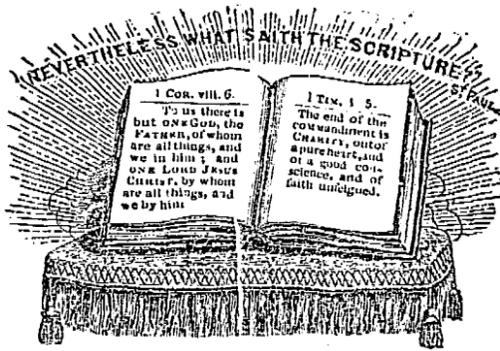


# THE BIBLE



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## PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES.

I have always considered the fundamental doctrines of Christianity to be obvious truths, which no one, who reads the Bible, can mistake. It is not denied, that there are many difficulties not easily solved, and many truths, which must be sought after as hidden treasure, before they can be found; yet I do not believe that any of these can be reckoned among the essentials of a christian faith.

Doctrines of inference may be true, they may be useful and important, but not such as can affect the conditions of salvation. It is not to be admitted, that Jesus came into the world with a special mission from heaven, relating to the condition and duty of men, and neglected to make known in the clearest possible manner the terms of that salvation, which it was his great and only purpose to bestow. One of the best methods, it appears to me, of ascertaining what the Apostles themselves deemed the prominent articles of christian doctrine, is to examine the manner of their preaching, and observe upon what topics they chiefly dwelt in teaching the religion of Jesus. No one can doubt, that they were explicit and full in declaring all the counsel of God, and in preaching every thing requisite for a true christian convert.

In the Acts of the Apostles, is given a historical narrative of the travelling and preaching of the Apostles, in converting heathens and Jews to a belief in the gospel. Several of their discourses are preserved at considerable length; and from these I will select a few passages particularly illustrative of this subject.

In Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost he said to the people, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts, ii. 38. And again, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." iii. 19. "And daily in the temple, and in every house, he ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." v. 42. At the beginning of his discourse to the family of Cornelius, it is said by Peter, "Of a truth I perceive, that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." x. 34. 35.

To the people of Antioch Paul declared, "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." xiii. 38. At Athens this same apostle "preached Jesus and the resurrection." xvii. 18; and to the jailer at Philippi, he said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." xvi. 31. The eloquent Apollos "convinced the Jews publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." xviii. 28. To the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul declared, "I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." xx. 20, 21. To Felix he preached faith in Christ, and "reasoned on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." xxiv. 25. He also "showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." xxvi. 20. And lastly, during his bondage at Rome, he was "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ." xxviii. 31.

In these short extracts we have the entire substance, so far as doctrines are concerned, of all, which the apostles are recorded to have preached in promulgating the christian religion. By examining these passages, we shall find three particulars insisted on; namely, the Messiahship of Jesus; the doctrine of repentance; and the resurrection of the dead. If we may judge from all we know of their preaching, these were the topics upon which they mainly dwelt.

First, they preached that *Jesus was the Christ*, or the person foretold by the Patriarchs and the Prophets, as coming to release the Jews from the bondage of their ceremonial law, to make known the will of God, and es-

tablish a religion, whose blessings should extend to the whole human race. The Evangelist John tells us, that his gospel was written for this express purpose, that they, who should read it, "might believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God." John, xx. 31. Mr. Locke has written to prove from the Scriptures, that this is the only essential article of christian faith. A sincere belief of this truth implies a belief of every thing else relating to Jesus, which can promote the objects of his mission. Whoever preaches Jesus to be the Christ, must demand a belief in the divinity of his character and commission, and in the truth of all his instructions. Such a belief necessarily implies an acknowledgement of his absolute authority, and of the necessity of a perfect obedience to the laws of his religion.

Secondly, the apostles preached *repentance*. The religion of Jesus has one grand object, to which all others tend as rays to a centre, and that is, the holiness, or moral perfection of men. The whole system of his doctrines and precepts is a combination of means to attain this end. No man can be holy, till the ill effects of his past sins are removed, and he ceases from those of which he is now guilty. The former depends on the mercy of God, the latter on the exertions of men. God has promised to pardon the sins of which we repent by sincere contrition and sorrow. If we continue the work of repentance, and turn from our sins, and forsake them, in compliance with the principles and commands of our religion, no crime will be laid to our charge, and we shall escape the evil of sin by resisting the cause. There can be no true repentance, in fact, without a thorough change of character from bad to good, and an implicit obedience to every divine command. Hence it is, that repentance, in a practical view, is vastly the most important doctrine of religion.

Thirdly, the apostles preached the *resurrection of the dead*. This truth was revealed by Jesus Christ, and confirmed by his own death and resurrection. With this is connected the doctrine of a future state of retribution, where every one will be judged according to his character in this life. The resurrection of Jesus was a convincing evidence and sure pledge to his followers, that they also should be raised and live again according to his declaration. No truth can more deeply interest every mortal, than the certainty, that in the present state of being we are preparing for an immortal existence, where rewards and punishments, enjoyments and sufferings, will be in proportion to our good or evil deserts in this life. This doctrine is most solemn and imposing, both as it vindicates the justice of God, discloses the destiny of man, presents the most powerful motives to a holy practice, and brings to light the primary object of the christian religion.

In reviewing this subject, it cannot escape our notice, how different was the preaching of the apostles from that adopted by many preachers of later times. It cannot but be observed, that numerous doctrines, of which no mention is made in the apostolical discourses, have since been zealously preached as vitally important. Nay, entire systems of divinity have been erected on foundations, and constructed of materials, which seem not to have made any part of the knowledge or conceptions of the primitive christians. They preached, that Jesus was the Christ, or a divine person empowered to make a communication from heaven to earth respecting the will of God, the duty and prospects of men; they preached the necessity of repentance as a means of attaining that freedom from sin and positive holiness, which should secure the divine pardon, and qualify the soul for the felicities of the blessed; they preached the doctrine of a resurrection and a future state, as a proof of the truth of the Gospel, a sanction of its laws, and a motive to obedience.

These doctrines the apostles preached as prominent doctrines of the christian religion; but in no single passage of their discourses, or in the narrative of their travels and preaching, is anything said of a Trinity, nor of three persons in the Godhead, nor of an equality between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nowhere is it said, that Christ had two natures, one divine and the other human. Not a hint do you find concerning

that great doctrine of Calvinism, by which we are taught, that a certain number of the human race has been arbitrarily elected to be the heirs of glory, and that the remainder are doomed to perdition without cause or remedy. Not a word is said about the soul being totally depraved, and worthy of infinite misery from the moment it comes into the world, and before it has either capacity or opportunity of committing a single voluntary act. So far from it, that we meet with perpetual exhortations to repent, and be converted, and turn to God, which would be only a mockery of our wretchedness, if we have not the freedom and ability to comply with these exhortations. In the apostles' preaching, not a word do they say about the vindictive justice of God, which requires the sufferings and death of an innocent being to assuage his wrath, and make him compassionate to his erring creatures. They inculcate the mercy and love of God as necessary attributes, which make him always ready to show compassion to the penitent, and forgiveness to all who heartily repent of their sins, and seek his favour by fervent prayer for his guidance, humble submission to his will, and a constant obedience to the command and precepts of the Gospel.

There is not, I repeat it, in all the preaching of the apostles, a single phrase nor word, which points to a trinity of persons in the Supreme Being, or to the doctrine of two natures in Christ, or to the notion of an unconditional election of some and reprobation of others, or to a total depravity and natural inability of moral action in human nature, or to the cruel demand of God, that his justice should not be satisfied, nor his wrath appeased, without the sufferings and sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty. Yet these have been preached, as the fundamental doctrines of christianity, a belief in which is necessary to salvation. If they are true, they certainly are not obvious truths, like the attributes of God; and why should not the apostles have preached them? Is it to be credited, that they would have entirely passed over so many doctrines, the very belief of which was necessary to salvation, and thus ensnare the souls of their hearers by omitting essential points, without which their preaching as far as it went availed nothing? This is not to be credited, unless you would impeach not only the qualifications, but the honesty of the apostles.

What inference shall we draw, then, but that they had no knowledge of these doctrines? And if what they preached was christianity at that period, why should not the same be christianity now? Who is willing to desert these primitive teachers, and their pure faith, for other masters and other systems? For my part, I am contented with the sermons of Peter and Paul, because I believe they spoke the truths taught by the Saviour, and as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and because the sentiments they convey are in perfect harmony with every other part of the sacred writings.

## THE WORKING CLASSES.

(From an Address by J. Berker.)

It was a subject of complaint among the orthodox ministers generally, at a late convention in London, that they had lost their hold of the working classes. And such is the fact. The orthodox ministers of England have lost their hold of the working classes. The working classes want a religion which they can understand, and they cannot understand the doctrines of orthodoxy. The working classes want a religion of charity, of freedom, of peace, of brotherly equality; and the orthodox ministers preach a religion of bitterness and strife, of bigotry and intolerance, of pride and uncharitableness, of caste and tyranny. The working classes want a religion that they can understand, a religion that is rational, a religion that is consistent with itself, a religion that is in harmony with truth and human nature, a religion that is worthy of God and friendly to the best interests of men; and the orthodox ministers preach a religion of mystery, a religion of absurdity, a religion of contradictions, a religion that defies common sense and the plainest matter of fact, a religion which wars with man's noblest faculties, a religion which throws the darkest and

most blasphemous reflections on God's character, a religion which sanctions the most barbarous and cruel institutions of society. It is true: the orthodox ministers have lost their hold on the working classes, and it is well they have. The working classes are the better prepared to listen to more Christ-like teachers. They are less likely to be prejudiced against a reformer by priestly calumnies. The orthodox ministers of England are the great enemies of truth, and the chief calumniators and persecutors of those who preach it. In proportion to their hold of the working classes, the prospects of the religious reformer are dark and discouraging; and in proportion as they lose their hold of the working classes, do the prospects of the reformer become bright and cheering. The working classes are then prepared for you, if you are prepared for them. They are prepared for the purest and highest views of christianity you have to offer them. They are more prepared for truth, than the men who are lost in business or panting after rank and honours. They have natural powers of mind as strong as other people, and their hardships have not ruined them. Notwithstanding their long hours and hard work, the men in the factories still read, and think, and talk. There is scarcely a subject either in politics, in science, or religion, which they do not discuss at dinner hours. Let one of them have a new tract or a new book, and it is discussed from beginning to end by almost every man in the factory. And even the younger, who are not permitted to talk, stand by and listen. It is so in our neighbourhood, and it might be so in every neighbourhood. There is no want of capacity among the working classes; it is books, and tracts, and plain and artless lectures, that they want. It is not a capacity that is wanting, but supplies of plain and useful information. If preparation be still wanted, it is such a preparation as can only be given by the supply of suitable tracts and books, and by plain and popular addresses.

As a proof that the working classes are prepared for the reception of sound principles, I may state the following facts. There are in England and Wales not less than from two to three hundred churches, which have been formed within the last few years, on the broad principle of requiring nothing as a condition of church fellowship, but a belief in Jesus as the *Christ*, and a determination to obey God's will. They ask each other no questions about opinions, they bind each other to no particular forms, they leave each other perfectly free. In connexion with these churches, there can hardly be less than six or eight hundred persons who preach. Yet none of these preachers subscribe any human creed or confession. Not one of them has been bound either to Trinitarianism or to Anti-Trinitarianism, Pelagianism or Calvinism; yet the whole of them, or nearly the whole of them, have become Anti-Trinitarian. Among these people, a very considerable portion of the People's Edition of Channing's Works, published in Belfast, were circulated; and since then, there have been, I suppose, from fifteen hundred to two thousand copies of my own edition of Channing's works circulated among them. Amongst those same persons, and amongst those with whom they have intercourse, no less than from ten to fifteen thousand tracts have long been circulated every month. They have also purchased considerable numbers of the works of Ram-mohun Roy and other Anti-Trinitarian writers, besides many copies of English translations of Griesbach's Greek Testament. Yet almost the whole of these persons are of the working classes. I feel persuaded that upwards of twenty thousand persons of the working classes have of late embraced purer, more rational, and more practical views of christianity. And I know that in the orthodox sects themselves there are great numbers that are reading and thinking matters over, and not a few that have become thoroughly heterodox. In fact, in some parts of England the younger members of the orthodox sects are infected in great numbers, and such is the influence that has been exerted on the minds of people generally, by lectures, tracts, and other means, that the orthodox sects cannot make any way at all. In short, only let those who profess and prize a purer theology, act as becomes their profession,—only let them