

SERMON XI.

THE FALSE APOSTLE TRIED AND DISCOVERED.

PREACHED A. D. 1656.

“ And hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”—REV. ii. 2.

IT is not only the opinion of Mr. Brightman, but of very ancient writers,* that these seven epistles, written to the seven churches of Asia, do contain the state and condition of the whole church of God, unto the coming of Christ. This first epistle is written to languishing Ephesus, holding forth the state of the church presently after Christ and his apostles, and is a good looking-glass for all those which begin now to languish, and to lose their first love. Something our Saviour doth commend in this church, and something he reproves them for. He commends them for what was good, and rebukes them for what was evil. Some will commend what is good in their friends, but will not take notice of what is evil. Some will take notice of what is evil in others, but will not commend what is good. This is not according unto Christ's proceeding; the commendation of good, is a good introduction to the reprehension of what is evil.

Now our Saviour Christ doth commend this church, both officers and people, for many things. For their labour; for their patience; for their zeal. “ I know thy works, (saith he,) and thy labour, and thy patience.” Labour and patience go together. Those that will labour in the work of God, must be patient; they shall surely meet with opposition, and therefore patience must accompany our labours. Yet this patience does not exclude zeal; but saith Christ here, “ I know thy labour, and thy patience, and thy zeal: thou canst not bear them that are evil.” Possibly then, a man may be

* In Joannis Apocal. septem ecclesias scribitur per quas una catholica designatur.—Greg. Hom. 15, in Ezek.

Joannes scribit ad septem ecclesias, in quibus etiam universas ecclesias septenario numero intelligimus commendari. Austin Epist. 106, Extra septem ecclesias quicquid foris est alienum est optat.—Milevitan, lib. 2.

patient, and yet cannot bear or endure those that are evil. Now this zeal and severe dealing with those that were evil, is described two ways: first, by the persons which they did deal withal, those were false teachers, ver. 2, 6; secondly, by the exercise of their zeal and severity, which did consist in two things, the discovery of those false teachers, and the hatred of their deeds. The hatred of their deeds ye have at ver. 6, "This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans;" the discovery of these false teachers ye have in these words, "And thou hast tried them," &c.

It is strange that there should be false apostles in those days, whilst some of the true apostles were alive to confute and discover them. But it seems that the discovery of these false apostles, was not a work only belonging to the true apostles, for this church of Ephesus found them out, and are commended for it by our Saviour Christ. And so the doctrine from this part of the verse is:

That it is a matter of great commendation in the eyes of Jesus Christ, to try and discover false teachers, or false apostles.

Christ doth not only commend this church for their zeal herein, but hath left their commendation upon scriptural record, as a good example for all the churches of Christ. And therefore, I say, the discovery of false teachers and false apostles, is still a matter of great commendation in the eyes of Christ.

It is that which we are all commanded to do, 1 John iv. 1, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone into the world."

But for the clearing of this truth, it will appear, if you consider,

What a dangerous and mischievous people, false teachers and false apostles are. They do deceive men in the matter of their souls; they are called deceivers and seducers, John ii. 7, "Many deceivers are entered into the world," &c. 2 Tim. iii. 13; "But evil men, and seducers, shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." And deceitful workers, 2 Cor. xi. 13, 6, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers." Now a man loves not to be deceived in any thing, no, not in a small matter. If I had spent or given

away much more, it would never have grieved me, you say ; but I cannot endure to be cheated and deceived. And if a man cannot endure to be deceived in lesser things, what an evil thing is it then to be deceived in the matters of his soul ? Such are the things that these false teachers do deceive men in ; yea, they will and do subvert men's faith, and spoil them of the very fundamentals of their religion. Therefore saith the apostle, Col. ii. 8, " Beware lest any man spoil, or make a prey of you." Is it not a sad thing for a man to lose his faith for a fable ? They will first take away your faith, and then they will lay a fable in the room of the faith ; for their highest speculations and notions are but fables. Ye may observe, therefore, that when the apostle Paul doth exhort from their doctrine, he saith still, " Take heed and beware of fables." Those are many, and of divers sorts. There are old wives' stories and fables ; such are the doctrines and speculations of false teachers. Therefore, 1 Tim. iv. 1, the apostle having said, that in the latter times some should depart from the faith, " giving heed to seducing spirits ;" and speaking of the doctrines of those seducers, in the following verses, he saith, ver. 7, " But refuse thou profane and old wives' fables : " for such in the eyes of God are the doctrines of these seducers. There are Jewish fables also, whereof the Talmud is now full ; and such are all those doctrines and commandments of men, which are beside the Scripture, the doctrines of false teachers : and therefore saith the apostle, Tit. i. 14, having spoken of seducers in the former verse, whose mouths must be stopped, " Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men." There are also the fables of heathen poets, the figments and devices of men's own brains : and such are the doctrines and speculations of all false teachers. And therefore says the apostle, 2 Pet. i. 16, " We have not followed cunning and devised fables ; but we have a more sure word of prophecy," at ver. 19. So that look whatever doctrine is not according to the Scripture, is but a fable in the eyes of God. Now is it not an evil thing to lose my faith for a fable ? Such fables do these false teachers bring ; they steal away your faith, and lay a fable in the room thereof ; yea, they will and do beguile men of their reward ; they beguile them of their faith ; they beguile them of their souls, and they beguile them of their reward ; there-

fore saith the apostle Paul, "Let no man beguile you of your reward," Col. ii. 18. Yea, they will not only beguile you of your reward, but they will bring you into pernicious ways, which if you follow, the way of truth shall be evil spoken of, 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2: in which scripture the apostle Peter tells us, that as false prophets did arise in the times of the old testament, so false teachers should arise in the times of the new testament. He tells us, that the ways of these false teachers are pernicious ways. That they shall infect many, for he saith, "Many shall follow them." That by reason of them, the ways of truth shall be evil spoken of. Surely then, this sort of people are a very dangerous and mischievous people, and therefore a commendable thing in the eyes of Christ to make discovery of them. But,

Though they be a dangerous and mischievous people, yet it is an hard thing to discover them, for they walk in the dark, and transform themselves into ministers of light; they creep, and they privily creep into houses, saith the apostle; and they will come to you, saith our Saviour, in sheep's clothing, Matt. vii.* That is, look whatever garb the true prophet was or is found in, that will they be found in also. Did the true prophets of the old testament go in a plain or rough garment, or a garment of hair, 2 Kings i. 8, Matt. iii. 4? so did the false prophets also, Zech. xiii. 4, wear a rough garment, or a garment of hair, as the Hebrew, to deceive. Did the true prophets sometimes quake, shake and tremble? so did the wicked diviners also. And so now in the times of the new testament. Do the true teachers of the gospel press or make use of Scripture? so do false teachers also. Did the true apostles preach Christ? so did the false apostles also: "Some preach Christ out of envy," Phil. i. 15, 16. Did the true apostles and prophets declare the deep things of God? 1 Cor.

* Induti speciem ovium, id est mentientes ovinam fraudisque nesciam simplicitatem, vestimenta igitur ovium sunt ea omnia, quæ sunt proprie ovium, hujusmodi vestimenta sunt perpetua verbi Dei et evangelii inelamatio, densissima, scripturarum citatio, mansuetudo, blandiloquium sanctimonie species, &c.—Luc. Bruggens. in Matt. vii. 15.

Vestes ovium sunt: 1. Sophisticus verbi pretectus, Matt. iv. 2. Nomen ecclesie, Jer. vii. 3. Hypocrosis in vita, Col. ii. 4. Ficti entusiasmi, Col. ii. 5. Miracula, 2 Thess. ii. 6. Excellentia dona, Matt. vii. 7. Fortitudo in suppliciis. 8. Χρηστολογίαι και ευλογίαι, blanditiæ et promissiones —Strigel. in Matt. vii. p. 64.

ii. 10; so did the false prophets also, Rev. ii. 24, "the depths of Satan as they speak." Look what that is which the true preachers do, that will false teachers in appearance do. On a time, says Austin in his Confessions,* the house where I lived was broken up in the night by thieves; and the men of the house perceiving that the house was beset with thieves, and making a noise, the thieves run away, and left their crows of iron and instruments whereby they did break up the house. Then my friend Alipius coming to the house, and finding those instruments and tools lying on the ground, he took the crow of iron into his hand; and when the men of the house came out, and saw the crow of iron in his hand, they took hold of him, and thought that he was the thief. So, says another, the heretics of the times will take the same instruments to destroy the house of God as we do to build the same. The same crow of iron, the same scripture that is in the hand of Alipius, a friend, is made use of by a heretic, one that is a thief, who comes to make a prey of your faith. He that comes not in by the door, is *fur et latro*, a thief and a robber: not *apertus hostis*, an open or professed enemy, but a secret thief and a robber, whose coming is unknown, and of whom you can less be aware: and you know the more crafty and subtle they are in their practices, the more hardly they will be discerned. Now false teachers, who come in sheep's clothing, are a subtle and crafty generation; for as Satan at the first beguiled Adam by beginning with Eve, the weaker vessel; so do these people also creep into houses, leading silly women captive, laden with divers lusts; there they begin, even with the weaker vessel, as Satan at the first did; and as Satan beguiled Eve, by telling her that she should be like unto God himself, and so drew her from the appointment of God; so do false teachers now tell poor souls, that if they will follow their doctrines, they shall be like to God, yea, be God and Christ, and so draw them from the appointments of Christ; and therefore saith the apostle, "I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 3. Now if it be so hard a thing to discover these false teachers, and they be so dangerous and

* Augustini Confess. lib. vi. cap. 9.

mischievous a people, then surely it is a matter of great commendation to make discovery of them.

It is an excellent thing also to make discovery of them; Christ doth commend what is excellent, spiritually excellent, and the more excellent the thing the more it doth fall under the commendation of Christ. Now by discovering of these false teachers, you put a stop and check unto their folly and madness; their madness or folly, saith the apostle, shall proceed no further. How so? It shall be made known to all: 2 Tim. iii. 9, "But they shall proceed no further, for their folly shall be made manifest to all men." Thereby, also, ye shall preserve those who are not declined; and thereby you shall be serviceable unto Christ in the great work which he hath to do and is doing in these latter times. One part of his work is to discover those that are unsound: Rev. ii. 24, "Then shall all the churches know that I am he that searcheth the heart and reins." But did not the churches know that before? Yea, but then, that is, in the latter times, they shall have experience of it, for then I will discover Jezebel and all her false prophets; so that this discovery of false teachers is part of Christ's own work in the latter days, and the more you labour therein, the more serviceable you are unto Christ. Surely, therefore, it is a matter of great commendation in the eyes of Christ, to try, find out and discover false teachers and false apostles.

If it be so commendable in the eyes of Christ to discover these persons, then it is lawful for us, though weak, to go to the meetings of these false teachers, or to receive them into our houses, and to speak with them; else how shall I try and discover them?

Nay, but this follows not, no more than that you must go to Rome to try and find out the deceits of the papists, or that you must go into Turkey to try and find out the false doctrine of the Turks; you may try and discover papists and Turks, yet it doth not follow that you must read over their books and Alcoran. The apostle saith, "Mark those which cause division, and avoid them. False teachers shall arise in the last days (saith he), and from such turn away." And the apostle John saith, "If any come to you not with this doctrine, receive him not into your house, nor bid him God speed," lest you be partaker of their evil deeds. Look, what-

ever mischief they shall do abroad by their false doctrines, all that shall you partake in if you receive them into your houses, or countenance them by bidding them God speed. He that receiveth a true prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive that prophet's reward; he shall profit by that prophet, and shall have a share in all the good which he doth. So he that receiveth a false prophet, shall receive a false prophet's reward; he shall be poisoned by him, and shall partake in his evil deeds.

But how then shall I try all things?

Mark this scripture well. Those words are spoken to the church of the Thessalonians, 1 Epist. v. 20, 21, "Despise not prophesyings, prove all things;" that is, try those things which ye hear in the church by way of prophesy; but he doth not say that you must run out to every meeting of suspected persons to try all things there, but keep your place in the church, and try all things; otherwise, it being a commandment, all men should be bound to read Popish books, Socinian books, and the Turkish Alcoran. And if you should go to these meetings, do you think that is the way to try all things? Do ye not know that it is the ordinary way of all false teachers, to hold out truth at the first? Will they not preach an hundred truths first, that they may make way to one error? And if so, how can you try them by going to a meeting or two? But keep your station in the church of God, despise not, turn not your back on prophesyings, and so try all things. If you be convinced of the truth and way of God by the Scripture, you will easily find out a false doctrine, for *rectum est index sui et obliqui*; truth known will discover error. But where do you find in Scripture that trying is the end of hearing: that we are to hear that we may try? I must therefore go to hear that I may learn and profit by my hearing; and if you go to these meetings that you may learn and profit, are you not in a fair way to be deceived by them? The members of the church of Ephesus, here, did not run from the church for this discovery, for says the apostle, Acts xx. 30, "And of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things;" which, when it came to pass, the Ephesians did discover them, saith our text, for which they were thus highly commended of Christ.

Now if this be so commendable in the eyes of Christ,

then why should we not all take some pains herein, and be found doing this work of our generation? Do ye think that there are no false teachers, and false apostles, and false prophets, in these days of ours? Read what is said in Zech. xiii. 2—6. 1. The prophet tells us, that in the days immediately before the calling of the Jews, there shall be unclean spirits in the land, verse 2, and false prophets, verse 3. 2. He tells us, that when the Jews shall be called, in that day, verse 1, there shall be so great a zeal amongst them, against these false prophets, that their parents, and such as are near to them, shall be the first that shall punish them, verse 3, “His father and mother that begat them, shall say, Thou shalt not live, for thou speakest lies;” and yet these are high gospel times. 3. He tells us here, that this correction shall be a means to reduce them; for upon that it is said, verse 4, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophet shall be ashamed,” &c. But the thing that I bring this scripture for, is to shew you, that there shall be such people as these, immediately before the call of the Jews, and that is in these days of ours. Only observe how the prophet doth here describe them: He tells you that they shall be such as were originally husbandmen; for upon their reducement, he shall say, “I am no prophet, I am an husbandman.” He tells you here, that they shall be such as shall wear a rough, hair, or plain garment to deceive, verse 4. He tells you, that they shall come in the name of the Lord, and say, they are not sent by men, but by God immediately, verse 3. That yet these men shall be acted by the very spirit of the devil; for says the Lord, “I will cause the false prophet, and the unclean spirit, to pass out of the land;” that is, such as do work and act by the inspiration of the devil, having the fierce and unclean spirit of the devil: these are the men that shall arise in these days of ours. Do you think then, that we are free from false teachers now; or do you think that it is not incumbent upon all; only upon officers, to try and discover them? Here the whole church are commended for it. Or do you think that it is nothing to be commended by Christ? Those that he commends now, he will commend before the Father, and all the angels, and saints another day; his commendation shall never make you proud, as the applause of

man may do. Oh, what an excellent thing then is it, to make discovery of these false apostles, and false teachers: why should we not all, more or less, according to our places, labour to be found in this work, in these days of ours?

How shall we find out, and discover them? for if we may not go to their meetings, and they be such a crafty, deceiving people, what shall we do, and how shall we try, a true teacher, from a false teacher; or a true apostle, from a false apostle?*

All teachers are to be tried three ways. By

Their call.

Their doctrine.

Their fruits or lives.

As for a man's call to preach: whoever is called to preach, is either called *ad opus*, to a particular work: or he is called *ad munus*, to an office. If he be called to a work only, then his preaching is called prophesy; and so some are called to preach; for else how should we know whether men be fit for office, if they may not preach before they be in office? Now if men be so called to preach, then they must preach according to the proportion and analogy of faith, Rom. xii. 6. If they be so called to preach, they must have a gift to profit others publicly; for all prophesy is for exhortation, edification, and comfort, 1 Cor. xiv. 3. And if they be so called to preach, they must submit that they speak to the judgment of others: the officer speaks with authority; but another speaks with submission, "and let the rest judge," 1 Cor. xiv. 29. So that, if any man will take upon him to preach and teach as a gifted man, if he have not a gift to profit others in public: a gift beyond a family gift; and if he do not speak according to the proportion of faith, and do not submit what he speaketh to the judgment of others, he is a false prophet, and no true teacher in this kind.

But if a man be called to office; then his office is either extraordinary, or ordinary.

If extraordinary, then he is either a prophet, who doth foretell things to come, and they do come to pass; or he is an evangelist, whose office was to accompany, and minister

* Veri doctoris lana est vocatio vel authoritas, sana doctrina; vita probata sed hac lana non omnes eodem modo utuntur imo multi abutuntur.—Ferus in Matt. vii. p. 255.

unto the apostles: when the apostles therefore ceased, then the evangelists ceased; for *sublato subjecto tollitur adjunctum*. Or he is an apostle who hath seen the Lord, and is immediately sent by him, whose commission extendeth unto all the world, who is infallible in regard of doctrine delivered, having the gifts of tongues given him; not by industry, but by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and doth work miracles. And therefore if any man say, that he is an apostle, and yet hath not seen the Lord Christ, nor hath these gifts of tongues, nor can work miracles; then he is a false apostle, and a false teacher in that kind.

But if a man be called to an ordinary office, then, he must be apparently godly: not only free from vice and scandal, but holy and blameless, shining with positive virtues, as well as free from scandalous sins, 1 Tim. iii., Tit. i. He must be qualified, and gifted for the work of preaching, being apt to teach, anointed with the unction of the Holy One; not that he must necessarily have the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost: for when the apostle Paul sets down the due qualifications of a minister, 1 Tim. iii., there is not one word of that. Being gifted and duly qualified, he must be chosen, or desired by the church, Acts xiv. 23. Then having consented, he must be separated to the work of the ministry. And therefore if any man say, that he is a teacher in office, ordinarily called, and yet be profane, scandalous, or vicious, or ignorant, being not fitly qualified; or is not desired, or chosen by the church, and separated to the work of the ministry, he is a false teacher in this kind.

But whether a man's call be ordinary or extraordinary; whether he be called, *ad opus*, to a work, or *ad munus*, to an office, he must make out his call to others; it is not enough to say, I am sent of God, I tell thee I am sent of God: the apostles themselves made out their call to others; "Do ye require a proof of my ministry, or apostleship?" says the apostle Paul; then thus and thus. So that though a man do pretend that he is sent of God, and that he hath seen the Lord; yet if he be not able to give an account thereof unto others, he is surely a false apostle, and a false teacher. Thus may you try and discover men by their call.

As for doctrine. Teachers may, and must be tried by

their doctrine, 1 John iv. 1. Particular doctrines whereby men may be tried, are many : I will name some briefly, because I intend this work no further than to this one exercise. Therefore,

The true apostles never did decry the Scriptures, but under God and Christ, did exalt the Scriptures. They called them the word of God, Rom. ix. 6 ; 2 Cor. iv. 2. They told us that the Scriptures are a sufficient rule, and able to make us wise unto salvation, 2 Tim. iii. 14, 16, 17. That they are the only rule and judge of all doctrines, whereby we are to try the same, according to that of the prophet Isaiah ; “To the law, and to the testimony ; if any one walk not according to this rule, there is no light in him,” chap. viii. That these Scriptures may be expounded, 2 Peter i. 20. The apostles never did deny the original, saying, I deny the Hebrew, or I deny the Greek ; but often cited the original Hebrew ; yea, the Septuagintal Greek. This was the true apostle’s doctrine in regard of the scripture.

As for Christ : The true apostles never did deny the Deity of Christ, whilst he lived here on earth ; nor the humanity of Christ in heaven. But for his Deity, the apostle tells us, that he is very God, and the only wise God, 1 John v. 20.

And for the body of Christ : The true apostles tell us, that he did not only rise from the dead, but his body ascended, and that he is man still, 2 Tim. ii. 5, “There is one Mediator, the man Jesus Christ.”

As for the ordinances : The apostles never did deny the ordinances ; but have told us that the ministration of the gospel, is more glorious than that of Moses, because this was to continue, 2 Cor. iii. ; they did not destroy, but erect these ordinances, by commission from Christ, “As I have ordained in all the churches,” saith Paul. And more particularly, they did not deny the ministry, not the being of a settled ministry, Rom. xii. 7, though by the hand of man : Titus i., “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest ordain elders in every city :” nor the maintenance, the settled maintenance of ministers, 1 Cor. xi. 14, “Even so hath the Lord ordained, that those that preach the gospel, should live on the gospel.” As they did not deny the ministry, so they did not deny water baptism : but they rather called for water baptism, because Cornelius had received the Spirit, Acts x. 47. They did not lay a necessity

upon the disciples, to be plunged into the river or water; for the jailor and Cornelius were baptized in their houses: nor did they ever forbid infant baptism, but tell us that children of believers are holy, 2 Cor. vii. As the true apostles did not deny water baptism, so they did not cry down the Lord's supper, but tell us plainly, that thereby we hold forth the Lord's death till he come. As they did contend for the supper, so they commanded singing: 1. That the whole church should sing; for the whole church of Ephesus, and the whole church of Colosse, are commanded to sing, Eph. v. 18; Col. iii. 16. 2. That the whole church should sing the Psalms of David; for by those titles, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, the Psalms of David are distinguished. 3. That this singing should be performed with an audible voice, and not in the heart only; for saith the apostle in the same scriptures, "Speaking and singing with grace in your hearts." 4. That these psalms, or hymns, or spiritual songs, should be sung by many together; not by one alone, but by the whole church; for the evangelist tells us, that Christ, and his disciples, sung a hymn, and so went out after supper: if only one sang, and the rest consented, then that one was Christ, or some one of his disciples; Christ it was not, for if he had sung a hymn, it would have been said, that he sung, and the hymn would have been set down; as it is said, he prayed, and his prayer recorded, John xvii. Nor was it one of the disciples, for as yet the Holy Ghost was not fallen upon them, to gift them with spiritual gifts; neither can it be said, that the word *ὑμνησαντες*, should be translated, *Praised*; and when they had praised, &c. For when it is to be so translated, then it is joined with an accusative case, as Heb. ii. 12, but they all sang, audibly, and together. Thus the true apostles of Christ, were for, and not against the ordinances of Christ.*

As for the doctrine of justification: The true apostles preached for justification by imputed righteousness, and by faith, in opposition to works, Rom. iv.

They never preached, or told us that there is a light in

* Affirmabant autem hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ vel erroris quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere secum invicem.—Plin. Epist. ad Trajan.

Vel communi voce dicere. Magdeburgens. Hist. Cent. ii. cap. 6.

every man, which followed, will bring to salvation : indeed the evangelist saith, That Christ, as God, enlighteneth every one that comes into the world ; the wicked with the light of reason and understanding ; the godly with the light of grace : and the apostle saith, that the grace of God hath appeared to all men, that is, both Jews and gentiles ; but doth not say, that the grace of God hath appeared to all particular men : but he saith, The whole world lies in wickedness ; and a natural man doth not perceive the things of God, neither can he.

They never preached, that any man might be perfect, so as to be without sin in this life, but the contrary ; saying, “ If any man say, he hath no sin, he deceives himself, and there is no truth in him,” 1 John i. 8 ; he doth not say, and there is no humility in him, though it be pride to say so ; but there is no truth in him.* And again, the apostle James, “ In many things we offend all,” chap. iii. 2. And again, “ We see and know but in part,” 1 Cor. xiii. 9, they acknowledge indeed a perfection of uprightness : but the true apostles never placed any perfection in monastical virginity, or abstaining from meats, cuffs, points, and laces.† But says the apostle, Col. ii. 18, “ Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and in being subject to ordinances : as touch not, taste not, handle not : which all perish in the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men. Which things indeed have a shew of wisdom, in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body,” ver. 19—23.

The true apostles never preached against respect unto magistrates, parents, and masters. Indeed our Saviour Christ says, “ Call no man your father ; neither be ye called masters :” but *master*, he tells us at verse 8, is all one with *rabbi* : now these rabbins were their sect-masters, who were the masters of their faith ; and such a father and master, no man ought to be : but otherwise the apostle saith, “ Children obey your parents ; honour thy father : and ser-

* Poterat enim apostolus dicere, si dixerimus, quod non habemus peccatum nos ipsos extollimus, et humilitas in nobis non est, sed cum ait nos ipsos decipimus et veritas in nobis non est satis ostendit eum qui sic dixerit non verum loqui sed falsum.—Concil. Milevit. Cau. 6.

† Nunc bene vivitur si sine crimine sine peccato autem si quis vivere se existimet non id agit, ut peccatum non habebat, sed ut veniam non accipiat.—Austin.

vants, be subject to your masters." And did not Paul the apostle call himself, a wise master-builder? Acts xxvi. 25, Paul calleth Festus, most noble Festus; and Agrippa, King Agrippa. And chap. xxvii., he saith to them that were in the ship with him, "Sirs, I perceive that voyage will be dangerous:" and again, verse 21, "He stood forth in the midst, and said, Sirs:" and yet again, verse 25, "Wherefore, Sirs;" or excellent men, be of good comfort, &c.

The true apostles never preached against the resurrection and ascension of the body, but make the doctrine of the resurrection a fundamental article of our faith, 1 Cor. xv., yea, they tell us, that Christ did not only rise, but ascend with his body; and that our bodies shall remain bodies in heaven, as Christ's doth, Phil. iii. 20, "Who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be like to his glorious body."

The apostles never preached that there is no place of heaven and hell after death: but as they received of Christ, so they delivered truth unto us. Now Christ saith expressly; "Go ye cursed into everlasting torment, prepared for the devil, and his angels: and Come ye blessed, inherit the kingdom of the Father, prepared for you before the foundation of the world."

These were the doctrines of the apostles, and the true teachers of the gospel. Doth any man therefore say, I now come unto you from God, and God hath sent me? And doth he say, there is no other heaven, nor hell, than what is in this life? Or doth he preach against the resurrection and ascension of our bodies? Or doth he preach against respect unto magistrates, and civil relations? Or doth he tell you of a light within all men, which is able to bring them to salvation? Doth he preach perfection, saying, that man may be perfect, and without sin in this life? Or doth he tell you of justification by somewhat within you? Or doth he cry down, degrade, and vilify the ordinances of Christ, ministry, water baptism, Lord's supper, and singing? Or doth he deny the Deity of Christ on earth; or the humanity of Christ in heaven? Or doth he preach down the Scripture by telling you, that the light and spirit within you is your rule? Surely this person is a false apostle, and a false teacher. Thus you may try a man by his doctrine.

A teacher also may and must be tried by his life and fruits;

for saith our Saviour, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves: ye shall know them by their fruits," Matt. vii. 15, 16. As ye know a tree, not by the leaves, but by the fruit; so, saith he, ye shall know these men, not by their first profession, but by their after works and ways and fruits.

But if they go in sheep's clothing, how shall I know they are wolves?

Yes; for though their clothing be the sheep's, yet they have the nature and disposition of wolves, the voice, howling and barking of wolves, and the practice of wolves.

The nature of a wolf, though he be in sheep's clothing, is fierce and cruel. So is the nature, spirit and disposition of the false teacher: 2 Tim. iii. 3, "Without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good: of this sort are they (ver. 6) which creep into houses, and lead silly women captive," &c.

The voice of the wolf doth betray him; he howls as the sheep do not, and barks at the shepherds. So do false teachers do, they resist the truth, as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, and are continually barking at and speaking evil of the true ministers of the gospel, and shepherds of the sheep. It is recorded of Philip of Macedon, when he laid siege to Athens, that he sent word into the city, that if they would send out ten of their orators, he would be at peace with them. Whereupon Demosthenes rose up in the senate, and said, If the wolves come to the fold, and tell the sheep, that they will be at peace with them, if they will send away all their dogs and shepherds, will the sheep do it? No, the great design of the wolf is to part the sheep from the shepherd. Those therefore that come in sheep's clothing, and cry out against the true ministry of Christ, are no true sheep, but wolves.

The wolf, though he be in sheep's clothings, doth tear and rend the sheep; he cometh not in by the door; and when he is come in, then he doth devour the poor sheep. And so it is with false teachers, they come not in by the door of a lawful call, and they bite and devour and destroy the faith of some.*

* *Οἱ λῆνες ἐρχονται πρὸς υμᾶς*, Matt. vii. 13, qui venient ex seipsis legitime non missi, de quibus Jer. xxiii. 21, currebant et non mittebam.—Luc. Brugens. in Matt. vii. 15.

But our Saviour saith, that we may know them by their fruits; what are those fruits, and how shall we know them thereby?

If you find that they are given to uncleanness, then they are not sent of God. So are false teachers many times, 2 Pet. ii. 1, "There shall be false teachers amongst you." "These do walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness," ver. 10. See the Epistle of Jude. God doth often give men up to fleshly sins for their vile errors.*

If you find that they are given to lying, then you may know that they are not of God. Truth doth not need our lies to maintain it with; but the doctrine of lies is often maintained with the practice of lying. "And hast found them liars," saith our text here.

If you find that the height of their religion is to maintain some opinion, and that doth consist in some voluntary humility, and keeping under the body, then are they not of God. Col. ii. 18—26.

If you find that their doctrine tends to draw men away from the ordinances of God, then though they pretend to be prophets, yet they are but false prophets. Deut. xiii. 1, "If there arise among you a prophet, and he giveth a sign, and it come to pass, thou shalt not hearken to him," ver. 3. "And he shall be put to death," ver. 5. Why? "Because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God."

If you find that in truth he falls short of him whom he would seem to be, and yet in shew goes beyond him, then he is a deceiver. As for example: If a man say that he is an apostle, but pretends to do more than ever any apostle did, as to judge infallibly in all things; whereas the apostle saith sometime, "This say I, not the Lord;" yet in truth falls short of what an apostle did, who spake with tongues, and

* Pseudo-prophetæ quo modo probari possint: cettissima autem demonstratio hæc est, si deliquerit et contemnat voluptates corporales, imprimis vero sensum illum qui nobis est opprobrio et dedecori et si abominentur omnem libidinem et scortationem; an ignoras enim, qua ratione Zedekias filius Maasijæ et Achab filius Kolijæ de propetia gloriati fuerint, multos homines ad se pertraxerint, verbaque prophetiæ ab aliis instinctus divini afflatu prolata sub suo titulo ventitarint, et tamen in voluptatibus suis venereis perrexerint, ita ut sociorum et discipulorum suorum uxores stupraverint. Donec a Deo relecti et a rege Babylonie, meritissima pæna igne combusti fuerint. Jer. xxix. 22, 23.—Rab. Mos. Maiemon. More Nevochim, part 2, cap. 40.

did work miracles ; surely this man is a false apostle. It is the way of an hypocrite to imitate the godly, and in outward things he will go beyond many a godly man, yet doth fall short of the weakest saint. Now though every hypocrite is not an heretic, yet every heretic is an hypocrite.

If you find that his great work and business is, to destroy the churches of Christ, then he is not of God, but by this fruit you may know him to be a false teacher. The apostles went up and down confirming the churches, not destroying them. But now, says Luther,* after we have taken much pains, even for ten years together, to gather and settle a church ; then comes some fanatic person, and he destroys more in one moment, than we could build in ten years. But, says the apostle, “ Mark those which cause division,” much more those that cause destruction, and avoid them.

“ If they will not hear us (says the apostle John), they are not of God,” 1 John iv. 6. “ We are of God : he that knoweth God, heareth us ; he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby know we the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” Doth a man then forsake the assemblies of the saints, as the manner of some is, and teach men so to do ? he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven ; he is a false teacher, and by this fruit you may know him. Yea, and by all these fruits you may know false teachers. You may know them by their call ; you may know them by their doctrines ; and you may know them by their fruits and their practices. And thus you see how those that are false apostles, or false teachers, may be tried and discovered. And is it a commendable thing in the eyes of Christ, to make discovery of them ? Now then, as you desire that you may fall under the commendation of Christ here or hereafter, let it be your work and business in these times to make this discovery. Only know,

That it is the special work of church officers, to try and discover false teachers ; for this epistle is directed to the angel of the church of Ephesus.

But though it is their work especially, yet it is a work in-

* Decem annis laboratur antequam ecclesiola recte et pie instituta paratur, et ubi parata est, irrepat aliquis fanaticus et quidem idiota, qui nihil novit quam contumeliose loqui, contra sinceros verbi doctores, in uno momento evertit omnia. —Luther.

cumbent upon all the saints and churches; for though the epistle be directed to the angel of the church, yet the matter thereof doth belong to all; for saith the same epistle, "He that hath an ear, let him hear, what the Spirit saith unto the churches." And if this work do belong unto all the church, what an evil thing is it for those that are members of a church, to be beguiled with false teachers. Shall they be beguiled by them, that should discover them? This is directly contrary to their duty. It is your duty, and it is all your duty, to make this discovery. Therefore, yet more practically,

Go to God for wisdom and the Spirit of discerning; it is Christ alone that doth see men's fruit under all their leaves: beg this discerning Spirit therefore at the hands of Christ.

Take heed that you do not lie in any sin or error, for all sin and error blinds. How shall you see the error of another, if you be blinded with your own sin and error?

In case any thing doth arise, which hath any difficulty in it, consult with others, for ye are not alone; and saith David, "I will inquire in thine holy temple."

Be sure that you keep to the Scripture, and take heed that you do not judge of doctrines by impressions. Let the light within you be your principle, enabling you unto what is good; but let it not be your rule to judge of doctrines, that is the word alone.

Take heed that you have not too great a charity towards, and opinion of, those that are suspected to be false teachers. Ye shall know them by their fruits, saith Christ. And lest you should think that they may be good, I tell you, nay, says Christ, in the next words, for a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit: no man gathers grapes off thorns, or figs off thistles: "but evil men and seducers," says the apostle. If seducers, you are to look upon them as evil men, as well as on drunkards, swearers, and profane persons; which because some have not done, they have been deceived, instead of making this discovery.*

And if you would be sure to make up a right judgment in this great discovery, then stay your time, and wait long

* *Plerique enim hominum ita impostorum liberalitate fascinantur ut quicquid proponunt monstruosæ doctrinæ tamen pro bonis habeant. Quibus Christus respondet, non modo hujusmodi homines bonos non esse, sed ne esse quidem posse.*
—Cartwrighti Harm. p. 271.

before you close with any of their opinions ; for saith Christ, Ye shall know them by their fruit. Now the fruit of a tree is not presently seen ; an ill tree in winter may seem to be as good as the best : stay therefore your time, and you shall know them by their fruit, and so be able to make this discovery, which is so pleasing to, and commendable in the eyes of Jesus Christ.*

It may be some will think and say, This doth not concern or reach my condition ; I am troubled with and labour under such or such a temptation ; and in all this, nothing hath been spoken unto that temptation. But remember, that our Lord and Saviour Christ hath not said to some, but to all, “ Beware of false prophets ;” not behold, but beware : we behold what is open, and beware of what is hidden.† And both Christ and his apostles tell us, “ That in the last days there shall arise false Christs, false prophets, false apostles, and false brethren ; insomuch, as if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect :” and is this nothing then unto your condition ? It may be it is your temptation, that you do not take heed and beware enough. I dare boldly say, he is under a temptation, that thinks these things do not reach him, or concern his condition. And what is the reason that many poor souls are so misled in these days of ours, but because they have not been prepared, and underlaid with knowledge for to make resistance. All their work and business hath been about some particular temptation, striving against some temptation : if they have heard any thing about that, well ; if not, then they think the matter concerns not them ; and so not being grounded in the faith, when deceivers come, they are taken captive by them. But I know you all desire to be commended by Christ at that great day, when he shall say, “ Well done, good and faithful servant.” And this discovery of false teachers, is a matter of great commendation in his eyes now ; and what he commends now, he will commend then : wherefore up and be doing. It may

* Si quis ex foliis et floribus iudicium formare velir, non expectata fructuum maturitate plane hallucinetur, sic etiam qui de initiis quibusdam iudicium sibi singant, &c. tandem enim eorum amentia omnibus innotescet. 2 Tim. iii.—Cartwrighti Harm. p. 270.

† Attendite a falsis prophetis, diligenter cavete non dixit aspicite, sed attendite, quod aspicere est ad allud quod palam videtur, attendere autem est cum sollicitudine inquirere.—Abulens. in Matt. vii. p. 218.

be this may be some pains and labour to you; but Christ saith, "I know thy works and thy labour." It may be it may cost you much trouble and sorrow; but he saith also, "I know thy labour and thy patience." It may be some may think you are too busy and severe in the work of this discovery; but he hath said, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and that 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." Wherefore let us comfort and encourage one another with these words.