

Correspondence.

THE DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL.

Phil. i. 17.

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We have in the word of God many instances of heroism, but none more striking than those we meet with in the life of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. From the day that divine grace took possession of his soul until he finished his course, he is the undaunted champion of the gospel. Mountains are no barriers to his burning zeal, rivers arrest not his course, while seas are but pathways to regions beyond.

Why all these labors? Why this cheerful endurance of privation and suffering? Let Paul himself reply, "I am set for the defence of the Gospel." He was possessed of a great thought. He aimed to realize the utmost limit of his ambition. Previous to his conversion he had tried to destroy the faith, and, to accomplish his object had brought the resources of commanding talents, the power of an influential position, and the authority of the chief council of the Jewish nation. Now his work is to undo the mischief. As far as he can, he must make reparation for the injury by a life of toil and suffering for Christ. Taking his commission from the hands of his Lord, he strives to fulfil it by pressing eagerly into the vast field that awaits the labourer. His irrepressible ardor cannot be quenched; his aim is not accomplished so long as there are "regions beyond" that need the gospel. He is a debtor to all men, "Both to the Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and unwise." Rom. i. 14. Paul, who was a model for every minister of Jesus, sets forth in the expressive words of our text the position and peculiar work of the church of Christ.

In considering this subject, we remark,

I. The Gospel must be defended.

The land of Canaan belonged to Israel by right divine. It was made sure to the chosen race by the promise of Him whose word cannot fall. And yet there were, according to the divine arrangement, certain conditions affixed, and necessarily connected with the promise. They must become willing to leave the place of bondage. They must pass through the Red Sea, and through "the terrible wilderness." They must encounter deadly foes, and overcome them through the conflict and perils of battle.

Jehovah could have led his people into the "land flowing with milk and honey," to repose in the midst of its vineyards and oliveyards, without exposing them to the privations and hazards of war. But what he could have done he did not do. Ere he would allow them to enjoy the promised rest, they must fight with sword and bow and sling, and enter the land over the dead bodies of their enemies. While He would have them know that the battle was the Lord's, not theirs, he would also teach them that they were the chosen instruments for the performance of his pleasure,—and that both their safety and happiness were connected with the strict observance of his commands.

The church of Christ may hence derive valuable lessons. The truth must prevail. Its final triumph is made sure by the divine decree. The gospel is committed to the elect of God, they are to maintain that gospel, they must fight for the Captain of their salvation, and enter the promised rest through patient endurance and conflict. This is the Saviour's legacy; "In the world ye shall have tribulation." The followers of Christ must be despised and rejected as he himself was; and for the very same reason. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Heaven in infinite love seeks reconciliation. Man does not desire it; he will not have it. "The Son of God" became "the Son of man" that he might be a brother among many brethren. But he was rejected, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." The gospel declares man's fallen and helpless state. This provokes his resentment. He cannot believe that he is the depraved and ruined sinner the gospel describes him to be; he therefore turns with aversion from it, and opposes it with all the might of his unrenewed nature. In the gospel God seeks the sinner, but its requirements are such as, instead of feeding his vanity, removes every thing that would nourish it. Instead of praising it blames him, bringing him as guilty before his God, and requiring him, instead of trusting in his own efforts, or righteousness, to regard all these as "filthy rags," and to cast himself as unworthy upon the sovereign mercy of God. This is wholly opposed to the feelings of the carnal heart, the heart that

in its pride will not permit the sinner to seek after God. This dislike of the Gospel is the fruitful source of those perversions and errors that have drawn men away from its simplicity. For this reason its apostles and preachers have always been persecuted, and its adherents visited with fire and sword. The followers of Jesus have not only to contend with men, with creatures upon the same plane of existence with themselves, but with spiritual beings, against whom they, unaided, would be powerless. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." At the head of these forces is Satan—the adversary—whom Peter describes as "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." The design of the gospel is to destroy his works, and save the souls he would ruin. It, therefore, arouses his resentment, and goads him onward in fiercest assaults against the kingdom of Christ. He presumed to encounter the Saviour; he opposed the early disciples; and, to this day, continues with malignant purpose, to set himself against God, and the souls of men.

The instruments by which he accomplishes his pleasure are various. Evil spirits are at his behest; wicked men are under his influence; they are "taken captive by him at his will," and become faithful servants, waiting on the command of their Lord; and god men are often, when they know it not, taken in his snare, and employed in his service.

As his instruments are various so are the expedients he employs. Witness his assaults upon the Saviour: see how, foiled in one attempt, he adventures another, and then a third. He who set himself against the Lord's anointed, will be none the less active in his opposition to his people, none the less fruitful in his devices for the overthrow of the church. He infused the spirit of ambition among the disciples. He makes one fall by denying his Lord with oaths and curses. He enters the heart of another, and fits him for the work of a traitor. He inspires hatred in the breasts of the Jewish Rabbins, and moves the lips of the people to cry "away with him," "crucify him, crucify him." He awakens the sword of persecution, drives the followers of Christ from Jerusalem, and pursues them into every country whither they flee. When he sees that his efforts fail, that still the word of God prevails, that converts are multiplied, and that the church is purified and strengthened by fire and sword, rather than injured, he employs other means for the accomplishment of his purpose. He leads good men into errors, that tend to the subversion of the faith; and, as though that were not sufficient, he even attempts the introduction of those among the believers who have only the "form of godliness"—who assuming the name to live are nevertheless "dead in sins." These he sends forth, under the sacred sanctions of religion, to create divisions and weakness in the church, and by their pestilential heresies to destroy the souls of men. Of these the Apostle speaks in his letter to the Corinthians; "For such are false Apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ." The efforts of these evil workers must be withstood, and their works destroyed. We have need to take to ourselves the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil!

II. Let us in the second place inquire, By whom must the Gospel be defended?

1. Plainly by those who possess it. God reveals his will that we may learn and obey. He communicates his truth that we may receive and defend it. Whatever be the duty of those to whom the revelation has never been made, it is clear that they are not under obligations to defend it; certainly not in the sense that others are, who have the blessed treasure of divine knowledge committed to their hands. The Lord has spoken to us, not by visions, not by the ministry of angels, but "by his Son whom he hath appointed the heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." He has spoken of sin and salvation. He declares his will, and man's duty. All that he would have man know, and believe, all that he would have him do, He plainly sets forth in the Word, positively enjoining that he shall, not only believe and do the truth, but proclaim it abroad, and defend it from the aspersions and oppositions of its enemies.

2. To be more particular, it is necessary to state that to the Church is committed this solemn responsibility. This is the work assigned her; for this she has been divinely prepared. Truth abides in her loving heart, dwells upon her lips, and speaks through her works. By the grace imparted she becomes the grand conservator. "Ye are the salt of the earth." Error is pernicious, destructive, deadly. Under its shade every thing is blighted, and perishes. As truth, in its nature, is essentially the opposite of error, so also is it in its influence. And as falsehood has brought misery and ruin upon the earth, so must truth throw aside the pall of death, and restore to life and soundness.

Again, the Saviour declares the church to be "the light of the world." He himself is the sun of the gospel day, the light that shineth in darkness. But the glory of Christ is only in part revealed. When the nations of them that are saved shall have entered upon the bliss of the heavenly state, they shall enjoy that light in all its perfection. "They have no night there." "The Lord God giveth them light." "The Lamb is the light thereof." Now He shines upon the earth through his church. She receives the light; she reflects his radiance. The church is in the most emphatic sense, "set for the defence of the Gospel." She receives her commission from the Lord "Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. She has the unerring word, and the promise of the Spirit to guide her into the Truth, and the assurance from the lips of Him who dwells in the midst of the candlesticks, "Lo I am with you always even unto the end."

God has written in his Book what he would have the church believe. He has clearly taught the duties his gospel enjoins, and with all necessary precision, He has shown what ordinances he would have observed. Some portions of God's Book are indeed above our comprehension.—Were it otherwise, we could not revere it as we do. Did it contain no mysteries, we could not receive it as coming from God who is himself incomprehensible to the finite mind. There is, however, much that may be learned by earnest and devout study, while what is of the first consequence to him as a sinner needing salvation is most clearly revealed. "The vision is written and it is made plain." Duties are prescribed with such clearness that there need be no mistake, while the ordinances of the Gospel are taught so plainly that a child may understand them. One might, therefore, reasonably expect to find a united church, trusting in "one Lord," holding "one faith," and receiving "one baptism," and all "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." But, alas! as we look over the christian world a very different spectacle is presented before us. We see strife and disunion where there ought to be love and concord. Sect is opposed to sect, doctrines the most conflicting are maintained, rites and ceremonies, varied in their nature and design are introduced. This we cannot help, but we may deplore it, and pray for the time to come when "the watchmen shall see eye to eye." But do not misunderstand me. I am not for the merging of the sects. Truth is too precious to be sacrificed; and we must do this when we surrender it for the sake of union with others. We would not yield what we conceive to be the truth, as we could not ask another to do it. Some doubtless are sincere in their protestations on this point, but the most employ the words "liberalism" and "union" as the rallying cry of their sect. Indeed the most sectarian of all the sects are those who declaim the most about union. With their mouths they have much love, but, in too many instances, their hearts are full of bitterness.

The great matter for inquiry is not, how may the different denominations be united, but what are the teachings of scripture? Which of the sects conform the most exactly to the teachings of the word? Paul speaks of "the unity of the Spirit," and again, of "the unity of the Faith." It is not sufficient that all profess to be guided by the scripture, they must be in reality. These furnish the true bond of union, and the whole company of believers will be brought together into the "unity of the faith," when, forsaking the traditions of men, they meet at the pure fountain of eternal truth; when, in simplicity of soul, they accept its teachings, and yield themselves in obedience to its commands. God will bless those who honor him. Errorists may succeed in their earnest endeavors to draw away disciples after them;—they may be permitted to boast of their growing numbers, but they will not always prosper. Elijah is stronger than the 400 prophets of Baal. Those who hold the banner of Truth shall be sure to triumph in the end. They will be hated; they must suffer, but they shall have a glorious reward.

Brethren, is not our boast that we are guided by the Word of God? Do we not bind ourselves to believe all that God declares, to do whatsoever he commands, and to be controlled by no other authority in Church or State? We may declare our sentiments before the world, and set them forth in formal and definite statements, but do we not take the sacred oracles as our authority and ultimate standard of appeal, as the Judge whose word must end all strife? Let us here take our stand, and fearlessly contend for the doctrines of the divine word. "He that hath my word let him speak my word faithfully." If we be what we profess, we are apostolic, we are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, whose chief corner stone is Jesus Christ. I trust this is no empty boast. I believe that of all denominations the Baptists are the most nearly conformed to the primitive order. If links are wanting in the chain, we know that history, if written, would furnish them. If there are rents and chasms across the path of him who would travel back to the first ages of Christianity, we can spare him the task of bridging the way by referring him to the New Testament and a Baptist Church.

Not that there are not good and holy men in other communities. We believe there are. Not that there are no unworthy members in our own churches; not that we, as a people, have risen to the highest standard of christian excellence, not that we have attained to the fulness of the knowledge of divine things;—but we do hold that we have more truth than any other people. It is not with us a matter of doubt or uncertainty. Our convictions are deep and abiding. Perhaps we are repeating what others are wont to say concerning themselves. They and we shall be judged by the word, and we are willing to abide the test.

If this be so, then we have no difficulty in answering the inquiry we have started, "Who are set for the defence of the Gospel?" Other bodies of christians may be employed to subserve important ends. For instance, the Presbyterian to defend the grand doctrine of the divine sovereignty; the Wesleyan, the necessity of the new birth; and the Quaker, the absolute need of a spiritual religion, instead of one of forms, and ritualistic observances. God, for aught we know, may, in his overruling providence, ordain each evangelic sect to guard, in a special manner, some particular doctrine, or gospel requirement, and eventually, in the millennial age, destroy all that is corrupt, and bring his people together in the purity of the faith. We, as Baptists, without laying any claim to infallibility, believe ourselves to be what has been already stated. We ought then most assuredly to realize our position and responsibilities, and "contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." We should by fidelity to the truth, and noble deeds, prove ourselves the worthy successors of those holy men, who in the first days of the church "went every where preaching the word," and who in all places when the Lord blessed their labors, baptized believing men and women.

(Conclusion next week.)

For the Christian Messenger.

IN MEMORIAM.

CAPTAIN IRA P. DUNN,

died at East Ragged Islands, July 11th, 1869, aged 26 years

Capt. Dunn was the third son of the late Edward and Penina Dunn, of Shelburne. Two or three incidents in connection with the last two years of Capt. Dunn's life I would like to mention, because they speak of the goodness and mercy of God.

In June 1867, the Bark *James Campbell* was launched from the Ship yard of Mr. Holden, Jordan River, Shelburne County, owned by Mr. Samuel Locke and others. At that time Capt. Eli Page was first, and Brother Dunn second in command. They took on board a cargo of lumber for the West Indies, they arrived in safety. After discharging cargo they went up the Essequibo River for a load of timber, from thence to Liverpool, England. During their stay up the River, which was protracted, the Yellow Fever commenced its work of death, they made all haste possible for Demarara, but death had marked all the crew but three for its victims. Brother Dunn was brought down to the door of death. Under this affliction our young friend was converted to God. So great was the change wrought by the justifying grace of God, that his soul was filled to overflowing, Jesus appeared "the fairest among ten thousand and altogether lovely." The promises were food to his soul, and he could say, "O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory." This blessing he enjoyed until death. But his end was not come, through the mercy of God he was restored to health. They took in another crew and sailed for England, but before they had proceeded far Capt. Page was attacked by Fever, and they were obliged to put into Barbadoes, and left the Captain who died in a few days.—Having shipped another commander they again proceeded, but before they reached the Port of destination they encounter a dreadful gale of wind, were dismasted and towed into a port in Wales. Brother Dunn with Capt. Locke came out to Philadelphia, and thence back to England. He was then put in command of the bark, but his race was short, and after sailing two voyages it became evident that he was in a decline. The Doctors advised him not to go another voyage in the bark.

Under these trials he fled to Jesus, laid his case before him and humbly prayed that he would grant him the privilege of returning home. His request was granted and after a voyage of about twenty days he arrived safe under his mother's roof. But it was very evident that his stay was short, seven days was all that was allotted him. During this time he warned and besought all who came to see him to prepare for death. I often had the privilege of conversing with him. It was a pleasure to hear him talk of heaven and glory, desiring to depart and be with Jesus. It was a most glorious manifestation of the power of Divine grace. The seventh day after his return home he departed this life, leaving behind him a good testimony that he has gone to dwell with Jesus. He has left a widowed mother bowed down with afflictions, she has been called to part with her husband and four children.

Two brothers and three sisters with their mother are left to mourn their loss. May the Lord support them. This dispensation of God's providence was improved by the writer, from Ps. xxiii. 4.

J. F. MCKENNE.

East Ragged Islands, Aug. 2, 1869.