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*Book*

THE

**NEW-JERSEY PREACHER:**

OR,

**SERMONS**

ON

**PLAIN & PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.**

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BY SOME OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL,  
RESIDING IN THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

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**VOL. I.**

*Edited by*

*George S. Woodhall*  
*1813 V.*

*Woodhall*  
*Editor*

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Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray *you* in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God....2 Cor. v. 20.

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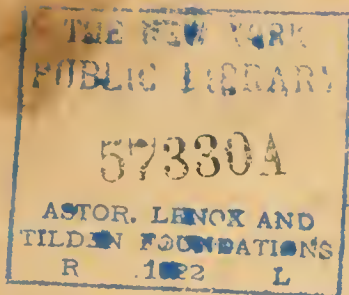
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*New Jersey*

*ZIX*



*District of New-Jersey, ss.*

**B**E IT REMEMBERED, that on the thirty-first day of March, in the thirty-seventh year of the Independence of the United States of America, George S. Woodhull and Isaac V. Brown, of the said district, have deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

“The New-Jersey Preacher, or Sermons on plain and practical subjects. By some of the ministers of the gospel residing in the State of New-Jersey. Vol. I. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.— 2 Cor. v. 20.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to the act, entitled, “An act supplementary to an act, entitled an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical, and other prints.”

ROBERT BOGGS,

*Clerk of the District of New-Jersey.*

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**SERMON IV.**

**THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH IN PRODUCING  
HOLY OBEDIENCE.**

Hebrews xi. 17.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.

**BY THE REV. AMZI ARMSTRONG, A. M.**

Pastor of the Presbyterian Congregation of Mendham.

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## NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

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### SERMON IV.

Hebrews xi. 17.—“ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.”

**W**HEN we read, in the book of Genesis, the history of the transaction here referred to, our hearts feel a deep interest in all the circumstances of that transaction, and are affected by some of the most powerful and tender emotions that our nature knows.

We wonder at the strangeness of the command, and at the implicit obedience of the Patriarch. We admire his resolution and firmness to engage in such a transaction, and the perseverance and constancy which could hold out during a three days' travel, and, after every opportunity for reflection and for the working of parental tenderness and love, could yet endure and be prepared for the finishing of the heart-rending catastrophe. We love the filial meekness, obedience and submission of Isaac ; and perhaps we weep over his honest simplicity ; or venerate the character of a father, who could so command the confidence and respect of his son. We readily think we see a certain kind of piety reigning throughout the whole transaction, and our hearts are melted in grief and tenderness—in love and admiration.

Yet, in all this, there is no regard to that true character of piety which distinguishes the transaction : and, with all our sympathies and feelings, we discover nothing that would seem to have power to prepare us for



such a scene, or perhaps even to excuse altogether the conduct of the Patriarch, and satisfactorily to account to our minds for so strange an occurrence.

Reviewing the subject more at leisure, we may revolve in our minds curious questions of the means by which Abraham was assured that God required the sacrifice at his hand; and we may indulge ingenious speculations about the interfering of the mother, and the means by which the son was brought to yield to his father's purpose. But all these speculations would only lead us farther from that scriptural view of the transaction, in which we are called to regard it.

It is related to us in the scriptures with plainness and precision, in all the circumstances needful for us to know; and in the text the Holy Ghost teaches us to consider it, *a work of faith*, eminently illustrative of that pure principle of obedience, without which "it is impossible to please God."

It was that faith which was imputed to Abraham for righteousness, that prompted him to obey, and that supported him in so trying a duty.

We are therefore most deeply interested to consider and "see how faith wrought with his works."

The two great efficient principles of duty, by which men profess to be influenced, are Faith, and Reason. While some zealously contend for the sufficiency of reason alone, it is yet evident to all, how much the scriptures insist on faith as necessary to our acceptance with God in our services.

Reason may afford very strong convictions of duty, and may influence men to a very considerable extent in a seeming respect for God's authority, and obedience to

his will. But all this comes far short of what is, in the scriptures, called “the obedience of faith.”

Every one who acknowledges the Being of God, must have some convictions of duty towards him. The heathen have often had very deep convictions of this kind; and much more may it be expected in christian countries, where his name and authority are declared by his word, that reason shall teach men to fear him, and in certain things, to profess obedience to him.

We are therefore greatly concerned to examine and know the difference, between that obedience which arises from the convictions of reason alone, and that which flows from that principle of faith which is so often and so solemnly inculcated in the scriptures.

It is evident that reason, under the instructions of God’s word, and supported by the power of conscience, may lead men to most of the common duties of social life. These duties are, for the most part, plainly deducible by reason, from the circumstances of relation and connection in which we find ourselves; and therefore as far as the mind can be brought to consider them without passion or prejudice, the authority and power of conscience will interpose to require that they shall be respected.

But in a more enlarged and correct view of moral obligations, we will find the influence of reason, to produce holy obedience, is essentially deficient, especially in these three particulars:—

In its extent,

In its efficient power,

And in the manner of influencing the heart.

1st. In its extent, regarding both the grounds and the matter of duty.

The influence of reason, in the concerns of duty, can be founded only in those considerations and principles which can be distinctly perceived and comprehended by reason: and therefore can, at best, produce but a heathenish kind of obedience. There are many truths respecting God, and his providence, which our reason is not adequate to discover, nor even to comprehend when revealed. These truths are just and essential grounds of duty, but cannot become such with us, without faith to believe them.

Therefore, in the beginning of this discourse on the nature and influence of faith, it is stated that it is "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." While Philosophy and Reason wander, in the regions of conjecture, after their chaos, their monads, and their atoms, of which they may suppose the world was formed, Faith is satisfied that it was *created* by the word of God. There are also some of the essential doctrines of the gospel, which the limited reason of man never comprehends, and therefore can never adopt as grounds of duty. Such is the great doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God, and his vicarious sufferings and propitiatory sacrifice for sins. And it is evident how exceedingly deficient in the christian duty he must be, who has not this as a settled ground of duty with him. Such also, are the doctrines of God's universal, complete and holy sovereignty—of his eternal decrees, and of eternal rewards and punishments. Our reason is not naturally disposed to receive these doctrines, or capable to comprehend them. Yet every true christian knows, and feels, that if these should not be grounds of duty with him, there



would be a very great and essential deficiency in his duty toward God. And in this he is convinced, that “without faith it is impossible to please him.”

In regard of the *matter* of duty also, the influence of reason is far from being universal.

However decidedly and clearly it may lead to some duties, there are others which, if unassisted by faith, it never discovers. This is the case, not only where the grounds of duty lie beyond the apprehension of reason, but also where they are plain and obvious. Such is the *spiritual* worship we owe to God—christian self-denial, and christian love and kindness toward them that are Christ’s, as are also love toward our enemies, supreme and ardent love to God, and love toward our neighbour as ourselves. The influence of reason alone, seldom, and perhaps never, leads to these and other matters of duty essential and indispensable in true christian morality. So that it is evidently insufficient in point of extent, both as to the grounds, and the matter of duty.

2d. In its efficient power to produce holy obedience, the influence of reason is deficient, as a principle of duty.

This is evident in the multitudes of mankind who, although no strangers to the dictates of reason, yet deliberately and daily disregard them.

It is evident also, in the many instances in which passions and prejudices lead men on in violation of the clearest dictates of reason.

In every instance, where reason is relied on to direct and encourage in duty, it is evident how feeble are its influences, opposed to the feelings of interest, and to the fear and the love of the world.

Faith alone enables a man effectually to resist, and to triumph over these. Therefore, the scripture saith,



“this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

3d. In the manner of influencing the heart, the insufficiency of reason is great, and will cause a radical defection from holy obedience.

Its influence is primarily and chiefly on the understanding and judgment; and the affections of the heart are untouched and unmoved. Every one knows, that the judgment may be clearly and powerfully convinced, and yet the feelings and sentiments of the heart be entirely opposed and unyielding to such convictions. Reason exerts its influence by instruction and argument; but “faith worketh by love.” While, therefore, the former produces only a constrained and unwilling subjection to the laws of duty, the latter has effectual influence to produce a ready and cheerful obedience, in which the best affections of the heart are engaged. Such alone carries in it the marks and distinguishing characteristics of a pure and holy obedience to God.

He that is moved to duty only by the convictions of reason, even with the aid of the power and authority of conscience, engages in it with a very different spirit from what the man does whose best affections lead him; and whose strongest emotions prompt and support him in a cheerful obedience. This is “the obedience of faith;” and is conformable to that requirement in which God saith, “my son, give me thine heart.” “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

Let us now observe the illustration of these positions in the example referred to in the text.

The apostle had taught the doctrine of justification by faith; and that the necessity of faith, in order to justi-

fication, might fully appear, he devotes the whole of this eleventh chapter to the subject ; beginning with the declaration, that “ faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” and then by an induction of particuilar examples, shewing its operations and influence. With others he introduces also this, “ by faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac : and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten Son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called ; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ; from whence also he received him in a figure.”

In considering this example, we may observe, 1st. As to the grounds and the matter of duty—

Had the Patriarch relied chiefly on reason to determine his duty in this case, he would have found much to object, even against the immediate and plain command of God ; and would have argued, as faithless professors often do, that the fitness and propriety of obedience to a command directing him to sacrifice his beloved and only son, did not, on any principle which he could discover, appear to him ; and inasmuch as his Creator had not given him an understanding or penetration to discover any grounds of duty, that would justify him to his own reason and conscience in such a deed, it would be highly absurd in him to think of doing it. However fit and proper it might be in the sight of God, or of any intelligent beings superior to himself ; yet it never could be a duty for him, who could discover no propriety in it. And he would therefore conclude, either that there must be some mistake in supposing it to be the command of God, or else that he did not give it with a purpose of having it executed, or with any design or expectation

that he should obey it. He would also have argued, as deists and unbelievers continually do, that it was against every principle of his nature; and inasmuch as God had given him that nature, he could not suppose that he would seriously call on him to violate all its strongest principles, and act contrary to its most amiable dictates: and he would therefore have concluded, that however plain the command of God might be, yet he must not interpret it according to its plain and evident import, or else he must not suppose it was designed for him strictly to obey. As to the nature of the duty, he would have argued, how can God be honored, or how can any good possibly come of such a deed by my hand. If my Son had been guilty of any great crime, or meditated any serious injury against society, public justice might require of me the necessary means of prevention, or the merited punishment. But, when he has done nothing, and meditates nothing of this kind, it would be unnatural and wicked in me thus to sacrifice a beloved son, and it could be productive of no good to fellow-creatures, and of no honor, but on the contrary of dishonor, to God. His justice, his goodness, and above all his promise forbids it: for in this very son he has promised me a seed in whom all nations shall be blessed. What therefore would be the consequence of obeying this strange command? And how could I justify myself, even to God himself, in view of the promise he has made me, and of the covenant he has established with me?

In consideration of such arguments as these, reason would have rejected, without scruple, the plainest and most direct command, and would probably have made high pretensions to piety and religious feeling in doing so. After this manner, carnal and unbelieving men dai-



ly reason concerning commanded duties, of which they do not readily perceive the fitness, the propriety, and the end to be answered by them. And they think they argue correctly, and are led by the clearest reason to neglect such duties; and having the utmost confidence in their conclusions, they think they may rest in them with a good conscience toward both God and men. Perhaps the greater part of professed believers allow themselves to be guided mostly by the same principles, and to rest in the same conclusions.

But it was not thus that Abraham's faith wrought with his works, when it made them perfect before God.

His faith esteemed the word and authority of God paramount to every authority, and to all law; and instead of looking to nature and to reason, looked to nature's God, the fountain of all true reason, for direction in the way of duty.

All that such faith needs, is only to know the command and word of God, and it can trust all the consequences of obedience to his disposing. Abraham's confidence in the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of God enabled him to submit the event, and trust in God concerning the consequences, while he was satisfied that he obeyed *his* command. This enabled him "against hope, to believe in hope, that he might become the Father of many nations." It was by this faith, that "Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." His faith required nothing more than to know the command of God, and by this all the pleadings of nature and of reason were answered; and for the apparent contrariety between the promise and the

command, he confided in God to reconcile them, and make both good. And as at the first, he staggered not at the promise through weakness of faith, so now he still accounted him faithful who had promised, and trusted to him to reconcile the hopes which he had inspired with the command he had given.

The event eminently justified this confidence, and entitled him, who thus believed, to be accounted the Father of all them that believe. The maxims of human reason would have condemned such conduct, as rash and unnatural. A self-righteous spirit would call it impious. And the affected wisdom and philosophy of men would charge it to the account of superstition, and by the reproachful epithet of *fanatic* endeavor to shake off the obligations of duty. But in all the scriptures, there is, I believe, no one action of any man more frequently and more decidedly commended as partaking of the nature of true piety and obedience to God, than this of Abraham: and all these cavils and objections can only serve to shew the great influence of faith above reason to produce holy obedience, and to support men in the path of duty before God.

Superstition and fanaticism do not consist in implicit obedience to the command of God, where reason and nature seem, in the apprehensions of men, not to countenance or justify it. On this principle, there never would be any call or opportunity for the exercise of faith; and this first of christian graces, so much commended and insisted on in the scriptures, would be in fact, nothing more than philosophising professors and teachers represent it—the mere result of reasoning and reflection upon obvious truths, level with our own feeble understanding, and according with our own preju-

diced notions and opinions. This would be to invert the whole order of gospel doctrine, and to make the cross of Christ of none effect.

Fanaticism consists in men's substituting their own or others' fancies, conceits, or dogmas in the place of God's commands, and paying a blind regard and reverence to them as such : and superstition, in deranging the order of christian truth and duty ; serupulously adhering to some, and disregarding or despising others. There can be no superstition, or fanaticism, in the most serupulous and implicit adhering to the word of God, and obeying his commands. It is but our reasonable duty. And yet reason, connected with our depraved nature, and guided by our limited understanding, would never prompt us to this, in all cases, or support us in it. Therefore it is that the scripture saith, "without faith it is impossible to please him." This is the vital principle of all holy obedience : and without faith, works however correct in the view of reason and philosophy, and however painful or splendid to the senses of men, are *dead*. Destitute of that vital principle in which the true spirit and nature of holy obedience consists, they can be accounted, in a righteous judgment, only a "departing from the living God," and "coming short of his glory." "There is none righteous ; no, not one ; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable ; there is none that doeth good, no, not one : there is no fear of God before their eyes."

2dly. In considering the example before us, we may observe also the inefficiency of the power of reason to strive against all the workings of natural passions and feelings, in promoting holy obedience.



Had Abraham been ever so thoroughly persuaded of his duty in this case—though no question had been left unanswered concerning his obligation to obey the command of God; yet reason alone could never have surmounted the difficulties that lay in the way of obedience. We all know that reason never stifles the natural affections and desires; and there is nothing in all the resources of reason and philosophy to hold that commanding station, which imposes stillness and submission on the heart, and animates duty in opposition to its tenderest emotions. The feelings of parental love would have plead powerfully, at least for delay; and instruction and argument could never have strengthened the mind, or supported the resolution, in a purpose of obedience. Nothing less than that faith which rejoices in God's holy sovereignty, and confides in his wisdom, power, and goodness, could overcome these difficulties, and put that restraint upon the natural feelings, which would leave the heart free to "rejoice that the Lord reigneth," "giving thanks at the remembrance of his holiness."

And, 3dly. If we could suppose Abraham's reason and judgment to have been wrought upon by fear, or by the force of authority, or by any other means, to yield obedience to the divine command; yet reason alone could never have engaged the feelings and affections of the heart on the side of duty. It could have been only by their being extinguished or overawed, that they would have ceased opposition; and there would have been no concurrence of the heart in performing the duty. So that, in the manner in which reason influences the heart, it is insufficient to promote holy obedience in men.

Faith alone could reconcile in Abraham's breast, the feelings of parental love and tenderness, with the spirit

of piety and obedience to God, and enable him, with all the feelings of a father, to fulfil the part of a dutiful son and servant of the living God. In the mingled feelings of tenderness and piety that wrought in Abraham's heart, parental love was not extinguished—it probably never wrought deeper; but it was brought to harmonize with the spirit of piety toward God, and was relieved and consoled by confidence in his power and goodness.

This is the genuine influence of true faith, when it is *tried*. It brings the believer sensibly near to God, and while it regards his will and his authority, above every other consideration, it also invigorates the mind to rest with confidence in his love, and to “wait for his salvation.”

In ordinary cases, the influence of faith will not be so conspicuous in the sight of others, and they who speculate on the subject, will discover nothing, that may not be attributed to the influence of reason and conscience. But every true believer knows there is an essential difference, between that conduct which proceeds from the convictions of reason alone, and that which is animated by love and duty to God, with a just confidence in his power and grace, and guided by a clear understanding and knowledge of his will.

If christians seldom feel themselves moved by that respect and duty toward God, which are the fruits of faith, it is because they yield themselves to the influence of inferior and unworthy principles. And if they seldom have confidence to venture much in the service of God, it is because their faith is weak.

Habits of pure obedience may make the genuine influence of faith less novel and surprising, and on this account less observable; but they can never make the be-

liever insensible of its refreshing and constraining power. The love of God and the love of Christ, are always arguments of duty, which have access to his heart: and to be found waiting on God, is infinitely better to him, than the utmost confidence of the approbation of reason and philosophy. The former always secures to him the latter; but the approbation of reason will not always satisfy him, that he is waiting on God in that respect and duty which he owes him.

Therefore it is, that a christian conscience is always better satisfied to take its directions immediately from the word of God, than from the most laboured systems of religion and duty, that human ingenuity can compile.

Brethren, is this influence of faith well known to us, and familiar in our daily experience? Are we partakers with Abraham in this, and followers of his faith?

It is the same faith that God requires in all ages of them that would approach, with acceptance, his altar. That principle which could so direct and support Abraham, and Moses, and Daniel, in former ages, is not, since the coming of Christ, debased to a mere uninteresting acknowledgment of the truth of the gospel; or chilled into an inert, mysterious, and uninfluential principle, that does not affect the life and manners; nor is it changed to a vain and presumptuous confidence, which regards chiefly a supposed security of God's mercy and approbation. Wherever christian faith exists now, it is the same as it was with Abraham; and it is as impossible to please God without it now, as it was in the days of Enoch. It was the same faith that Christ intended, when he said, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned."