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**SERMON**

PREACHED IN THE NORTH DUTCH CHURCH,

IN THE CITY OF ALBANY,

AT THE

**OPENING OF THE GENERAL SYNOD**

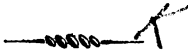
OF THE

**Reformed Dutch Church,**

IN

**NORTH AMERICA,**

JUNE 4, 1823.



**BY PHILIP MILLEDOLER, D. D.**

ONE OF THE COLLEGIATE MINISTERS OF THE REFORMED DUTCH  
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## SERMON.

ROMANS XIV. 19.

*Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace,  
and things wherewith one may edify another.*

**THE** apostle having laid down rules in the preceding chapter to regulate our conduct towards each other in things civil, as members of society, proceeds in that before us to direct our deportment towards each other in things ecclesiastical, as members of the church.

The rules prescribed by him refer to various apprehensions of things in themselves indifferent or unessential; but are of standing use for the preservation of that love and order so earnestly enjoined in the word of God throughout. Long experience has demonstrated that nothing is so fatal to Christian society, as the contention of its members. It is of God forbidden, in itself unnatural, and of unutterable injury to the cause. Hence, and in opposing such contention the apostle makes use of this strong expression, "*Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died.*" That is to say, take heed that you lay not such a stumbling-block in the way of your brother, in matters of indifference which but for the Divine safeguard, might or would prove his destruction, because in such case notwithstanding the Divine interference in saving him, you put yourself upon a footing with a murderer, inasmuch as your conduct was calculated to destroy him.

Men differ from each other as much in the construction of their minds, as of their bodies. Our minds too are very much affected by education, as well as by the opin-

ions, and sentiments of those around us. Hence the different impressions made by the same object or occurrence on different men. Hence also the various clans in politics and sects in religion. Now, although we are not bound to approve the wrong in principle, or obliquity in practice of any man, or set of men in the world, but on the contrary to obtain the most correct views of, and to contend earnestly for the truth, yet we must contend not so much for victory as for truth, and are consequently bound even in matters of the highest moment to conduct our contest with moderation:—neither to carry things too far, nor to use improper means, but to preserve untarnished and unbroken the distinctive badge of our discipleship, which is *love*, and to make every allowance for others that a heavenly charity can inspire. That grace which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, is the noblest in the Christian catalogue of virtues, and stands as such unrivalled and preeminent. “And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”\*

The church of Christ is an army, but the weapons of her warfare are not carnal. *She* is destined to subdue the world, but it will be by *love*.

And if *love* is to subdue *her* enemies, it must prevail among her friends.

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces, for my brethren and companions’ sake I will now say, peace be within thee.”† And, if we *pray* for her peace, to be consistent, we must also act for her peace, and if it be either difficult to attain or to preserve, which is sometimes the case, yet we must not be disheartened but by all lawful means, and with unwearied application, follow after and pursue it. Hence the exhortation, that so far as lieth in us, that is to the very

\* 1 Cor. xiii.

† Psalm cxxii.

stretch or utmost of our power, implying great pains and great patience, we live peaceably with all men; and if so then surely that we live peaceably among ourselves. Let us therefore, saith the apostle, follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. The man of God in this passage names two prominent causes of prosperity to the Christian church—namely *peace*, and *mutual edification*. He then shows that there are certain *things* by which these are formed, and brought into *operation*, and concludes with exhorting the Romans to follow after the things which *produce*, or *constitute* them; that is, that they not only do not obstruct the things which produce peace and edification, but on the contrary do all in their power to promote them.

The plan of discourse, brethren, is before you, and may the Spirit of the Master guide my lips in opening it to your view.

The man of God names two prominent causes of prosperity to the Christian church.

I. *Peace*.

II. *Mutual Edification*.

1st. *Peace*.

It is ecclesiastical peace that is here alluded to, and it consists in that state of the Christian church, or of any particular branch of that church in which it is comparatively free from *external persecution*, and *internal division*.

I say, *comparatively free*, because it is always a bush on fire, though that fire burns, sometimes with a fiercer and at others with a feebler flame.

It is to allay that fire, especially when kindled by conceit, by ignorance, or by malevolence, that the apostle penned the passage of Scripture now under consideration. That the peace of the church has been frequently invaded by, and that it has suffered much and long, from *external persecution*, is not to be controverted. I will not detain my hearers with those awful scenes which, commencing in

Judea, passed over to the Roman empire, and have since been so frequently reiterated by almost every nation under heaven, and in almost every section of the globe. I allude to scenes of cruelty and blood, to sufferings innumerable and unutterable, endured by the martyrs of Jesus for their companions, for the truth, and for their Master's sake. The pages of ecclesiastical history blush, almost throughout, with the blood-red narratives of their sufferings and their death.

The tyrants of the earth could bear no contradiction, and therefore fell upon the church with brutal force, to rend it, like wild beasts upon their prey.

To acknowledge their errors, forsake their altars, and surrender up the religion of their ancestors, suited neither the people nor the priests of a false religion, and they turned with relentless fury upon the bold innovators, who dared to tell them that they must either do it or perish.

As to the philosophers, priding themselves in the force of intellect and learning of the schools, towering in their own conceit, like the eagle towards heaven, and looking down from the giddy elevation, with sovereign contempt upon others; it might be supposed that they, at least, would overlook the pretensions of the humble Galileans: yet even they descended from their *ideal heaven* into the *arena* of controversy, to contend with the Christians; and what they wanted in force of argument, was made up in the bitterness of invective connected with the exercise of public or private influence with the civil magistrates, for the extirpation of the Christian name. Thus all ranks of men, from the throne of the Cæsars to the meanest slaves, have all raged in their turn against the Lord, and against his Anointed.

And this persecution has not been confined to any particular age or nation. It still exists, and has recently been called forth, in all its exterminating horror.

To what other cause shall we assign the late almost unparalleled atrocities of the Turks upon that noble race, who,

goaded by long oppression, have resorted to the first law of nature, in self-defence, and have flown to arms for the recovery of their long lost liberties. We allude to our fellow patriots, and fellow Christians, the Greeks. Can we see the vengeful Turk pouring destruction like a storm on Scio? Can we hear the crackling of the flames—the thunder of the artillery—the groans of the dying—the shrieks of wives torn from their husbands, and children from their parents? Can we see the vile butchery of its unresisting inhabitants, and the whole island a smoking ruin? Can we follow the armies of Mahomet in their invasion of Greece, see them pressing, with drawn scymitars, toward the *heart* of that beauteous country, and letting loose fire and sword, havoc and death, upon its hapless population? Can we enter the capital of the Turkish empire itself, and behold its Greek inhabitants, unoffending yet unprotected, flying like so many deer from the pursuit of the hunters, stricken down in the streets, and their blood mingling in streams with the water of their kennels? Can we behold mothers and daughters sold, like so many beasts, in the markets; and witness the scalding tear, and hear the groans of agony, and the last farewell, forced rather from the breaking hearts than from the quivering lips, of relatives parting to meet no more for ever? and do we not discern in their enemies the ancient spirit of the persecutors? If not—What is it we witness? Is this war in its common forms? No, we see the demons of bigotry and superstition let loose with the hell-hounds of war, and inspiring them with tenfold cruelty.

O Europe, Christian Europe! how couldst thou behold the scenes which thou hast witnessed, without moving perhaps, a finger, to avert them! What has become of thy statesmen and thy heroes? Have thy leaders become marble, and their hearts stone? Must every thing, in this day of refinement, even in cases like this, be sacrificed to the cold, and oft delusive, calculations of political interest? If the age of chivalry is past, has all human and Christian

feeling passed away with it? Can one part of the body of Christ be lacerated, and even torn from that body, whilst other parts of the same body are entirely unaffected by the event, and feel no manner of sympathy? But I forbear; pardon me, brethren, a digression, into which I have been hurried by feelings not to be controlled, and let it serve as an illustration of my subject.

The hostility of the world towards the Christian church, which has broken out, from time to time, with so much fierceness, is not of recent, but of very ancient date. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed," said the holy God in Eden, to the serpent, and so it has been ever since; and this is one of the strong reasons why the children of God should cleave to one another, and not weaken themselves with their unnatural, their abominable, and, I had almost said, unpardonable animosities. Blessed be God, that the church has its breathing times; but let not Christians, at such times, suppose that the enmity of the world has ceased: it is not so, or the word of God would not be true; and, to convince us of the fact, occasional storms still gather, hover over and fall, not only on individuals or particular churches, but, as we have seen, on whole sections of the Christian world.

From the breach of the church's peace, occasioned by *external persecution*, let us now take a view of that same breach of peace occasioned by *internal division*.

By internal division, we understand the interruption of her peace, by internal feuds and animosities.

Such division formerly existed between the Latin and Greek churches, occasioned among other things, as my auditors know, by the unprincipled ambition of rival Patriarchs. This also took place at the reformation, when our forefathers were obliged by their Bibles to protest against, and to withdraw themselves from, the enormous corruptions of the church of Rome, and were therefore, styled *Protestants*.



That separation was not effected on light ground. Our fathers were compelled to it; and nothing but the dread of schism, for wise men will always dread it, prevented its taking place much earlier than it did.

Since that period, the Protestant world have been divided into various sects, not produced so much by the reformation itself, as by the spirit of inquiry and religious liberty therewith connected.

That liberty has in many instances, it is true, been grossly abused; but surely error may be borne rather than the inquisition, and especially where religion and reason are left free to combat it.

However the Protestant world may differ in secondary points of doctrine, or government, yet in the main features of their creeds, as well as in their practice, there is an essential agreement.

They all agree, for instance, in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures; in the doctrine of a Trinity of persons, in Unity of Essence, in the Eternal Godhead; in the union of the divine and human natures in the person of the Son of God; in the vicarious nature of his atonement; in the necessity of repentance and faith to a justifying righteousness; in the necessity of good works; the immortality of the soul; the resurrection of the body; the final judgment, and a future state of final and eternal retribution.

Other doctrines connected with, or growing out of those we have noticed, may be, and doubtless are important; because all truth, like its Author, is precious, unchangeable, eternal; and the smallest particles of it, like the filings of gold, must not be trodden under foot. Yet they must be called secondary, because they are of secondary importance.

They may not, for instance, be considered as essential to salvation; nor should difference on these points sever the chords of Christian charity. It cannot be improper that these differences should be discussed, either from the

pulpit or the press, so long as that discussion is conducted with Christian moderation; but whenever it passes that *boundary*, it not only does no good, but is offensive both to God and man.

As to the primary or essential doctrines we have mentioned, they form so many constituent parts of the mystery of godliness; and if we either part with them ourselves, or dispense with them in others, under the guise of charity, we betray with a kiss, and in the most unanswerable manner, the cause and truth of Jesus Christ to the world.

If men will leave Christ, we must leave them; and if unsound in essential doctrines, we must not, we dare not, countenance their defection.

Defections of this description, especially when connected with great talents, with an apparently blameless life, and great show of humility, have produced infinite mischief in the Christian church, as in the case of Arius, and others; but, as Christians, we need not, and must not be afraid to say, with the Apostle Paul, "If I or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed."

No small strife has arisen in the Christian church, in some instances, by persons subscribing formulas, or confessions of faith, at the same time that they have dissented from some of the doctrines contained in such confessions. Now, it must be evident to all, that if persons on subscribing such formulas or confessions, do fairly signify at the time of subscribing, their dissent in all its length and breadth, to the body receiving them, and then subscribe with these honest and public exceptions, the church receiving them, has no right, afterward, to find fault with their holding such doctrines; but where this is not done, or where those bodies are deceived by artful evasions, misstatements, concealment or perversion of truth, or where persons, after being received into a church, change their views of divine truth without giving notice of such

change, and, by their subsequent preaching and conduct, sow the seeds of dissension, scatter their flocks, introduce heart-burning and confusion in the councils of the church, and increase their number by all means, that they may seize the reins of ecclesiastical power, I care not if they assume an angel's form, but fearlessly assert, that they are the cause of all the evils arising out of the dissension thereby produced, and that all the sophistry in the world cannot reconcile their conduct, even with common honesty.

*Much recent altercation* has taken place in the church, on the subject of creeds and confessions. It has not been unfrequently intimated, that narrow-hearted bigots have substituted them for the *Bible*, and have made them of equal, if not superior authority. It has also been, not obscurely, hinted, that it was time that they should be brushed away with the rubbish and traditions of former ages; and that men should drink their waters, immediately and solely, from the pure fountain-head.

I cannot now present my hearers with a history of the introduction of creeds and confessions, in the Christian church. Suffice it to say, that they were early introduced, and that the object of their introduction, was to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Nothing has been so perverted by erring men, even in the plainest matters, as the Bible. No fancy, no folly, no downright contradiction to that sacred book, that imbecility or wickedness could invent; but has at one time or other been substituted for truth, and palmed upon the *Bible*.

Is it to be wondered at, under these circumstances, that holy men of God, and learned in the Scriptures, have deemed it their duty, both in church council, and on their own responsibility, to draw up summaries of Christian doctrine in the form of catechisms or confessions.

If these catechisms and confessions were really substituted for the Holy Scriptures, as has been said, they

ought to be hurled without delay, without distinction, and without remorse, from the church of God. But is this the case? We answer, No—certainly it is not. Does not the whole Protestant world read the Bible? Is it not almost the very first book that is put into the hands of our children? Do we not hear the voice of Christ, “Search the Scriptures,” reiterated from church to church, throughout all Protestant Christendom? Are not Bible Societies employed almost in every section of the Christian church, in translating and multiplying the copies of the Scriptures, and in circulating them in every direction, without note or comment? Has not the prodigious and inconceivably powerful machinery of Sunday schools been put in operation to meet the wants of the most unsheltered and neglected class of the community? What is the Sunday school teacher’s highest object of ambition, but to teach his pupils to read the Bible? And what is all this but to lead myriads of immortal beings to the fountain-head of knowledge, that they may drink in heavenly truth from the Bible?

What are our catechisms and confessions of faith, but systems of truth, professing to be drawn from the Bible? What is their test but the Bible? What is their appeal, but to the Bible? And in what is their worth, but in conformity to the Bible? No man, in this country, has the creed of another forced upon his conscience; but every man judges for himself, and compares creeds and confessions with the standard of all truth, “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to these things, it is because there is no light in them.” But of what use, then, it may be asked, are confessions and creeds, and why must we receive the truth second-handed, as it were, when we can have it immediately from God? We observe, in reply, that even in penning the Scriptures, God has employed human instrumentality. Even in the original Scriptures, holy men of God spake, and, we may add, wrote as they were

inspired by the Holy Ghost. The same agency, without inspiration, has been used by the same God in translating them. Men have also been employed, in all ages, to preach, or expound them to the people; and these catechisms and confessions contain the substance of their expositions, well suited as helps to age and youth, to aid them in the study of heavenly science; serving to classify divine truth and assist us in its attainment, as systems of astronomy classify the starry heavens, to teach astronomy; and systems of geography divide and classify kingdoms and states, that we may understand the divisions of the earth. Gold is gold, wherever it may be found; whether it be immediately dug from the mine, or washed upon the strand; and truth is truth, whether it be found in the Bible, or in catechisms and confessions of faith. But again, how shall two walk together, except they be agreed? Can we blend all principles and practices professed to be drawn from the holy oracles? Can we bind together materials the most discordant in the world, and then worship God in that discord? No, it cannot be. In essential things at least, men must see eye to eye, or they cannot comfortably be united in a church state.

This principle is recognised by heaven itself; hence we are told, that when the great time of Christian union shall arrive, that men shall see eye to eye, and that this very fact will result in the most delightful harmony of principle and action.

In the mean time, nothing can be said against creeds and confessions, which will not equally operate against the preaching of the Gospel, as well as against all those pious and learned works on biblical and experimental literature; which have been published, from age to age, for the edification of mankind. As to the act of subscribing to these formulas, I would observe, that as such subscription is, and always must be, entirely optional on the part of the subscriber, he has no right to complain that the body receiving

him, requires such subscription; nor has he any right to complain of intolerance, if he should be rejected for the want of conformity to the doctrines contained in such formulas; for every society is the best judge of the qualifications of its members, and has an unquestionable right to determine what requisites they must possess, and what will or will not comport in them, with the general good.

It is true that in a civil and constitutional sense, these persons have as good a right to their peculiarities of opinion as has the society to whom they apply to be received; but they can have no right to introduce them into such society, to their annoyance, and breach of the peace. They must go elsewhere with their peculiarities, or they act dishonourably; they break covenant, expressed or understood, and that too in a way bordering on the most serious criminality.

Where persons have differed in their own apprehension in minor matters, from the formulas they have subscribed, if dissension in the church thereby ensue, they ought not to think lightly of such dissensions; nor should they too readily exonerate themselves, and throw the blame on others.

When dissension has been thus introduced, how often has it been said, we differ more in words than in things, and all this fire is kindled by the intolerance of our opposers. But do not these people see, that if there had been no provocation, there would be no opposition? Do they not see that instead of their own rights being infringed, they have actually invaded the rights of others? *This matter* may be soon settled, by the following view of it:

The difference of *doctrine* producing dissension in such case, is either *real* or *imaginary*; *important* or *unimportant*. If it be real and important, what right had the persons connecting themselves with that society to form such connection, and to break the public peace?

But if the difference be imaginary and unimportant, why do they not relinquish offensive words and expositions? And why do they not cease to circulate unnecessary, ill-timed publications, good for nothing but to kindle war?

They ought to do it, for the sake of Christ, that the body of Christ may not be rent; for the sake of their dissatisfied brethren, that their minds may be put at rest; for the sake of the weak, if you please, that they may not be disturbed; for the sake of the Gospel, that one and all, may unite their strength in its propagation; for the sake of concord among brethren, than which there exists not a lovelier sight on earth.

To preserve the peace, what would not the Apostle Paul have done and suffered? And what will such concession cost the persons of whom we speak?

If the difference be only in words, not in things, or if it be only in little shades of opinion, and not in substantial realities, what do they sacrifice by their relinquishment? Why, nothing at all, even on their own statement.

It ought, therefore, undoubtedly, to be done; and if not done, is a proper subject of disapprobation and of discipline. *Every person* knows how uncomfortable is the state of that society, in which there is no mutual confidence; and where there is substituted in its place, ever-jarring and conflicting interests. How, in such case, heart is alienated from heart, in ever-widening difference, until they become almost too far apart ever to meet in the same world! Who does not see the weakness and insubordination thereby introduced? And if such a state of things is to be deprecated in civil, how much more in ecclesiastical society?

It is deeply to be regretted, that personal like or dislike, ill-founded often, and perhaps entirely capricious, and as connected therewith, personal envy and ambition, should sow the seeds of discord in the Christian church; and yet from these causes, how many feuds have arisen, and how much sin has been committed? Men, under the influence

of evil passions, may wound their neighbour in a thousand forms ; in public and in private, at home and abroad.

The most innocent language may be perverted, the most virtuous actions misrepresented ; every excellency lowered, every fault distorted ; till the aggressor, from the natural course of his own malevolence, begins to hate his injured, unoffending brother, in right good earnest, and induces many others, it may be, till their eyes are opened, to follow his example.

It is indeed deeply to be lamented, that such things should exist in the house of God. Angels that witness it, might well weep over it, could angels weep ; though angels' tears could not obliterate its guilt.

Another prolific cause of dissension in the Christian church, is the want of subordination to correct ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

By correct jurisdiction, I understand the exercise of that rightful authority which is vested in church judicatories, by the word of God, and their ecclesiastical constitutions.

If such judicatories depart from either of these, so far as that act of departure is concerned they break the social compact, and the act itself becomes, on that very account, absolutely inefficient. But where the church has decided by her judicatories according to law, it is not for particular members or churches to evade or neglect her injunctions, and much less to oppose themselves to her authority.

Where this is done disorganization of authority must ensue ; and if the evil be not immediately counteracted, that church must fall. As a house divided against itself cannot stand, so neither can society without government. Where there is no law there is no concord, and there can be no prosperity.

If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do ?



The insubordination of which we are speaking is owing to various causes, all deserving the severity of rebuke ; but there is one, not *least*, because least noticed, the deleterious effects of which are most perceptible and distressing.

I allude to the spirit of novelty or change.

Sin has made men restless ; and they turn, like men in fever, from side to side to obtain relief. By these changes they are generally no gainers.

The same spirit of innovation sometimes exists in ecclesiastical bodies, and is manifested in some instances by change of customs and usages ; in others, by change of constitution, or ecclesiastical connection. Now the conduct of men is very much governed by these things : if they are going to remove from any particular district of country, they feel less interest in its improvement. If men contemplate pulling down a house, they are not very solicitous to repair its breaches, either in things useful or ornamental. And is it not so in states ? Is it not so in cities ? Is it not so in churches ? Ought such a spirit to be lightly indulged, and if indulged will it not produce innumerable evils ? Is it not an easy thing to run a gallant ship upon the rocks ; and when it is done where is the profit, it may be asked, either to God or man ? Its pilots may discover their daring, it is true, but at the same time they may also expose their ignorance and their unskilfulness ; and if chargeable with these, if ever employed again they certainly deserve to move in a very subordinate sphere.

Thus, brethren, I have endeavoured to run through some of the principal causes of the breach of peace in the Christian church, arising from external persecution and internal strife ; and do we not see in this illustration the force of the apostolic charge, "Let us follow after the things which make for peace."

With this PEACE, the source of countless blessings to the church and to the world, our apostle connects *mutual edification*.

The original word signifies growth in the knowledge and love of God.

It is derived from the erection of a building. Christians are like houses building, and which are gradually carried up and finished. "Ye are God's building."

Mutually to edify is to build up, support, strengthen, and confirm in the ways and works of God, in opposition to disheartening or weakening one another. As builders cheer each other in building, or soldiers in an army encourage each other by their acts and cries, so here, Christians may be serviceable to each other to great extent, and are bound to be so by the most imperative motives.

Peace and edification are closely connected. We are informed in Acts ix. that it was when the churches had rest that they were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

We can easily account for this ; for if truth can take its course, it is great, and will prevail.

Moreover, when the church is at peace with itself, the Holy Spirit is not only not provoked to withdraw, but is invited to approach ; and when the church thus moves with union in her councils, and with God at her head, it is then that she wields her influence ; it is then that she achieves her conquests, and appears "clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners."

Peace, therefore, and combined action for mutual help, are prominent causes of prosperity to the church ; and as such, should be constantly promoted.

We have promised to point out some of the means of such promotion, and shall now do it with all brevity.

To follow after the *things that make for peace*, is a mode of expression which would seem to indicate some difficulty to retain them. They are here represented as precious realities indeed, but such as would appear to treat

us as if we were unworthy of them ; whose visits, like those of angels, are few and short, and which always appear ready to flee or glide away from us ; so that, by pursuing we must evince our desire, nay, our determination to obtain them, and follow them continually like huntsmen on the track.

Entire peace with the world is neither to be attained nor desired. It is not to be attained, because a mind hostile to God will be so to his people, especially if they brightly reflect his glory : and it is not to be desired, because, if obtained, it must be at the price of conformity to its ways. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and I will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Yet the apostle exhorts (Rom. xii.) that if it be possible, as much as lieth in us, we live peaceably with all men ; that is to say, that we not only give no just cause of offence, but so conduct, that if the world will do us justice it will confess that our profession is good, and our conduct worthy of that profession.

If this will not secure our peace, then we must be content to take the place of Milton's Abdiel, in the revolt of the angels.

" Abdiel faithful found,  
 Among the faithless, faithful only he :  
 Among innumerable false, unmov'd,  
 Unshaken, uneduc'd, unterrified,  
 His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal ;  
 Nor number, nor example with him wrought  
 To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind.  
 Though single, from amidst them forth he pass'd  
 Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustain'd superior."

PAR. LOST, B. V.

That national sections of the Christian church may in some instances, command national peace, as in now existing European contests, there can be no doubt. And if Christian nations, as such, are to follow after peace

and not their own peace only, but also that of others ; if they may incur national guilt by refusing to oppose lawless aggression, to maintain human rights, and to save Christian blood, then the question of what is duty in particular cases, must necessarily become to them (extremely) serious and imperative.

But let us now attend for a few moments to the things that make for peace in the Christian church. And these consist,

1. In avoiding all those in their own nature evil things, which are calculated to break the peace. And,

2. In doing all those in their own nature good things, which are calculated to promote it.

First, In avoiding all those in their own nature evil things, which are calculated to break the peace.

Such are, coldness or lukewarmness in religion ; unnecessary agitation of questions producing strife ; perverse disputings, false doctrine, railing accusations, corrupt example, intolerance, and schism.

Secondly, In doing all those in their own nature good things, which are calculated to promote it.

Such as, exercising mutual kindness and forbearance ; offering up constant and fervent prayer for one another, especially when we perceive that our hearts are beginning to be alienated ; holding friendly intercourse ; looking not to our own things only, but also to those of others, and esteeming others better than ourselves.

He who is conquered by force is but half conquered after all. Love, all-powerful love, where it can be brought into action, is the influence that binds all power by binding all hearts, and this is the mighty engine of the Christian warfare.

We may not, it is true, buy peace at the expense of principle, for that would be to buy it too dear ; that peace is no peace which is not lawful ; but where it can be obtained by lawful means it must be followed. And if the

enemy shall take advantage of our simplicity, let them do it at their peril; vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord: and, after all, the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Having noticed the things that make for our peace, we shall now also mention those wherewith one may edify another. These have close affinity with the above-named, and evidently consist in the exercise of love, spiritual-mindedness, forbearance, faithfulness, benevolent exertions, and uniformity of Christian principle and conduct. By the observance of these things great evils may be prevented, and great good accrue to Christian society.

The evils prevented are all such as arise from a state of discord or inaction, and the benefits secured are those which give life, strength, and stability to the church; rendering her not only glorious in the eyes of men, but of God, and rapidly extending her *bloodless conquests* through every region of the earth, and through every nation under heaven: and who that loves the church of God, or her great and glorious *Head*, but, in reviewing the precepts of our text, and tracing their connection with human happiness, will or can refuse to acknowledge their unutterable importance.

## CONCLUSION.

From this subject, brethren, we may learn, 1. that Christian peace, connected with combined efforts for mutual good, constitutes the glory of the church.

I confess that the church, on fire yet not consumed, or tossed upon the raging sea and yet unburied in its waters, is an object of intense interest: but it is in a peaceful state, and in the affectionate union of her sons that you particularly see her strength and her glory. Her strength, because in such case there is all that combination of power which constitutes strength; and her glory, because there is an exhibition of that love which constitutes her glory.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

“It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments;

“As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”\*

How often did the injunction to mutual love fall from the lips of the Redeemer, how powerfully does the sanctifying Spirit of Christ incline to peace? How earnestly are we commanded to pray for peace? And is not the promotion of mutual comfort and improvement the very genius of the Christian system? Does not division in the Christian camp induce weakness? Does it not invite aggression? Does it not enfeeble, and lay every thing open to the powers of hell; and, if Heaven interfere not, to destruction. Hence we learn,

2dly. The great guilt, not only of those who wantonly break the peace of the church, but also of all those who do not seek with all their power to preserve it.

We have used the terms *wantonly break the peace*, that we may guard against misapprehensions.

There are times when the visible church may be in such a state that it will not abide the truth. This was the case when Elijah publicly withstood and purged the church of the idolatrous prophets of Baal. Hear his complaint uttered at that time, and recorded in 1 Kings xix. 10. “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away.”

Hear the language of Ahab to Elijah: “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy,” 1 Kings xxi. Hear the language of

\* Psa. cxxxiii.

the same infatuated monarch, in the case of one of the servants of God, recorded in 1 Kings xxii. When four hundred false prophets had vehemently urged the kings of Israel and Judah to go up against Ramoth-gilead, and Jehosaphat had inquired whether there was not one prophet of the Lord besides, of whom they might inquire, Ahab replied, "There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." And how, it may be asked, could the prophet help it; how could he prophesy good, when commanded to prophesy evil?

If the servants of God must conciliate men by suppressing or surrendering up the truth, how can they do it?

*Peace*, precious as it is, is bought too dear if bought at the expense of a good conscience. The servants of God, in old time, would not have peace on such terms, as we may see in the cases of Enoch, Noah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and the whole host of ancient worthies. John Baptist and the apostles would not have peace on these terms; hence they were spoken of as men who turned the world upside down, which indeed they did, and very much to its advantage. Our forefathers, at the Reformation, set a noble example of preferring the peace of God to the honour that cometh from man; and so must the faithful of every age; for they are charged not only to contend, but to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Persons who act in this manner, and with a single eye to the glory of God, do not wantonly break the peace of the church; for what they do is by Heaven itself commanded, and cannot therefore be either unnecessary or improper. That wanton breach of the peace to which we attach guilt, includes all dissention in matters civil and religious, doctrinal or practical, for causes not recognized as sufficient in the word of God; and especial-

ly the introduction into the church, or any branch thereof, of things new, offensive, and necessarily calculated to produce uneasiness and schism. Our Lord has said that offences must needs come, but has added his wo unto them by whom they come.

If men professing to be Christians cannot agree to agree, they ought to agree to differ; and if it must be so, let them rather separate, like Paul and Barnabas, than live in discord with each other. Our church, to show her abhorrence of the conduct of all those who produce strife or mutiny within her pale, excludes them on divine authority from participating in the Lord's Supper; and God himself has branded such conduct with the strongest expressions of his holy reprobation. Let us not wonder at this: it is not a mere arbitrary act of infinite sovereignty, but flows from the very nature of the case, as one of the most atrocious offences that can be committed.

3. And, finally, We conclude, from this subject, that such a profession of Christianity as regards not the edification of others is a false profession. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?

And if love to our brother requires that we not only exercise towards him all possible forbearance, but also all possible kindness, how can we be the Lord's if this be not our habitual disposition? Christianity is not a selfish but a social, benevolent, and expansive principle, continually operative in works which show its celestial origin; it every where attracts God to man, man to God, and man to man; binding each to each with full consent, in ties delightful, indissoluble, and eternal.

These are the bands of love, that mighty power that has moved the heavens, and is destined to subdue the world.  
*Amen.*



