

Christ displeased with unfaithful Christians.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED IN MIDDLEBURY, JUNE 21, 1816, ON A DAY APPOINTED
BY THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, FOR

FASTING AND PRAYER.

BY DANIEL O. MORTON, A. M.,
Pastor of the Congregational Church in Shoreham.

Watch ye—stand fast in the faith.—St. PAUL.

MIDDLEBURY, VT.

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August, 1816.

Middlebury, July 16, 1816.

REV. DANIEL O. MORTON,

Dear Sir—Through us, you will please to accept the thanks of the Congregational Church in this town, for your Sermon, delivered on the 21st of June, being the day of their Fast. We are requested to solicit of you a copy for the press.

Your brethren in Christ,

SETH STORRS, } *In behalf of*
WM. G. HOOKER, } *the Church.*

.....

Shoreham, July 20, 1816.

DEAR AND RESPECTED FRIENDS,

Confidence in the judgment of the Church, whose wishes you have signified, and a hope that the discourse alluded to may yet be useful, have overcome the reluctance, which I felt at the thought of its being published. Such as it is, I commend it to God, and to you.

With esteem and christian affection,

I am your servant in the Gospel of Christ,

DANIEL O. MORTON.

SERMON.

REVELATION, II. 4.

I have somewhat against thee.

THE apostle John was commanded to write to the seven churches of Asia. The first address was directed to the church of Ephesus. "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them, which are evil: and hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not; and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted."

In the church of Ephesus there was much to commend. Christ, "the faithful and true witness," says, "I know thy works"—I am pleased with thy works of faith and labour of love; I approve thy patience. Thou hast been submissive under trouble, patient in tribulation, and hast endured hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. I know and approve thy zeal. Thou hast not shunned the cross, nor feared man; but hast been faithful in discipline, and excluded from thy communion those

false apostles, those wolves in sheep's clothing, that troubled thee. From love to Me, and a tender regard to the honour of my name, thou "hast laboured," and toiled, "and hast not fainted." In thy feelings and conduct there is much that I approve ; and in many things thou hast honoured Him, who redeemed thee with His blood.

But notwithstanding, thou art guilty of some defects. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." That flame of love and fervency of devotion, which glowed within thee, when I took thee from "the horrible pit and miry clay," are now abated. That tender and ardent affection, which warmed thy heart, when I brought thee out of pagan darkness into the light of the glorious gospel, is now succeeded by a lukewarmness which I can by no means approve. "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

I have somewhat against thee. It will be the object of this discourse to enquire, whether the Lord Jesus has not somewhat against us, because we have left our first love, and for several other reasons.

I verily believe, my brethren, that there are some things in this church, which the Redeemer

beholds with approbation. I believe that, as a body you willingly and cheerfully support the institutions of the gospel ;—embrace the leading and fundamental truths of Revelation, and decidedly condemn those systems of human device, pretend- edly taken from scripture, which dishonor God, and destroy the souls of men. I believe that this is a church of Christ, and not a community of this world. And would to God that you were an hundred fold better than you are ! Would to God that you possessed the character of the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia !

But to return to the subject.

1. Have we not left our first love ; and has not the blessed Jesus somewhat against us on this account ? If we are christians, we remember the wormwood and the gall ; the time when we found ourselves condemned by the law, and borne down by its curse ; when our sins appeared like clouds on clouds, reaching up to heaven ; when destruction stared us in the face, and there seemed but a step between us and everlasting death. We recollect the period when we could view nothing but our sins, an offended God, and an opening hell. At that critical and awful moment, when apparently sinking into the dreadful pit, Jesus extended the arm of mercy, raised us up, set our feet upon the Rock of ages, and filled our heart with gladness, and our lips with praise. At that delightful period, was it not the language of our heart, “the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad ;—O, taste and see that the Lord is good !”—

Did we not speak of the infinite greatness of the Saviour's love, and exceedingly rejoice in the Rock of our salvation? Did we not feel that we could part with every thing that flesh and blood hold dear, for our Redeemer's sake? In view of his infinite condescension and grace, did not a melting heart and flowing eyes, in some favored moments, almost interrupt our praises? But where now is that gratitude, and love and joy? "Where is the blessedness we spake of?" Have we not left our first love? Lamentable facts demonstrate that we have. But why is our love to the Saviour less ardent? Why is it succeeded by a coldness cruel as death? Is He not still the same? Is not His mercy still as great? Is He not still "the chiefest among ten thousand; altogether lovely?" Have we forgotten His loving kindness and tender mercy? His tears, and groans, and death? His wounded hands and bleeding heart? Have we forgotten the moment when he spoke peace to our troubled conscience; bound up the wounds which sin had made, and poured into our aching bosom the oil and the wine?

After all, is it not abundantly manifest to the world, that we have left our first love? Should Jesus address us with a voice from heaven, might He not say, children, "I remember the kindness of your youth, and the love of your espousals; but I have somewhat against you." All heaven celebrates the mysteries of redeeming grace, and adores Me for my love to you; but your heart is cold, your tongues are silent. "Remember, there-

fore from whence you are fallen ; and repent ; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will fight against you with the sword of my mouth."

My brethren, can we any longer, by our coldness, grieve, and wound, and crucify our Saviour ? Can we any longer, by our lukewarmness and stupidity declare to the world "we know not this man ?"

2. Has not the Redeemer "somewhat against us" on account of our attachment to the world. Far be it from me to condemn honest and persevering industry. Indolence is an offence against that glorious Being, who has commanded, "six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work ;" and against the Saviour who has said, "gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost." It is contrary to the apostolical injunction, "be diligent in business ;" and to the christian axiom, "if any man provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." But while we avoid the extremes of indolence and prodigality, are we not too much attached to the world ? Have we not more anxiety to increase our estate than to advance the cause of righteousness ; more concern for property than for the salvation of souls ? Do we contemplate as much upon the character of God and heavenly things, as we do about our farms, and flocks, and merchandize ? Did we meditate as frequently on the divine perfections and Immanuel's love ; on the prosperity of Zion, and the everlasting inheritance

of the righteous ; as we do respecting our temporal conveniences and prospects, should we not be much more eminent christians than we are ? Do not worldly employments and imaginations often interrupt us in the duties of religion ? Was all the time, which we spend in vain, avaricious or ambitious thoughts, desires and calculations, noted down ; and the time spent in holy contemplations also noted ; how small a portion would be left for God ! Is Mammon better than Christ ; and the world preferable to heaven ?

It is not criminal to have property. If we possess it, we should be thankful to the great and glorious Giver, and use it as faithful stewards of His bounty. But it is highly criminal to set our affections upon it. Do not our affections centre on property and the things of time ? And has not our blessed Saviour much against us on this account ? My hearers, I sometimes tremble, when I read what the scriptures say on this subject. “No man can serve two masters ; he cannot serve God and Mammon. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.—Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Here is a test of character. If we love the world supremely, or more than we love God, we are strangers to godliness, and enemies to Christ. Paul says to Timothy, “godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is cer-

tain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil ; which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." I repeat the question ; has not Christ somewhat against us, on account of our attachment to the world ? In the fear of God, and in view of another world, let conscience answer,

3. Has not Christ "somewhat against us" for our conformity to the world ? The divine command is, "be not conformed to this world ; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." But are we not conformed to the world ? Do we not frequently unite with unbelievers, in "foolish talking and jesting, which are inconvenient ?" To please the wicked, and for fear of being considered bigots and enthusiasts, do we not indulge in conduct, which at the time we deem improper ; and conform to their sinful practices, when conscience cries, "forbear ?" Have we not neglected evident duties, lest we should offend a fellow-worm ; and repeatedly offended God for fear of offending man ? Have we not made long visits, and not uttered one word respecting Christ and heaven, lest we should displease some of the company ? Conformity to the world kills the life

and power of religion, quenches the flame of love, and sends barrenness into the soul. How do you imagine, my brethren, that He, who groaned in the garden, and expired on the cross for us, views our sinful compliances? Has not the "Son of God, whose eyes are like a flame of fire," somewhat against us, because of our conformity to the world?"

We ought indeed to be kind and benevolent to all men; to conciliate affection by all lawful means, and be willing, innocently, to become "all things to all men, that we may by all means save some." This is necessary to recommend religion, and exhibit it in its native loveliness. But respecting conformity to the world, the voice of God is, "come ye out from among them, be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

4. Are we not criminally negligent about attending the appointments of the church? By the direction of Christ, who is King in Zion, every church is required to regulate her concerns agreeably to the scriptures: and the meetings appointed by a church to transact those affairs, which relate to her order and spiritual improvement, ought to be conscientiously observed and attended. Every member is bound by duty and by covenant to attend; and scarcely any thing can excuse the absence of a member, which would not excuse his absence from the sanctuary on the Sabbath. But

do not many neglect these seasons? On the appointed meetings of this church, how many seats are vacant which are sometimes occupied by professors of religion? And do not some, without a sufficient excuse, neglect those meetings, which are designed as a serious preparation for the sacrament which commemorates the Saviour's dying love? Are there not members, who make arrangements to attend to considerable secular business, while on their way to the house of God; and thus deprive their souls of spiritual consolation, by having their attention occupied with worldly thoughts and cares, till they enter the doors of the sanctuary? Are there not others who come at so late a period as to disturb the devotions of their brethren? What think you, my hearers, is Jesus pleased with this? Had we appointed to meet a friend once in a month on important business, how would he feel should we oblige him repeatedly to wait an hour or two in suspense? And with what feelings does the blessed Redeemer behold us, when on seasons appointed for his worship, we amuse ourselves an hour or two with temporal concerns; when we ought to be in His house, uniting with His people in supplication, or offering the sacrifice of praise? Are there not some professors of religion, who are occasionally absent from the sanctuary on the Sabbath, who would not excuse themselves under similar circumstances, from attending freeman's meetings? And do not individuals neglect appointments for conference and prayer, who, at the same time, would go an equal or greater

distance to visit an absent friend? Has not the Lord Jesus somewhat against us for such shameful negligence? My brethren, we have reason to awake and tremble. Were not the meetings and appointments of this church punctually attended but a few years since? "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!"

5. Has not Christ somewhat against us for a deficiency in brotherly love? He says to his followers, "a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." In the epistle to the Hebrews it is commanded, "let brotherly love continue." And the beloved disciple says, "this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that ye should love one another. Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God." Christians are members of the same family, children of the same Father, bought with the same precious blood, subjects of the same King, engaged in the same warfare, exposed to similar trials, pilgrims on the same journey, bound to the same heaven, and expectants of the same glorious immortality. Christians likewise compose one glorious body, of which Christ is the head. Should not the members feel a tender solicitude for each other? But where is that fraternal affection, that ardent love of the brethren, which were apparent, but a few years since? Why do we witness among the followers of the Lamb a coldness, which may indeed comport with common civility, but

which sinks far beneath that christian affection, which becomes those, who are united by a Saviour's blood. Did christians feel a cordial attachment to each other, were they "of one heart and of one soul;" it would do more to convince mankind of the truth and excellence of christianity, than ten thousand volumes of learned and conclusive arguments.

6. Has not the Lord Jesus somewhat against us for the neglect of brotherly watchfulness and christian discipline? It is the indispensable duty of christians to watch over each other in love. This ~~we~~ solemnly covenant and promise to do, in the presence of God, and angels and men, when we unite with a christian church. But are we not guilty of a sad deficiency in this respect? Do we not often violate our covenant engagements? Do we not often meet and part with our brethren, without uttering one word calculated to increase their faith, strengthen their hope, and animate them in the way to heaven? When we see our brethren wander from the path of righteousness, do we not often fail to give them affectionate advice? And are there not some who are totally ignorant of the spiritual welfare of their brethren? Does the Redeemer approve such neglect?

Brotherly watchfulness among christians is attended with the happiest consequences in this world; and it will ensure a gracious recompense in the world to come. "Then they they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the

Lord hearkened and heard it : and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

Nearly allied to paternal watchfulness is the duty of christian discipline. This is abundantly inculcated in scripture. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church : but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." If a brother have publicly dishonored the cause of religion, and the church neglect to discipline him, they countenance his sins, hinder his repentance, and are guilty of unspeakable cruelty to his soul. For this neglect Christ condemns them ; and for it, the offender will condemn them, if he ever return to his duty. If the offender be a christian, such negligence tends to lead him farther and farther from God and happiness ; but if he be a hypocrite, it helps him forward to ruin. When a church neglects to exercise the discipline of the gospel, they rebel against the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ, tarnish and darken the glory of religion, and lay

stumbling-blocks before sinners, over which some will, in all probability, fall and perish. Has not Christ somewhat against this church for the neglect of discipline? Shall the fear of man, or fear of trouble, lead us to dishonor God, wound the Saviour, injure our brethren, and destroy immortal souls?

7. Has not the Redeemer somewhat against us for the neglect of family religion? An illustrious patriarch, now in heaven, once said to an assembly of the tribes of Israel, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Is this the determination of every head of a family? My brethren, have you erected in your houses an altar to the living God? And do you regularly offer on it the sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving? Do your children hear the morning and the evening prayer? You may have excuses for neglecting it. But do they altogether satisfy your minds? Will Christ accept them? Will they be admitted in the day of judgment? Will you then be acquitted for neglecting prayer in your families?

We may, however, offer the morning and evening sacrifice, and still be greatly deficient in family religion. We may do it with a coldness and a formality, which, instead of making it a sweet savour unto God, render it little preferable to the sacrifice of fools. We may do it, while our general deportment does by no means correspond with our profession. Has not the blessed Jesus somewhat against us, for the neglect or improper performance of family prayer?

Another branch of family religion is the pious education of children. On this subject the command of God is, "and these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart : and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day ; which ye shall command your children to observe ;" and "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." These are the mandates of the everlasting God ; and we cannot neglect them without positive disregard of His authority. Has not the great Head of the church somewhat against us for neglecting the religious education of children ?

But methinks I hear a parent say, I would gladly instruct my children in religion, but they will not hear. Suffer me to ask, do you begin aright ? Do you, in the first place, seek the blessing and assistance of God in the important undertaking ? Do you mourn over the impenitence and unbelief of your children, and weep for them in secret places ? Do you feel more abundant concern for their salvation, than for their temporal prosperity ? And do you converse with them on the subject of religion, with tenderness and tears ? Until you feel and proceed thus in the education of your children, never say that they will not hear. Did your heart melt with affectionate pity when you endeavor to instruct your chil-

dren, I presume they would hear. Are not those parents guilty of barbarous cruelty, who suffer their children to go stupidly on to eternal perdition, without the tenderest advice and the most solemn warning? Is not the neglect of the religious education of children one great offence for which Christ is displeased with this church?

And has not our Saviour somewhat against us for the neglect of secret prayer? No christian will altogether neglect this duty; and how that person can be a christian, who month after month omits the duties of the closet, I am totally at a loss to determine. It is true that a person destitute of piety may punctually attend to secret prayer; but no one can be a christian who habitually neglects it. Communion with God is the believer's life; and scarcely any opportunity is so favorable for it, as the retirement of the closet.

Secret prayer is an invaluable privilege. Blessed be God! that we are permitted to enter our closet, to commune with Him, and to derive consolation from the infinite Fountain of enjoyment, through our divine Mediator. Strange that a person once acquainted with the blessedness of secret intercourse with heaven, should ever after be a stranger to his closet. Did we feel like the Psalmist, when he exclaimed, "if I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem, above my chief joy"—we should abound in secret prayer. Did our heart bleed for sinners rushing

to eternal wo, we should be familiar with the closet. Do we not often neglect an interview with our Saviour in secret prayer, when we would not thus neglect an earthly friend? And has not our Redeemer somewhat against us as individuals, and as a church, for our delinquency in this respect? But why interrogate? Conscience has already answered, and we stand condemned.

Lastly; are we not criminal in neglecting to warn sinners of their danger? It is not my intention that all should preach; nor that any should engage in the sacred work, unless they are qualified, and have been solemnly consecrated to the employment. But love to God, and love to men, will induce private christians to converse with sinners respecting the concerns of the soul, and the solemnities of a future state. There are meetings also, for conference and prayer; in which they would be constrained to speak, if they felt suitable compassion for their perishing fellow-creatures. If it be not the duty of private christians to invite unbelievers to Christ, and to warn them of the destruction that awaits them; why, when the Holy Spirit awakes the attention of a people, do we see them earnestly persuading sinners to be reconciled to God? If we beheld a house on fire at midnight, should we have the infatuation to wait for a magistrate to alarm the sleeping inhabitants? And if christians had only a glimpse of the danger to which the wicked are constantly exposed; would they imagine that there was no necessity for warning except from the desk? Would they think

that those, who seldom or never visit the sanctuary, have no need of spiritual advice? Christian, look around you; see your friends and neighbors crowding the downward road! Will you not tell them that "their feet go down to death, and their steps take hold on hell?" Will you suffer them to perish unapprised of danger? Shall they curse you forever for your unfaithfulness? While suffering the torments of the damned, shall they say to their companions in wo, that the christians of yonder world never directed them to the cross of Christ?

Though we may sometimes warn sinners of their danger, and point them to "the Lamb of God," yet are we not greatly deficient in this duty? And on this account, has not the Redeemer somewhat against us?

I might proceed in my enquiries; and ask whether Immanuel has not somewhat against us, that we do not more frequently and seriously peruse His sacred Word;—that we are so little acquainted with the doctrines and mysteries of salvation; that if we grow in grace, it is by slow and imperceptible degrees;—and finally that we are so unprepared for death and heaven? But I forbear. Permit me, however, to remark, that the wickedness of professors of religion has done the cause of Christ more injury, than pagans and infidels have ever done in their most successful efforts. The everlasting destruction of many souls will undoubtedly be owing, in a considerable degree, to the improper conduct of nominal christians. The unfaithfulness of churches is also the reason, why so many of them are rent

with divisions, deprived of ordinances, and left in a state of desolation. Surely, my brethren, if repentance and reformation do not prevent it, the Lord will remove this candlestick, this church out of his place.

Let us then hear with reverence, one more exhortation from Zion's King. "Be watchful, and strengthen the things, which remain, that are ready to die : for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know in what hour I will come upon thee. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment ; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but will confess his name before my Father, and His angels." And "him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith to the churches."

I was going to conclude ; but my feelings will not permit me, till I have suggested a few thoughts to those, who are still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Has the Lord Jesus somewhat against His followers, who have some love to Him, some repentance, some faith ; and what are His feelings toward you, who have no love, no repentance, no faith ? Has He somewhat against His friends on account of their imperfections ; and what are His feelings toward you, who are His enemies, and entirely sinful ? Has He

somewhat against those, who strive to promote His glory, and make some exertions to lead men to heaven ; and what are His feelings toward you, who have never done any thing to His glory, and whose whole conduct tends to lead men to eternal wo ? Has He somewhat against those, who have been washed in His blood ; and what are His feelings toward you, who are covered with unrepented guilt ? Has He somewhat against those, who are struggling in the way to heaven ; and what are His feelings toward you, who are rushing with heedless indifference to hell ? Sinners, your situation is dreadful. “Your foot shall slide in due time ; the day of your calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon you make haste. Your judgment lingereth not, your damnation slumbereth not.” But the door of mercy is still open. If you now repent and turn unto the Lord, “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. The spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”—AMEN.
