

Preaching the Gospel of the Grace of Christ

by

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The work of the Ministry, appointed by Jesus Christ, and given in Commission to all his faithful messengers, is to preach Glad Tidings; freely to publish Grace, Peace, Salvation, and Eternal Life alone through his Name; or to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God, and no other thing.

1. The Commission which the Lord of glory received from his Father was to preach the Gospel. "The Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak; and I know that his commandment is life everlasting." "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings, &c" "I will declare thy name unto my brethren - I have preached righteousness in the great congregation - I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation." Here we see the Name, Righteousness, and Faithfulness of God, and good Tidings of Everlasting Life, are the things which the Son of God was anointed and Commissioned to preach; and in the performance of this work, his Glory appears. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings."

2. Christ gave the same Commission to his apostles. "And as ye go, preach, saying, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." "Go thou and preach the Kingdom of God." "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his Name, among all nations." "And ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the outermost part of the earth." In these orders nothing appears but Pure Gospel; for that repentance which accompanies remission of sins is an Evangelical blessing, a gift of Special Grace. "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." "To give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

Again, the Commission given in the mountain of Galilee, where Jesus met his disciples by special appointment, and where it is probable the five hundred brethren were present, contains no direction for preaching anything but the Pure Gospel. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world." The doctrine to be taught, must certainly be that into which the converts were to be baptized; that is, the name of the Sacred Three, which is the very quintessence of Gospel Marrow; and the things which afterwards must be taught them to observe, were such as had had the Power of the Gospel for their Foundation; being the commandments of Christ to his disciples, and having the promise of his Presence to encourage them therein; so that Grace is first and last.

3. The Apostles who received this Commission from the lips of the Prince of Light, understood it to intend the Gospel only. "The ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." "Called to be an Apostle,

separated unto the Gospel of God." "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." "To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen." "That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable Riches of Christ."

4. The Apostles strictly attended to their Commission, making it their constant practice to preach the Gospel, and nothing else. "Daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." Saul at Damascus, "straightaway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." Apollos in Achaia, "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was Christ." Paul at Rome, "expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the Prophets, from morning till evening." And, "two whole years in his own hired house - preaching the Kingdom of God, and testifying those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ." And he declares to the Corinthians, {among whom he had resided a year and six months,} that, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." And to the Ephesians, among whom he had gone preaching the Kingdom of God for three years, had kept back nothing that was profitable, nor shunned to declare all the Council of God; all that he showed and taught publicly, and from house to house, and testified to Jews and Greeks, is summed up in this, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," which is nothing else but the Grace of God exhibited in the Gospel.

5. It was the Gospel of Christ alone which the Holy Ghost was pleased to bless to the primitive churches. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on them which heard the Word." "When they heard this they were pricked in their heart." "When they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the

kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women." "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Paul at Thessalonica, "opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ; and some of them believed, &c." "In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation." "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." "He called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the Glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." And the Apostle, to convince the Galatians of this truth, and of their folly in being bewitched from it, thus interrogates them, "this only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of Faith?"

We do not find anything to be preached but the pure Gospel of Grace, either in the Commission which Christ received from his Father, or the Commission which he gave to his apostles; nor do we find that the apostles understood anything else to be contained in their Commission, or that they practiced any other thing in their ministry; neither do we find that ever the Holy Ghost blessed any other doctrine to the calling of sinners, or to the edification of Saints. I do not say there is nothing to be mentioned but Christ, Grace, Gospel, Life, Peace, Salvation, &c., for these would be a set of unmeaning words, if they were not illustrated by the other things which are contained in the Scripture. But I say, as the Word of God is now digested into one perfect System, and every part, whether it be History, Law, Devotion, Prophecy, &c, is made subservient to Christ, and his glorious Gospel. "The Law was our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ." And considered in its true Light and full Intent, the Scripture is a consistent chain of Divine Truths, all conspiring to

magnify the Excellency of the Son of God, and the rich Grace given us in Him; and consequently those sacred Oracles, and all things therein contained, under the sanction of Gospel Grace, unite in one entire stream of Evangelical Blessings, to preach the Glad Tidings of Life and Salvation by Jesus Christ alone. Ministers must needs represent the Holiness, Justice, and Perfection of the Law, as a killing Letter to all that are under it, otherwise they cannot set forth the Perfection of the Righteousness of Christ; they must administer ordinances to believers, {which is only a different mode of preaching Christ,} for the enlarging of their souls, and drawing forth their minds in the things of the Kingdom of God; they must teach them to observe all the commandments of the Lord, to the glorifying of rich Grace, whereby the righteousness of the Law as Fulfilled by Christ is declared unto them. Thus, the fullness of Christ is the first and the last; the whole and alone design of everything contained in the ministerial Commission, and everything which is to be explained, performed, taught, enforced, or anyway touched upon in the work of the ministry is purely appointed in subserviency to the Gospel of Christ; therefore every individual things spoken in the Bible, {directly or indirectly,} contributes to the preaching of the Gospel; but it is the Gospel alone that is preached.

Hence I take assurance to repeat the words for which I am reproved. 'Nor is it included in our Commission, to exhort and admonish sinners, or a promiscuous audience, to the performance of duties; to caution and warn them against sinful practices; and to teach and instruct them in the regulation of their lives, &c. Our Commission is not to preach the Law, but the Gospel!'

1. The Ministers of Christ have no Commission to preach the Law. To preach is to publish, declare, or hold forth some certain Fact; or publicly to represent some message to the people, upon

which some matter of consequence depends. As the enemies of Judah charged Nehemiah, saying, "thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, there is a King in Judah." When it is understood in the name of God, it is a publication of his will to men; wherein a plan of peace is represented between God and his creatures; which was fully implied in the Commission given to Jonah, {and was understood by the Ninevites, when they heard his message;} "go unto Nineveh that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." And this is either a proposal of conditions, whereby God shall be glorified, and men made happy; or a proclamation of Free Grace from God, whereby that salutary End shall be answered without conditions on man's part. The former of these has been tried, in the preaching of the Law; for, "the man that doeth those things, shall live in them;" but it hath not answered the desired end; "for by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Wherefore, the latter is now appointed to be preached in the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ; "that the Righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." Wherefore the Law is no more to be preached, or represented as the subject of our Embassy; yet is always to be retained, as a witness to that more glorious system of Sovereign Grace which now succeeds it.

The Law is to be expounded in its Holiness and Righteousness, the intent and extent of its Spirituality, its Authority and Immutability; that the exceeding Riches of Justifying and Purifying Grace may appear in its native Lustre. But whether it be the Law, or any other thing, that may be retained, occasionally introduced, or treated on in our preaching, it is still in subserviency to the main Design, either by way of introduction, and illustration of the glorious Doctrine of Grace, or for proof of its Efficacy, or the obligations brought upon us

thereby, or the obedience required in consequence thereof; for it all begins, ends, and centers alone in Sovereign Grace. For no other thing whatsoever is represented, as of itself answering any salutary end; only introduced for the magnifying the grace of God in Christ, and to render the glory of the Gospel of Christ more conspicuous, and used only as necessary concomitants in preaching the Gospel. Therefore, in a strict sense the Law is never to be preached, but the Gospel only.

When our Lord gave that spiritual explication of the Law upon the mountain, he was then preaching the Gospel. "When he was set, his disciples came unto him." It was to them he addressed himself; to whom he says, "ye are the salt of the earth - ye are the light of the world." And often repeats to them, "your Father which is in heaven." And upon these souls, who had received Gospel Grace, he begins with pronouncing Evangelical Blessings; and to them who by Grace had the Righteousness of the Law written in their hearts, he expounded the letter of the Law in its spiritual purity; that the righteousness of the Law being fulfilled in them, they might walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. But suppose him speaking to the multitudes, {which in a great part of the sermon he could not be,} he was only expounding the Law, maintaining the Equity, Justice, and Perpetuity thereof, to convince them of the imperfection of their obedience; and to lead them to Himself, by whom alone the Law is fulfilled, both for his people and in them. "Think not that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill; for verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled." And if we attend to the main scope of the sermon, from end to end, he was preaching the Gospel, and expounding the Law in subserviency thereto; for himself the Fulfiller of the Law, the Grace of his Heavenly Father, the

Kingdom of God, blessings of Gospel Grace, and instructions peculiar to the Saints, run through the whole.

And when the Apostle Paul explains the nature, and asserts the authority of the Law, as a covenant of works, with its curse and condemnation to all the breakers thereof, he was truly preaching the Gospel; showing the insufficiency of all obedience to the Law for Justification; and the absolute necessity of Gospel Grace, to save the sinner; so that this was not preaching the Law, but the Righteousness of Christ. And when he urged the necessity of believers being under the Law to Christ, and discoursed of the various duties which are incumbent on the Saints, and exhorted them to the practice of those duties, {I am asked, therefore I answer,} this was not preaching the Law, but preaching the Gospel, and establishing the Law; forasmuch as it is the Law in the hand of the Mediator, by grace become a perfect Law of liberty; and all the motives to obedience are evangelical. "For the love of Christ constraineth us." "I delight in the Law of God, after the inner man." "Neither count I my life dear unto me." "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous." "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." Thus every precept of the Law is taken under the sanction of Gospel Grace; therefore the Gospel includes all that is to be taught by ministers, and all that is to be learned and practiced by Christians. Christ is Alpha and Omega, and Grace is the cry to every stone in the building.

2. Admonitions to the world in general, or to mankind considered in a state of nature and sin, to leave their sins, reform their lives, and practice goodness, are not any part of the work of a Minister of the Gospel, nor included in his Commission.

All the commands, promises, and threatenings contained in the Law, and all the admonitions, exhortations, and persuasions

used by the preachers thereof, have been found utterly ineffectual to turn one sinner to God, to cleanse the conscience from one pollution, or produce a spark of real holiness in the heart. This work has been fully demonstrated to be "what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh." But in the preaching of the Gospel all the human species are considered as they really are, dead in sin, shut up in hardness and blindness, beyond the reach of any influence but what is absolutely Divine. And the Gospel is sent as a sovereign Remedy; "for it is the power of God unto salvation." Therefore, the Ministers of Christ are not sent on such a fruitless message, to call upon corrupt trees to bring forth good fruit, to admonish thorns to bear grapes, or exhort thistles to produce figs. The Gospel is an entire stranger to any such empty inconsistencies, as to call upon carnal creatures to perform spiritual acts.

And as for such acts of moral virtue, or performances in religion, as a natural man is capable of attaining to; these are only the productions of a carnal mind, and consequently must be utterly foreign to that Word of Grace which is Spirit and Life. And as the Holy Ghost assures us, "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" therefore it can have no affinity to the Gospel of Peace; nor produce any fruit in conjunction with the Word of Reconciliation. The Gospel is a Declaration of the Glad Tidings of the Kingdom of God, wherein all things are made new, and no old thing can possibly remain; but the highest attainment of a natural man, or the greatest improvement that he can possibly be brought to by any commands, promises, threatenings, or persuasions of any kind whatsoever, cannot ascend one step higher than to mend the old, nor to that in reality; for whatever appearances it may have before men, it is impossible for the carnal mind in a natural man, by any of his own endeavors and improvements, to become a whit better in the sight of God, "for it is not subject to the Law

of God, neither indeed can be." Therefore, it is incompatible with the glorious message of Gospel Grace, and with the Commission given to the Ministers thereof for them to spend their time in teaching sinners to mend old things, when they know it is impossible for them to be mended; and were it possible for anything to be mended, it would still be impossible for any mended thing to enter that kingdom which they preach. "He that sat upon the Throne, said, behold, I make all things new."

The Commission is, "go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." The Gospel is the Unsearchable Riches of Christ. Sovereign Grace, plenteous Redemption, ample Salvation, and Everlasting Life in the Son of God, which being preached in demonstration of the Spirit, and accompanied with the Power of God to the heart, communicates new life to the dead soul, according as it is metaphorically represented in the vision of the dry bones; where the whole house of Israel, after all the legal messages, warnings, and instructions sent to them from God, continued insensible, without life and motion, and utterly destitute of all spiritual blessings. "In the open Valley, and lo, they were dry." But the message which God now sent must be effectual; therefore it did not consist in cautions, exhortations, and admonitions; but in a Pronunciation of Sovereign Blessing from the Fountain of Life, spoken with Divine Authority from heaven; "prophesy upon these bones." The Prophet, who was a type of Christ, first pronounces the almighty Word, or powerful Benediction; "O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord." Being in substance the very same as Jesus himself spake, "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." And this Word of the Lord was a Full, Free, and Pure Declaration of the Good Pleasure of God towards them, and of the Good Tidings which he would do unto them. In the vision, and in the explanation thereof, no other language is spoken but that of

Sovereign Grace; "thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live &c." "Thus saith the Lord God, behold, O my people, I will open your graves, &c," which is the very language of the Gospel of Christ. "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." "You being dead in your sins - hath he quickened together with him." All the sons and daughters of men are by nature dead in sin, "being alienated from the life of God." And it is not possible they should be made alive unto God any other way than by a Direct Communication of Life from Christ. "This is the true God and eternal life." And he has not appointed any other way of Conveyance whereby Life may be received from his fullness, but by the Gospel, the Word of Life, by which Word, under the Influence of the Holy Ghost, God reveals his Son in the hearts of his elect. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

But there is a common objection, which I have often heard, to this purpose, 'the glad tidings of Gospel Grace will not give life to dead sinners, unless it be attended with the Energy of the Holy Ghost; and exhortations, admonitions, and excitements to come, &c, may answer the same end, if attended with the same power.'

I reply: This objection is a flat contradiction to the Word of God; for notwithstanding the Holy Ghost is pleased to bless exhortations, and admonitions, and to make them of excellent use in their proper place, yet never for conveying Life to the soul, for they properly pertain to the Law; and the Holy Ghost saith, "if there had been a Law given which could have given life, verily Righteousness should have been by the Law." God cannot deny himself, nor be guilty of contradictions; therefore he cannot produce an Evangelical Operation by giving Energy to legal means. The more energy is given to anything, the more effectually it will operate according to its own nature. Power given

to frost will not cause it to burn; and frost added to fire will not cause it to freeze; nor will the greatest strength cause the edge of a sword to heal a wound. If God is pleased to give Energy to his Law in the heart of a sinner, it will operate as a killing Letter to wound the conscience and rend the soul to pieces. And if he is pleased to give Energy to the Word of his Grace, it is Life from the Dead; and this is so familiar and experimental to all that have passed the new Birth, that it is impossible there should be one believer under heaven that does not know it in his own experience. Therefore when I hear persons talks such incoherent stuff, I know assuredly that they are either utter strangers to the Power of the Grace of God themselves, or else their minds have been infatuated by some vain conversation received by tradition; so that they inconsiderately express the undigested sentiments of other men, rather than the result of a mature deliberation, in comparing what the Lord hath wrought in their souls with what he hath spoken in his Word.

But let us come to the real matter of fact; for a just conception of the nature of the Gospel, and of the true Design of the Preaching thereof cannot fail to form our conceptions right with respect to what is, or what is not, included in the ministerial Commission. To preach the Gospel of Christ is the same thing as to preach the Kingdom of God; and the intent thereof is to bring sinners out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son; and to edify and establish saints in all things pertaining to that Kingdom. The power and the success is of God; but the appointed means is the Preaching of the Gospel; therefore whatever means is in the Minister's power to use, which has a natural tendency towards drawing souls from Satan unto Christ, or towards the edification of the Saints, so as God may be glorified, or in any way to promote the Kingdom of God in Truth; such means must of necessity be included in the Commission;

and in consequence, in whatever Light admonitions to repentance, and exhortations to duty, &c., may really tend to any such salutary End, they must be the Ministers indispensable duty.

Admonitions and Exhortations, in their proper place, and justly adapted, have their special use; but in the way that many preachers apply them, they tend directly to invert the Purity of the Gospel of God; when they jumble them in such a confused manner, that the hearer cannot tell what the preacher intends by them; nor even guess whether he has any determinate meaning himself; or whether he intends to direct them to saints or sinners; or whether he calls upon them to keep the Law in its perfection, or only to make use of all the power they have, to imitate it as far as they can; or whether he calls upon them to work spiritual grace in their own hearts, or only to make use of the power and opportunities they have, in the use of all means waiting upon God for the blessing. And I have observed many of those preachers, when conversing on these points, that they shift from thing to thing, so that it is difficult to find out where they intend to fix. And I've often been told, 'that if persons are not to be called upon to perform impossibilities, we must use no exhortations at all, because neither sinners nor saints are able to perform anything of themselves;' but this is idle talk, for we never suppose a creature to do anything independent of the sustaining Power of God; and yet there is a special difference between those works which are proper to a creature to perform in that strength or capacity which God has given, and those works which are peculiar to God himself; and also between the nature of those things which a natural man is able to perform, and those things which a believer may perform under Divine Influence. The Ministers of the Gospel have no Commission to call upon any man to perform impossibilities; for this is directly the reverse of Gospel Grace, or of preaching Glad Tidings of Liberty. Nor have

they any Commission to preach Eternal Salvation, in connection with anything which is in the power of man to perform; for this is to make it of Works, and not of Grace; and unless due distinctions be retained respecting these things, the Trumpet will give an uncertain sound.

If we see our fellow creatures pursuing a course of sin, and have a proper occasion or opportunity put into our hands, {as Lot with the men of Sodom, Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar, &c.,} it is our duty to reprove, and admonish to Reformation; showing the hideousness of such crimes, and the misery that is likely to ensue upon such practices; but this is no more than that friendly part, which is the duty of every Christian, as well as Ministers; and therefore is not a part of the ministerial Commission, inasmuch as an external Reformation has no immediate relation to the Kingdom of God. And if we should suggest, that an outward Reformation from notorious sins, lays any Foundation for Eternal Life, we should then seduce them into a more damnable error than that we admonish them to forsake. So that it cannot be our duty to spend our time in these kind of Exhortations under any pretext whatsoever, to the neglect of the great Embassy which Christ hath given us in Commission. If we set forth the Law of God in its commands and threatenings, and call upon men to fulfill it; this is to preach the Law, and postpone the Gospel; and to the soul, whose eyes are not open to see the Law in its Spirituality, it naturally tends to establish its own Righteousness, by encouraging him to imagine it is in his power to perform it; and if he is told that it is utterly out of his power, and yet hears it laid upon him as a task, and himself called to fulfill it, this naturally tends to confound his understanding and harden his heart. And if the soul is sensible how Perfect, Holy, and Righteous the Law of God is, this kind of preaching is sufficient to sink him in utter despair. If we call upon persons to repent, believe, and

come to Christ, in such an undigested way, as to convey to them an idea that they are called to perform those works in themselves which are inseparable from Salvation; or to cause them to conceive of these things as Conditions of Salvation to be performed by them; this is to preach man's free will, and postpone the Work of the Holy Ghost; and to the soul, whose eyes are not open to see the excellent greatness of Spiritual Grace, it naturally tends to settle him in his carnal conceptions, to imagine the special work of God to be only some human performance, and consequently that himself may do it, and receive the Glory; and if he is told that it is of too high a nature for himself to perform, and yet hears himself called upon to do it, this naturally tends to alienate his mind, and cause him to look upon the Gospel as a Chain of Inconsistencies; and if the soul is sensible of the carnality, blindness, and hardness of his own heart, and the extent of his alienation from God, such preaching is sufficient to drive him to distraction, for knowing how impossible it is for him to work these things in himself, it naturally tends to deprive him of all Hope.

But as Ministers are sent as the Ambassadors of Christ, to declare the Royal Proclamation of the King of Glory; it must necessarily belong to the execution of their Commission, to use all proper measures to attract attention to the Message they are sent to deliver. 1. They are to assert the Divine Majesty and Excellent Glory of their Sovereign Lord; which manifestation is attended with Authority, and is an immediate Call to all mankind wherever the Gospel comes, to pay Divine Adoration to his Name. For where the true God is revealed in Christ, there is an indispensable obligation upon men to forsake all idolatry, and all false worship taught by men, and to attend diligently to that Revelation which God is pleased to make of himself; and hence Paul declared to the Athenians, "God - now commandeth all men

everywhere to repent;" and showed the things which they were to repent from; idolatry, superstition, and ignorant worship; and what they were to repent unto; "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him;" and to the same effect he spake to the people at Lystra, "that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God;" that is, to attend to his Word, and hearken to the Record given in the Gospel. 2. They have authority to call upon men to hearken to the Divine Declaration, "be this known unto you, and hearken to my words - ye men of Israel, hear these words - men, brethren, and fathers, hearken - men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience." 3. They have authority to call upon men to repent, and be converted from those practices whereby they have hardened themselves against the Heavenly Message; as Peter did to the Jews, who had "denied the Holy One, and the Just - and killed the Prince of Life." And so Paul declared that he did, at Damascus, at Jerusalem, in Judea, and to the Gentiles, showing, "that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." The Jews contradicted, and blasphemed, and the Gentiles mocked, and rejected the Word of the Gospel; which sins he showed that they ought to repent from; and that it was their duty to turn to God, by a serious attention to that Word of Salvation which God had sent unto them; and that they should do works meet for repentance, by casting off all those vanities which they had followed, and hearken to the Revelation of Infallible Truth; as the Ephesians did, when they confessed their deeds, and burned their books; and the Bereans, when they daily searched the Scriptures. But in all these Admonitions we may observe, that they respected such sins as the Admonishers were witness to, and could distinctly point out; that they called for practical Repentance, such as the people were capable of performing; and that the design was only to bring them to a submissive adherence to the Preaching of the Gospel; and in all the ministry of the Apostles we

do not find any such thing as a promiscuous calling upon men to a general Repentance, Reformation, and to live religious lives, &c. It never was the design of the Gospel merely to change men's manners; but that by the Power of Special Grace they should be translated into the Kingdom of God, and thence begin their whole lives anew. The work of a Minister of the Gospel is like that of a recruiting officer, who has no direction to reform the people in the streets, but to draw the attention of all, to hear the Proclamation which he is commanded to make in his Majesty's Name; and when any one is encouraged freely to enter, then he instructs him into all things pertaining to the military life; so, in the Church of God, where souls profess subjection to King Jesus, it is the proper work of Ministers to teach them all the Commandments of Christ; and they have authority to warn the unruly, to reprove, exhort, and admonish as occasion shall require; and herein the Apostles of Christ have manifested their Faithfulness, both towards societies and individuals. And even with those that sinned, they continued using all proper means to reclaim and restore them, so long as they did not appear incorrigible in their iniquity. As Peter, when he was convinced that Simon the sorcerer was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; yet as he had professed to believe in Christ, and was baptized in his Name, he was a subject of the Apostle's care, and he did not treat him as a common sinner, but admonished him as a brother.

But the common objection is, 'that to call upon men in general to leave their sins, to admonish the whole world to reform their lives and practice piety and religion was a great part of the work both of the Prophets and Apostles.'

To which I reply: That to read the Scriptures carelessly, and assert things unadvisedly is the work of too many. The Bible does not furnish us with one instance of any such thing in one of the servants of God in any age, unless there was some special

occasion, or particular reason more than a general address to the world. Jonah being sent with a special Commission to a particular city of the Gentiles, is no instance of such a promiscuous call to a religious life; nor had his Message any relation to the Spiritual Kingdom of God, but to the destruction or preservation of the city. The warnings and admonitions sent by the prophets to the house of Israel, were under immediate Direction from God, and had respect to such particular sins as that people were guilty of at that present time; and however wicked that people might be, they were the visible Church of God, and considered in that capacity, in all the messages which God sent to them; and under that legal dispensation, the promises and threats annexed to those Admonitions related not to eternal Life, but to the tranquility of Israel as a nation. Therefore, here is no precedent to Ministers of the Gospel to exhort the whole world. John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus himself, and his disciples, preached that men should repent; but it was not the Gentiles, nor the Samaritans, but it was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, who were still considered as God's Church, until the Death of Christ. And the repentance called for was not the groveling notion of leaving some gross immoralities, to betake themselves to a religious life; but to completely abandon the false foundations which they had built to themselves, of having "Abraham to their Father," and "trusting in themselves that they were righteous;" and that they should attend to the Preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. But we often hear of the Parable of the Great Supper, where the servant received this Commission, "compel them to come in;" and hence they argue, 'that ministers are to compel sinners, by urging, persuading, &c.,' but as this discovers the Objectors unskillfulness in the Word of Righteousness, to dream of sinners being brought into the Kingdom of God, by urgings and persuasions; so it discovers his inattention to this Parable; where it is easy to observe, that there was no Servant

sent but one; and this Servant knew all the seats, and for whom they were prepared, "yet there is room." So that the thing intended is, the Father's Commission to Christ.

I know, that for Ministers to exhort, persuade, and call upon persons in a general way to mend their lives, to practice virtue, be religious, live godly, &c., is the most pleasing method of preaching, to persons who have a natural inclination to religion, affecting the form without the power; provided that they be not touched too close, for they cannot bear the Gospel Probe. They are not displeased to be called upon, and told what they ought to do, and how they ought to live; but they cannot bear the searching Word, to distinguish between Flesh and Spirit, for their carnal life is yet whole in them. And I am well assured that it is a very easy matter with many persons to be stimulated into a religious zeal, voluntary humility, external devotion, and reformed to a strict reservedness in their behavior, through a fond conceit of being saved, pleasing God, obtaining heaven, human applause, &c.; and yet be no more than stony ground hearers, carrying lambs without oil, or plants which the heavenly Father hath not planted. But this only proves the depth of the deceitfulness of sin; for such must needs be the more prepared for the unclean spirit to inhabit in a different form; and it does not give me any better opinion of human nature, or to conceive any less of its depravity and corruption; no more than the art of the serpent gives me a better opinion of him, while I observe into how many different postures he will turn himself, but still retains his poisonous nature.

And this is the very thing which I insist upon; that sin lies so deep in our nature, that nothing short of Sovereign Grace can change it, or bring us the least step nearer to God. The Ethiopian may change his garments, and the Leopard his position, but the skin and the spots remain; so does the pollution of nature,

whatever change may be wrought in appearance by moral suasion. But where the Pure Gospel of Christ enters the heart, in Spirit and Power, the soul is by Faith {experimentally} united to God's Holy One; and this vital union with Christ cannot fail to produce righteousness and true holiness, both in heart and life. A hypocrite, a formal professor, or one that is carnally religious, may be an Antinomian in the worst sense of the word; making a vain pretense to the Righteousness of Christ, and despising the Holiness of God's Law; which in my judgment deserves no better a name than a devil incarnate. But it is not possible that a real believer in the Lord Jesus Christ should be such; "because he is born of God, and is a new creature;" which new man "after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," and therefore "the Law of his God is in his heart." For this motto remains upon all the Saints, engraven with the Finger of God, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.

These things, holy brethren, I leave you to try by the Word of God; and may the Holy Ghost guide you into all Truth. Amen.
John Johnson {Evangelical Truths Vindicated, 1758}