

Editor's Note: This was taken from The Spiritual magazine and Zion's Casket; or, Saint's treasury.
June 1840 Pages 121 to 126

A MAN AMOUNG THIEVES

JUNE, 1840.

A LETTER FROM REV. JAMES WELLS,
OF THE SURREY TABERNACLE, TO A MAN AMOUNG THIEVES.

Sir,

I received your letter, dated April 27, 1839, and I feel grieved to find that you have passed from one delusion to another. You rightly call the man, whose Sabellian and presumptuous doctrines you so eagerly received, before you left England for America, an ungodly professor. Well do I remember the way in which you treated the great foundation of all gospel truth, the doctrine of the Trinity; and although my earnest expostulations with you, did not bring you out of the callous state you were then in, yet you acknowledged that you could not say anything more against the doctrine of the Trinity: which gave me some hope that the snare would be broken, and that you would escape, and that I should find you with a broken heart and broken bones, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in your right mind. But, alas, instead of this, I find you among duty-faith workmongers, exhorting everyone to be a Christian, to make sure work for eternity; and that, by what you call protracted meetings, you are converting people by scores and by hundreds; and calling upon me, in your letter, to rejoice in what you call revivals in religion. I have been through these delusions and know well what they are, God forbid I should ever again turn to these beggarly elements. You, after your sin, blasphemy and presumption, would, I should have thought, have been the last to have found anything like rest or satisfaction among the worshippers of Baal. That which you call the outpourings of the Holy Spirit, is nothing but the natural workings of the conscience, and the effusions of human passion, by which men become religious; and it is a religion which God will despise (Psalm lxxiii. 20).

Nothing can be pleasing to God, but that which is in, and by, and according to the person, the work and dignity of his dear Son; — "What a man soweth that shall he also reap." The enemy is constantly sowing tares, and a fine crop he has in our day. Never in this world were there more empty professors than in the present day. Not that this shall make void the faith of God's elect, nor overturn the scriptures, but shall fulfil them; for we are assured that the time was to come, and surely it now is come, when they will not endure sound doctrine, but will, after their own lusts, [that is, their own fleshly views of things which are spiritual,] heap to themselves teachers having not circumcised but itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables, [that is, human inventions,] 2 Tim. iv.

I have, from my first acquaintance with you, some lingering hope that there may be some good thing in you towards the Lord God of Israel, but I do, at the same time, stand most solemnly in doubt of you: prejudice against you I have none, but some degree of concern for your best interests I have, and shall, therefore, in the feelings of friendship and freedom state my reason for standing in doubt of you.

Which is the way in which you treat the precepts of the gospel? this includes all my reasons for standing in doubt of you: you sever the precepts from the Holy Spirit, and, in a flippant sort of way, exhort Mr. L. to let his light shine before men,—to watch and pray,—to put off the old man,—to put on the new man,—not to be conformed to this world,—and that Mr. L. is to make sure work for eternity: these are the things to which you exhort another, not one of which you do yourself.

It is your spiritual walk I have now especially to do with, for if you are amiable as an angel before men, yet if you bring another gospel, among whom does the Holy Ghost class you? (Gal. i.) But, you say, let your light shine before men. Now mind there is a false light and there is a true light: the light which you hold forth does not bring to view the unutterable deceitfulness of the heart; does not shew up salvation to be in its several departments the joint work of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; but leaves room for boasting: taking the mere outworks of religion for religion itself, —substituting ornaments for essentials. As the, body without the spirit is dead, so is faith without works: yet a dead body may be decorated with plenty of fineries, but, lo, there is no breath in it. Now mind, and mind it well too, that where there is a living faith, there will be an hunger and thirst for the love, salvation, and presence of God; throughout the soul there will be a diffusion of the Savior's name, his glories will be seen, his fragrance as the Rose of Sharon will be recognized, the truths of the gospel become a joyful sound, and the words of the Lord sweet to the taste; there is a laying hold on eternal life, not merely what is called a religious life among men, but eternal life in Christ; there will be a walking in the narrow way, a way but few can find: absolute election brought forth scripturally, makes Christ a way too narrow for those who are trying to take all the world with them. Now as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without these essential works of breathing, circulation of the fluids, &c. is dead. These are the good works of faith, this is the faith that makes Christ the food and raiment of the soul, this is the faith that bows to the truth and sovereignty of God, whether it be to sacrifice an Isaac, or to receive the spies of the promised land: these works are essential to prove our election of God. Ornaments may attract but it is the essentials that unite. Let one Christian discover in another these essential works of faith, and an union of soul immediately takes place. These good works, which when beheld by those who have spiritual discernment, lead their beholders to glorify God. The ornamental have their place and their use, but when, as in most cases they are, substituted for the essentials, they are, when thus used, or rather abused, an offence to the Lord, they are brambles- and briers, and he will burn them, up;

Your letter has a great deal about human doings, but the Father of lights, he who is the true light, that Holy Spirit, who is to his disciples the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, giving them a knowledge of the Father and of Christ; this everlasting light, which is above the brightness of the sun; this light in which shone forth the counsels of the Father, the salvation of Christ, and essential operations of the Holy Spirit; this light you do not shew forth: how then are the children of light, who are to judge you by your works of faith, to feel any union of soul, or real spiritual love to you: like the barren fig tree, you may, by the foliage of morality, appear even lovely at a distance, but alas no fruits; these we know are the essentials. Your exhorting a good man, that is a real Christian, is like an owl attempting to direct an eagle, or the pur-blind mole attempting to guide the vulture's eye. Therefore, before you again exhort others to let their light shine before men, I hope that you yourself may be brought into the light. Some degree of light, it is true, is to shine forth in ornamental works, but it is in and by the essential works of faith, that the light so shines as to be manifest that they are wrought in God, and thus to unite one Christian to another.

Again, you say Watch and pray, but you appear to me to do neither. Look after the externals of profession and say prayers it seems you do, but in you what watching is there against the intrusion of error, when you are imposed upon by nominal conversions, the effusions of fanaticism, and symptoms of universal invitation, which are nothing but free-will in disguise; yet not much in disguise either, and that you must

know if you are not awfully bewitched. True disciples are commanded to take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, —to beware of false prophets, —to be girded with truth; that the light of truth is to be, not smothered with human inventions, but burning, and they, the true disciples, ready to receive and go with their Lord. To watch, therefore, scripturally, is with the light of truth to see that we receive not another gospel,—that we be not entangled in the yoke of bondage, —that we have and do receive the truth of God by the Spirit of God,— that we walk in fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, —that we contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints: this adds unto faith virtue, [that is, power,] faith gains power by embracing an increase of God, and this gains knowledge, and knowledge brings spiritual sobriety, [delivers from the intoxicating cup of error,] this temperance or sobriety brings patience, [that is, willingness to endure hardness for the truth's sake,] and this patience brings godliness into exercise: then comes brotherly kindness, then comes true (not false) charity.

If these things had been in you, you would not have joined in the systems of men, but you would have watched against their intrusion, and have prayed for grace to enable you to stand fast.

Again, you say put off the old man and put on the new man; do you do this? what do you do in your protracted meetings as you call them? why you stir up the sympathies of the flesh with long prayers and plenty of noise; the people become religious, as you say, by scores and hundreds. This indeed would if they became spiritually-minded, were brought to thirst for a knowledge of their eternal election of God, this would indeed be truly delightful; but the great yea and amen truths of the gospel do not become their strength, so that those who do know the truth cannot have any fellowship with these people: the old man is not put off, but is only dressed up, white-washed, and garnished. Eternal election is a yoke which does not suit the neck of the old man, for when this yoke is put spiritually and really on, the whole gospel is put on; the old man is brought to light, arraigned, condemned, and put off. In this yoke the believer is willing to labor, knowing he must not be yoked with the opposers of the truth: he has put off the old man, and put on the new man. Do you do this? I fear not.

Again, you say be not conformed to this world. But what is your present hypocritical pretension to fleshly sanctity, but conformity to this world. This fleshly sanctity is the cloak under which the bitter enemies and persecutors of the truth and people of God have in all ages sheltered themselves. By those who make great pretensions to holiness, were prophets, apostles, and martyrs persecuted and slain: and by whom was the Prince of life put to death? by publicans and harlots, by notorious idolaters, by unlearned and ignorant men? verily no, but by those who were righteous before men, by those who compassed sea and land to make proselytes, made long prayers, or had, as you call the meetings of your modern synagogues of Satan, protracted meetings; yes, they made long prayers, they were not born of fornication, oh no, they had one Father even God; aye, and thought very highly too of all the prophets, took care to garnish their sepulchers, and, if these pious folks had lived in the days of these prophets, they would not have persecuted them: dear, loving, holy, meek, and pious creatures: but when Jesus appeared, he being so humble in circumstances and so high in doctrine, they were, of course, doing their God a great service, in getting rid, as soon as they could get an opportunity to do it piously, of such a very dangerous man as was this Jesus of Nazareth, for he declared they were all hypocrites together. Of course, these good folks were not conformed to this world, they had one Father even God; and besides they had made many laws in order to improve the laws of God: they had brought in several new means of grace, the means appointed by the Lord being insufficient and not altogether suited to the taste of the public. And almost all the wise and the learned men of this world agree, that these very high doctrines have a tendency to keep men from coming to Christ, all men being so eager to leave all and follow him. These high doctrines, though found in the Bible, must be kept back as much as possible: of course it is a great pity these high doctrines should be in the Bible, and a greater pity still that a few narrow-minded beings should be always preaching

these doctrines, and thus hindering the pious folks from going to heaven in their own way; and although it is written that all those whose names are not found written in the book of life are to be cast into the lake of fire, yet we must not talk of this book now, because it brings the dear creatures to nought, swallows up all their efforts, exertions, pretensions, duties, and doctrines; the fire of truth burns up the whole. The religious world is the world turned religious, for it is the world still; they hated the truth before they made any profession, and they hate it still: their conversion is not a conversion from falsehood to truth, but merely a transition from the inventions of profanity to those of religious delusion. Professors thus begotten and brought forth, are what the Holy Ghost calls children of whoredoms. (Hosea ii. 4.)

These are the people whom you are bidding God speed, and if God should open your eyes to see where you are, you will be as willing to leave these old wives fables, and doctrines of devils, as was the prodigal to leave the pig-trough, and as was David to leave Achish the king of Gath, and as were the lepers to be cleansed. But alas, at present, as far as externals go you are conformed to this world; the whole body of free-willers, low Calvinists, and hypocrites must applaud your present position; and thus you stand in the shadow of the woe pronounced, — "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." You are not among the few who find the narrow way, but you are among the many who walk in the broad way of general profession, and would subvert the gospel of Christ. You join with those who would alter the dimensions of the ark, the pattern of the tabernacle and the temple: but whoever hardened himself against God, and finally prospered. If then you have any conscience left, let the exhortation recoil upon yourself, be not conformed to this world.

Again, you say make sure work for eternity. You try in your letter to be very awful, but you are notwithstanding abominably carnal; there is not one particle of spiritual savor in your letter. The children of God themselves, until better taught, are apt to take legal gloominess, for spiritual solemnity, and thus for a while become imposed upon by the sad faces, awful gesture, and sort of damnation language of the ministers of Satan. The true Christian's fellowship with God is indeed solemn, but it is, at the same time, in the endearments of redeeming and saving love.

And now, by way of conclusion, let us see what it is to make sure work for eternity. Be it then remembered that none can do this, but those for whom the kingdom is prepared; none but the redeemed can savingly turn to God; none can be conformed to the image of the Son of God, but those who are predestinated thereto. To make sure work then for eternity, is to make our calling and election sure in us, it is sure for the redeemed, but they cannot be sure of it, until they are enabled to make it sure in their own consciences; and no one creature effort, nor all creature efforts put together can do this, for the things of God knoweth no man, only as the Holy Spirit is pleased to reveal them. Those who are born of God have the Spirit of grace and supplication, and are brought to know that the great turning point is election; that they are either chosen to salvation, or they are not; that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy; that no man can know the Father, only unto whom the Son will reveal him; that no man can know the Son, but he to whom the Father will reveal him; and no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost. The man that is brought to feel the force of these truths, will not be able to rest in human doings, or human testimony; nothing can satisfy such but the testimony of God: the word of God must be brought home to the heart with power, the efficacy of pardoning blood must be felt, the love of God must be shed abroad in the heart, the Savior's name must be made precious, the mind of the Lord must be revealed, and the salvation of God enjoyed. It is receiving these things in their power, importance and glory, that constitutes what is called making our calling and election sure. Nothing short of this can satisfy those who are born of God. It is the small still, but powerful voice of truth, bringing the soul into fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, that gives assurance while the everlasting covenant is unfolded. The service of sin is rejected, the world is overcome, the enemy

retreats, the affections are set on things above, and not on things on the earth. Of these things, the Lord's people are brought to feel their need, after these things they long and seek, and these things they sooner or later realize, for they shall come and sing in the height of Zion. And thus those who believe through grace shall have the witness in themselves, and shall bear testimony against the inventions and doctrines of men, and shall to eternity bear witness of the truth of absolute election, divine predestination, everlasting righteousness, eternal redemption, effectual calling; in a word, that the Lord hath loved them with an everlasting love, and saved them in and by himself with an everlasting salvation, that they shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.

It is by the reception, experience, and practice of these truths, that true Christians let their light shine before men; which light is of course offensive to the carnal mind, for men love darkness rather than this heavenly light. It is by these great truths that the true Christian puts off the old man with his deeds and puts on the new man; is not conformed to this world, but is conformed to the image of Christ, and to him is revealed the immutable counsel of God: this is sure work for eternity.

If it be the will of the Lord, may he stir you up to a sight and sense of the delusions you art, under, that you may be brought to think soberly, pray spiritually, and walk humbly (not proudly as you now do) with the God of eternal truth; for if you live and die in any capital error, recollect you will be found among those of whom it is written, "that he that loveth and maketh a lie, shall have his portion in the lake." Your present position takes the work of God out of his hands, disregards the honors of the Holy Spirit, and in part dethrones the Savior; and that under the garb of human holiness and pious real for the good of souls. May Almighty God tear off the mask, and cause you to refuse the evil and choose the good. So prays your old friend and acquaintance,

Surrey Tabernacle, James Wells.
Borough Road.