sinfulness, but are not in the least delivered from it, nor hate it as odious and dishonourable to God. They have a repentance, but it worketh death. They are grieved for their sins as ruinous to themselves, but not as offensive to God. They are grieved, not because they have trampled on God's law, holy, just, and good, but that God is so holy and just, that he will not, cannot, suffer their sins to go unpunished.

The preacher, therefore, must not dwell always, nor even very long at a time, upon such cutting alarming subjects, lest his hearers should thereby

be stupified, hardened, and rendered desperate. As the skilful surgeon never cuts any deeper nor longer than is necessary to the cure, and administers cordials, if needful, in the time of the operation, so ought the preacher. The gospel, strictly taken, must therefore be next held forth, in its suitableness, amiableness, and love, in order to encourage, captivate, melt, and draw the sinner's heart. The covenant of grace, in its source, its making, its condition, its promise, its administration, and the manner of attaining an actual interest in it, must be clearly and distinctly unfolded. The preacher must, by the direction and authority of God's word, explain, how in God there was and is help for self destroying men; how he thought upon us in our low estate; caused his only begotten Son to approach him as our Surety; so loved the world that he sent him into the world, that whoso believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting life; sent him to be a propitiation for our sins, spared him not, that with him he might freely give us all things; how, when the law could not justify and save us, being weak through the flesh, he sent him forth, that by his offering of himself, sin might be condemned, and the righteousness of the law fulfilled in us; how, when sacrifices and offerings were found altogether unavailing to take away sin, Jesus Christ, the equal, and only begotten Son of God, cheerfully, and with his whole heart, engaged to be our Surety, was made man, made under the law, made sin for us, had our sins charged to his account, and punished on him; how he suffered once for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, bare our sins and iniquities, our griefs and sorrows, that by his stripes we might be healed; how, having by the holiness of his manhood, the obedience of his life, and satisfactory sufferings, finished transgression, made full atonement for sin, completely obeyed and magnified the broken law, fulfilled the condition of the new covenant, ratified all its promises in his blood, and brought in an everlasting righteousness suited to every sinful man, in respect of its value and form,—he was raised from the dead for our justification, and received from his Father all glory and power in heaven and earth, all fulness of gifts and graces for men, even the rebellious,—power over all flesh, that he might give eternal life to his elect, and that our faith and hope might be in God,—and is by his Father exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins,—sent to seek and to save that which was lost, and to bless us in turning us from our iniquities, and turning away our ungodliness,—and so came, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; and in the most engaging and earnest manner, freely presents and gives himself to us as an all-sufficient Saviour, made of God to us, who are sinners, ignorant, guilty, unholy, enslaved; made to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,—to be by faith received by us in his person and fulness, as the infinitely precious free gift of God, bestowed without money and without price, that by spiritual union and fellowship with him we may be justified, adopted, sanctified, and become possessed of eternal life.

LETTER V.

DEAR SIR,

ON the topics mentioned in my last, which respect the making and administration of the covenant of grace, how delightfully ought the preacher to display the exceeding riches of the grace of God, and how the whole of our redemption tends to the praise of the glory of that grace; how fit the blessed Jesus is to rescue us from the broken law, from sin, death, and hell; how altogether lovely, precious, rich, liberal, and gracious he is; and what exceeding great and gracious promises are given to us, as the New Testament in his blood. More particularly, *1st*, He ought plainly to set forth God's redoubled gift of his own Son, as a ransom, to obey and suffer for us ungodly sinners, and as a husband, effectual Saviour and portion, to espouse, deliver, and satisfy us sinful and miserable sons of men, as the foundation of every call and invitation to accept of him. Without this, his calls and invitations to receive Christ and his salvation, are little else but an instructing of men how to rob God of his Son and salvation, and how to take the mercies of the new covenant as stolen waters which are sweet. *2nd*, He ought clearly to state and explain the nature of faith as an assurance, a real persuasion of the truth and veracity of God's giving promises as directed to a man's self, and as a receiving and resting upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is freely offered to him in the gospel; and as the finishing means of our union with Christ, and of our actual interest in all that he has; and the instrument of our receiving all supplies of grace out of his fulness; that his hearers may not, like too many, be importuned with calls and charges to come to Christ, and yet never be distinctly taught what this coming or believing means. *3rd*, He must take great care to describe the persons for whom Christ was given as a ransoming sacrifice, and to whom he is given as an effectual Saviour; and that precisely as the Holy Ghost does in the scriptures. Though indeed Christ laid down his life only in the room of his elect, yet, as the secret things of the divine purpose belong only to the Lord, the gospel-preacher, when offering relief to sinners, ought to represent the persons for whom Christ offered himself as a propitiation for sin, under the character of *men, many, unjust, ungodly, without strength, enemies to God, sinners, condemned in law, lost in themselves, and so forth*. In a similar conformity to scripture, he is to invite men to Christ, not as *elect*, or as *sensible* sinners duly convinced or good-hearted; but as *men, sons of Adam, simple, foolish, scorers, stout-hearted, far from righteousness, wicked, disobedient, gainsaying, heavy-laden with guilt and trouble, thirsting for happiness in any thing, however vain or vile; self-conceited men, who weary God with their iniquities, who have spoken and done evil things as they could, nay, as many as they find out of hell*. Nor will it be improper to show to them how every absolute promise in scripture supposes the persons to whom God directs it to be in a sinful and wretched condition. To whom does God bring near his righteousness, and offer his pardon, but to the unrighteous and guilty? To whom does he offer his Spirit, a new heart of flesh, but to such as are sensual, in the flesh, carnally-minded, stony and stout-hearted? To whom does he offer himself as their God, but to such as are by nature without God, and without hope in the

world? To whom does he offer his great and everlasting salvation, but to them that are lost, and by law condemned for their sins to everlasting destruction? To offer Christ and his fulness, or to invite men to receive him, provided they be sincere sensible sinners, duly convinced and humbled, and who hunger and thirst after righteousness, is to contradict all the gracious offers of God in scripture, to embarrass the consciences of men, as they who are the most sensible and sincere are the most sensible of their own stupidity and dissimulation. Nothing spiritually good can proceed from a heart under that law which is the strength of sin, or from a heart which is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, a carnal mind enmity against God. If any such good thing could be found in a Christless person, it would necessarily exclude him from all right to salvation through Jesus, who was sent to seek and save that which was *lost*, and is not come to call the *righteous* but *sinners* to repentance. The persons who *labour*, and are *heavy-laden*, whom he invites to his rest, are such as have fatigued themselves in sinful, carnal, and self-righteous conduct, and are laden with the guilt and power of their sins, and the weight of their troubles, as well as those who are burdened with some sense of their guilt and misery. The *thirsty*, who are invited by him, are such as spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. *4th*, In dealing with sinners, he, must take no round-about way of recommending preparation for receiving Christ, but urge them to come directly to him, guilty, polluted, and wicked as they are, that their sinful state and nature may be, not rectified or amended, but wholly changed, by union with him. This ministerial labour to make them sensible of their sinfulness, of the guilt, wretchedness, and danger of their natural condition, and of the fearful folly and criminality of continuing to refuse Christ offered to them; this labour to make them sensible of Christ's infinite excellency, love, loveliness, fulness, suitableness, readiness, and earnestness, to help and save them, is not designed to employ them in *preparing* themselves, but is the using of those instituted *means* by which God introduces his Son, and all his salvation, into the heart. It is but a clearing of the way for their reception of him. It demonstrates their need, and drives them to Christ as they are. It demonstrates that they bear the characters of those invited to Christ, and that he and his fulness of salvation exactly correspond with their infinite necessities. He must not call them to reading or hearing of God's word, or to prayer, meditation, or any other instituted ordinance, as means of *preparing* themselves for Christ, but as Christ's appointed *means* of meeting with and laying hold on their souls, and of bestowing on them his righteousness and grace.

I am your's.

LETTER VI.

DEAR SIR,

I PROCEED to show, in the *last* place, that the evangelical preacher must perseveringly demonstrate to them, from the oracles of God, that no good disposition, no change of nature, no reception of spiritual blessings, is to be desired, sought after, or expected by men, but in the way of first receiving

Christ himself; that, by spiritual union with his person, and actual interest in his righteousness, they may be justly set free from the curse of the law, which is the strength of sin, and may be justified, adopted, and created in him unto good works.—If his hearers have been driven by the law as a covenant, and allured by the gospel, strictly so called, to receive and unite with Christ, as their Saviour, Husband, and Head, the evangelical preacher must carefully instruct, and earnestly excite them to walk in him, and worthy of him.

1. He must carefully show them, how Christ is their *supporting* and *securing* way, and only medium of their access to, and fellowship with God: and how God's holy law of the ten commandments, as a rule in his hand, in all the extent of its precepts, but without any penalty of judicial wrath here or hereafter, or any promise of happiness as the proper reward of *their* works, is their *directing* way, and the unerring and authoritative *standard* of their whole conversation.

2. He must earnestly urge them, as persons who have had their state and nature changed by union to Christ, to consider, abhor, and flee from sin, of every kind and degree, as their fearful *misery*, as their only *crime*, and in them a crime peculiarly heinous and hurtful. He must urge them to follow after righteousness and holiness in all manner of disposition and conversation; receiving it out of Christ's fulness, as their *great privilege*, purchased with his blood, given in his promise, produced by the application of his blood, and the operation of his indwelling Spirit. He must urge them to the practice of this holiness, as their honourable and all-comprehensive *duty*, enjoined by his law, constrained to by his love, directed in by his example, performed by his assisting grace, and accepted for his sake. He must urge them to the practice of this righteousness, as their useful *business*, by which they at once honour God, profit their neighbour, and gain to themselves a present and everlasting, but absolutely gracious, reward. He must, in this view, teach and stir them up to detest, shun, and mourn over sin, as that abominable thing which is infinitely dishonourable to, and hated by, their God and Saviour, and defiling to their soul, on which his image has been mercifully renewed. He must stir them up to study to perfect holiness in heart and life, as the will of their God, as the glorious end of all his gracious purposes, precious promises, inestimable benefits, holy laws and ordinances, and diversified providences, particularly those which bear relation to the work of redemption.

3. He must, with clear evidence, insist, that no attainments possible in mens natural state, whether inward or outward, can have the true form of holiness, in them, or be obedience to the authority of God, seeing they proceed from a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, a carnal mind enmity against God, which cannot be subject to his law, but which must be unclean, the mind and conscience being defiled; and that every thing done, by even a saint, according to the remaining temper and principles of his *natural* state, is an abomination to the Lord.

4. He must insist, that as union to Christ, as of God made to us wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, is the foundation of our renewing our state and nature, so the continuance of this union, and the fellowship with Christ dependent on it, are the immediate source of all our holiness in habit and practice. Hence we are said to walk in Christ; to be rooted and built up in him; to have Christ living in us; to have a good conversation in Christ; to

be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; to be strengthened in him, and walk up and down in his name; to go in his strength, making mention of his righteousness; to do all things in his name; to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection; to be set free from the law of sin and death, by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; to be led by the Spirit, and walk after the Spirit, and through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body; or, in short, that, Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, as the Lord our righteousness and strength, by his Spirit as our Sanctifier and comforter, bestows support, actuates, determines, and strengthens our new nature, for every good word and work.

5. He ought clearly to teach, how, as the curse of the law is the peculiar strength of sin in our natural state, so justification, through the righteousness of Christ, imputed to our person, and applied to our conscience, is the distinguished strength, source, and support of all our holiness of heart, or life, in our gracious state. It is not sufficient to represent the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, and the gracious and holy tempers and good works produced by them, as purchased by the righteousness of Christ; but the removal of the curse of the law, which is the strength of sin; the engagement of all the divine persons and perfections by the sentence of justification, to promote holiness, as the begun eternal life, to which in that sentence they were adjudged; the immediate influence of Christ's blood in purifying our consciences from dead works to serve the living God; the constraining force of his redeeming love, when savingly discovered, believed, and felt, on our will and affections, to love him who first loved us;—these must be carefully set forth, explained, and inculcated.

6. Our begun and continued receiving of Christ's person, righteousness, and fulness, by faith, ought to be distinctly and earnestly represented as the constant and only immediate means of all gospel-holiness, repentance, love, and new obedience: hence it is said to proceed from a pure conscience, and faith unfeigned; and is called a walking by faith, a living by the faith of the Son of God, faith working by love, obedience of faith. And, according to the height of our assured persuasion of God's giving promises, and of our believing vigour in cleaving to, and receiving from, the given Saviour, will the degrees of every other grace and duty be.

7. No marks of grace ought to be given but such as can be traced up to a believing of the record which God has given of his Son, as the repository and dispenser of eternal life for us sinful men; and to our spiritual union and fellowship with him by faith.

8. In urging believers to the study of holiness in heart and life, great care ought to be taken that no motives be used which are inconsistent with their state of marriage-union to Christ, their perfect and irrevocable justification through his blood, and their infallible conservation in him. How absurd and wicked to thunder forth any liableness to damnation against those who have passed from death to life, and cannot come into condemnation; against those whose life is hid with Christ in God, and who must live because Christ lives; against those with whom God has sworn that he will never be wroth, and from whom he will never suffer his covenant of peace to be removed! How absurd and wicked, to talk to the divinely established, and immutably secured heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, as if they had their title to eternal life, or their claim to the actual possession of it, to *earn* by their own good works. But the preacher must draw his motives from the

offices, relations, works, and fulness of Christ; from the redeeming love and endearing example of Christ, and of his Father; from the authority of God as their God and Father; from the indwelling influence of his Spirit in their hearts; and from their own advantages or disadvantages as stated by the covenant of grace.

9. The evangelical preacher must clearly represent, that whatever reward here, or hereafter, is annexed by promise to the holiness of believers in heart and life, is freely bestowed upon them; not properly for their work, but because their persons are united to Christ, as the Lord their righteousness, in whom their holiness and comfort connectedly come to them, as equally free mercies and privileges. He must not less clearly represent, that whatever affliction believers meet with, it is a destructive punishment to their sins, but a kind chastisement, a precious blessing to their persons and nature, purchased by the righteousness of Christ their Surety, and bestowed by God in him, as their wise and loving Father.— Thus, wishing you large measures of the wisdom from above, in order to understand these gospel-mysteries,

I am yours, &c.

APPENDIX TO LETTERS ON GOSPEL PREACHING.⁶

List of Improper Phrases sometimes used in the Pulpit.

1. God is reconcilable to sinners on Christ's account. *Improper.* God was reconcilable prior in order of nature to the engagements of his Son as our surety; now justice is fully satisfied, and God is actually reconciled to the salvation of guilty men. Hence in the gospel he is revealed as a God of peace, and is represented as beseeching men to be reconciled unto him, 2 Cor. v. 19.

2. God excludes none from receiving Christ, but such as exclude themselves, *Improper.* Unbelief does not exclude men from a right to receive Jesus in the gospel offer, but by rejecting that offer, unbelief prevents our *possession* of what is given. According to scripture unbelievers have an equal right or warrant to believe with the best of saints, Prov. i, 22, 23.

3. Sinners may hope in God for mercy, but they must not immediately appropriate him, *Improper.* View God as in Christ, and he is given to all who hear the gospel. I am the Lord *thy* God is the preface to a law, which every man is obliged to obey: Its first commandment binds us to know and acknowledge God, not only as the true God but as *our* God; nay, if sinners do not appropriate him, they are condemned for their refusal, Psal, lxxxii. 8,—12.

4. Many would take Christ as a priest for salvation, who refuse him as a king, *Improper.* The salvation which those persons desire, is not the salvation of Christ, but a salvation in sin; nor is it a salvation from *him* as a

⁶ These hints were composed by one of the Author's sons in the ministry.

priest, but a deliverance obtained in part by their own works. Divine grace is most gloriously displayed, and the vileness of our own righteousness most evidently discovered, by the office of Messiah's priesthood. Hence the man's open enmity may be against Christ as a king, yet his strongest secret hatred is at Christ as a priest, Rom. x. 9.

5. Obedience to God's laws while we are out of Christ, is more than men are able to perform, but they should ask assistance of their Maker, *Improper*. Sinners are naturally under the law as a covenant of works, and in this form *Christ has completely fulfilled it*. By every attempt therefore to *obey that we may live* is a virtual neglect of Christ's righteousness, and to pray for divine aid in such endeavours, must be very sinful, Rom. ix. 30.—32.

6. Christ is freely offered to every penitent sinner, who is truly sensible of his sins, but not to the unconcerned and self-righteous, *Improper*. It is a truth that till men be convinced of their sin, they will not prize the Saviour, but Jesus is offered to all without exception. In the gospel he is presented to the careless and impenitent, as much as to the contrite and most convinced. Indeed were he not offered to sinners as such, penitent persons would absolutely despair, for who more hardened in their own reckoning than themselves, Isa. xlvi. 12. 13.

7. Assurance is a rare attainment, and not to be looked for by every one. *Improper*. Assurance of sense by which we are certified from feeling, that the work of God begun upon our soul is saving, is, I am afraid a rare attainment; but, a persuasion on *God's word* that, God has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son, and we shall enjoy it, is a privilege enjoyed by numbers. But, why not *look* for assurance? why not press *after* both the assurance of faith and of sense? Paul and Peter who attained assurance, met with great opposition from indwelling sin, as well as we; and the commands obliging to such assurance are no less binding on us than they were upon them, Heb. x. 22. 2 Pet. i. 10.

8. Men should conduct themselves in such a way, that they may not be ashamed to live or afraid to die, *Improper*. The best of men, though they have no ground to be ashamed of the Master whom they serve, or of the religion which they profess, yet have cause to blush deep on account of their own *inactivity* and *unstedfastness*. As to fears of death, I apprehend that not a reflection on our own good conduct, but the faith of Christ's finished atonement must remove them, Luke xvii. 10. compared with Matth. xxv. 30. 1 Cor. xv. 53.