

The Faith of the Gospel Vindicated:

THE
SUBSTANCE
OF TWO
SERMONS,

PREACHED AT THE BAPTIST MEETING, GREAT
YARMOUTH, OCTOBER 27, 1799.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

TO ALL THAT LOVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN SINCERITY.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

BE assured I have your consolation very much at heart in the following publication, which contains Two Discourses, nearly as they were delivered from the pulpit. And though, in this attempt, I labour under many discouragements, it gives me unspeakable pleasure, to contemplate the kind reception it will meet with from you.

While the self-exalted pharisee is perusing this publication, with a proud contempt, and the self-conceited novice, destitute of all honest and manly criticism, is endeavouring to exaggerate its imperfections, by incidious and scurrilous invectives, you will be reading for the edification of your immortal souls. Many of you, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, and especially you who are my own dear children in the Lord, will, doubtless, receive this as a tribute of my unfeigned affection; for, you, above all others, always lay near to my heart: and it is my fervent prayer, to the God of all grace, that you may be kept by his Almighty power, through faith, unto salvation. That, though the iniquity of error abounds, and the love of many, to the truth, waxes cold, you may be included in the happy number of those, who shall endure to the end, and enter the joy of their Lord!

WILLIAM WALES HORNE.

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The Faith of the Gospel Vindicated:

PHILIPPIANS 1. 17.

STRIVING TOGETHER FOR THE FAITH OF THE
GOSPEL.

FAITH in Christ, is a subject so infinitely important, that we find it constituted one great part of Paul's ministry, who declared, that it had been his grand aim, and the principal business of his life, from the time of his conversion, to enforce its necessity, declare its excellency, and explain its sublime mystery. In Acts xx. 20, 21. "I kept back nothing, says he, that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." So far was this great apostle from making light of faith, or thinking it an insignificant matter, that in our text, he exhorts the church at Philippi; and it stands written as an exhortation to all Christians, and Christian churches, throughout the world, to the end of time, to *strive together for the faith of the Gospel.*

In which we have represented,

I. The children of God as *striving together*.

II. For what they strive: for the *faith of the Gospel*.

As Christians, *real* Christians, are become dead to the world, and feelingly alive to God; through the powerful influence of regenerating, and reviving grace, they will certainly be active in the cause of Christ, who has done so much for them; and cannot but strive for the faith of the Gospel, in defence of which, the saints of old, "valued not their lives unto death!" And, therefore, are consistently exhorted to *strive*.

STRIVING, saith our text. But how? We are exhorted, in some respects, not to strive; as in 2 Timothy ii. 14. *Charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers*. And again, in Philippians ii. 3. *Let nothing be done through strife, or vain-glory*. A striving for the gratification of their own *mind* and *will*, having nothing in view but the approbation, and praises of men, or worldly profit, and self-aggrandizement. Let us beware of this diabolic strife, which is always an impediment to the Gospel's prosperity, and destructive to the peace and comfort of

a church, wherever it prevails. But striving, as mentioned in our text, is countenanced by the Eternal Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! We have the approbation of heaven, for this evangelic strife! May the Lord grant, then, that we may so strive, as abundantly to obtain, and keep in possession, the desirable object for which it is our honour, and happiness to strive! Christ himself exhorted his disciples, in the days of his humiliation, and *now* exhorts us, to strive to enter in at the strait gate. The disciples, doubtless, having heard of distinguishing grace, came and asked their Lord this question—Lord, *are there few that be saved?* What answer did he give? What improvement did he advise them to make of this doctrine? Did he say, like some in our day, “Seeing there are but few, comparatively, that shall be saved, and the salvation of those being certain, you need not trouble yourself about eternal things; if you are included in the number, you shall be saved, and, therefore, you may live as you list, follow the dictates of your carnal mind, and indulge in all that licentiousness, in which your corrupt nature delights!” No, the holy Jesus informed them, in his answer, that this doctrine would have a different kind of influence over those who are taught of God. That, as all are not interested in the great salvation, but on the contrary, few, compared with the bulk of the world, those who are alive to a sense of their lost condition, will particularly and anxiously inquire, whether they are included; and attend the

Gospel with the greatest seriousness, and with fervent prayer, in order to make their calling sure, that they may also be assured of their *election in Christ, before the foundation of the world!* (Ephesians i. 4.) That having the evidence in themselves that they are born of God, they may adopt the triumphant language of inspiration, "*We love him, because he first loved us!*" Such was the reply of Christ: *strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* (Luke xiii. 24.) Why not able? Because they strive not lawfully; Paul says, (2 Timothy ii. 5.) *And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully:* that is, consistently with the mind and will of God. The Jews of old sought to enter in, but were not able, because they strove, like our modern pharisees, to enter in by the works of the law. Romans ix. 32, 33. *But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not obtained to the law of righteousness; Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law, for they stumbled at that stumbling stone.* They stumbled at Jesus Christ, the way to God; at his atoning blood, and imputed righteousness; and at the free, electing, distinguishing grace of God, in Christ, which are to this day, and will be to the end of time, stumbling stones, and unexpressibly offensive, to the whole self-righteous tribe of free-agents, and merit-mongers!

The children of God are also striving against the deceitful lusts of their own hearts, the diabolical assaults of a tempting devil, and the flattering enticements of a vain world! All which are combined to oppose our progress in the divine life. These, Christian, you shall assuredly conquer; yes, you shall be more than conqueror; but remember, it shall be through him who loved you. (Romans viii. 37.) You strive, not in your own, but in the strength of Jesus, and shall do all things through him, who is the everlasting strength of his saints! And who will never fail them, nor forsake them!

But our text says, *striving together*. It is the gracious appointment of God, that his people should dwell together in Unity; for the accomplishment of which he gathers them, by the preaching of his Gospel, communicates his loving-kindness, makes known to them his everlasting covenant in Christ, and diffuses spiritual life into their souls; thus their fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ! 1 John i. 3.

And, as children of the same family, loved with the same love, bought with the same invaluable price, the precious blood of Christ, members of the same mystical and glorious body, being all one in Christ Jesus; and beholding the reflection of his image in each other, they feel themselves

happily united together in mutual love. This is the society of men which the Psalmist so much admires. Psalm cxxxiii. 1. *Behold how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!* And, it is their comfortable privilege, and exalted happiness, to strive together, for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause, and glory, in the earth! Striving together in prayer! O what a precious privilege is prayer! What boundless, and unspeakable blessings have been poured down upon the church, in answer to prayer! Knowing the blessed effects of prayer, Paul exhorts the Romans, (xv. 30.) *To strive together with him, in their prayers to God.* May the Lord teach us, my brethren, to assemble together, and offer up united prayers, before the gracious throne, in behalf of the Redeemer's cause! And in his strength, earnestly, and successfully, to strive together for the faith of the Gospel! We are not to consider this a matter of indifference; and vainly suppose, with some carnal professors, that if a man is *sincere*, it is of no consequence what he believes; whether he embraces truth or error, he is safe, because, *sincere!* Evidently making his salvation dependent, not on Christ, but his *sincerity!* God forbid that we should, for a moment, countenance such a vain, and Christ-dishonouring sentiment. The falsehood, and blasphemy of which, appear too obvious to require argumentative refutation, when we seriously consider, how offensive *error* is in the sight of God, how derogatory to his glory,

and the merits of Christ! When we turn to the Sacred Pages, and read, under the Spirit's enlightening influence, the striking contrast between *Truth* and Error, our hearts burn with almost unbounded love to the former, while they madden with holy detestation to the latter! For in that precious volume, error is represented (as it really is) black as hell itself! While truth, in all her celestial charms, and amiable qualities, shines, through every page, bright as heaven!

The children of God strive for the faith of the Gospel, as distinguished from all other faith, (Ephesians iv. 5.) *One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.* And (Jude iii.) *It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints.* Knowing it to be a matter of the greatest importance, *strive, contend earnestly*, that ye may be sound in the ONE faith, ONCE delivered to the saints; having right views of God as a covenant God and Father; of Christ, as the only Mediator between God and Man, the way, the truth, and the life; the fountain fulness of grace; the source of everlasting love; and the able, willing, complete, and everlasting Saviour of the elect; and of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who convinces, converts, and sanctifies, all who are savingly brought to a knowledge of the precious Jesus!

Sincerity must not be substituted for the Faith

of the Gospel; for a *godly* sincerity springs from the influence of faith, over the regenerated soul.

Those who are renewed in the image of their minds, are led into the truth, agreeable to the promise. (John xvi. 13.) *When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth!*

And as new creatures in Christ Jesus are enlightened by the illumination of the Spirit; *for he who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge, of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.* (2 Corinthians iv. 6.) They can behold, in the face of Jesus, the attributes of God, sweetly harmonizing in a sinner's salvation: that, in him, *mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.* (Psalm lxxxv. 10.) That justice is satisfied, the law fulfilled and magnified, and *mercy built up for ever:* (Psalm lxxxix. 2.) not upon the ruins of justice, but upon the precious foundation of a crucified Christ; in whom, God is just, *yet the Justifier* of the ungodly!

But some of you may be ready to say, since there is such a diversity of opinions in the world, How are we to know the true faith of the Gospel? How is it to be distinguished from others? I answer, by the volume of Inspiration, the precious Scriptures of truth: there we have a glorious fund

of heavenly information; *so that he who runs, may read.*

It may be farther objected, that the Bible is so full of self-contradiction, that after searching, it is impossible to know what we are to believe. What a presumptuous reflection is this upon its Divine author! What a striking proof of the darkness and ignorance of man by nature! So far is the Bible from self-contradiction, that the prophecies and doctrines thereof, are admirable for their harmony and agreement! Read Acts xv. 14, 15. *God did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a PEOPLE for his name, and to this AGREE the words of the prophets.* Yes, the prophets and apostles are all agreed in this, that God hath visited the world, by Jesus Christ, to take out of it a people, who are the objects of his everlasting love, and in his due time, shall be the subjects of renewing, and sanctifying grace; and thus being made meet, in Christ, shall, at the dissolution of their earthly tabernacle, have an happy and easy transition into a better state of existence, in the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!

Yes, my dear hearers! there is, in the Scriptures, such a sweet agreement, and such a plentitude of information, that under the tuition of the eternal Spirit, *they are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.* (2 Timothy iii. 15.) And, from these Divine writings, we may fully know the precious faith of

the Gospel. To this agree the words of an-inspired apostle. (2 Timothy iii. 10.) *Thou hast fully known my DOCTRINE, manner of life, purpose, FAITH, long-suffering, charity, patience.* And so concerned was he, for the spiritual prosperity of the church at *Thessalonica*, and knowing it depended entirely upon their establishment in the true Faith of the Gospel, he could not forbear writing to them upon the subject. He well knew, that, consistent with the Christian character, they must suffer tribulation; of which he had already given them verbal information, and had exhorted them to continue in the grace of God, (i. e. in the doctrines of grace.)

But he knew as well, the evil propensities of their nature, their liability to forget his exhortations, and that their natural cowardice would lead them to endeavour to shun the cross, by forsaking the faith of the Gospel; which always meets with opposition from a frowning world, a tempting devil, and the ministers of Satan transforming themselves into the ministers of Christ, (2 Corinthians xi. 13—15.) Lest they should *turn aside after Satan*, (2 Timothy v. 15.) and embrace the *doctrines of devils*, (1 Timothy iv. 1.) *the damnable heresies*, (2 Peter ii. 1.) which Satan was disseminating in the professed churches of Christ, he writes, with all the fiery zeal, and affection, of one who knows the inconceivable worth of souls, and the great importance of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians iii. 5, 6.) *For this*

cause, writes he, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to KNOW YOUR FAITH, lest, by some means, the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your FAITH and charity, we were comforted. Timothy carried Paul good tidings; part of which was their soundness, and continuance in the faith; which removed his jealousy and anxiety, and administered joy to his soul, and to those that were with him. For now ye live, saith the apostle, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

Second. As there is but ONE TRUE FAITH, which is plainly revealed to us in the Scriptures, and powerfully, to our souls, by the Holy Ghost, we strive for it, that the church may be sound in the faith. That, being rooted and grounded in the doctrines of grace, they may rely, stedfastly, upon the Lord, as their eternal, unchangeable, covenant-keeping God; who, having appointed, and purposed all things, in his eternal councils for them, performs his gracious will, in all his dealings with them, and dispensations towards them, both as a God of providence, and as a God of grace.

And, knowing Christ as the inexhaustible source of love, the fountain-fulness of invincible grace, and their all-prevailing Advocate, they may come with boldness *to the throne of grace*, (Hebrews iv. 16.) *that they may obtain mercy and find grace*

to *help in the time of need*. And being taught to view the complete body of Christ, the church, as one with him, and eternally in him, they may rejoice in the safety and security of the people of God; that because *Christ lives*, (and for no other reason,) they *shall live also*; (John xvi. 19.) that their living depends entirely upon Christ's living—for *their life is hid with Christ in God*. (Colossians iii. 3.) Thus they shall be enabled with boldness, to bid their enemies defiance: who must destroy Christ, in order to take away the life of his people! for *Christ is their life!*

Observe here, then, the great necessity of preaching doctrinally, in order to *comfort God's people*. (Isaiah xl. 1.) It is the meat of the Gospel;—the precious savory meat, such as their souls love, and which their Father has provided for them in covenant. And shall we keep it back? God forbid! since it is so profitable to their souls, and so much for the glory of free grace!

What teaches the Christian resignation to the Divine Will? What causes him to rejoice in complicated trials, and difficulties, in dark and adverse providences? Is it not the Eternal Spirit's gracious, and *heart-felt* application of the doctrines of the Gospel? Yes, it bears up his spirits under the heaviest pressure, and enables him to sing with Watts:

“ The Gospel bears my spirits up;
 A faithful and unchanging God
 Lays the foundation of my hope,
 In oaths, and promise, and blood.”

Knowing that all things work together for good to them that love God, and that nothing happens by mere chance, or accident; but that every change and vicissitude, is directed by the unerring council of God: that not an hair of his head falls to the ground without his notice, and Divine appointment; knowing this, I say, he is taught submissively to endure affliction; and his language is, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*—(1 Samuel iii 18.) *he performeth the thing that is appointed for me,* (Job xxiii. 14) he does all things well—he knows what is *best* for *me*. Being established in the doctrines of the Gospel, the Christian can triumphantly interrogate with the apostle, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (Romans viii. 35.)

O what a never-failing source of consolation is the eternal love of God in Christ! and what solid comfort, and satisfaction doth the believing soul derive from the everlasting covenant, when he can say, *Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure! for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.* (2 Samuel xxiii. v. compared with Hebrews vi. 17, 18.)

Though he may be tempest-tossed upon the ocean of trial, faith looks to the covenant, and assures him he cannot be lost: and hope, animated with faith's report, pierces through the waves of trouble, and takes anchorage *within the veil*. (Hebrews vi. 19.)

But, what joy, peace, or satisfaction, can spring from the doctrine of human merit? "I may, or I may not be saved; and though I am a child of God to-day, to-morrow I may fall from grace and perish! *I have "A never-dying soul to save, and fit it for the sky"* O what an arduous task! what a great undertaking! poor self-righteous creature! you save your own soul! No, you have damned it by sinning against God; and did you see yourself, as you really are, nothing but sin, you would start from your self-righteous stupor, disclaim your own righteousness, and cry, *Save Lord, or I perish!*

What distress, instead of comfort, the consideration of such doctrine must occasion in the soul, that is truly concerned about eternal things! And this, Sirs, stimulate us, the more zealously to strive together for the faith of the Gospel, since the joy, peace, and comfort of precious souls, so much depend upon their establishment in the truth!

The want of which causes so many, that sincerely seek Jesus, to go daily bowed down with doubts

and fears. Yet some will say, doctrines must not be preached, lest we hurt their tender minds; when their distress springs from a diametrically opposite cause; their ignorance of God's covenant, love, purposes, and designs; and of his never-failing, and resolute grace in Christ—that he is *resolved* to save his people—and though the gates of hell may oppose, shall never prevail against them! We are to build them up in our most holy faith, that they may know where to look for wisdom, strength, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (1 Corinthians i. 30.)

If error abound, it is the business, not only of ministers, but of all Christians, as opportunity offers, to expose it, and thereby *strive for the faith*. What is the advice of Paul to a young minister, upon this subject? (Titus i. 13.) *Rebuke them sharply*: For what? for every inconsistency; but more especially for error, to answer this grand end, “*That they may be sound in the faith.*”

Third, Strive for the faith, on account of your propensity to err. How melancholy to see those depart from the truth, who once professed to be its warm, and zealous advocates! In the real Christian, it is God-dishonouring, and soul-distressing; but in the mere professor, who becomes a final apostate, and can violently persecute the church of God, it is a flagrant proof of everlasting perdition! Such are said to make shipwreck of faith and conscience; as in 1 Tim-

othy i. 19. *Holding faith, and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith, have made shipwreck. Have not we seen something of this? Have we not seen some, that for a little time, have made a blazing profession of Christianity; and, according to appearance, warmly espoused the doctrines of the Gospel, fall away, and become vile, and open contemners, of that truth, which once they pretended so unfeignedly to love! Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith! Beware of the seduction of error! Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. The lip of truth hath informed us, that many shall fall away—Because iniquity, (the iniquity of error) shall abound, the love of many, (to the truth) shall wax cold! And many, even of the people of God, will “ forsake their first love,” and shew a coolness for truth, and an attachment to error! The mystery of iniquity (2 Thessalonians ii. 7.) began to work in the apostle’s time, and many turned aside from the faith. Paul laments this in 1 Timothy vi. 10. “ For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have ERRED from the TRUTH, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows;” many of whom, no doubt, were God’s own people. And in 1 Timothy iv. 1. The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and DOCTRINES of DEVILS. And as a fulfilment, and an awful exemplification of it, we know that the man of sin,*

who exalts himself above all that is called God, hath, for many centuries, filled all Europe with his doctrines: O then, may the Lord himself teach us to take heed, lest, through the darkness of our hearts, we embrace error for truth, and bow the knee to anti-christ, instead of following, worshipping, and adoring, the only wise God our Saviour, to whom be glory, and majesty, dominion, and power, both now and ever. (Jude 25.)

Fourth, The damning nature of error, irresistably argues the absolute necessity of striving for THE FAITH. Sirs, it is at the peril of your souls, that you embrace, and die in, those errors which depreciate the merits of Christ, and exclude him as the foundation laid in Sion! Peter calls them *damnable heresies*. (2 Peter ii. 1.) And such enemies of Jesus Christ, as will not have him to reign over them, shall be brought and *slain before him*, (Luke xix. 27,) in the great day of his wrath, by the fire of his jealousy: for he is jealous of his own honour, who hath declared, “*My glory will I not give to another, neither my praises to graven images.*” (Isaiah xlii. 8.)

And we, who are regenerate, are called upon to keep the faith, as well as strive for it. O! how animating is that precious promise—“*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*” (Revelations ii. 10.) He who has promised the crown of life, will make and keep his people faithful.