

Christian UNITY and PEACE
recommended.

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P R E A C H E D

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B O S T O N :

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2 Cor. xiii. 11.

Finally brethren farewell: Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

Y text contains the apostle's valediction to the church of Corinth, and a very affectionate and pathetick one it is; evidently proceeding, from an heart warm with divine love, and containing great encouragement to the person, who cordially complies with the exhortation therein contained. It seems, it was antiently, as it now is, customary for an author to conclude his epistle with a benevolent wish. Paul falls in with this custom the more readily, as it suits the present temper of his heart. He does not take his leave with a dry empty compliment, but heartily wishes the Corinthians the best blessing, *viz.* the divine special presence, which he also promises them on their compliance with the exhortation. This consists of several short sentences. *Be perfect*, KATA RTIZESTHE, literally it signifies be compact, or united, *viz.* as the members of the same body, or the constitute parts of the same building. The perfection of a society lies much in the unity of it. 'Tis probable, that the apostle here, has particular reference to the perfection or completing the body of the Corinthian church, by restoring some members, who had for a time been

separated from its communion by suspension ; or else who had, by a divisive contentious spirit, withdrawn themselves. The original word quoted favors this sense, signifying the putting those members of a body into their proper places, which had been loosned from their joints. *Be of good comfort*: the original word may be rendered *exhorted*, or comforted, or confirmed ; what if we should take it as comprehending all these ? Be *exhorted* to pay a due regard to the various precepts and counsels I have given you, from the Spirit of God. Be *comforted* in all the trials, all the afflictions you have met, or may meet with in your profession of the gospel. Be *confirmed viz.* in the truths and righteous ways of God. *Be of one mind* ; *q. d.* labour for a unity of sentiment ; try to think alike, to be of the same mind, of the same judgment, in matters of religion ; but if you cannot attain to this, but are obliged to differ in opinion in some lesser things, yet be one in affection, *live in peace : i. e.* free from that wrath and envy, those contentions and strifes, which have hitherto been but too frequent among you ; remember that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God ; and do not, by your conduct, give me occasion to repeat these words ; “ whereas there be divisions among you, are ye not carnal, and walk as men.” To induce to a ready compliance with the duty exhorted to, he adds, *The God of love and peace shall be with you ; q. d.* The true God is the God of peace ; he is love in the abstract, so that your complying with this exhortation is the direct way to enjoy his gracious spiritual presence. What an animating motive is here !

In speaking more largely on this subject, I shall endeavor,

First, To shew what that peace and love among Christians is, to which the apostle exhorts with so much warmth and earnestness.

Secondly, To evince and illustrate the great importance of such a peace, among Christians, those particularly, who are connected in the same society.

Thirdly, ADVENTURE to give a few directions, by a due attendance on which, this important blessing may be attained and promoted among Christians. And then make some application.

I am to shew, *first*, what that peace and love among Christians is, to which the apostle exhorts with so much warmth and earnestness? In answer to this enquiry, I shall mention two essential characters or qualifications of this peace.

First, An agreement in principle, at least in the main things. The prophet no doubt intends, that his question should have a negative answer, when he says, Can two walk together except they be agreed? * Doubtless two may walk together, *i. e.* may have religious fellowship; may join sweet counsel, who differ in sentiments on some lesser points, otherwise there could be no act of occasional communion, among christians of different denominations: Nay, perhaps, it would be found on enquiry, that there could be no such thing as religious fellowship or

* Amos iii. 3.

walking together, in the matters of religion, but every one must walk by himself, there not being two persons, who are exactly agreed in all points of doctrine. In matters of lesser moment, christians should exercise mutual forbearance: a tender, charitable disposition, towards a christian brother, erring in some lesser things, will be an effect of that modesty and humility, which well becomes the present infant state of darkness and imperfection, where the best know but in part, and all are liable to err. To see the christian church rent to pieces, by the over-rigid urging of uniformity, in sentiment and practice, on points of small moment; and persons under the influence of party rage, excommunicating and anathematizing one another, as though the essence of religion was at stake, affords a lively picture of human weakness and folly; and yet, how often do we see humbling and shameful instances of this kind; sometimes in men, who are, otherways, pious, learned, eminent.

BUT when all this is freely granted, it nevertheless remains true, that among Christians, particularly those, who are associated in religious societies, there should be an agreement in principle, at least in the main things. To see Orthodox, Arians, Pelagians, Socinians, and even Deists, all confusedly blended together in one communion, is not seemly. This may be termed catholicism, but it is latitudinarianism. This is saying a confederacy, to which heaven will not say amen; and instead of being acceptable, is abominable to God. What fellowship hath light with darkness! It is surprising, as well as sad to observe, to what a length some moderns have carried the matter, even to the as-

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fering, that it is no material thing, what a man's religious opinions are, provided, he appear to be of a benevolent disposition, and to pay a proper regard to the social virtues. This is departing from bigotry and narrowness, to another, and I was going to say, a worse extrem. Christians should beware of all extrem: They should remember, that the wisdom which cometh from above, is first *pure*, then *peaceable*: that precious as peace is, they who sell the truth to buy it, give too high a price. If they consult their bibles, they may read of damnable heresies,* doctrines, that subvert souls,† words, that eat like a canker.‡ Among all the apostles of our Lord, none was more eminent for a catholic disposition, a heart dilated with the love of God, than the apostle John; and yet, how strict he is upon the head of doctrine, you see, by that precept, 2 epif. of John, ix. 10, whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not unto your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds. How awful are those words of Paul, Gal. i. 8. where, he is manifestly speaking of those, who, in the justification of a sinner, mingled the law with the gospel. Though we, or an angel from heaven, profess any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Secondly, ANOTHER essential character or qualification of that peace among Christians, which the apostle exhorts to in my text, is, that it *be founded*

* 2 Peter ii. 1.

† Acts xv. 24.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 17.

on love to God. There may be, and often is an external peace, among a society of professed Christians, and much outward unity and harmony, where there is little or nothing of the love of God at bottom. Such a peace may be founded upon principles of policy, or on a party spirit. “ We must be united, this will render us a respectable body ; nothing will be able to stand against us ; we shall be an over-match for all our adversaries.” Thus many reason ; and this is the basis of their strict union : But this is not the peace and love, which my text so warmly recommends. There is nothing peculiar to Christianity in this peace : A society of Mahometans or Pagans, may keep united from the same motives, the same political views. The peace and love in my text, is built on love to God : according to that divine word, every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.* That love which unites true believers to the head, cements them in the closest, and most cordial bonds to each other. They regard one another, as the children of one common father, who have one Lord, one faith, one baptism ; who are one bread and one body ; who are at present, in many respects in the same circumstances, in the same state of warfare and trial, exposed to the same enemies and temptations ; who expect a common salvation. And hence they love as brethren, are pitiful and courteous, no one allows himself to seek his own good, separate from that of his brethren. They cover one another's infirmities with love : they feel the happy and powerful influence of that fervent charity, which is the bond of perfectness ; and hence, they do all

* I. John v. 1.

mutual

mutual good offices, with a benevolent heart. Happy the christian society, which is held together by this bond!

I PROCEED to the second head, *i. e.* to shew, of how great importance, such a peace and harmony as has been described, is, among christians, those particularly, who are connected in the same society.

THAT such peace and love, is a valuable and important blessing to christian societies, appears from the warm manner, in which it is urged in my text, and other scriptures; and the powerful motives with which the duty is enforced. How affectionate is the apostles farewell in the text; how warm, and withal, how argumentative! Those are pathetic words, Phil. ii. 1, 2. "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies: fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." In what a variety of expression, does the prince of peace recommend love and peace to his followers. This is his "new commandment."* This is the badge, or distinguishing note of his disciples.† May I not add, that this is one of the things which our great intercessor is now pleading for, on the behalf of his people, at the throne of grace. This we may learn, from that specimen he gave of his intercession, before his passion; see John xvii. 21. "That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may know that thou hast sent

* John xiii. 34. † ver. 35.

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me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." To excite them to peace and love, he puts them in mind that they are brethren, that they should therefore love as brethren. That they are but a little flock, have many and formidable enemies; that therefore, they should cleave close together. I might shew that love is called the fulfilling of the law;* is put among the foremost of the fruits of the Spirit.† The apostle John, who is termed by way of eminence, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and who partook of our Lord's spirit in an eminent degree, appears transported in a manner, in the commendation of christian love and unity. "Love (says he) is of God, and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God."—That "he who dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." That he who is destitute of love, whatever other attainments he may boast of, is "a murderer, a liar, and abideth in death." It is reported of this apostle, that as he survived all the rest, and lived to extream old age, so when his powers were greatly enfeebled, in somuch, that he could do little more than move and speak a few words, he often used to address the christians, saying, "see that ye love one another." I might moreover shew, that christians are commanded "to be kindly affectioned one to another:—That love be without dissimulation:—To be pitiful and courteous:—To provoke one another to love and to good works."

Now, considering how express the scripture is upon this head, I think, there are but few dutys of religion, the obligation of which, it is more dif-

* Rom. xiii. 8. † Gal. 5. 22.

ficult to evade. If a person be utterly destitute of love, be evidently of a sour, narrow, selfish, malevolent temper; if he be under the dominion of a malicious, revengeful spirit; what ever knowledge he has, what ever faith, what ever zeal for God and his truth, he may pretend to, it is plain, that the love of God has never taken possession of his heart. If it had it would doubtless have humbled his pride, and moulded him into a more Christ like temper. A society in which there is little or no brotherly love to be seen, where jealousies and heart burnings, bitter envying and strife, whispering and backbitings are frequent, is liker a society of pagans than Christians.

“LIVING in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another,” was a character suitable to the gentiles, before they knew Christ; “but after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared,” and they began to feel the benign influence of the christian religion, matters put on a new face.*

I might here expatiate, in shewing the excellency and importance of love. It were easie to make it appear, that love is the very spirit of angels, of glorified saints, and of the best men upon earth. Perhaps there is nothing, wherein the angelical and diabolical natures are so much distinguished, as by love and goodness. The devils have spiritual immortal natures, and great degrees of power and knowledge, but devils cannot love; instead of love, sweetness and benignity, with which the blessed

* Tit. iii, 3, 4.

angels

angels are replete, these depraved lost, miserable spirits, are subject to the vassalage of the fierce passions of malice, cruelty and revenge. "These are the very image of satan, and the spirit of hell." On the other hand, we have reason to think, that the blessed angels and glorified saints live in the joyful exercise of perpetual love, and the most tender endearments: and the better any man is upon earth, the nearer he approaches to the temper of the blessed inhabitants above. Love dilates the good man's heart, so that he no longer makes himself his chief end, but he has a sincere concern for the good of others. 'Tis one of the characters of charity, that "she seeketh not her own."* The good man is never so much pleased, as when he is employed as an instrument, in the hand of God, in promoting the good of others; he shews mercy with cheerfulness. How many lovely examples of this kind, does the sacred scriptures afford, as well as later history: O that there were more of them! O that the same mind might be in us, which also was in Christ Jesus?

I might add, that, as love is the spirit of angels, and good men, so it is the tie or band of christian communion. This communion is necessary, at least, for the well-being of the church, which is a compound body, made up of many parts or members, which stand in mutual need of one another; the qualifications or gifts of this member, supplying the defects of that; each contributing its part, to the good of the whole: so that "the eye cannot say to the hand, nor the head to the foot, I have no need

* 1 Cor. xiii.

of thee." Now, in a divided state, where love is gone, and in stead of keeping the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace, a christian society is split into parties, a sad consequence often is, that they who should lay out their talents for the good of the body, are apt to employ them for its hurt. Instead of edifying or building up, they do their utmost to pull down with both hands. 'Tis an observation which has been often made, and which is a sad truth, that the greatest evils which have befallen christian societies, are those which flow from intestine divisions, growing upon the decay of love. That these are the flames which have consumed the church; when the flames of persecution have only singed her garments.

I MIGHT add, that love and peace in christian societies, commends christianity to them that are without. Behold how the christians love one another, was a proverb among the heathen in the primitive times; and I make no doubt, but the seeing this sweet harmony, was the means of convincing many a spectator, of the divinity of the christian religion, and by that means, of gaining profelites. I have often thought, that were the humility, the goodness, the peaceableness and charity of the christian religion transcribed, or carefully copied into the lives of its professors, it could scarce fail of captivating the hearts of impartial spectators. They would be ready to say, "surely this religion must needs be from God, which makes its professors so godlike." And in consequence hereof, they would be apt to take up the same happy resolution, with those mentioned by the prophet, who said, "we will go with you,

you, for we have heard that God is with you.”* Hence our skilful intercessor, when he pleads for unity among his disciples, uses this argument, that hereby the world would be convinced, that his mission was from God, or that christianity had a divine original. “That they all may be one, as thou father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the *world may believe that thou hast sent me.*”* What is the reason why christianity makes so little progress in the world, notwithstanding of many excellent books, and much good preaching, and other precious means! Alas, the reason, or at least one main reason, is the bitter party spirit, the fierce tempers, the antichristian lives of many of its professors: these are the things, which powerfully tend to harden the profane in their evil ways, and to cast a stumbling block in the way of the blind.

I might further add, that where there is in a christian society, such a peace as has been described, its salutary effects are innumerable. The apostle James observes, that “where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” So on the other hand, where there is love and peace of the right sort, there, will be every good work, for love is the fulfilling of the law. For instance, the members of such a society, will be mutually assisting to each other, in all difficulties; they will help to “bear one another’s burthens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ.” If any thing is projected, tending to promote the common good, it meets with a general suffrage, is harmoniously embraced. Whereas in a divided

* Zach. viii. 23. † John xvii. 21.

state,

state, one party is apt to oppose, what the other projects, so that the salutary scheme is rejected, and the common interest suffers. Where there is love between a minister and people, where he knows he has their hearts, and that he is heard with candour and due respect, it cheers his spirits, and encourages him to deliver his message with precision, with life, with tenderness. On the contrary, when an evil spirit is got between pastor and flock, so that he has reason to suspect he is hated or despised, it is apt to embarrass his mind, and so to discourage him, as that it is well if he does not resolve, that he will make no more mention of the name of the Lord. Let what has been said, suffice as to the excellency of love and peace, and its happy influence among christians, especially them that are connected in the same society.

THE *third*, and last head in the doctrinal part, was to give a few directions, by attending to which, christians may receive some assistance, in putting in practice the apostolical exhortation in my text. This, however unfit for, I shall attempt with all humility, in the following particulars, in which I request a candid hearing.

I. LET christians, who would enjoy peace, and live in love, look and apply to him, with whom is the residue of the spirit, for a revival of religion. To have it revived in their own hearts, and in the societies to which they belong. The essence of religion is love. Love to men, originating from a principle of love to God, is "the fulfilling of the law," and I might add the gospel also. And, as love to the brethren, is founded on love to God, so when

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the latter is decayed, the former cannot be expected to flourish. Sometimes this is remarkably the case. The great interesting matters of eternity, are in a sad degree out of sight. The effect of which is, that the love of many is waxed cold. The forgiving love, and astonishing grace of God, manifested in the gospel, has but a feeble influence on the hearts of professors. Christians, at such a time, can hear the truths of religion, and perhaps approve of them in their speculative judgment, but they do not relish the truth, they do not feel it. They do not "receive the truth in the love of it." In a word, the things that remain are ready to die; inward godliness is in a low state. A wasting consumption preys on her vitals, by which the glory of Jacob is made thin, and the fatness of his flock is waxed lean. Now, when this is the case, there is apt to be but little brotherly love, very little of that fervent charity, which is the bond of perfectness. A private selfish spirit is apt to prevail. That lovely character of charity is forgot, *viz.* that *she seeketh not her own*. Every one acts as if he were made for himself only. People at such times, are easily offended, and hard to be reconciled; their passions, touched with the smallest spark, are apt to fly into the most furious and violent explosions. They are ready to take one another by the throat for a very trifle. "I'll not let it go with him, I'll be revenged on him, I'll do to him as he has done to me, I'll render to the man according to his work." O sirs, where the prince of peace appears among a people, with the precious influence of his special grace, this private, selfish, this fierce vindictive spirit, falls before him, as dagon fell before the ark of God. Christians would be disposed to embrace

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one another; to love as brethren; and notwithstanding some lesser differences, to keep "the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace."

II. GET the inward corruptions of the heart subdued. You may remember the question of the apostle James, with the answer: "Whence come wars and fightings? come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?" There is a spirit naturally in man, that lusteth to envy. Men are naturally of a revengeful disposition. I might also mention pride: this makes men impatient of contradiction. Scorn to give place to any, disposes them to set up their wills, to regard their own judgment, as the standard to which all must conform. Pride is so many ways destructive to the peace of society, that the wise man sees ground for that observation, "Only by pride cometh contention."* If professors would live in peace, and enjoy peace in the societies they belong to, they should endeavour to find out these corruptions of the heart, to lament them; to spread them before the physician of souls, in order to a cure; to beg of him, that "through the spirit they may be helped to mortify the deeds of the body."

III. AVOID any conduct, which tends to render each other odious. This is a shameful behaviour in the disciples of Christ; directly contrary to that charity, without which, we are as "a sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal." And yet I appeal to facts, whether it be not too common among professors, especially when a party spirit runs high. Sirs,

* Prov. xiv. 10

we should carefully shun every practice of this kind. We should beware of party names, such as new lights, old lights, new schemers, opposers, &c. These things tend to irritate and inflame men's spirits, and by this means to widen divisions. Do not be forward in condemning one another as heretics, or putting the worst meaning on every doubtful expression, thereby making a man an offender for a word. Do not impute to your neighbours all those consequences, which you think are fairly deducible, from some principle of his, providing you find, that he professes not to see these consequences to be the result of his principle: That far from owning the consequence, he detests it as much as you do; and declares, that he would renounce the principle, if he were convinced, that it did really give ground for any such consequence. When will christians learn to treat one another with more candor!

IV. BE on your guard against whisperers and tale bearers. The devil is termed the accuser of the brethren;* he might also be called the accuser of God, for he accuses God to men, as well as men to God; and he accuses men to men. And as satan loves to sow discord, so, are there not some of mankind that do in this particular too nearly resemble him. Solomon observes, that a "froward man soweth strife, and a whisperer separateth chief friends.†" Some are like the troubled sea, that cannot rest; those talents, in a right improvement of which, they might do much good, they employ in doing mischief. Instead of acting the part, and deserving

* Rev. xii. 10. † Prov. xvi. 28.

the character of peace-makers, they act the part of incendiaries: They employ themselves in the odious office of tale-bearers. Such persons, far from being encouraged, should be regarded as the pests of society, and treated with the neglect and contempt they deserve: And if they were thus hated, they would soon loose their influence, and grow weary of their hateful employment; and thus the remark of the wise man would be verified, "The north wind driveth away rain, so doth an angry countenance a back-biting tongue." † 'Tis the encouragement that is given to such, especially by persons in public stations, which tends greatly to encrease the number of these pernicious vermin, as well as to whet their diabolical zeal; and so, another remark of Solomon, is sadly verified, that "when a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked." ‡

V. BE not forward to enter into disputes, upon controverted points. I grant, that debating a point fairly, has often a good tendency to the investigation of truth, but as disputes are managed, there is seldom much good comes of them, and often a great deal of mischief. How often are they seen to end in vain jangling and bitter altercation! How frequently do the parties in a controversy leave the point in debate, and fall to pelting one another with virulent personal-reflections! If at any time we debate a point, let it be with that moderation, that coolness and candor, which may make it appear that it is truth, not victory we have in view. Never cast dirt, never do any thing that might but seem to favour of hatred or contempt of the person of an

* Prov. xxv. 23.

† Prov. xxix. 13.

antagonist. Never think it a shame, but account it your honor to give up a point, when you are convinced it cannot be defended: And be candid enough to own your error, as soon as you are convinced you are in an error. If you find that disputes cannot be managed without envy, strife, evil surmisings, and the like, then avoid them altogether: Remember, that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

VI. BEWARE of a false and irregular zeal. True zeal, under a proper regimen, is indeed a very lovely grace. "Be zealous," was one part of the advice of the spirit, to the wretched church of Laodicea. There can be no true religion without this grace. Fervency in spirit, is a necessary qualification in the service of God. We have zeal recommended, by the example of our Lord; his amiable moderation, and lamblike meekness, had no tendency to take off the edge of zeal. Hence, he says, "the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up." For the want of this grace Christ threatens to spue Laodicea out of his mouth. "It is good to be zealously affected, always, in a good thing." But how excellent soever zeal is, it is a grace which requires a heavy ballast: Dreadful have been the effects which false zeal has produced. How often have persons, under the influence of it, spoken wickedly for God, and talked deceitfully for him. It made a conscientious persecutor of Saul the pharisee; * nor was he the only instance of the kind: "They shall put you out of the synagogue (saith Christ) yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, shall think that he doeth

* Acts xxvi. 9.

God

God service."* The false teachers in the church of Galatia, who stirred up the christians against Paul, their spiritual father, zealously affected them, but not well. † If zeal is not found in conjunction with truth; if it is not guided by wisdom, and qualified by the christian temper; the more zeal a person has, the worse; the more mischief is he like to do.

VII. Be on your guard against a separating spirit: This is an antichristian spirit. Separates often talk much of the spirit, and make high pretences to it; but let them pretend what they will, it will be found on enquiry, that want of the spirit of Christ is at the bottom of their conduct. See Jude, 19 ver. "These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the spirit." The Jewish church in the days of our Lord was become very corrupt; and yet, he countenanced her so far, as to attend her ordinances, common and special: And it is hard to name any thing, which the heart of Christ appears to be more set upon, than that his disciples might be united among themselves. It has been observed of some eminently godly men, ministers and others, that in proportion as they grew in years, in knowledge, in experience and sanctification, so they have been more and more tender of the churches peace, and fearful of division. I would by no means have any thing that I have said, be so understood, as if I condemned all separations: some are no doubt lawful, and matter of duty. Such was the separation of our fathers from mystical Babylon, the mother of harlots, and abomination of the earth. If a professing church is gone off from the gospel of

* John xvi. 20.

† Gal. iv. 17.

Christ

Christ, to another gospel ; if the gospel way of sinner's justification is not taught ; if mens supposed sincere obedience, is put in the room of Christ's righteousness ; if the necessity of faith and regeneration, are not insisted upon, or if the true nature of them is explained away ; if the special influences of the divine spirit are derided and denied ; if the general strain of teaching in a church is evidently legal, such as in the nature of it tends to settle sinners on the covenant of works, instead of disposing them to renounce all confidence in the flesh ; in a word, if a church corrupt the word of God, and reject or neglect the means of purging herself, with Babylon refusing to be healed, in this case, the Lord seems to call for a separation. See the command, 2 Cor. vi. 17. " Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." Or if a church, which is doctrinally sound in the main things, impose on her members unscriptural terms of communion, so that they cannot be of her communion without wounding and defiling the conscience, by doing that which is sinful, in this case separation seems inevitable. We are never to do evil, that good may come. " Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin." This was the case of those, who dissented from the episcopal church in South Britain and Ireland. But for the members of a church to separate, where they do not alledge, that any unscriptural or sinful terms of communion are imposed ; where they cannot deny but the doctrine is sound, and the true way of salvation is taught, because they think the minister's gifts are not quite so edifying, that he is not so zealous, so lively, so spiritual, so evangelical as some others, or that he has not

not so happy a talent in distinguishing, or riding marches between the law and the gospel: Or to separate, because it is alledged that there are some corrupt members in a church; that she does not exercise discipline with that impartiality and strictness that might be wished; these are separations, to which heaven will not give its sanction. How many, who seem more fearful of being defiled by corrupt fellow members, than by the corruptions of their own hearts! These would do well to remember, that it is "out of the heart that divers abominations proceed;"* that "these are the things which defile a man;" that "he who eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself."† Such conduct as we are faulting has rendered, and will render the ancient Donatists infamous in the future ages of the christian church. I do not find that they are charged with any gross doctrinal error; schism was their crime. The church was too corrupt for them to abide in her fellowship: They pretended to set up pure churches. By their uncharitable breaches of communion, they rent to pieces the seamless coat of our Lord. Their hateful practices tended to destroy that unity, which renders the church "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." They were active in exposing their mother's nakedness, which filial duty bound them to conceal. They repeated the crime of Noah's impious grandson, on account of which, the patriarch pronounced these terrible prophetic words, "Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be to his brethren."‡

VIII. BEWARE

* Mat. xv. 19. † 1 Cor. xi. 29.

* "Donatists, I find, had their name from Donatus. He lived about the time of the emperor Constantine. The real cause

VIII. BEWARE of false teachers. The church of Ephesus is commended for "trying them, who said they were apostles, and finding them liars."* The apostle John cautions the Christians not to believe every spirit, but "to try the spirits whether they be of God."† The christian people have the more need to be on their guard against such, because no age of the church is exempt from them. Sometimes they abound greatly, and perhaps never more, than in a day of God's power. If Satan cannot prevent God's work, he will endeavour to mimic, and by this means, to bring a slur upon it. When Moses did, by the power of God work true, the magicians, by the assistance of Satan, wrought counterfeit miracles. So, in the apostles days, there were false apostles. So at the reformation, how were the bowels of the infant church, in a manner

"of his going off from the church, is said, to be a discontent, that he mist of the bishoprick of Carthage. He would allow no church to be a true church, but what was pure from all sin. He rebaptised those who had been baptised by them whom he called hereticks."

And here I would leave it to be considered, how far the character of this antient scismatic, agrees with theirs, who deny the visible church membership of all infants; who teach, that the baptism of such, altho' the only baptism that the christian church knew for many centuries, is no baptism, has no foundation in the word of God; who will admit none to special communion with them, but such as have been baptised at an age of observation; thereby practically declaring, that they look on the whole christian church, (their own sect excepted) to be, "aliens from the common wealth of Israel," Who shew a forwardness, to pick members out of the purest pedobaptist churches. Receiving with open arms, all who are disposed to renounce their infant baptism, and make a profession of faith, though it be too apparent, that they neither have had sufficient time, nor means to examine the controversy. Whose conduct gives substantial proof, that they are disposed to build their sect on the ruins of every other denomination of professed christians.

* Rev. ii. 2. † John iv. 1.

torn to pieces, by the divisive practices of anabaptists, and other enthusiasts.

PEOPLE should beware of the depths of Satan; they have more need, considering that false teachers do often act with much cunning, so that the hurt they do is not presently discerned. Hence they are compared to foxes, to "little foxes, that spoil the tender vine."* They often make a fair shew, hence they are said to come "in sheeps cloathing."† And are called "deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." Some of them are said to shew great signs and wonders, to deceive, were it possible, the very elect. Such teachers may have rich natural endowments, and great acquirements; they may preach many precious truths; they may be soft and insinuating in their address; may profess great intimacy with heaven; they may not only use such good words and fair speeches, as have a tendency to deceive, but may make high pretences to zeal, and may zealously affect their easy credulous followers; and they do this the more easily, because as their principal design (whatever they may pretend to the contrary) is to please, rather than to edify; so they are apt to fall in with men's favourite passions, by insisting chiefly on such topics as they know will please. In fine, to discern between true and false teachers is not so easy a thing as some may imagine, especially at a time when a sectarian spirit prevails; when unclean spirits ascend as it were in swarms, out of the bottomless pit; when many false prophets are gone out into the world; when there are a great variety of op-

* Can. ii. 15.

† Mat. vii. 15.

‡ 2 Cor. xi. 13.

posite pretences, one crying, "lo here is Christ," and another, lo he is there, and each very sanguine that he is in the right, and that he is only so. But is deception then unavoidable? Is there no criterion, no certain mark, by which God's people may avoid being deceived; by which, the sheep of Christ may be able to discern his voice, from the voice of strangers? Yes, blessed be God there is, else our Lord could not have said, "by their fruits ye shall know them."* If a teacher does not direct souls to Christ, but to Moses for salvation; or, if under the notion of exalting Christ and grace, he teach what tends to licentiousness: if he is not open and frank; is not willing to declare his principles on all points: if he depreciate human learning and a regular induction into the gospel ministry: if the spirit he promotes among his followers, instead of a meek, humble, catholic, be a violent, furious, self sufficient spirit: if he acts deceitfully, pretending one thing, when it is evident he intended another, disclaiming and pretending to abhor a party spirit, when it appears more and more plain, that the promoting of a party spirit, was, and is the chief thing, he had, and has in view: if they are active in endeavouring by every means, to pick members out of those churches, which themselves cannot deny to be true churches of Christ: if their whole conduct, as far as it succeeds, evidently tends to build their own sect, on the ruins of every other denomination of professed Christians: if under the highest pretences to disinterestedness, they are evidently greedy of filthy lucre; or, if they are strangers, and not properly recommended; in any or all of these cases,

* Mat. vii.

people

people would do well to fear the worst, and to act with caution. That is a very solemn and tender address of the apostle, Rom. xvi. 17, 18. " Now, I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine ye have learned, and avoid them, for they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and with good words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple."

HAVING gone through the doctrinal part, I proceed to some practical improvement, which, I have in a great measure anticipated by what has been said, particularly on the last general head. I shall therefore confine what I add, to a use of lamentation, and a few words of exhortation.

First. I say, we may infer from the subject, that the divisions among christians are much to be lamented. How many parties at this day, each very sanguine that they are in the right; one crying, lo here is Christ, and another, lo he is there! Professors not only divided, but sub-divided, crumbled almost into atoms of parties; " Ephraim against Manassah, and Manassah against Ephraim, and they together against Judah." In how many places, where hopeful religious appearances have been of late, have tares sprung up, almost to the choaking of the good seed: Surely an enemy hath done this? and yet, are not such enemies, by many mistaken for friends. None so high in the esteem of some, as those who run into the difficult office of the ministry, without being sent; who would be teachers of the law and the gospel too, not knowing what they say, nor whereof they affirm. Are not persons of this

stamp hugged and careffed, while the faithful ministers of Christ are despised. None like those who go about as incendiaries, endeavouring to fill the minds of people with prejudices against human learning and a regular ministry : who deal with mankind, rather as affectionate than rational creatures, using their utmost skill to get the passions of people on their side, that by the means of them, they may bribe the judgment, and so win profelites to their party. Are there not in our days, persons of the same complexion, with those mentioned by the apostle, who “ creep into houses, and lead captive silly women,” and men also? And in some places, do not people seem to be seized with a spiritual giddiness ; like a ship without ballast, are tost with every wind ; appear possessed with an incessant desire of novelty ; with the Athenians, seeking to “ hear some new thing, heaping to themselves teachers, having itching ears, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth!” Does it not look awful to see many, and some of whom better might have been expected, renouncing their infant baptism? Others, pretending to be the only christians, according to the primitive model, representing all other denominations, as corrupters of the word of God, and their teachers, as blind leaders of the blind ; while the carnally secure, and men of infidel principles, or of a deistical turn, make a scoff at all these things, and ridicule christianity itself, on account of the folly of its professors. Surely sirs, these divisions of rulers, are sufficient ground for great thoughts of heart. I know but of one consideration, which upon such a proposition, is sufficient to quiet the mind of him, who prefers the welfare of Zion to his chief joy : It is this, That all things are

in the hands of Zion's king: that he hath power and skill sufficient to bring a revenue of glory to God, even from human weakness and folly. O that the ecclesiastical anarchy of this day might dispose ministers and other christians, to enter into a serious enquiry, whether a common fence about the churches, might not be likely to prevent many of these bad things, and to keep out the boar of the forrest, from entering in to waste the vineyard at his pleasure.

I PROCEED to a word of exhortation: *First*, to the unconverted. Altho' I would have you to take a part of the advice of the apostle in my text, *i. e.* to live in peace with men, yet that which chiefly concerns you, is to get into a state of reconciliation or peace with God. Consider, that till once you are in this state, you cannot love your neighbour, nor do any duty you owe to him from a right principle. Some of you, are already, it may be, in possession of a sort of peace: "The strong man armed, keepeth his palace, and his goods are in peace." But does not your own conscience tell you, that your peace is not well founded? that it will not endure the test of God's word? that you have never been thoroughly awakened, convinced and humbled? that the spirit of self dependance has never been effectually subdued? that you have never gone out of yourselves to Christ; that you are not new creatures, so that if you die in your present state, you must needs perish? To such I would say; why will you, or rather how can you remain easie in your present state? Can you think with any patience, of falling into the hands of the living God; of being led forth with the workers of iniquity, and having your portion with the unclean? Nay, can

you

you bear the thought of having the hottest place in hell; of sinking far deeper than the abominable Sodomites, in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? If you cannot, then "acquaint yourselves with God and be at peace," take hold of his strength and make peace, and he says, "you shall make peace;" and what you do, do quickly; to delay till to-morrow, may be for ever too late. The ax is laid to the root of the tree, and the judge stands at the door. "Your judgment for a long time lingereth not, and your damnation doth not slumber." It has been of late, and I trust yet is in many places, a day of God's power: such seasons do not happen often: if you outstand this, you may never see another: They are startling words, Jer. viii. 20. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

MAY I, without offence, be permitted to drop a word to ministers? I would just say, let us, my dear bretheren, pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and do what we can to promote it. If we would put an effectual stop to men of separating principles and practises, let us out do them in abundant labours, in evangelical preaching, in zeal for God, and hearty concern for souls. To use bishop Burnets words, in his pastoral letter to his clergy, "let us out preach them, out pray them, and out live them." I would add, let us see that we hurt not the churches peace, nor lay a stumbling block in the way of our people, by carrying catholicism too far. For instance, if they see us giving the right hand of fellowship to men of corrupt principles, will not this be a cause of stumbling to them? How natural will it be for them to say, these our teachers in-

culcate on us, the absolute sovereignty and freedom of divine grace, the doctrine of original sin, of justification by faith only, of the new birth, of the necessity of divine supernatural influence, &c. but we see that they maintain all acts of communion with those, that do not believe these doctrines. What can we infer from this their conduct, but either, they do not believe these doctrines, or, at least, do not believe them to be so important as they teach us they are. Perhaps, some of us are not sufficiently aware, how stumbling this is to some of our hearers, and what a handle is made of it by separates.

To the assembly in general, I would say, you have been hearing in the doctrinal part the nature of that peace which is acceptable to God; What an excellent and important blessing it is: Some directions have likewise been given by a due attendance on which, you may be likely to attain this invaluable blessing. These things, however weakly spoken upon, have been laid before you, I trust, with a single eye, by one who is under infinite obligations to redeeming love, and who has a sincere concern for the peace and welfare of Jerusalem. I hope then, you will take the word of instruction and exhortation in good part; and that you will follow with your earnest prayers, him who takes his affectionate leave of you, in the words of my text; "finally brethren farewell; be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

F I N I S.