

there are no wells in, nor any of God's ordinances. 'Where no vision is, the people perish.' This is the dismal case of the Pagan world. Which should move us to pray that the Lord may send the light of the gospel to these dark places of the earth.

2. The filling up of the wells in a land, by removing ordinances from a people, is a sad stroke. Where the word and sacraments are not, there is no church there; and consequently God has no people to save there. O let us cry to the Lord, that this may never be our unhappy case.

3. The defiling of the wells is a sad matter for those who drink of them, whether it be by error in doctrine, superstition in worship, or uninstituted government of the church: but worst of all, where they are poisoned with damnable heresies and idolatry, as in the apostate church of Rome. Let us pray for, and strive to maintain, purity of doctrine, worship, and government.

4. Heinous is the sin of the neglect or contempt of the wells of salvation, which God has opened unto them. Let despisers and neglecters of ordinances consider this, and what they will answer when God rises up to call them to an account. Alas! this is one of the great grounds of the Lord's controversy with the present generation, which loudly calls to deep humiliation before him.

5. Great is the sin and loss of those who come to the wells, but never draw of the water nor taste it: who are never bettered by ordinances, but remain as dead and unconcerned about their souls as if the means of salvation were not vouchsafed to them.

6. *Lastly*, Prize the ordinances. Prepare for them, and duly improve them; remember they are the ordinary means of salvation: therefore seek to enjoy God, and to have communion with him, in them, otherwise they will be in vain as to you.

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#### HOW THE WORD IS MADE EFFECTUAL TO SALVATION.

EPH. vi. 17.—*The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

IN these words we have, (1.) A particular piece of the Christian armour recommended, *the word of God*, the revelation of his mind communicated to us in the scriptures, with which every one who minds for heaven should be familiarly acquainted. (2.) A particular piece of its commendation; it is *the sword of the Spirit*; i. e. it is that which the Spirit of the Lord uses in fighting the battles of the Lord, and conquering an elect world to Christ, and bringing them, through

all opposition from the devil, the world, and the flesh, into the heavenly Canaan. And therefore it cannot but be of singular use to a Christian in the spiritual warfare. It is but the sword, but the Spirit cuts with it.

The doctrine of the text is,

Doct. 'The word of God is the sword the Spirit makes use of for raising up a kingdom to Christ.' This more fully in the words of the Catechism, runs thus: 'The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.'

In handling this subject, I shall shew,

I. In what respects the word is an ordinance of God, and mean of salvation.

II. What are the ends for which the Lord has appointed these means and ordinances of reading and preaching the word.

III. Consider the efficacy of the word.

IV. Improve the subject in some inferences.

I. I am to shew, in what respects the word is an ordinance of God and mean of salvation.

*First,* The reading of the word is an ordinance of God, and mean of salvation, of God's own appointment. The Bible is this word, and God has given it to us, and appointed it to be read.

1. The public reading of it in the congregation is God's ordinance, and a mean of salvation. And we find it in scripture performed by the teachers of the people, Neh. viii. 8; 'So they read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.' Ver. 2, 3. 'And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that is before the water-gate, from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.' And so the reading of the word claims a place among public ordinances. Hence reading and expounding a passage of scripture every Lord's day in the church, is a laudable and well-warranted practice in this church.

2. The private reading of it in families, Deut. vi. 6, 7, 8, 9; '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. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and

they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates,' Psal. lxxviii. 5; 'For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children.' Every family ought to be a church; and as they are to speak to God by prayer, so they are to hear God speak to them, by reading his word. And this they ought to do every morning and evening, as well as command their children and servants to read it by themselves.

3. Secret reading of it by one's self, Deut. xvii. 19; 'It [the law or word of God] shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life,' John v. 39; 'Search the scriptures.' By this means the soul converses with God in his word. And those who do not make a practice of daily reading the scripture, are none of the Lord's people, whatever otherwise they may profess.

Hence it is evident, that the people not only may, but ought to read the Bible, and therefore it ought to be translated into the vulgar languages. Which highly condemns the Antichristian church of Rome, which takes away the key of knowledge from the people, by prohibiting them to read the word of God.

*Secondly,* The preaching of the word is an ordinance of God, and mean of grace, 1 Cor. i. 21; 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' But though all may read the word, yet none ought to preach it, but those who, being qualified for it, are duly called thereto, 2 Cor. iii. 6; 'Who hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, Rom. x. 15; 'How shall they preach except they be sent?' 1 Tim. iv. 14; 'Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.' Though the reading of the word, as well as the preaching, is a mean of salvation, yet the preaching of it is the special means, though a despised ordinance in the world; therefore called *foolishness*, 1 Cor. i. 21. It is the most ancient of the two. Noah was a preacher, before the Bible was to take his text from, 2 Pet. ii. 5; and so was Enoch before him, Jude, 14. In this work Christ himself spent the time of his making public appearance in the world, viz. preaching the kingdom of God. It is the mercy of the church of God, that they have the word of God as a lamp always burning: but the preaching of it is the snuffing of the lamp, by which it gives the greater light. And for this reason the preaching of the word should be attended to by all, if ever they expect to be saved.

II. I proceed to shew what are the ends for which the Lord has

appointed these means and ordinances of reading and preaching the word.

*First*, For sinners out of Christ they are appointed means of two great and necessary purposes.

1. Of their conviction, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. 'But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' The sinner naturally is asleep in sin, and the word awakens him; he is bold and daring, and will not consider his sin, nor duty either; but the word brings him to the bar, judges him, convicts him, and condemns him. And,

(1.) It discovers his sin to him. [1.] What are his sins. It comes home so close to him, as if it said, 'Thou art the man.' It goes out through and in through him, and opens up his very heart, tells him of himself what none in the world were privy to, but only God and his own conscience, 1 Cor. iv. 25. This is what the spouse means by the watchmen's finding her, Cant. iii. 3. Who has told the minister? say many, when the minister drawing his bow at a venture knows not whom it hits, till the party touched cries out, but the minister directs the arrow, Heb. iv. 12. And many a time have we seen the reproof laid in seasonably for the sin, that one could not miss it, if but going on straight in the ordinary.

[2.] What the heinous nature of sin is, Heb. iv. 12. God's word pulls off the paint and varnishing from the man's sin, and discovers it in its loathsome nature, and killing aggravations. It makes him see the evil in it, that he never saw before, Acts xxvi. 18.

(2.) It discovers his misery out of Christ, Acts ii. 37. The sinner sees in the word, as in a glass, his lost state without a Saviour; perceives himself bound over to death with cords of guilt, which fills him with fear, terror, anxiety, and remorse.

2. Of their conversion, Psal. xix. 7; 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.' The word is the means which God hath chosen for bringing sinners to himself, Acts xxvi. 18; for raising the dead soul to life, for regeneration, and the working of faith and repentance. This effect of the word we take up in these two particulars.

(1.) The word is the mean of driving the sinner out of himself to Jesus Christ by faith, as it did Peter's hearers, Acts ii. 37, 38; 'Faith cometh by hearing.' The law goes before and condemns the sinner, and discovers him a lost man. The gospel follows with the glad tidings of salvation, and the soul is persuaded to embrace them.

(2.) It is the mean of driving the sinner out of his sins unto God, Acts xx. 21; it sets fire to his nest in sin, and brings him to the Lord as a Master, and to a compliance with his will as his duty.

*Secondly*, For saints they are means appointed for their edification or building up, Acts xx. 32. The church of Christ in this world is but a building, and not yet finished; and every particular saint's state in this world is but an unfinished building: and therefore they must have the word continued with them, as the scaffolding is with the house till it get on the topstone, Eph. iv. 11,—13. And the reading and preaching of the word are,

1. Means of building them up in holiness, the foundation of which is laid in them at conversion, Acts xx. 32. As they are born again of the incorruptible seed of the word, so they are nourished by these breasts; by the same means they had their spiritual life, they get it more abundantly, 1 Pet. ii. 2. It does so by,

(1.) Establishing them in the good they have attained, setting them to hold it fast over the belly of temptations, Eph. iv. 14. By the reading and preaching of the word, the truth according to godliness is rivetted in them, that the longer they live under the means, they are more confirmed in the Lord's way.

(2.) Cleansing them from remaining evils in their heart and life, Psal. xix. 9. Coming to this glass, they get their spots discovered to them, that they may wipe them off. So the word is the pruning-hook of the great Husbandman, John xv. 2, 3; and the engine for demolishing the remaining strong holds of the rebels, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

(3.) Pressing and helping them forward to the good thing lacking, 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17; and so the effect is, that they 'all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord,' 2 Cor. iii. 18. It helps them still to add a cubit to their stature, shewing them more of the truth and the duties of holiness.

2. A means of building them up in comfort, Rom. xv. 4. They are liable to many griefs in the world; but it is appointed to be their great cordial, and sovereign remedy against all their griefs. And this it does, (1.) By setting their case in a true light, Psal. lxxiii. 17. (2.) By affording suitable remedies for their case, from the precious promises and doctrines of it suited to every case, Isa. xl. 1, 2. 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.'

III. I shall consider the efficacy of the word. Concerning which observe,

1. The parties to whom it is effectual. Its convincing efficacy it may have on the reprobate, as Felix, Acts xxiv. 25. Its converting efficacy it has on the elect only, Acts xiii. 48. 'As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.' Its edifying efficacy, both in holiness and comfort, it has on the saints.

2. The spring of its efficacy is not from itself, nor the preacher, but from the Spirit's operation by and with it, 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6. 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase.

3. The inward mean which the Spirit makes use of to render it efficacious, is the faith or belief of it, resting upon God's faithful word for the efficacy, Heb. iv. 2.

I shall conclude with a few inferences.

*Inf.* 1. Prize your Bibles, and read them diligently in your families, and by yourselves, and look on that exercise as a mean appointed of God for your souls' good, John v. 39. 'Search the scriptures.' Alas! the dust of many people's Bibles will be a heavy witness against them at the great day: which should excite us all to the careful perusal of them.

2. Prize the preaching of the word, and attend it conscientiously; and remember that the neglecting and deserting it is not such a light thing as many look on it to be; since it is the spiritual means which the Lord makes use of in converting sinners, and edifying saints; and is necessarily productive of the most terrible consequences to those who contemn it.

3. Let not the one jumble out the other. God has joined them; do not ye then put them asunder. Think not that because ye hear the preaching, therefore ye may neglect reading the Bible; nor to sit at home without necessity on the Lord's day, thinking to do as well with your Bibles, as attending the dispensation of the word. For as the preaching sends you to your Bible, your Bible would send you to the preaching, if ye would hearken to it, 1 Cor. i. 21. And the Bible is read in vain, if it do not inspire you with a sincere love to the preaching of the word.

4. The word is necessary, for saints as well as sinners. It is false growth by which people grow beyond it, either in preaching or reading, before they get to heaven. Nay, all such growth and progress is an arrant delusion.

5. *Lastly*, Look to the Lord himself for the efficacy of the word; and labour to believe the word, that it may profit your souls. For without faith the word will be unprofitable to you; and without the influence of the Spirit, ye will reap no benefit by it.