

Puritan fathers? The Wesleyan fathers? Luther and his co-reformers could not follow the footsteps of their fathers, but left them with all their piety for the better inheritance of more light, liberty, and piety. Wesley could not take the track of his fathers, but stirred up the zeal of venerable churchmen against him by calling for reformation. He did not argue like some of his theological sons, that he could not move a step in discovering and receiving a greater degree of the truth of heaven lest he should thereby judge his Episcopal fathers to have been impious and to have gone with the destroyed. Degenerate logic! Spurious piety! The history of the reformation speaks better things. The world admires Luther, not for his errors, but because he was a reformer according to all that he knew. On the like principle we admire Wesley, not for his ecclesiastical imperfections, but for following the path of reform as fast and as far as he found it.

Strange ideas some men have in relation to their own immediate duty and reformation of life. Measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves (and looking at themselves in the looking-glass of their fathers,) Paul tells them that they deceive themselves. The capital scripture principle is forgotten, that where much is given much shall be required. By the help of the divine Book, our fathers freed themselves of some of their errors; and we cannot be as worthy even as they if we do not go on to perfection by the same rule. Every gem of truth they received—every jewel of spirituality they enjoyed—was by ‘What saith the scriptures?’ and not by ‘What saith the fathers?’

Reading friend, if your eyes are turned to the pious men who have gone before you, let me lead you where you may see the true nature of the principle by which you work. By the telegraph of sacred history, Noah is brought before us. The voice of God says to him in tones of divine distinctness, ‘Build an ark.’ But what is the answer of the Patriarch, if your principle be followed? Briefly this—‘My father built no ark, I need not.’ Abraham, in like manner, stands before us. The language of heaven to him is, ‘Go, visit a country which I will show you.’ ‘By no means’ replies the faithful man, ‘my father never did such a thing.’ Ere we get done hearing these, the meek Moses appears in sight as he watches with all Israel on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea. God looks down and says, ‘Stretch forth your rod and divide the waters.’ Israel’s leader responds after the tenor of the popular principle. ‘Lord, I cannot; it would be contrary to all that was done by my fathers.’

But did father Noah, father Abraham, father Moses thus reply and thus act? Happily for the world and for themselves they did not.

Now let us take a lesson from master Paul. . . . ‘I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth . . . being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers . . . but I conferred not with flesh and blood . . . on hearing Jesus saying that he appeared to me to make me a minister and a witness to the Gentiles, to open their eyes, to turn them from satan to God, in order to the forgiveness of sins, by faith in Jesus’ See