

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

After devotional exercises, the retiring Moderator, Rev. Thomas Wardrope, D.D., preached the following sermon

Christ—whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. C. I.

These words lead us to consider the theme, the manner, and the object of apostolic preaching, the theme, "Christ, whom we preach;" the manner, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom;" and the object, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

I. THE THEME OF APOSTOLIC PREACHING.

"Christ, whom we preach." "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." It was not themselves, but Christ, that the apostles sought to commend. It was not their own glory, but Christ's, that they sought to promote. They were determined not to know anything among those to whom they preached, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The apostles preached Christ. The preaching of Christ includes all the truth relating to man's salvation by Jesus Christ: It includes the declaration of man's fall from the state of holiness and happiness in which God created him; of the misery and guilt and condemnation in which he was consequently involved; of the way of salvation opened up for fallen man through Jesus Christ; of the infinite love of God in giving His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. It includes the declaration of Christ's equality with the Father, of the glory which He had with Him before the worlds were made, of the willingness with which He offered Himself to carry into effect God's purpose of grace to man, saying, "Lo, I come, I delight to do Thy will, O my God;" of His actually appearing in our world in the fulness of time, and sojourning here, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" of His holy life, His obedience unto death, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven, His sitting down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, His ability and willingness to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, since, having been delivered for their offences, He is risen again for their justification, and ever liveth to make intercession for them. It includes the declaration of our need—our constant and urgent need—of the Holy Spirit, to convince us of our sin and misery, to enlighten our minds in the knowledge of Christ, to renew our wills and to persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the Gospel; and to carry on in us the work of grace whereby we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. It includes the declaration of Christ's coming at the end of the age to receive His people to Himself, and of His final appearing at the judgment of the "great white throne," to confess before the assembled nations those who have not been ashamed to confess Him here, and to sentence the impenitent to everlasting destruction from His presence and from the glory of His power. These, and all other Gospel truths connected with them, are included in the "preaching of Christ."

To preach Christ is to make Him the centre to which all Gospel truths converge, or from which all Gospel truths radiate. If we speak of faith, Christ must be presented as the Author and the Finisher and the Object of our faith. If we speak of repentance, we must point men to Christ exalted to the right hand of God, to give repentance and the remission of sins. If we utter forth the threatenings of God's law against the workers of iniquity, it must be with the real and earnest purpose of inducing men to seek refuge in Christ. In the system of divine truth Christ must be made by us, must be esteemed by us, as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the First and the Last.

Such was the preaching of the apostles, and the first ministers of the Gospel. Christ was their theme, whether they reproved or exhorted or warned or entreated—whether they explained holy doctrine or enforced holy practice. They were never weary of setting forth His almighty power, His amazing grace, His unspeakable preciousness, His matchless love. And so should it be with ministers now. They should be constrained by the same love, they should be animated by the same spirit, their souls should be filled with the same exalted exhaustless theme.

And we may safely add that Christ's people will never be weary of hearing Christ preached to them. If the pure doctrine of Christ be obscured or concealed, whether by rhetoric, or logic, or by philosophy, the believer complains: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." Others may weary of the Gospel of Christ in its purity and simplicity—those to whom Christ is only as "a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness, and no beauty that they should desire Him." But the humble believer will not be weary. "Can a mother forget her sucking child?" Can the miser forget his treasure? Much less can the believer forget his Saviour. If he loves to look upon the wonders and beauties of creation, it is because the heavens declare His glory, and the firmament showeth His handiwork, and all nature speaks His praise. If he loves the Scriptures, it is because they testify of Christ. If he loves the ordinances of God's appointment, it is because in them he meets with Christ, and receives communication of His grace and love. If he desires to depart, it is that he may be "with Christ, which is far better."

II. THE MANNER OR SPIRIT IN WHICH THE APOSTLES PREACHED.

"Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom." These words let us know about the faithfulness of their preaching, and the care with which they adapted their instructions to the case and circumstances of those whom they addressed.

1. Faithfulness: "warning every man." This was the word of the Lord to Isaiah long ago: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins;" and to Ezekiel: "Hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." What was required of prophets under the Old Testament dispensation is no less required of preachers under the New. And perhaps no more subtle temptation comes to us than this: to allow our people with whom we live in pleasant relations, and whom we feel to have so many claims on our confidence and esteem, to remain unwarned of the danger of "neglecting so great salvation." A note of warning sounds throughout the whole Word from Genesis to Revelation, and we are recreant to our trust if we fail to let our hearers know, if we fail to say to them in language that they cannot but understand, "the wages of sin is death."

You know, fathers and brethren, how Christ preached. Whose heart ever yearned with compassion for perishing men like His? And yet, in His teaching, the "worm that dieth not," and the "fire that is not quenched," and the "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," are subjects more frequently introduced and more plainly spoken of than in any of the writings or sermons even of the prophets and apostles. Do we not hence learn how little those understand of the "mind of the Spirit," who would make faithful and solemn warning no part of the preaching of the Gospel? And do we not learn how pernicious in Christ's ministers is that mistaken tenderness which makes them decline or hesitate to place the guilt and danger of the impenitent in their true light, and warn them to "flee from the wrath to come"? The more they compassionate the misery of those who are far from God—the more vividly they realize the awfulness of the destruction impending over them—the more earnestly they long for their deliverance, so much the less will they hesitate to call sin and the punishment of sin by their true names; and so much the more plainly will they declare to their hearers that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living

God." Thus it was with the apostles: "Knowing the terrors of the Lord," they "persuaded men." Had it not been so, how could they have appeared to their hearers in words like these: "I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." "I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, testifying repentance toward God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. The care with which they adapted their instructions to the case and circumstances of those who heard them: "Teaching every man in all wisdom." After men are warned and awakened, they rejoice to be taught. And it is when men are awakened and convinced of sin that they eagerly attend to the truths of the Gospel. It is when they anxiously enquire, "What must I do to be saved?" that they gratefully hear the Gospel message, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

In the teaching of the apostles there was a strict avoidance of everything like darkening counsel by words without knowledge. Awakened sinners especially require to be carefully dealt with and plainly. They must not be left to suppose that if they avoid certain sins to which they have been addicted, and become more circumspect in their deportment, all will be well with them. They must not be left to suppose that, by attending upon ordinances, going to the house of God and sitting down at the sacramental table, they will find rest to their souls. Such ordinances will be observed and prized by those who have come to Christ. In them they will have communion with God. They will be to them, through grace, as wells of salvation, when they shall draw water with joy. But such ordinances may also be observed with all external reverence—and we cannot doubt that they are thus observed—by many who really never come to Christ. Awakened sinners must be plainly told of this.

To those that labour and are heavy laden Christ says: "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." When the Jews enquired of Him: "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said unto them: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." And you need "not say in your heart, who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). For the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou wilt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

But the same carefulness and discrimination ("teaching every man in all wisdom") are requisite also in instructing those who have really received the Lord Jesus, and have cordially embraced the offers of mercy through Him. They need to be "built up on their most holy faith." The weak need to be strengthened, the erring to be admonished, the mourners in Zion to be comforted. "Ye know," says the Apostle Paul, "how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you into His kingdom and glory."

III. THE OBJECT—THE DESIGN AND DESIRE

of the apostles in thus preaching Christ: "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

This "presenting of every man perfect in Christ Jesus" carries out thoughts forward to the great day of Christ's appearing, "when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe." So says the apostle. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The work of sanctification carried on by the Holy Spirit cleanses, elevates, transforms the whole man. It will be seen in its completeness when in body, soul and spirit we stand holy and unblamable and unprovable in the sight of God. This blessed consummation we are taught to expect, not during the life that now is, but only at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It seems as if the apostles had been almost always thinking of the day of Christ in connection with their labours. Reference to this day is introduced in connection with almost every topic. It is ministers of the Gospel who are exhorted to be faithful to the people of their charge? They are reminded of that day. "I charge you," says the apostle, "before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." Is it hearers of the Gospel who are exhorted affectionately to cherish, and dutifully to regard, those who minister to them? They, in like manner, are reminded of that day: "Remember them who have . . . spoken unto you the word of God. . . . They watch for your soul as they must give account." Does the apostle express his joy in those whom he had been instrumental in bringing under the power of the truth? He connects that joy with Christ's appearing. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? And again he exhorts them to be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they were to shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life that I," says he, "may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain."

But why, it may be asked, should he have postponed his rejoicing to the "day of Christ," and connected it therewith? To this it may be replied that all his rejoicing was not postponed to that day. Even while he continued on earth, he did greatly rejoice in the results of his ministry. Thus, writing to the Colossians, he says "Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." But, while he rejoiced here, he rejoiced with trembling. While he contemplated with satisfaction the progress of Christ's cause generally, and bright particular examples of Christian faith and patience, he could not but remember many things calculated to grieve and to discourage him. Demas, who had once been his fellow-labourer in the Gospel, had forsaken the cause of Christ, having loved this present world. Many who once seemed to "run well" had by various adverse influences been hindered. Many, having put their hands to the plough, had turned back, and become manifestly unfit for the kingdom of God. He therefore looked away beyond the present scene of things, in which he was often perplexed, although not in despair—often cast down, although not destroyed. He looked forward to the day of Christ, the glorious, the blessed day, when, in the presence of the Lord, with those who had been given him as seals of his ministry, his joy, unalloyed with grief, would indeed be "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

"That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." This is the great object of all true ministers of Christ. They know that, whatever theoretical knowledge of divine things may be imputed, whatever external reformation may be effected through their instrumentality, no saving results have been accomplished—none such as cause joy in heaven among the angels of God—unless those among whom they labour are, in the great day, presented perfect in Christ Jesus. They know that, without this, they may take up the lamentation, so far, at any rate, as regards the lost: "We have laboured in vain, we have spent our strength for nought and in vain." The place of worship in which a minister preaches may be crowded—what he says may be admitted to be true and important—credit may be given to him for having preached with all earnestness and all faithfulness—deep impressions may at times be produced on the minds of many;

but oh, fathers and brethren, what of all this? What—if souls are not saved, if men are not constrained to turn out of the broad road that leadeth to destruction, and to enter upon the way that leads to eternal life and glory?

Christ alone is able efficiently, and in the highest sense of the words, to present His people perfect before the throne—perfectly justified by His blood, perfectly sanctified by His spirit; and thus He is said to "present them to Himself." He "loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." But we are employed by Him in the furtherance of the great work. "We are ambassadors for Christ." And, speaking for Him to those whom we address, our appeal must ever be: "As workers together with Him, we beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." We must ever say, "The salvation of the soul is precious, precious beyond all price. Thy souls may be saved, you are living under this dispensation of grace. For this end the Gospel is preached to you. For this end the Spirit pleads with you, and conscience utters its remonstrances. "Quench not the Spirit." "To day, if ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts."

"Now, unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding great joy. To the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever." Amen.

After the Assembly had been constituted Dr. Wardrope briefly addressed the court, and intimated that time had now come for the appointment of his successor. Principal Caven and Rev. Thomas Sedgwick were nominated. Principal Caven was elected by a majority of twenty-three. The newly elected Moderator then briefly addressed the House, making reference to the loss sustained by the death of Dr. Cook, Dr. Donald Fraser, Principal Cairns and C. H. Spurgeon. A vote of thanks was cordially tendered to Dr. Wardrope for his excellent discourse and for the very efficient manner in which he discharged the duties of his office.

A letter from Dr. W. Fraser, the venerable recording Clerk of the Assembly since the union of 1861, and of the United Presbyterian Church for many years previously, in which he tendered his demission owing to illness and advancing years, was read. The matter was remitted to a special committee to be considered by them and reported to the Assembly.

THURSDAY, JUNE 9.

The first hour was occupied with devotional exercises, several members taking part.

An application from the Presbytery of Pictou for giving Rev. George Patterson, D.D., a seat in that Presbytery was read. The application was cordially granted.

A delegation was appointed to convey to the Congregational Union the fraternal regards of the Assembly. It consisted of Drs. Cochrane, MacVicar and Rev. Robert Murray.

Applications for the reception of ministers and on behalf of a number of students respecting their standing in the theological classes were remitted to the respective committees appointed for their consideration.

An overture from the Synod of Toronto and Kingston praying that the Assembly be relieved of a considerable portion of the business that may be transacted by the Synods was read. Many appeal cases could be disposed of by the secondary courts. Principal Grant spoke in support of the overture. Drs. Proudfoot, Jackson, Laid law, Rev. A. McLean Sinclair, Rev. T. Sedgwick, Dr. Gregg, Dr. McLaren, Dr. A. B. Mackay, Dr. Reid, Dr. MacVicar, Dr. King, Revs. D. J. Macdonnell, Finlay McQuaig, J. Carmichael, Norwood; L. G. Macneil and Mr. Geo. Hay all took part in the discussion of the question raised. On motion of Dr. Gregg it was resolved to send down the proposal for consideration of Presbyteries and be reported on next year.

Principal Grant then proposed that a committee be appointed to consider whether any or what matters strictly belong to the Assembly, or can with advantage be transferred to the Synods to be dealt with by them. The motion was discussed by Dr. McCrae, Walter Paul, Dr. Laing, Dr. MacVicar, Dr. Forrest, Dr. A. B. Mackay, Dr. S. Lyle, Dr. King, W. Adamson, Robert Rae, Rev. J. Fleck, Dr. McLaren, Dr. Proudfoot, Dr. Warden, Rev. George Sutherland and Principal Grant replied. A vote was taken with the following result: for the motion, 126; against, 29.

An overture from the Presbytery of Stratford to the effect that Conveners of Assembly committees forward blank forms for the answers from which the annual reports are compiled, before the 1st of December. Rev. A. F. Tully, who was appointed to support the overture was called upon to speak, when he showed how necessary it was to have the blank forms forwarded before the close of the congregational year. Rev. A. C. Henderson also spoke in support of the overture. D. G. McQueen spoke in support of a similar overture from the Presbytery of Calgary. Dr. Bryce moved that the blank forms be issued not later than December 15.

When the Assembly was constituted, after the transaction of some routine business, the first matter of general interest was the report of the committee appointed to deal with the matter of Rev. Dr. Fraser's resignation, which was presented by Rev. T. Sedgwick, and is as follows:—

That, taking into consideration the long and valuable services of Dr. William Fraser as Recording Clerk of the General Assembly as well as his position as a venerable minister of our Church, who has for more than fifty years discharged the duties of a pastor, and for about forty years has occupied the position of Clerk in the various branches of the Church, the General Assembly should, in accepting his resignation, as they now do with the deepest regret, place on record an adequate estimate of his services, and should, in recognition of them, ask Dr. Fraser to accept during his life the salary which he now receives as Clerk.

On motion of Principal MacVicar, Rev. Dr. Robert Campbell was unanimously appointed to the office of Recording Clerk of the Assembly, vacant by the resignation of Rev. Dr. Fraser. Dr. Campbell tendered his thanks for the action of the Assembly by expressing its confidence in him, and promising to discharge the duties of the responsible office to which he has been appointed.

Rev. John MacMillan presented the report of the Home Mission Committee, Eastern Section. The census returns show a decrease in the last decade, a total of 6,548. The total of Presbyterian membership at present in the Maritime Provinces is 182,663. This decrease was unexpected, and great as the exodus has been, it does not altogether explain the apparent decrease. The census of 1891 was taken differently from that of 1881. Many were then counted who should not have been counted. A comparison of the state of the Church ten years ago with its condition now will show that there has been far larger increase than the census of 1891 will show. In congregations, ministers, officers, Sabbath schools and in contributions there has been a marked increase. For example, the total contributions in 1881 were \$232,000; last year the amount was \$350,000. Ten years ago the contribution per family averaged \$12; now they average \$17. At the beginning of the last decade the average individual contribution was \$8.50; now it is \$10. Mr. MacMillan gave an interesting account of missionary work in Labrador carried on by the Church in the Maritime Provinces. Missions to lumbermen were also maintained. In an eloquent address he gave an encouraging account of Home Mission work throughout the field under the care of the Maritime Provinces