

A WORD ON BEHALF OF MEN OF TRUTH¹

Dear Mr. Editor. Edward Potter, who Edward Potter is I know not; but this said Edward Potter does, on the fifth page of your November number², ask a question and suggest an accusation against men of truth.³ This question is, Does God in his word say anything to unregenerate sinners, and what does he say to them?

Let the counsel of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, (Daniel 4:27.) dispose of this question, for it would be contrary to all right reason to suppose that the word of God does not meet the unregenerate as being responsible to God for their actions. And it is also true that they will be rewarded according not only to the nature, but also according to the amount of their works they will not be punished for what they do not commit, nor can they escape judgment for what they do commit. There is, therefore, a motive the most solemn for the unregenerate to act as natural responsible men conscientiously. Hence it is that we read of a greater condemnation to some than to others. This principle of human responsibility connected with heaven's righteous distribution of judgment is so clear that I will not here say more upon it.

My chief object is to meet the accusation which Mr. Potter suggests. "Can it," says Mr. Potter, "be admitted that they declare the whole counsel of God so as to be pure from the blood of all men?" Mr. Potter founds this question upon the idea that the sermons of men of truth are restricted, or nearly so, to the people of God.

Now it does appear to me that Mr. Potter is entirely wrong in his suggestion.

Let us ask a few questions, and then see what the word of the Lord is upon this matter. Do not men of truth insist upon and describe the work and evidences of regeneration? Do they not handle the law lawfully, and show that by it is the knowledge of sin; that it is, as brought by the power of God, the ministration of death and bondage, lamentation and woe, and that unless a sinner be convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the helplessness, depravity, and utter ruin by nature of the sinner; that they must be brought to tremble at the word of holiness, judgment, and truth; and that without this correcting and humbling work of God in the heart, there is no real prayer, no real godly fear, no real sighing as a prisoner of hope after the mercy of God; that thousands upon thousands are deceiving themselves, are strangers to the strait gate and narrow way that leads unto life; that by far the greater part even of professors are seeking to enter the kingdom of heaven by the wide gate and broad way of humanly devised forms and doings; at the same time despising the real soul-trouble of the poor and needy, and calling that only gospel, that only order of things by which a ruined sinner can be saved, "dangerous doctrine"? At the same time eagerly palming all the faults (real or supposed) of the people of God upon the pure word of electing and saving grace.

Do not men of truth open up these delusions? Do they not lay the axe to the root of the tree? Do they not tell everyone within the sound of their voice of that vital acquaintance they must have in order to be saved both with themselves as sinners, and with the Mediator of the New Covenant as

¹ E.V. December 1853 pages 297-298

² I have not been able to find this reference. R.C.S.

³ I have been unable to find this reference in the Nov. 1853 E.V. (RCS)

a Savior? Do they not clearly and constantly show up the one thing needful? Yet, according to Mr. Potter's suggestion, they do not preach to sinners. Do they not cast up the highway of eternal truth? Do they not show the necessity of being brought experimentally to the end of the law for righteousness; and that there is no justification before God but by the Spirit of God uniting the soul to the righteousness of God? They tell the ungodly and the deluded as well as the godly this, and yet do not preach to sinners! Do they not insist that where religion is real that nothing can give peace and rest but a sense of pardoned sin, and that by the eternal Spirit sprinkling the conscience by the blood of Christ? that nothing short of the blessedness of the non-imputation of sin, and the imputation of righteousness without works, can bring into felt fellowship with God? Men of truth thus warn the sinner of the error of his way, and yet they do not preach to sinners! Do not men of truth set forth in its own most vivid and heavenly colors the discriminating truth of eternal election, and show that none at the last can enter the holy city but such as were from the foundation of the world written in the Lamb's book of life? Does not this give force to the exhortation addressed to those who professed to be Christians? "Make your calling and election sure." Calling and election are sure in themselves: the election have obtained it, and the rest are blinded. All his sheep, those for whom he laid down his life, shall hear his voice and follow him. Election then and calling are sure in themselves. But how is it with you? Is your religion real? Be diligent to make sure that your calling is a saving call, and so one with eternal election. For many are worked upon by the letter of the word and natural conscience, and are thus called into a profession, but the call has not been vital; thus, though they are called, they have no scriptural evidence that they are chosen, and so it is that "many are called but few chosen."

Men of truth thus take forth the precious from the vile; the wheat from the tares; the sheep from the goats; and the righteous from the wicked: drawing a line of distinction between the church and the world, honestly setting forth every sanction of divine truth, yet do not preach to sinners, and are not pure from the blood of all men.

But, perhaps, by preaching to sinners, Mr. Potter would mean telling them falsehood: namely, that salvation is offered to them, and so Mr. Potter would not approve the testimony of the Apostle who says, that "all Israel shall be saved." Mr. Potter perhaps would like sinners to be told that it is their own fault if they are not regenerated; that the wild beasts in Peter's vision should and can begin to do something towards turning themselves into men, aye, and Christian men too, that the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision ought to do something towards their own resurrection, Tell them this, and this deludes them ten times more than they are already deluded. Yes, deal in general indiscriminate exhortation, and so get rid of the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost; get rid of truth in the inward parts. Get rid of all the soul troubles, illuminations, and manifestations, to get rid of all the sealings home upon the soul of the living truth of the living God.

Let this general offer, so called "preaching to sinners system", let this delusion be tried by the several scriptures containing gospel commissions. First take Matthew 10th, and then ask whether general offers or vitalities accord most with casting out devils, healing the sick, cleansing the leper, raising the dead, and freely giving because freely received. Alas, the natural man does not know that he is under the government of the Prince of Darkness. The natural man does not know that he is sick, that he is a leper, or that he is dead in sin.

Again, Mark 16:15, 16, "Preach the Gospel to every creature." Now mind it must be the Gospel, and the Gospel is to be preached to every creature. That is that every creature to whom they preach at all, they must preach to them the Gospel. And so, the Apostle testifies (Colossians 1:23) that every creature to whom, under heaven, they preached at all they preached the Gospel. Which then looks most like the Gospel, the doctrine of general offers, which is nothing but a doctrine of general nothings. Which looks most like the Gospel, divine realities or fleshly conceited appeals to fleshly minds?

He that believes shall be saved, not he that believes in free-will or creature strength in these matters. For real Christians are God's own workmanship. He creates them in Christ, he forms them for himself. He that lives by the power of the Holy Ghost and believes shall be saved, and we can be saved in no other way; and besides salvation there is nothing left but condemnation, and so it is, that he that believes not must be damned, while he that believes and is baptized, that is, is not ashamed publicly to own the Savior, such shall be saved.

Again, take John 21:15th verse. Which looks most like feeding the lambs and sheep of Christ, leading them into the green pastures of living truth, and beside the satiating waters of eternal mercy, which looks most like feeding the sheep, this, or trying to get a dead sinner to do that which can be done alone by the Lord himself?

We may admire your good feeling in weeping over Lazarus in the grave, but you may depend upon it he will not move so much as one of his fingers, until he who is the resurrection and the life, speaks with quickening power; and it is as certain that he will come forth by this power, as it is certain that he will not come forth without this power.

Again, take Acts 20:28, "Feed the Church of God which he has purchased with his own blood."

Here then is one of the greatest scriptures in the Bible. Here we see that the blood of Jesus Christ was the blood of his person, and that, therefore, the efficacy of that blood must accord with what he is in his person; and as he has in himself eternity, omnipotence, infinity, and "a thousand glories more", his atonement can no more fail of its design than he himself can fail; and he is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth, if these be the eternals, by which we are to be fed with knowledge and understanding, by which we are to know Him that is true, and to be one with Him that is true, even the true God, and eternal life: if these be the prospects of the Christian, this the hope of the self-condemned sinner, then how small a portion, in comparison of what he is, is as yet known of him; even all the revealed counsel of God is but a small part of what is to be revealed; so we know only in part, these revelations are but a whisper of his ways; but the thunder of his power, who can understand?

If, therefore, sinners are to be preached to, these mysteries of God are to be proclaimed; as hereby sinners are by the power of the Holy Ghost by the preaching of the gospel, convinced of their ignorance, and made to feel that they are afar off from God and salvation; and yet men who constantly affirm these things do not preach to sinners!

I cannot close without saying, that not only do these men of truth preach to sinners but are the only men in the world who do preach to sinners; for none but those who are taught of God know really

what a sinner is, either whilst dead, or when quickened into soul-trouble. Everyone, who has passed through deep soul trouble, well knows that there is hardly one messenger or Scripture interpreter among a thousand, that can rightly open up the way of manifestative justification or set forth rightly the ransom that delivers from the pit wherein is no water.

I therefore conclude that men of truth, who seem to restrict their sermons to the Lord's people, do preach to sinners as well as to saints.⁴

Much more, Mr. Editor, may be said upon this weighty matter; but as I have already, perhaps, exceeded your limits, I will add only, that I shall take no notice of any reply that may be made to this, unless that reply be in a proper spirit; for I well know that angry disputation and unhallowed controversy cannot be profitable. My object in what I have written, has been the truth, and nothing but the truth. And I do still believe that the rejoicing of men of truth is the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity they have their conversation towards God and man, and that they are free from the blood of all men. "A Little One."⁵

⁴ My emphasis

⁵ James Wells