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SERMON CXCVI.

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THE TRUTH, IN RELATION TO CHRIST AND HIS SALVATION, THE GREAT BOND OF HOLY FELLOWSHIP.

I. JOHN, i. 3.—*That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

FELLOWSHIP in the moral system depends on a congeniality of views, feelings, and pursuits. Were these alike throughout a universe of minds, it would effectually secure their harmony, and render discord impossible. But the fellowship of the moral system has been broken in upon, and very discordant views are now entertained, even concerning matters of such high consequence, as the Creator's right to rule over his intelligent creatures, and their obligation to obey his commands. Discordant views and feelings on these points, interrupted the fellowship of angels ; for a part of their number became disaffected with the government of God, while the other part remained steadfast in their attachment to it. This made a wide breach between them, which never will be healed. The first parents of our race took the side of the disaffected angels, and withdrew their allegiance from the Most High ; in consequence of which we all find our native character is that of rebels against the divine government.

This interruption to the harmony of the moral system, occasioned by the apostacy of angels and men, was a dark and gloomy event. But a wise and benevolent God will bring light out of this darkness, and order out of this confusion. Through the mediation of his Son, he is recovering from their apostacy a precious number of our fallen race ; whom he receives back into favor in such a way, that the bonds of fellowship between Him and them, and also between themselves, will be more closely drawn than they could have been, had no separation ever taken place. Since the apostacy, in connection with redemption, has made way for a clearer exhibition of His perfections, and of the dependence and obligation of His creatures, it has given a more interesting character to those things which lay the best foundation for preserving a permanent and holy fellowship in the moral system. Though it has lessened the number in fellowship, the number of

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SERMON CXCVII.

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MOTIVES AND MEANS OF PEACE TO THE CHURCHES.

PSALM, CXII. 7.—*Peace be within thy walls.*

THE Psalmist, contemplating the beauty of Zion, and the delightful harmony and exquisite grandeur of the worship at Jerusalem, and feeling his bosom glow with love for his "brethren and companions," when they said, "let us go into the house of the Lord," breathes forth to Heaven the soft aspiration, "Peace be within thy walls." This prayer of the sweet singer of Israel, contains a sentiment which ought to be cherished in every Christian's heart, and often uttered in his petitions before the Throne. It is of the same spirit with the final blessing and legacy of the dear Redeemer: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you:" and will therefore be an appropriate theme for a few remarks on *the importance of peace in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.*

1. The triune Jehovah, the covenant God of the Church, is the *God of peace.* How frequently in the benedictions of the Apostle Paul, is he thus characterized: "The God of peace be with you," Rom. xv. 33.—"The very God of peace sanctify you wholly," 1. Thess. v. 23.—"The God of peace make you perfect in every good work," Heb. xiii. 20.—"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace," 1. Cor. xiv. 33.—Consequently, in entering into covenant with him, he will expect of us conformity with his own character, and esteem us as his people only so far as we imbibe his spirit. And we cannot consider the church as fulfilling her obligations to her Sovereign, unless she cultivate those dispositions which will fit her for communion with him, and continually "follow after the things which make for peace."

2. Jesus Christ, the head of the church, and king in Zion, is the *Prince of peace—the Lord of peace.* At his birth as the Son of Man, a choir of the heavenly hosts sang, "Peace on earth." To effect a reconciliation between an offended God and rebellious men, was the purpose for which he came into our world, and submitted to poverty, reproach, and death; and to secure this object, he now lives as Intercessor in heaven. He therefore anticipates, that peace will reign in his spiritual kingdom, that its members will all speak the same thing, being perfectly joined together in the same mind, that there may be no schism in the body, but the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What! shall there be strife and divisions among the subjects of that kingdom, which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?" Shall the soldiers of the Prince of peace, march forth under any other banner than that of love? Shall they not emulate the spirit and manner of their great leader? His paths on earth were paths of peace; his sermons, sermons of peace; his prayers, his benedictions, his commissions, all were peace. And now that "he reigns exalted high," peace is inscribed on the radiant bow of glory that encircles his head.

3. *The Spirit*, who inhabits the church as his temple, is a *spirit of peace*, and *refuses to dwell in the midst of noise, strife, and confusion*. "The fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, *peace*, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance." These effects of the Spirit's operation are all connected with a subdued and softened heart; and every thing which is of an opposite nature and tendency, belongs to the flesh, grieves the Holy Spirit, and induces him to take his departure. "Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?" Wherever then we find envying, strife, and divisions, there is carnality, confusion, and every evil work; there the Spirit will not remain, and we may not look for his peaceful and purifying presence. But how shall the church ever arise and shine, fair as the moon, and clear as the sun—how shall she ever put forth her strength, and exert her power to bring the world to the love of God and holiness, if that Spirit desert her, whose it is to cherish her graces, give her might in prayer, and make her instrumental in the conversion of the world?

4. *The constitution of the kingdom of Christ*, is one whose essential principles are *peace*. "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."—The principles on which I establish my government in the world, are not the ordinary principles of human government, but such as inspire my subjects with peaceful feelings, and induce them to sheath the sword, and make conquests only by the persuasive influences of truth and love. The gospel is the gospel of peace. "Have peace one with another." "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." "The kingdom of God is *peace*." Indeed we can scarcely read a section in this constitution, without perceiving clearly that it emanated from the God of peace, and was intended and adapted to bless the world with peace, and to lead men to love and pursue it.

Hence we read that "unto them that are *contentious*, and obey not the truth," God will render "indignation and wrath:" but "blessed are the *peace-makers*, for they shall be called the children of God." "Live in peace, and the God of peace shall be with you." When therefore the Christian church enters into sharp and virulent controversy, when her members indulge in debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, back-bitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults, they belie Christianity, contravene its laws, rebel against its righteous principles, and offend its author, their King. If then we would preserve inviolate the very charter under which we act, and which we acknowledge to be excellent by our voluntary adoption of it, we must avoid foolish and unlearned questions, which gender strife, and follow after peace with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

5. *The church can only then shew forth her beauty, and glorify her King*, when her members are at peace with one another. The beauty of the church consists not in any external habiliments, or any system of observances, but in a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God, is of great price; in the manifestation of kindness, tenderness, meekness, forbearance, peace. Only when clothed with humility, and crowned with love, and speaking in the mild accents of mercy, can she so let her light shine, that others, seeing her good works, shall glorify her Father who is in heaven; and only then can she go to the footstool of mercy, and implore the Spirit to lift up a standard against

the onsets of the enemy. In order to glorify her Jesus, she must walk in his steps, imitate his example, grow up into his likeness ; and

“ Thus will she best proclaim abroad,
The honors of her Savior God.”

Thus will she convince the world of the purity of her motives, and the excellence of her religion, and lead multitudes to shout, “ Hosanna to the Son of David.”

But who can admire the church, when they see it the arena of strife and sedition ? Who can believe it to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone ? Who will imagine it to be the image of a pure and lovely religion ? Or who will be won over to the love and belief of the truth ? And how can Christianity ever hope to take hold of the world, and secure its favor, while her professed friends are not at peace among themselves, but displaying towards each other the rancor and malice of bitterest foes ? How can we dream of making conquest of the whole earth, and recommending the religion of Jesus to Pagan nations, until we shake ourselves from the dust, and put on the beautiful garments of peace ?—until, in one united host, accoutred in the armor of God, and wielding the spiritual weapons of the heavenly warfare, we go forth to conflict only with the powers of darkness, under the great Captain of salvation ?

II. But if peace be so important, and so manifestly incumbent on the children of the Most High, it will be interesting to inquire, *what means should be used for its cultivation ?*

1. *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.* The lusts of the flesh include, among others, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife ; and are directly opposed to the exercises of the spiritual nature—love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness. If then we place ourselves under the guidance of the “ Peaceful Dove,” and act in conformity with his suggestions, we shall be preserved from biting and devouring one another, and shall pursue the things which make for peace. And when a brother errs, we shall labor to restore such an one, in the spirit of meekness. Whenever the church is rent with unholy contentions, and her members indulge inimical and untender feelings, she is not walking after the Spirit, but after the flesh, and led captive by the devil, throwing herself off from the heavenly influences of that Spirit, who flies from the scenes of turmoil and divisions, to seek for some more peaceful and quiet resting place. Let the church only listen to the wooings of the Spirit, let her members cherish his movements on their souls, and often sit with docility under his teachings, and they will necessarily cultivate the Christian graces of love and peace.

2. In contending for THE FAITH, *avoid the usual concomitants of controversy.* There is no allusion now to the controversy often existing between different departments of Christ’s kingdom, but to that contest which the whole church is expected to maintain with the enemies of truth. *The faith* of which Jude speaks, as the connection will shew, is manifestly that which is included in repentance unto life and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ; for it is opposed to the doctrine of those who were “ ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, even our Lord Jesus Christ ; sensual, having not the Spirit, walking after their own lusts ;” and is character-

ized as the "*common salvation*." While therefore the church, as a body, is required earnestly to uphold the essential truth of the gospel, "*the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.*" The whole contest for the faith once delivered to the saints, must be conducted without strife or vain-glory, and with the meekness and gentleness of Christ; so that the sanctifying power of the gospel may be manifest even in controversy, and win opposers from the snare of the devil. The enemy will come in like a flood, the powers of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places will attack the citadel of truth, and the church must maintain her ground, standing fast in the Lord: but she will always do it most successfully by keeping the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, and putting on bowels of mercies, kindness, tenderness, humbleness of mind. "Union is strength." And a union on such principles would be mighty indeed to the pulling down of strong holds.

3. In reference to differences of opinion among those who name the name of Jesus, and acknowledge his reign in their hearts, *if they be of minor consequence, and not necessary to salvation, they must not be dwelt upon, as if of more importance than the vital and practical points of the Christian faith.* On this subject there is doubtless much error in the practice of the church; much that prevents the cultivation of peace, grieves the Spirit of all grace, and throws a cloud over the horizon of the Christian world. The Psalmist considered the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom to be dependent on its peaceful condition, and every righteous soul will doubtless respond to this call to "pray for the *peace of Jerusalem*:" "For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, *peace be within thee.*" But how shall we sincerely offer up petitions for her welfare, or her unity, while those points on which we disagree, are magnified into mountains that separate us from each other; and the infinitely more important matters of agreement, are almost buried in oblivion, and excluded from exercising their appropriate influence to bind together the members of the body in sweetest harmony of love? Oh! when shall the children of God leave off doting about strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, railings, evil surmisings, and perverse disputings, and desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby? When shall bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from the midst of them? When shall foolish and unlearned questions, which only tend to dissever, be dropped, and the *weightier* matters of the law be presented to the view of the church? Not until then will peace be extended unto her as a river, and her borders be enlarged.

We are too prone here to act on the principles of the world, too unwilling to compromise, and meet on the broad ground of *the common faith*. Why should not the precious, soul-reviving truths of the gospel on which we harmonize, have more influence in uniting us in love, and peace, and Christian communion, than the confessedly minor ones on which we differ, in driving us asunder? "Come," let us say, like Abraham to Lot, "let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me, for we be *brethren.*" Let us yield all that we can, and yet be on the platform of essential, saving truth: and thus, while we mutually overlook small mistakes and misapprehensions, we can unite in praying for the peace, and laboring for the prosperity of Zion.

4. Peace will be promoted by not *dwelling too exclusively on a*

single aspect of divine things, nor magnifying one particular doctrine above another of equal importance in the word of God.

From the various relations in which men are placed, and the different circumstances of their birth and education, they naturally adopt variant views, and cherish discordant sentiments. Some have always read the Bible with a certain system prominent in the mind, and others, with an opposing one. Hence their interpretations of many of the more obscure, and some even of the plainer instructions of God's word, will be dissimilar, and modified by preconceived opinions. And from the fact of never diverting their attention from this one view of the revelations of the gospel, in which they may have been built up by the only authors to whom they have had access, they are prepared to maintain it against every other system, and that, too, with warmth and zeal. Thus members of the church of Jesus Christ often engage in vain disputes of no avail, and oppose one another with all the unholy passions which nestle in the hearts of the unregenerate.

All minds will not apprehend the same system precisely alike, especially if it be extended over much ground; nor is it of high importance that they do, if there be mutual patience and forbearance, and no disposition each to exalt his own adopted creed to such a pitch of extravagant fondness, as to exclude all others as absolutely false and dangerous, and those who maintain them as unworthy of Christian courtesy and fellowship. We must be willing, for the sake of peace, to sacrifice a little selfish affection for our own philosophy, remembering that others entertain it as warmly for theirs.

5. *In controversy, verbal or written, impute nothing to opponents which they do not allow—neither pervert their meaning, nor attribute consequences to them which they disclaim.*

The peace of Christ's kingdom would be much increased if all controversialists would bear this remark in mind. How many seem intent on finding something erroneous in the writings of those who may not fully accord with them in sentiment. And for this purpose, when they cannot point out glaring error in the general propositions, either search for it in a perverted interpretation of the language, or conjure up horrid consequences which the candid reader can never allow. But how utterly unkind and unchristian, and how foreign from the Spirit of the Master is it, thus to refuse the hand of brotherly love to one who, while he agrees with us certainly in the main, would also rather retract his promulgated opinion, than entertain the consequences attributed to it! Out of these imagined and falsely charged views, arise most of the heart-burnings and discords among brethren, and most of those clouds of dust which whirl about the paths of the church, impede her progress, and spoil her beauty.

6. *Abstain from censoriousness, and pride of intellect.* These faults are intimately connected, and where they exist have a direct tendency to stop the current of the river of peace, which makes glad the city of God. We must ever remember that the understandings of men are not all cast in the same mould, but almost as various as the individuals of human society, and that all have not the same appetencies. Some find one mode of worship adapted to their feelings, and in that experience most profit and pleasure; others choose a different form, and under it sit with most comfort and improvement. Now we may not presume to pique ourselves on our superior wisdom, and the propriety of our choice, and therefore censure those who depart from us

into another chamber of the house, which, however inferior in our estimation to that we have selected, is in accordance with their taste, and best adapted to their wants. We must not be wise in our own conceits, and say, "*we are the people, and wisdom will die with us,*" thus assuming to ourselves a singularly correct judgment, wrapping around us the robe of self-complacency, and walking forth in self-important majesty, expecting the world to follow in our wake. No! brethren, No! In those matters which are plain to the wayfaring man, and cherished by the whole Christian world, we must be steadfast, immovable: but while we cry with one voice for *peace, peace*, we must not imagine that all the light of Heaven has settled upon our minds, and that in order to the attainment of this blessed end, others must borrow of us, and extinguish their own. In things of "doubtful disputation," which from this very circumstance are less important, less necessary, and from which come the "wars and fightings" of the church, we must put away all censoriousness, distrust our own decisions, open our minds to further illumination, and continually wear the veil of modesty. Thus shall we enter into a covenant of peace, and dwell safely in quiet habitations, and the God of peace dwell with us.

In view of results so desirable, we cannot but reflect, how unholy the flame which burns in the Christian's heart, when he cherishes any dispositions opposed to the peace of Jerusalem. Oh! how should the church humble herself before God, and, weeping tears for past offences, pour forth the fervent prayer, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee." Truly, "they shall prosper, that love thee, O Jerusalem!"—When, Oh! when shall it be said of Zion spiritual, "She is beautiful, the joy of the whole earth, her walls salvation, her officers peace, her exactors righteousness!"

"How sweet, how heav'nly is the sight,
When those who love the Lord,
In one another's peace delight,
And so fulfil his word:—

When free from envy, scorn, and pride,
Our wishes all above,
Each can his brother's failings hide,
And show a brother's love!

Let love, in one delightful stream,
Thro' every bosom flow;
And union sweet, and dear esteem,
In every action glow.

Love is the golden chain that binds
The happy souls above;
And he's an heir of heav'n who finds
His bosom glow with love."