

OUR FAITH.

[The annual sermon, preached by Rev. B. H. Nobles at the Free Baptist Conference, in St. John, Oct. 10: 93.]

"Ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was delivered unto the saints."—Jude 3.

"God, who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds, who being the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1-3). Thus wrote the apostle unto the Hebrews, and this revelation of God through his own eternal Son is final. Never again shall we have Patriarchs to dream dreams for us, which shall disclose the divine mind. Nor a Moses to give us a new law expressing new obligations to God under which we are. Nor prophets to unveil the future.

Such things we need never expect, for a more excellent messenger than any of these has already come, even Jesus, who has revealed all that can and shall be revealed unto the sons of men on earth. Let the warning words spoken across the barren wastes of Patmos into the ear of the inspired penman assure us of this. "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city and from the things which are written in this book." (Revelation 22:18, 19).

Yes, brethren, the revelation Christ has given is final. The faith, the doctrine which was once delivered by him unto the saints is the faith that shall endure; and for its promotion and defence all of us should earnestly contend.

1. Let me then at the outset call your attention to this faith delivered unto the saints—the faith of ourselves as a church and people, for if our faith is not that of which the apostle here speaks, viz., that delivered to the saints, we had better see to it that we do not prune our creed, or so enlarge it, that we shall feel that our faith is in very truth the faith delivered to the saints.

2. That faith declares that man by nature was hopelessly ruined through sin. Medical science declares a man's case hopeless who is afflicted with an incurable disease. How often you hear it said of a person, whose malady no human power can heal, "He is a dead man—his case is hopeless." Such was the case of man—hopeless because he was diseased with sin. Human skill might diagnose the case—find out the trouble and locate it, but no human skill could provide an effectual remedy. Their case was hopeless, and doubly so because of the condemnation pronounced upon them by the broken and dishonoured law. When once a criminal is condemned and sentenced to be executed, he is virtually a dead man—his case is hopeless. Not many years since in this city there was a man hanged. After the trial was over and the verdict of guilty was brought in and he was sentenced to be hanged on a certain day, it is said that when he returned to his cell, he took chalk and marked on the wall—one mark for each day or until the day of his execution, and then every morning when he arose he would erase one of them. So the last day came, and the last mark is erased, and he is within a few moments of his execution. The hour has come and he is hanged. Well now so far as the law was concerned he was a dead man as soon as he was sentenced. His case was hopeless. Even so was it with man when sin had once entered, and the sentence of the broken law declared his case was hopeless so far as human means could avail. So this faith declares that man was hopelessly ruined, because he was under the just condemnation of God's law and in no wise could he atone for his own sin. While, further, he was afflicted with an incurable disease beyond the power of human skill.

3. Again, I remark that faith declared that Christ hath made provision for man's salvation from this hopelessly ruined condition, by the atonement. Now there were two things that necessitated the atonement. One we have already considered viz., man's perishing condition. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Second—God's nature. In that nature we find infinite justice, mercy and love. Infinite Justice must have the law honoured. God cannot maintain his justice and

yet release the transgressor from the condemnation of the law. Infinite mercy cannot be satisfied short of at least a provision for man's salvation being made. Now when we tear apart the word atonement we have at-one-ment. To atone is to make one, or to reconcile parties at variance. Therefore, in or by the atonement of Christ not simply was reconciliation made between God and man, but also in God's nature itself. Infinite justice was satisfied, because the law had been vindicated; and infinite mercy and love were satisfied, because a remedy had been provided and man was no longer hopelessly ruined. Eternal justice and eternal mercy have embraced each other in Christ Jesus. So that now God can be just and yet the justifier of the penitent sinner; and mercy is satisfied notwithstanding hundreds of precious souls go out into a dark, miserable eternity, for the utmost has been done for them. Christ brought a great panacea for our disease, a relief for our condemned souls. He is the foundation of the entire Christian system. But when and where did he do all this? It began away back in the secret chambers of Diety. Then, by promise and prophecy, through the shadows and types of the old dispensation, until the fulness of time had come and he was born of Mary in Bethlehem, a cooing babe. When he took upon himself human nature, and, enduring successfully all the assaults of the devil, yet carrying around with him the infirmities of the flesh, he triumphantly won the battle of the wilderness and took all the laurels of victory because he conquered death, hell and the grave and ascended as the world's Redeemer. Oh, could you have looked upon him when in Gethsemane he agonizes, suffers and groans with a world on his heart. Oh, disciples, why did you not watch with him? See him as he comes out of that sequestered spot, where I believe the greatest agony and suffering that ever was endured by God or man was endured by the Son of Mary, the token of which the stain of blood on his face produced by the extreme tension of the most vital cords of the God man. Now gaze upon him as he climbs Golgotha, carrying his own cross, upon which he is soon to die! Look at those three leafless trees on Calvary! Do you see the patience in the countenance of that sufferer on the middle one. He is suffering all alone. He trode the winepress alone, and of the people there was none to help. Nobody sings to him "when he is about to die," or fan his fevered brow. Mary would gladly do it, but she is not allowed that privilege. Jesus must suffer and Mary must look. All the surges of satanic hate rolled up and over him. Hear the taunt of the crowd, "He saved others himself he cannot save." Hear the impudent malefactor, "If thou be Christ save thyself and us." Oh Jesus, marshal legions of angels and slay this iniquitous mob! But not a word of rebuke from that patient sufferer's lips other than, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." Oh, what a sight! the hands of high priests and devils joined in murdering the only spotless man that ever lived. And as the sun looks down upon this awful scene he sickens and faints, falling back on the black lounge of the Judean midnight. Yes, nature curtained herself out of respect to him who was the victim of the central tragedy of history. And the great heart of the earth was touched, and the shrouded dead were rocked in their hammocks, and the rocks, throbbing with life, threaten to roll down upon those who are taking the life of their Creator. What does it all mean? Come up close, for it is so dark you cannot see! Come up closer, until you hear the gasping, expiring breath of your expiring Lord! Come up closer, until you can hear the blood as it flows from his head and haads and side and feet—drop! drop! drop! Wait until you can read in letters of blood the explanation, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." Lift up your eyes now into the darkness, look higher than the inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews;" look until you see in letters of fire, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." It is getting clearer now. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." I understand it better now. "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." The debt has been paid. Redemption has been accomplished. Here is the glorious consummation of the scheme of man's complete emancipation from sin, full and free.

4. Again, I remark that that faith which was once and for all delivered

to the saints declared that the benefits of Christ's atonement accrue only to those who, having repented and believed, have been begotten of God. Notwithstanding atonement has been made there is something else that God does for man, which prepares him to walk with God here and at last to live with him in eternity. That something is regeneration by the Holy Ghost. It is an experience, a recreating, which is, in a measure at least, conditioned upon the powers of a man's own volition. Christ was born, lived and died and lives again irrespective of man's volition. He did it all of his own free will. He laid down his life himself. Now the condemnation is not, simply, that man is a sinner, but it is this that he will not accept what Christ has done for him. "This is the condemnation that light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light." Man is, naturally, blind to God and his own good. The Holy Ghost must impart that sight. A blind man can hear the murmur of the brook, can feel the heat of day and the cool of night, can smell the fragrance from forest, hillside and garden, can taste of the vine and the olive, but to the beauties of nature he is blind. The heavens with their glory, the earth with its beauty—these he sees not. How suggestive of the unregenerated man. He can think and reason; he can execute and destroy; he can love and hate; he can suffer; he can be happy; but of the things that belong to the Spirit of God he is ignorant. He sees them not, knows them not. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searched all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God, which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:9-14). That faculty of the soul by which God and the spiritual are apprehended must be imparted to the unspiritual man, as eyesight to the blind, before the things of religion can be known; or if it be in the natural man paralyzed, then must it be energized so that it may perform its functions. Try as you may, you can never make the deaf appreciate harmony; try as you may you can never make the blind understand the sparkling beauty of the diamond and try as you may to make the unspiritual, whether in Sabbath school class, or audience, or whosoever, apprehend the spiritual, and you must fail. The understanding must be opened of God. The spiritual faculty of those who are new creatures in Christ Jesus must be present ere spiritual truth be discerned. Now, the natural man is criminally blind, because the Holy Spirit comes and convicts him of his condition, woos him, draws him. And here is where man's free agency comes in, he may or he may not yield to that Spirit and the invitations of the gospel. That is what brings the condemnation; men will not accept this Light, this Spirit this Gospel. God will do no violence to the sovereignty of man's will. He must yield, and yield fully—not partially. Some people come reaching out the one hand to God asking him to save them. But what is in the other hand—money or possessions gained dishonestly? what is that in the other hand—a pack of cards and live for the pleasures of sin? what is that in the other hand—hatred, jealousy, sin? among that class are the unconverted part of our churches, and all those who never get out into the light and joy of Christian experience. But when that other hand lets go, and there is full surrender, it is evidenced by a goodly sorrow for sin, repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is then, and not till then, that the Holy Ghost regenerates him. He meets the conditions—repentance and faith—and then the Holy Ghost does the work. He is begotten of God.

Man may put on the exterior of christianity, but not the genuine. God alone can impart that. Imagine you see a great volcanic mountain, which at times pours out its boiling lava, destroying vegetation and human life. But now it is quiet. Yonder, I see a man climbing its steep. He reaches the summit; he slowly goes towards the great crater; and now he looks down the dark abyss. Retreating to a

less exposed spot, he studies, and then decides that he can control that volcano. So he employs teams and men, and hauls rocks and fills up the great chasm. Then looking about him, he believes that this would be a great place to have a beautiful garden, a resting place for tourists; he seals the top all over with good soil, he plants trees and shrubs and flowers, and decorates the garden until it is a real paradise of beauties. Students go up there to get practical lessons in botany; tourists go up to get the clear bracing air as it comes across the continent. The owner is a public benefactor. Agriculture and commerce flourish at the base, all because this volcano has been fastened. But look! the ground is trembling. Do you see those shrubs and trees shaking? There is no wind. But escape for your life. See the smoke winding itself up into a great pyramid of darkness; and now come rocks and lava thrown away up into the atmospheric world; coming back they take all kinds of life. Devastation and ruin immediately follow. He could not fasten those elements away down in the bowels of the earth which caused the eruption. So the unregenerated man may put on the decorations, make the profession, endow colleges and be in the sight of men all right; but he cannot change his heart, which is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Louis XIV, while walking in the garden at Versailles met Mansard, the great architect. The architect took off his hat before the king. "Put on your hat," said the king, "for the evening is damp and cold;" and Mansard the rest of the evening kept on his hat. The dukes and marquises, standing with bare heads before the king, expressed their surprise at Mansard, but the king said "I can make a duke or marquis, but God only can make a Mansard. Men have the power to build churches, to appoint bishops, to ordain men to office in the church, but God alone can make the christian. These who, having repented of their sins and believed in Jesus, are begotten of God.

5. Again, for those who have thus been begotten of God, or born again, this faith declares that provision has been made that they be kept sanctified, made one and brought into habitation in glory.

Jesus knew well the power of the evil one, and the bitter hatred which was entertained toward him and his, and how cunningly devised were the plans of Satan for the seduction and ruin of the saints. Christ knew it all from experience and so feeling the need they had of protection through supernatural means, he willed concerning them that they should be guarded and kept from the evil one. Let us hide in him from the conflict; he is our sure defence. Jesus provided for our sanctification. He knew how we hungered and thirsted after righteousness, how, as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so our hearts panted after God and holiness of heart and life. He knows how we long to be delivered from every earthward tendency and unholy thought, and to be like him—to be just like him, in the perfection of his manhood. Said John Newton, "can it be possible that I, that such an one as I, once so foul and vicious, that I, the chief of sinners, shall be cleansed and sanctified and made fit to associate with the holy Christ? Yes, such is our hope, and provision has been made for its accomplishment.

"Fly swifter around, ye wheels of time, and bring the welcome day."

Provision has been made that all the saints shall be one. Not, we believe, by all becoming one organization, but rather by all becoming one in purpose and aim, recognizing the worth of each other as members of the body of Christ. The narrowness and bigotry and prejudice and ignorance which have crippled and fettered and afflicted God's people shall yet give place to largeness of heart and knowledge and love and sympathy, when each shall recognize the worth of each and all shall recognize the worth of all, and with one accord shall seek the glory of their common Lord. Just as a great orchestra, with its many instruments and different sounds, at the signal from the leader produces harmony out of diversity, so these great denominations of christians, with all discords and jealousies banished at the signal of their Great Leader, will give to the world harmony—harmony out of diversity. This faith declares provision has been made that the saints, sanctified by the Spirit and truth, shall be brought to the eternal habitations and behold the glory of their Lord.

And who can conceive that glory? In yonder land of pure delight he abideth amid angelic hosts and the spirits of just men made perfect. Before him, the Brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, our own exalted Lord all heaven bows in adoration, and his praise every tongue doth speak. He it was "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and now, at the right hand of God, hath sat down glorious in strength and beauty." From his sacred brow the years have not erased the prints of the thorn crown, nor

from his side the spear mark, nor from his hands the scars of the nails.

With all these marks of honour, he who was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification, liveth amid the glories and splendours unspeakable, and hath provided that his own shall behold his glory and have their abode with him. And,

"When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun," We've no less days to sing his praise, Then when we first began.

II. In the second place, observe, we are exhorted to contend earnestly for this faith. This, I believe, is the faith which the fathers of this communion contended for. And we are not worthy to be their successors, or to have the inheritance they left us, unless we vigilantly and untiringly contend for this faith. They went over hill and dale, through cold and frost, enduring all the hardships of a new country and their own poverty, publishing this gracious news, and unless we, with greater advantages, do as much—we ought to do more—we cannot hope for success. If we do not contend for this faith we will cease to live. God peeled and wasted and wrecked his ancient chosen people, because they did not earnestly hold what he had given, because they ceased to do right.

And where are the seven churches of Asia to-day? They are not, because they did not fill their mission. And so if we fail to fill our mission, these churches, with their spires pointing heavenwards, will only be monuments to mark the place where once stood a glorious denomination of christians. Let us arise and with greater earnestness than ever before, contend for the defence and promotion of these heavenly truths. Let us contend I. In love. The age of intolerance is gone, at least in this Anglo-Saxon race. We read about it in history. Governments and Rulers can no longer do just as they please. Citizenship has arisen, claimed her rights, and holds them to-day. The Herods and Cæsars and Neros have had their day. Not as these contended, but in love, let us contend. The greatest power in the world is love. It woos. It draws, it constrains, it holds. God does not drive nor compel. Men come to Him because they are drawn. God attracts, wins. "God is love." So let us, in our contending, seek to make ourselves a power not by compulsion, but rather by attraction.

2. Contend intelligently. The Holy Spirit is to give us power to draw and hold and to be useful and to bring things to our remembrance. But we must remember that He works by means. So we must seek information from the word of God and every other source that will help us in an intelligent contention for this faith. All honour to the men who preceded us in this grand work; they used what they had, and they used it well. But that man is guilty of sin who today does not seek to have more, for there is more to get now; and so, with better equipment, there should be greater results.

3. In this contention use well the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (II Tim. 3:16). In the Apostle's opinion, that man who would be prepared to reprove and correct the erring to their profit, and to instruct and indoctrinate his fellowmen, needs to be furnished with the word of God. Among the expressions frequently upon the lips of the Great Teacher from Galilee was

(Continued on third page)

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