

**THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY:**

**WITH**

**AN INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSES OF ITS INEFFICIENCY,**

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**"AN EXPOSITION OF PROVERBS," ETC.**

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and appears under such a variety of symptoms, that these may be considered as so many distinct diseases, which demand a proportionate variety in the method of treatment; nor will the same prescription suit all cases. A different set of truths, a different mode of address, is requisite to rouse the careless, to beat down the arrogance of a self-justifying spirit, from what is necessary to comfort the humble and contrite in heart: nor is it easy to say, which we should most guard against, the infusion of a false peace, or the inflaming of the wounds which we ought to heal.<sup>1</sup>

A defect of this discrimination must greatly impede our success. For it is not the general virtue of medicine, but its suitable application to the disease, that heals, though perhaps with painful efficacy. A practitioner, who had one sovereign remedy for every complaint, without regard to the patient's age, constitution, or habit, would be thought, as Baxter says, 'a sort of civil murderer.' Much more would we deprecate the spiritual application of this promiscuous regimen; inasmuch as the fatal result would be—not for time, but for eternity.\*

#### VI.--DECIDED PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.

THE power even of a Scriptural exhibition of truth is often materially weakened by an indecisive mode of statement. The doctrines of the Gospel appear to be allowed and set forth; but in so feeble and hesitating a tone, as evinces either a careless investigation into their character, a doubtful opinion of their truth, or an indistinct apprehension of their value and efficacy. Such a representation awakens but little interest, and produces no effect. Our people feel little obligation to receive what, from

<sup>1</sup> Hall's Sermons, ut supra, p. 22.

\* Zepper speaks so admirably upon the subject of this Section, that, as his work is not in few hands, we give a quotation:—'Cujus operis difficultatem tam multiplex et varia auditorum, quibus verbi divini mysteria dispensanda sunt, diversitas sexuum, ætatum, ingeniorum, opinionum, profectuum, conditionis, institutionis, morborum et affectionum animi discrimen, imò contrarietas non parum auget: dum alii hypocritæ sunt; alii afflicti peccatores: alii flagitiosi; alii pie viventes: alii desperabundi; alii cum infirmitate et conscientis variis tentationibus variè luctantes; alii pabulo, quod pascua tantum, et fontes Israëlitis sapiat, contenti; alii delicati et nauseabundi, quorum palato nihil ferè sapit, quantumvis orthodoxum, nisi carnem quoque et mundum respiciat. Quos animorum morbos, et diversam auditorum rationem, ut nosse difficile est: ita convenientia omnibus et singulis remedia, ex verbi divini pharmacopoliæ depromere, eaque feliciter etiam applicare, quanti, quamque immensi laboris et sudoris, quanti ingenii, quantæ spiritualis prudentiæ res est.—Unde etiam Christus Ecclesiæ suæ pastorem servo comparat prudenti et fideli, super famulitium Domini constituto, ut illis alimentum det, et quidem in tempore, hoc est, non promiscuè, obiter aut perfunctorie, sed pro ratione temporum, adeoque ut locorum et ingeniorum, quibuscum negotium illi est. Matt. xxiv. 45.' Pref pp. 5, 6.

the spiritless mode of presentment, seems to be of minor importance—at least not worthy of inconvenient consideration, or expensive sacrifices. In many views of human corruption, of the grand doctrine of justification, and of the work and influence of the Spirit, it would be difficult to detect any positive contrariety to Scripture; while yet there is an evident deterioration from the “full assurance,” with which our reformers have laid them down, as the primary doctrines of the Gospel, indispensable to the character, hope, and establishment of the Christian. There is an excessive caution in fencing and guarding the statement. The offensive spirituality of terms is covered in the garb of a more popular theology, and the distinct recognition of the cardinal points is greatly obscured: so that, though there is no actual pulling down of the house, there is a palpable want of power to build it up. This indecisive tone may be partially traced to an undue regard to human standards; in some measure taking the place of an entire submission to the word of God. For it is only when we stand upon the whole ground of Scripture, that we can make those strong and constant appeals “to the law and to the testimony,” which characterize a decided view of the Gospel, and enable us to deliver it in a clear and decided manner. It is not enough for us to speak the oracles of God. We must speak *as the oracles*;<sup>1</sup> “magnifying our office” by the undoubted confidence, that “the Gospel, which is preached of us is not after man”—that our message is “not the word of man, but in truth the word of God.”<sup>2</sup> On the deeper and more mysterious points of the Gospel, (on which difference of sentiment has always existed) Christian moderation and forbearance may be required. But on the grand fundamentals, an authoritative decision of statement becomes us; not allowing a doubt to belong to our message, any more than to our own existence. Thus did the Apostles and their fellow-labourers preach the Gospel. They had received it from the mouth of God; they were assured of its Divine authority; they delivered it in despite of all resistance,<sup>3</sup> as a *testimony*, bringing with it its own evidence; and thus, “by manifestation of the truth, they commended themselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”<sup>4</sup> The Apostle considered the charge of indecision, even in ordinary matters, to be so grave an accusation, and so injurious to his Ministry, that he felt himself justified in calling his God to witness, that in no re-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter. iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 11, 12; 1 Thess. ii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> See Gal. v. 2-4

<sup>4</sup> Comp. Luke i. 3; 1 John i. 1-3; 2 Peter i. 16; with 2 Cor. iv. 2.

spect had his word been fickle among them; but that his testimony had been consistent, decided, and unwavering.<sup>1</sup>

Such—again—was his decided conviction of the truth of his own testimony, that he hesitates not to curse himself, or even “an angel from heaven,” upon the supposition, that he could “preach any other Gospel, than that which he had preached unto them.”<sup>2</sup> To those whom he detected in undermining it, he “*would give place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with*” the church. Nay when he met with an opponent to the liberty of the Gospel in the person of an Apostle—“he withstood him to the face,” even before the whole Church, “because he was to be blamed.”<sup>3</sup> Yet this was the same Apostle, who in matters of lesser moment was ever ready to “become all things to all men, if that by any means he might save some;”<sup>4</sup> who would give up the use of meat to the end of his life, rather than put a stumbling-block in the way of a weak brother;<sup>5</sup> and who would circumcise Timothy in condescension to the infirmities and prejudices of his brethren, to gain a more conciliating access to their hearts.<sup>6</sup> This was he, who, in his own spirit, was “gentle among his people, as a nursing-mother cherisheth her children;” who yet could not endure among them any perversion of doctrine, or laxity of practice, without the severest rebukes and most fearful threatenings.<sup>7</sup> So important is it, that the character of decision should be—not our own spirit—“lording over the Lord’s heritage,” or “having dominion over their faith,”<sup>8</sup> (a spiritual exercise of the power of the princes of this world<sup>9</sup>); but “the meekness and gentleness of Christ,” who, though “the servant of all,” yet as the messenger of God, “spake as one having authority.” “We speak,” (said he on one occasion) “*that we do know: and testify that we have seen.*”<sup>10</sup> “We having the same spirit of faith,” (said his chosen Apostle) “according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; *we also believe, and therefore speak.*”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. i. 17—20.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 22.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8 with Gal. v. 2. 1 Cor. iii. 47.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. xx. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. 8, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ib. viii. 13.

<sup>10</sup> John iii. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. ii. 5, 11, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Acts xvi. 3.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter v. 3; 2 Cor. i. 24.

<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 13.