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Sermons

BANGS SKETCHES

(Two Sermons)

By

Dr. Nathan Bangs

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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THE METHODIST PREACHER

Containing

Twenty-Eight Sermons

On

Doctrinal and Practical Subjects

By

Bishop Hedding, Dr. Fisk, Dr. Bangs, Dr. Durbin

And Other Ministers Of The Methodist Episcopal Church

Published In 1859

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**PORTION OF THE INTRODUCTION
ABOUT NATHAN BANGS**

The Rev. gentlemen whose names are connected with the following discourses, are among the most eminent ministers of the church, living or dead ... The venerable Dr. Nathan Bangs, [is] eminently worthy to be classed with the Apostles of American Methodism; he has by his pen, his pulpit labors, and personal influence, done more to promote the growth and prosperity of the church of his choice, than any other living man. -- D. Holmes, Auburn, April 29th, 1852

**QUOTATION OF NATHAN BANGS
BY MILTON LORENZO (M. L.) HANEY**

"Dr. Nathan Bangs. 'Those who teach that we are gradually to grow into a state of sanctification, without ever experiencing an instantaneous change from inbred sin to holiness are to be repudiated as unsound, anti-scriptural and anti-Wesleyan.' Article in Guide 1854." -- From The Inheritance Restored, by M. L. Haney

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NATHAN BANGS

BANGS, NATHAN (1778-1862), distinguished American editor and author, was born in Stratford, Conn., on May 2, 1778, the son of Lemuel Bangs and Rebecca Keeler Bangs. He was almost entirely self-educated. In 1799 he went to Canada where for three years he was a teacher and land surveyor. He became an itinerant Methodist minister and spent six years in the Canadian provinces. He was licensed to preach in 1801 and rode horseback through the Canadian woods in order to preach. He is regarded as the founder of Methodism in the Quebec Conference of the Methodist Church. On April 23, 1806, he married Mary Bolton of Edwardsburg, Upper Canada.

Upon his return to New York in 1820 he became the head of the Methodist Book Concern in New York City and put it on a paying basis. He was the editor of The Methodist Magazine which in 1832 became The Methodist Quarterly Review. In 1828 he also became the editor of The New York Christian Advocate. He is credited with starting the system of maintaining official church journals. He was one of the founders of the Methodist Missionary Society and in 1836 he was appointed to serve as its secretary, a position he held for many years. In 1841 he became the acting president of Wesleyan University at Middletown, Conn. In the following year he resumed his pastoral work in New York. Upon his retirement in 1852 he devoted much of his time to literary endeavors. His most important work was The History of the Methodist Episcopal Church From Its Origin In 1776 To The General Conference Of 1840, which was published in four volumes in New York from 1839-1842. His numerous published editorials, sermons, addresses and other works include: Predestination Examined (1817); Methodist Episcopacy (1820); Letters To A Young Preacher (1835); Essay On Emancipation (1840); Letters On Sanctification (1851).

Abel Stevens of New York published The Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D. D., in 1863. Three of Bangs' brothers were also Methodist ministers. Nathan Bangs died on May 3, 1862.

--Ralph Hardee Rives, The Encyclopedia of World Methodism, using information from: Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography, New York, 1888; and Dictionary of American Biography.

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JOHN BANGS
(Brother of Nathan Bangs)

BANGS, JOHN (1781-1849), son of Lemuel Bangs and Rebecca Keeler, was born in Stratford, Conn. As a boy of eleven he moved with his family to Stamford, Delaware Co., N. Y. He became apprenticed to a blacksmith and followed this trade until his children were well grown. He married twice: Mary Rickey, of Harpersfield, N. Y., Jan. 2, 1804, and, following her death, Mrs. Arenusa Palmer, of Maryland, Otsego Co., N. Y., Oct. 6, 1845.

Ordained a deacon in 1815 in Albany by Bishop Asbury, Bangs did not seek admission to the New York Conference until 1819; in 1821, he was granted full membership and ordained elder. Assigned first to the Sharon (N. Y.) Circuit, then to the Jefferson Circuit, he continued throughout the following quarter of a century to serve circuits in the northwestern portion of the New York Conference.

John Bangs's contribution to Methodism is impressive. While he did not achieve the notice accorded his famous brothers, Nathan and Heman, he made an imprint upon the upper end of the New York and lower end of the Troy Conferences which considerably exceeded theirs.

At least seven presently existing churches can trace their origins to societies which John Bangs formed, and as many more claim him as their founder. He contributed three sons to the ministry: John D. Bangs, Nathan H. Bangs, and one other. For forty years he was an active promoter of Camp Meetings. It was while dealing with a company of rowdies at such a meeting that he suffered a blow on the head which nearly cost him his life, necessitating a supernumerary relationship in the conference for most of his remaining years.

From: The Encyclopedia of World Methodism, William R. Phinney, using "Apostle to the Mountains" an essay by himself, information from the Autobiography of Rev. John Bangs, New York, 1846.

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HEMAN BANGS
(Brother of Nathan Bangs)

BANGS, HEMAN (1790-1869), American minister, eminent in the M. E. Church, during its formative years, was born in Fairfield, Conn., in April, 1790. He united with the New York Conference in 1815, and served in the work of the ministry for fifty-four consecutive years. Thirty-three of these were in the pastorate; three years he was agent of the Wesleyan University of Middletown, Conn.; and eighteen years he was presiding elder. Most of his life was spent in or about New York City and New Haven. He was among the first to advocate and to assist in the organization of the Missionary Society of the M. E. Church. He also was a strong protagonist of education in the church and temperance reform engaged much of his time and effort.

Bishop Edmund Janes, who conducted the funeral of Heman Bangs said: "In every position he filled he was equal to the responsibilities imposed upon him. As a preacher he was peculiar to himself, he imitated no one; nobody could anticipate his sermons; they were original, always connected, short, and eminently practical. At times he would seem to bring the whole heavens down, overwhelming his audience with an emotion and power, altogether superhuman. As a pastor he excelled."

Heman Bangs died in New Haven, Conn., on Nov. 2, 1869 and his death is recorded as "Having been one of great peace and triumph."

From: The Encyclopedia of World Methodism, N. B. H. using information from the Simpson Cyclopaedia. 1878

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SERMON IV.

By Rev. Nathan Bangs, D. D.,

THE SPIRIT'S INFLUENCE

ROMANS, viii. 26.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

In the preceding part of this very important epistle, the apostle had stated and defended some of the fundamental doctrines of Christ; refuted many of the strongest objections of the Jews; confounded the Gentiles by the power and conclusiveness of his arguments; and opened to the true believer the unspeakable privileges to which the gospel of Christ exalts him. In the chapter before us, he treats principally on the blessed effects which these doctrines have upon the hearts and lives of all those who sincerely and believingly embrace them. So far from being led by the imaginary flights of those who worship false deities, as are the Gentiles, or groping in the darkness of the Mosaic dispensation, as did the infatuated Jews, the light of Christianity throws demonstration upon the path of the experimental Christian, conducting him by a sure and safe way to life and immortality.

This is done by the influence of the Spirit of God upon the heart; "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." And that no one might be left in uncertainty respecting his right to the enjoyment of these peculiar and distinguished privileges of the Christian dispensation, the apostle furnishes him with an infallible criterion, by which he may ascertain his title to them. To all such, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God."

Lest, however, some might erroneously infer from these undeniable premises, that the apostle designed to represent the Christian as exalted above the common frailties of our nature, and as being beyond the reach and influence of those temptations which are common to man, he speaks of him as still groaning, even though he has "the first fruits of the Spirit;" as still being "saved by hope," although walking under the direct rays of the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." But whatever defects

might arise out of the infirmities of our nature; whatever impediments might be thrown in our path by the numerous enemies with which we may have to contend, a remedy is found for all these defects and a removal of all these impediments, in the efficient aids of the Holy Spirit; "likewise the Spirit helpeth our infirmities."

In these consoling words, the apostle contrasts the Spirit's influence, strong and energetic with human strength feeble and inefficient; and shows that, however infirm may be the one, the other is sufficiently powerful to help in all times of need--so to help that the believer may finally be "more than a conqueror through him who has loved him." This Spirit helps,

I. THE WEAKNESS OF OUR UNDERSTANDING IN OUR PRAYERS.

"We know not what to pray for as we ought." Through the weakness of our understanding, we know not at all times, and under all circumstances, what is best for us, and therefore are at a loss how to direct our prayers, only in general terms. At one time the disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume their enemies; at another, to build tabernacles for Jesus, for Moses, and for Elias; both of these petitions originated from the weakness of their understandings, rather than from any particular depravity of their hearts. Under the pressure of particular circumstances, over which he may have no control the Christian will often find his heart prompting him to pray for things which, if granted, would prove a curse instead of a blessing.

It is in these circumstances that the Spirit, in a very particular manner "maketh intercession for him," "helpeth his infirmities," either by reflecting light upon his mind, and thereby revealing to him the error of his understanding, or by crossing his inclination disappointing his expectation, and finally leading him "in a way that he knew not." The Spirit may also operate directly on his heart, create new desires, as well as new aversions, and present, in a luminous manner, those objects after which it is both lawful, and for his highest interest, to pursue. Here often, in this way, does our heavenly Father interpose in our behalf! He obscures to our view those objects which, though we may greatly desire them for a time, He perceives would be injurious to us, denies us their possession and enjoyment, and presents us with others which he sees are better adapted to our condition. The Spirit helps,

II. THE WEAKNESS OF OUR FAITH.

Were our understandings always clear and perspicuous in respect to those things "which make for our peace," our faith would not so frequently be wavering. How often, under the clouds which hover around us, does our faith in God, in the justice and goodness of his providences, and the stability of his purposes, as well as the certainty and faithfulness of his promises, become wavering, so that we are ready to exclaim, "All these things are against us!" And in the sad dilemma to which we so frequently find ourselves reduced, we feel the justness of the rebuke, "Wherefore dost thou doubt, O thou of little faith;" while we, in our turn, are forced to adopt the language of Peter, "Save, Lord, or we perish."

Here, under these circumstances, often so afflicting because of their perplexity, "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities," by dispersing the clouds from our minds, by helping "our unbelief," and by

imparting vigor to our languishing souls. As this Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth," and as he was promised that he might "lead us unto all truth," so he helpeth our infirmities, by strongly impressing truth upon our mind, by forcibly presenting to the eye of our souls those true and substantial realities which are reserved in heaven for those who love God. In this way, "the feeble are made as David," "strong in the Lord of hosts, and in the power of his might." The Holy Spirit, by powerfully operating upon our hearts, takes us up in some sense from the earth, and gives us those ravishing views of God in Christ Jesus, which cast a shade upon all terrestrial objects and makes us feel somewhat as Peter did, when he wanted to prepare a residence upon Mount Tabor for himself and his glorious Master.

While faith is thus in vigorous exercise, through the energies of the Holy Spirit, the soul rises in its contemplations, and feels that in the presence of God "there is fulness of joy," and believingly anticipates those "rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore." But why is this? Is it because of any peculiar strength which the soul naturally possesses at this time, more than any other, to grasp spiritual objects? By no means. It is because the Spirit helpeth its infirmities. "Out of weakness we are mad strong," through this mighty influence. It is then that faith penetrates through every cloud, soars above every obstacle, and grasps, with a strong and vigorous hand, the infinite Jehovah, while it,

"Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done.

The Spirit helps,

III. THE WEAKNESS OF OUR AFFECTIONS WHICH IS MANIFESTED IN THEIR VACILLATING FROM ONE OBJECT TO ANOTHER.

Nothing more strikingly distinguishes man, and distinguishes him, too, as a creature of depravity, than the instability of his attachments. He is not only mutable, he, as it respects his liability to err in his judgment, and to change from good to bad, but he is ever prone to be perpetually veering about from one object to another, though perhaps he may not be able to assign any reason, satisfactory even to himself, for the objects of his preference. Tomorrow he will hate what he loves today; and his desires and aversions are ever transferring themselves from one object to another.

But while this remains true in the general, and goes to corroborate the remark of a wise statesman, "that there is nothing perpetual among human beings, but change;" yet there is one object to which man is continually prone to cleave. To this he clings with all the tenacity of the most bewitching fondness. It is the world. This is the idol of his heart; of that heart which is "earthly, sensual, and devilish." And even the Christian, whose attachments have been in a good degree broken off from the world, by the renewing of his mind by the Holy Ghost, will often feel these worldly attractions drawing him back again to the world, as though his chief good were concentrated here. This is his weakness. This is the snare that is laid for him. Here, if any where, he will find himself bitten by the serpent which lies coiled under the riches, the pleasures, and honors of the world.

How shall he escape? Here the Spirit is peculiarly necessary to "help his infirmities." Though he may not know precisely what particular and special blessing he should pray for under these

circumstances, yet he may to be delivered from "the love of the world." But let him remember, as one of the cardinal truths of the gospel, that he cannot conquer this inordinate attachment to the world, but by the mighty working, the energetic, the inworking of the Holy Spirit. To purify and elevate the affections, "to things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God," to place them permanently there, as on their supreme object, the object of love, and the source of all joy and happiness, is the special work of the Holy Spirit. This is the refiner. This, like the fire upon the ore, separates the dross, every thing which is vile, from our affections, and then "lifts them up to things above;" and so long as the Spirit helps our infirmities, do they remain fixed on God as the supreme object of our hope and desire.

By thus placing our affections on God, as our Maker, our Redeemer and Saviour, our love and hatred, our desire and aversion, become also fixed and permanent. No longer vacillating between God and the world, we uniformly hate that which is evil, and love that which is good, and regulate our conduct accordingly. And though something of that changeable disposition, by which the fickleness of human nature is distinguished, still evinces itself in things of an indifferent nature, of which neither good nor evil may properly be predicated, yet, so long as the heart is under the influence of this Divine Spirit, there is a steady "abhorrence of that which is evil, and a cleaving to that which is good." As the Spirit uniformly leads the soul to God as the centre of all good, and the source of all excellence, so those who are led by it are steadily and delightfully conducted into all truth, and into the paths of peace and pleasantness. While this is the case, the Spirit helps,

IV. THE CHRISTIAN TO WITHSTAND THE NUMEROUS TEMPTATIONS TO WHICH HE IS CONSTANTLY EXPOSED.

In no instance is the weakness of poor human nature more strikingly exemplified, than in its incompetency to resist the many allurements to sin. In addition to the weakness of our nature in this respect, there are superadded the many and powerful temptations of our grand adversary, all of which are most admirably adapted to beguile the understanding, to allure the heart, as well as to inflame the imagination, and to corrupt the passions. "We are not ignorant of his devices." And "we wrestle not against flesh and blood (only), but against principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places."

With what weapons shall we conquer our arch, our malicious, our ever vigilant foe? "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds."

"No strength of our own, or goodness we claim;
Our strength is all thrown on Jesus's name."

But in vain may we "wrestle in the mighty strength of prayer;" in vain do we pray, and watch, and strive, unless we are assisted by the Spirit of God. This harnesses us for the combat. This makes us more than conquerors in the name of Jesus. When the Spirit of God comes upon us, we feel fully equal to the crisis, however severe and perilous it may be; and though thousands may be around about us, waiting for our halting, making sport with our weakness, yet, aided by this mighty Spirit, we lay fast hold on the pillars of unbelief, the temple of our adversaries falls, and we shout victory to God and the Lamb. In all these ways, and many more not enumerated, does the "Spirit help our

infirmities!" "Out of weakness are we made strong," so that we may "put to flight the armies of the aliens," and continually "wax valiant in fight."

I now come to another branch of the subject. It might be asked, How does the Spirit help our infirmities? The answer is given to this question in the latter clause of the text, namely, "By making intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

There is often a mighty conception, if I may so speak, in the heart of the believer, too big for utterance. This may arise either from the pressure of those circumstances with which he is surrounded, or from that enlarged desire of his soul, awakened by a view of the infinite goodness of God, as manifested particularly in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ--a desire so ardent, so extensive in respect to the objects which it embraces, that the tongue cannot well express it. In either, or in both these cases, "the Spirit maketh intercession for us," speaks in the heart, and carries the intense desire of the soul before the throne of God.

1. The soul is very often so overwhelmed with afflictions, arising from crosses and disappointments, from sharp mental conflicts, and from various other sources, that it is pressed down "like a cart beneath its sheaves." In the conflicts occasioned by these circumstances, despair would be added to the other evils under which we "groan the unutterable groan," were we not sustained by the intercession, the strong, supporting influence of the Holy Spirit. This gives energy to the soul, sustains it under its burden, and enables it to "count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

2. "The desire of the righteous shall be granted them." Though it is often the case with a heart penetrated with a just sense of the worth of immortal spirits, now fluttering between heaven and hell, to be unable to express itself in suitable language; yet in this respect, also, the Spirit maketh intercession, both by producing and making known that strong desire for their salvation by which the deeply experienced Christian is distinguished. Some may laugh at folly, make a mock at sin, and treat the perilous condition of the sinner with indifference; but the Christian entertains that lively and piercing sense of his danger, which makes him cry out, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach." And while his heart is thus penetrated with a piercing sense of the sinfulness and danger of the sinner, from a view of the unbounded love of God in Christ Jesus, he is led to make "Strong cries and tears to God," that he may obtain salvation. Here it is that, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, the devout Christian becomes an intercessor in behalf of a sinful and perishing world, and often feels to prostrate himself before God, while he can only express himself with groanings which cannot be uttered.

But this is more particularly the case in his silent meditations, in his musings on the condition of a lost world, the means of its recovery, and the unwillingness of Almighty God that any sinner should perish. And though the mind of man cannot fully conceive of the things which God hath done, and is still willing to do, to save mankind, yet we often find ourselves at a loss to express even those little conceptions of our finite minds which we have. In this state of mind the believer stands in silent awe before God, only expressing his strong desires by those groanings which the tongue cannot utter.

3. Neither is this subject inapplicable to the penitent sinner who is groaning after redemption in the blood of the Lamb. He, in the midst of his perplexities, arising from a consciousness of his guilt and helplessness, finds himself at a loss how to express himself before God. Sickened with the world, tired of himself, and condemned for his past conduct, and hardly knowing either the cause of his distress or the way of deliverance from it, he inwardly sighs for a repose which he does not find, and for a peace to which he is a stranger. Every thing tends to humble him, to break down his spirit, and to bring him to the feet of the Redeemer. The frowns of God press upon his conscience, a sense of his guilt makes him afraid, while a knowledge of his own weakness causes him inwardly to tremble for his fate. He knows not, perhaps, that in the midst of these things the Spirit of God is at work with him, begetting within him desires after himself, after a deliverance from sin, and an adoption into the family of Jesus Christ.

In this sad plight, what does he do? He cries for mercy. But while the word mercy trembles upon his lips, or falters upon his tongue, he scarcely comprehends its meaning; he knows not that it includes that pardon and peace which he needs to set him free from his sins and bondage, and which can only be obtained by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the Spirit maketh intercession for him with unutterable groanings; and under this influence he breathes out his desires to God, until the Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit that he is a child of God.

4. But more especially does the believer find himself inwardly groaning after an entire deliverance from the "bondage of corruption." In the light of God he sees himself more and more vile. This sight of himself, which is also the work of God's Spirit upon his heart, makes him ardently "pine for deliverance;" and under the pressure of this inward, this dire disease, he would soon sink into despondency, were it not for the aid of the Spirit's influence, which pleads for him in a language more intelligible than he himself can express. Following the dictates of this Spirit, and borne along by his mighty hand, the believer is enabled so to cast all his care on God as to feel and know that he careth for him, until, finally, his perfect love is so shed abroad in his heart, that he can perfectly love God, and "worthily magnify his holy name."

Thus does the Spirit help our infirmities, and make intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered. And from these considerations we may learn,

1. To be careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Is it so, that "nothing good, nothing strong, and nothing holy" can be effected without the aid of this divine and powerful agency? Then, surely, we ought to be extremely cautious how we "do despite to this Spirit of grace," lest he take his departure from us, and leave us to the wretchedness of our own blindness and hardness.

One single consideration will show us how important it is for us, as Christians, "to walk in the Spirit." Though it must be admitted that the Holy Scriptures are an infallible guide in all matters of faith and practice, yet it is equally certain, that as it respects individuals and individual cases, they speak only in general terms. We do not find any of us there called by name, with an express command that thus, and so, we must do in every particular circumstance. And there are, in the course of our pilgrimage, a thousand circumstances, often critical and perplexing, in which we find ourselves at a loss how to act. Here the influence of the Holy Spirit comes to our aid, reflects light upon our path, imparts consolation and strength to our hearts, and teaches us how to apply the

commands and promises of God to our particular cases and circumstances. Should we not, therefore, welcome the visitations of this heavenly Comforter, and follow, scrupulously and diligently, his sacred dictates? "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." We may learn,

2. How deceitful is the system of religion which excludes from it the conscious agency of the Holy Spirit. Take from Christianity this Spirit, and you strip it of one of its most striking peculiarities. It is "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes us free from the law of sin and death." As the tree without sap is dead, so that heart which is destitute of the "Spirit of God is dead--dead to God--destitute of all spiritual life--to all feeling of true, religious enjoyment--and, of course, can perform no acceptable service in the sight of God. So essential, indeed, is the possession of this Holy Spirit, that the apostle declares, "no man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost;" that is, as I conceive, no man can call Jesus his Lord, can claim him as his Saviour, who has saved him from his sins, but he who is enabled to do so by having received the "Spirit of adoption, crying," in his heart, "Abba, Father."

Away, then, with all idle notions about having a religion destitute of the Spirit of God! No! It is this Divine Agent which awakens the sinner, converts and sanctifies him; which guides, sustains, and comforts the believer, through the whole course of his pilgrimage

This subject affords,

3. Unspeakable comfort to the weak, the trembling, and oftentimes sorrowful, Christian. Under the unavoidable toils and burdens of life, such are frequently tempted to think that their afflictions are intolerable. Indeed they would be, were it not for the aid and the consolations afforded them by the eternal Spirit. Let all such know that "the battle is not to the strong, nor the race to the swift, but of God that showeth mercy." It is not by human might, nor human power that the battle is fought, or the victory won, "but by my Spirit," saith the Lord. If ye, therefore, "being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

While the heart of the weak believer trembles under the unavoidable burdens of life, often fearing that he shall one day fall under the hands of his enemies, he hears the voice of his heavenly Shepherd, saying unto him, "Fear not;" "greater is he that is for you than he that is against you." To this consoling declaration, the Divine Spirit sets his seal, stamps it upon his heart, leaving the impress of God's own image, on which is written, "God is love." This revives his drooping Spirit, and he thanks God, and takes courage.

4. The subject affords great encouragement for perseverance in prayer to God. In what particular exercise does the Spirit help us? Though he enlightens the understanding, strengthens our faith, gives stability to our affections, and imparts vigor and activity to our souls, yet all this is done in answer to our prayers--to those groanings which are produced in the heart by the intercessions of the Holy Spirit. If, therefore, we would enjoy the full benefit of these intercessions, we must be faithful co-workers with the Spirit--where he leads we must be willing to go--what he dictates, we must be willing to speak and do--and the desires which he creates in the heart, we must pour forth, as we are able, in fervent prayer to Almighty God.

It is in this way, and in this way alone, that we may expect the fulfillment of the promise, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Yes! it is in answer to mighty prayer, that prayer which is inspired by the Spirit himself, that the soul is "filled with all the fulness of God." And who can doubt that God will answer such a prayer? Will he not grant that request which is of his own dictation? Surely he will. Let, then, the humble Christian continue "instant in prayer," "open his mouth wide," ask for much, even the constant "indwelling of the Holy Spirit," and God shall grant him the desire of his heart.

It is by this means that every thing "is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." And the more abundantly this true Spirit of prayer prevails, the more abundantly shall our own souls prosper, and the more extensively shall the "word of God prevail," and the kingdom of Christ be extended upon the face of the earth. When the hearts of professing Christians shall every where be imbued with this Divine Spirit, by whose holy dictates they shall be led forth in earnest and united prayer to God, though it may be only by "groanings which cannot be uttered," then "shall the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ," and God shall every where be worshipped "in spirit and in truth."

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SERMON V

By Rev. Nathan Bangs, D. D.

SUBMISSION TO GOD.

PSALMS, XLVI. 10.

BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.

These words were addressed to heathen. Against the God of Israel those "heathen raged--the kingdoms were moved," even though when he "uttered his voice the earth melted." In the midst, however, of all this frenzy and rage, the people of Israel remained unmoved by terror, because they could say, as the Psalmist expresses it, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." And with a view to impress their minds with a suitable sense of his supreme dominion over all things, and thus to inspire them with adoration to his character, they are invited to "Come, and behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth--he maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth--he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder--he burneth the chariots in the fire." How vain the impotent rage of these heathen, who armed themselves against the mighty God of Israel who doeth all these terrible things! Their only safety was in a humble submission to his government; to be still, and know that he is God.

To know God, is one of the primary duties of man; and the neglect of this duty is, therefore, one of the most prolific sources of the vices and irreligion prevalent in our world. Hence, says our Saviour, "This is eternal life, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." The knowledge of God, however, inculcated in the Sacred Scriptures, does not suppose that we are able to "find out the Almighty to perfection." "Full orb'd with his whole round of rays complete," he eludes the grasp of finite minds; so that we may say, "he draweth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a cloud upon it." But though the "full glories of his mind" are not to be perceived by the feeble powers of man, he has condescended to make such a revelation of himself as to give us that knowledge of his perfections which is essential to our happiness and salvation.

While, therefore, it is allowed that only a small part of his ways are comprehended by us, there is a sense in which it is most important for us to "acquaint ourselves with him;" we must know him as our God, who is "reconciled to us through the Son of his love," and that we are reconciled to him by faith in Jesus Christ, "in whom we have redemption, even the forgiveness of our sins." When we thus know him, we feel in our hearts that God is love, and that he "dwelleth in us, and we in him." All who in this sense know God, are prepared to submit to him in all the dispensations of his providence and grace.

This is the duty as I humbly conceive, taught in the text--"Be still, and know that I am God." This implies,

I. A SUBMISSION TO WHATEVER GOD COMMANDS.

A thousand objections are perpetually urged, especially by unregenerate sinners, against the commandments of God. Though they may not array themselves in direct hostility against God, and adopt the express language of the slothful servant, "Thou art an hard master," yet the impious sentiment exists and rankles in their hearts, and vents itself in some form or other. When they are called upon to repent they excuse themselves by saying they have no power to repent; thus implying that God requires an impossibility at their hands. To this, and all other objections of a kindred character, which sinners make, either expressly in so many words or implicitly by their conduct, God furnishes them with a decisive answer in our text--Be still, and know that I am God. "Know thou, O man, that I, who am infinite in wisdom, power, and goodness, not only have a right to command thy services, but that the perfections of my nature preclude the possibility of commanding any thing wrong, any thing unkind, unwise, or even that is not for thy highest interest to do. Submit, therefore, to my requirements, and thou shalt live."

Others take an occasion to excuse themselves from a prompt obedience to the commandments of God, by what they suppose the text itself requires Be still, say they, implies that we are to wait God's time, which he, as a Sovereign, has set for our conversion and salvation. And by this erroneous interpretation of the text, they strive to content themselves in their sins, foolishly charging them upon the sovereignty of God. I do not deny God's sovereignty, but I deny that it furnishes any just excuse for sinners to delay the time of their repentance: or that it will in any degree lessen the criminality of their sinful conduct. The sovereignty of God is displayed in devising the plan and fixing the terms of man's salvation, and in proclaiming to him that now is the day of this salvation. The stillness, therefore, commanded in the text, is so far from furnishing an excuse for the criminal delays of sinners in submitting to those immutable terms of salvation which bespeak the sovereign pleasure of God to man, that it requires them to lay aside all their unreasonable objections, to submit without reserve to the just and gracious terms of the gospel, and to surrender themselves up without delay as prisoners to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does the master say to his peevish child, or servant, who makes objections to his commands? He says, Be still, and do as I have commanded. The mother says to her crying child, Be still, and submit, without murmuring, to your task. So God says to all those sinners who "reject the counsel of God against themselves," and strive to intrench themselves behind his sovereignty, while they are impiously insulting the majesty of his government, trampling upon his laws, and despising

the offers of his mercy in Christ Jesus, "Be still,--cease all your complaints; cease to urge your objections; and make haste, delay no longer to do what I, who am your God, whose 'commandment is just, holy, and good,' have required at your hands."

There are yet others who infer from this, and other similar texts, that they are to refrain from works altogether, and especially from vocal speaking and praying, and simply rest in silence before the Lord. That this is a wrong interpretation of the meaning of such like scriptures, I think, is plainly manifest from such commands as the following: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate,"--"lift up thy voice like a trumpet; cry aloud, and spare not," "pray with all prayer,"--"work out your own salvation." So, to explain one part of Scripture as to make it contradict another, and thus destroy the harmony of its several parts, is manifestly to "wrest the Holy Scriptures to our own destruction." The meaning, therefore, is, that we should silence all objections to the performance of these obvious duties; discharge them unhesitatingly, without delay; and leave the event to God, who never commands in vain, nor without a good reason. If I mistake not, the ingenious Mr. Fletcher illustrates the manner in which we may both be still, in the scriptural acceptance of this word, and yet move forward in the discharge of external duties at the same time, by comparing it to the mathematician when drawing a circle: while he fixes one point of the compass in the centre, where it remains stationary, with the other he draws the circle. So the Christian man must fix his faith firmly and steadfastly upon the promises of God, strongly confiding in his wisdom, power, and goodness, while he cheerfully moves around in the circle of obedience to God's commands, in the prompt discharge of his various duties as a citizen, a member of the church; fulfilling his relative and social obligations with all fidelity.

In this way he submits with a ready cheerfulness, to whatever God has commanded, under the full conviction that he who is God has a right to demand the obedience of his creatures; and being infinitely powerful and good, as well as wise and just, he can require nothing of them but what is for their highest and best interest to yield. In this way they are still before him.

The duty required in the text implies,

II. A SUBMISSION TO WHATEVER GOD DOES.

Nothing is indeed more common, than for mankind to find fault with the government of Jehovah. Not only does the professed infidel impeach the government of the God of the Bible, by saying that it is administered either in manifest injustice or with evident partiality; but even those who profess to believe in the divine authority of the Scripture, and to be governed by its precepts, very often impeach its divine Author with a want of wisdom and goodness in the dispensations of his providence and grace. Though they do not do this in so many words, yet the many complaints which are uttered on account of the hardness of their lot, the severity of their chastisements, and the cruel bereavements they are called to suffer, all imply a complaint against Divine Providence; originating, perhaps, from not duly considering that all things are under his control, and are made to serve his sovereign will. To silence all such complaints, God addresses us in the language of the text--Be still, and know that I am God. "Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?"

The manifest import of this language is, "Be still, and know that I have a right to dispose of thee, as well as all things else, according to my own pleasure. But to silence, for ever, thy unreasonable murmurings, and to fix, deeply to fix, in thy heart a submission to all my dispensations, know me, know that my wisdom precludes the possibility of erring in the choice of either ends, or means to accomplish them; that my goodness prevents me from withholding any 'good thing from those who walk uprightly;' that my justice secures the impartial administration of every part of my government; and if these considerations will not induce thy patient submission, nor conquer thy rebellious will, know that my omnipotence will arrest thee in thy mad career; and if thou dost continue in thy perversity, it will enable me to overtake thee at last, and then 'vengeance will claim the full arrears.' Why, then, dost thou find fault? Canst thou resist omnipotence? Vain effort. Canst thou devise a better plan, more wise, more benevolent, better adapted to thy condition? Or if I were to resign the government of the world to thee, canst thou give any security that it shall be better administered? If not, then bow down thy will to mine. Submit to my dispensations without murmuring, and all things shall work together for thy present and eternal good."

This language is particularly consoling to the pious Christian, who is suffering under the unavoidable ills of life--under afflictions arising from crosses and disappointments. In the midst of these severe trials of his faith and patience, he may be tempted to think that his case is peculiar, and, in the language of unbelief, to say, "my judgment is passed over from my God." But let such remember, that "all things work together for good to them who love God."

"Wait thou his time: so shall this night
Soon end in joyous day."

Be still, therefore, before the Lord; submit thy cause and thy case to him who numbers the hairs of thy head, and he shall make thy "light to spring up as at noon-day," and "thy bread and water shall be sure."

The duty inculcated in the text implies,

III. A SUBMISSION TO THE VARIOUS WAYS IN WHICH HE IS PLEASED TO CARRY ON HIS WORK, EITHER IN OUR OWN SOULS OR IN THE SOULS OF OTHERS.

To dictate for God is no new thing under the sun. It is certainly among the many melancholy evidences of the conceitedness of the human mind, as well as the pride of the unrenewed heart, to undertake to prescribe how, and when, and where, God shall work. The manifest design of God, in his manner of working, is to "destroy the wisdom of the wise," to bring down the proud and lofty looks of man; for he "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." And who will presume to say, in reference to God's method of bringing souls to himself, "hitherto shalt thou come," or, in this manner alone shalt thou work!

This, indeed, was the great sin of the Jews. They had prescribed the manner in which the Messiah should make his appearance; and because, when Jesus of Nazareth came, "meek and lowly," it was so opposite to their preconceived opinions, so humbling to their pride, so mortifying to the lofty

notions they had conceived respecting his personal appearance, that they rejected him with scorn and derision, reproached him as an impostor, and finally imbrued their hands in his innocent blood. All this originated from the pride of their hearts, and an unwillingness to submit to the wisdom of God, and to his ways of developing his purposes of wisdom and love to mankind.

There is in the natural heart of man a strong opposition to God's method of saving sinners. This shows itself in divers ways. It shows itself, not only in the various excuses which he invents for a neglect of his most obvious duties but also, when convinced of his sinfulness, by the methods to which he resorts to save himself. Though struggling under the power and influence of sinful propensities, and unable to extricate himself from his sad dilemma by his own efforts, he still goes "about to establish a righteousness of his own, and will not submit to the righteousness of God." Instead of bowing with gratitude to the immutable terms of salvation which God hath proclaimed in the gospel of his Son, Jesus Christ, he vainly and proudly strives to have the terms of salvation accommodated to his narrow views, and to induce the Almighty to work according to his understanding of things. All these, however, are vain efforts. The sinner must submit--he must submit to be saved by grace alone, through faith in the Lord Jesus, or not be saved at all. He must know that God has dictated the plan of redemption, and the terms of salvation, and that these are immutably established--established in perfect conformity to infinite wisdom and goodness; and that, therefore, his unreserved submission to them is not only required, but it is required because none other can possibly be invented which are so mercifully suited to his condition. Let him, therefore, be still before the Lord of the universe, lay aside his frivolous objections, and bow in humble submission to God, that he may be saved from his sins.

There is not only an opposition to the terms of salvation, but there is also an opposition, strong and powerful, in the carnal mind, against the manner in which God works by his Holy Spirit in the heart, in order to bring the sinner to an experimental knowledge of "salvation by the remission of sins." He not only struggles to free himself from the checks, the restraints, and the strivings of the Spirit of God, but he often finds a rebellious disposition rising within him, tempting him to "resist the Holy Ghost." And when he is at last willing to submit to be saved upon God's terms, how often does he object to the time and manner in which the work shall be completed. He either wishes God to come in a "still small voice," that others may not discern the exercises of his heart, or that some great revelation may be made to him, in particular, of the love and mercy of God, that he may proclaim it aloud to his fellow men. Now, although God often works in both of these ways, the desire itself may be, in that particular case, but the echo of a proud and deceitful heart; and therefore, to humble such a heart, God finds it necessary to deny its wishes, and to lead the person under their influence in a way he knew not. Whether, then, God see fit to come in the whirlwind, or in a still small voice; whether under the word preached, in the use of his ordinances; in answer to prayer in the closet, or in the public assembly; whether by a powerful and sudden operation of his Spirit, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, or in a more gradual method, it matters not, so that the work be his, and that it be so done that we may know that he has saved us and washed us from our sin's in the blood of Christ. In this particular, also, be still, and know that he cannot err in the manner in which he carries on the work of thy salvation.

Are not professing Christians, also, frequently perplexed in a similar way? Do not they secretly, though, perhaps, unconsciously, resist the operation of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts? Do they not

often manifest an unwillingness that the "Spirit should blow where it listeth"--that God should work where, and when, and how he pleaseth? Aye! here is the grand secret why God's work does not more abundantly prosper. Our pride has already prescribed the manner in which the work of reformation must be carried forward; and if God see fit to deviate from our views of propriety, and of gospel order, it is all wrong; we "never saw it in this fashion, and therefore it cannot be right!" This was the sin of the Pharisees. And Pharisees exist in the church in all ages. Their spirit, which is a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency, is ever opposed to the Spirit of Christ. How often, when penitent sinners, from the bitter anguish of their souls, are induced to cry aloud for mercy, saying, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me," do these modern Pharisees mimic the cry of those ancient opposers of Jesus Christ, and say, "Master, bid them hold their peace!" Or if, under the powerful application of divine truth to the heart, and the merciful influence of the Holy Spirit, the devout Christian is constrained to "shout aloud unto God," and praise him for his wondrous works, these Pharisical professors of religion, always "wise above what is written," and therefore know, much better than God himself does, how he ought to work, are offended, strive to disparage the work, either by speaking reproachfully of its instruments, or by vilifying its subjects! It is sufficient, in all these cases, that we may silence all complaints, to be able to ascertain that the work is of God. Be still, at least for a while. "If it bear fruit, well; if not, then cut it down." If those who profess to be subjects of this work bring forth the fruits of the Spirit--if those who are its advocates and promoters live according to the gospel in all holiness and godliness--then acknowledge and adore the hand of God. "Let him alone: let him do as it seemeth him good;" but do not exalt thy wisdom against the wisdom of God. Stand in awe, and sin not.

How many Christians, "who have begun in the Spirit," might this day have been exulting in the enjoyment of perfect love, if they only had been willing to submit to God's time and manner of effecting this gracious and most desirable work in their souls. But, by substituting their own ways in the place of God's ways, they have "grieved the Holy Spirit," and, perhaps, have lost even "their first love." God says, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." Unbelief says, this is impossible, at least in this life. Our hearts are naturally so perverse, so feeble; our temptations so innumerable, powerful, and constant, that we cannot obtain a victory over sin. This is the language of unbelief, which always prompts the soul to rise in opposition to God. To all such, who make these futile objections, the Lord says, "Be still, and know that I am God--know that I, who have commanded you to be holy, am able and willing to make you so--that I, who am your God, have pledged myself, all the perfections of my character, to defend you against all the assaults of your enemies; and when I say, respecting them, let them be thrust out and be destroyed, it shall be done. And, in regard to your weaknesses, have I not laid help upon one who is mighty, and able to save, even to the uttermost, all that come unto me through him? What though the strength of sin in your members be great, cannot I control the monster? Am I not able to bind the strong man, and cast him out--to cleanse your heart, even from all unrighteousness? Only, therefore, submit to me. Let your willing soul bow down to my dictates--follow wheresoever I lead--walk in the light of my countenance, and these things, which seem impossible to you, shall be perfectly possible to me; I will then accomplish all the good pleasure of my will, and carry on the work of faith with power. At last, then, know me; know that I am love--that I am strong to save---and that none can pluck thee out of my hands, so long as thou dost submit thyself to my direction.

In this way let all Christians submit themselves to their heavenly Father, and it shall be well with them.

The duty inculcated in the text implies,

IV. A SUBMISSION TO GOD, IN REFERENCE TO WHATEVER HE HAS PROMISED.

The commands and promises of God are always inseparable. What I mean, is, that whatever God commands, there is always connected with it a promise that we shall have strength to perform it. In this respect, duties and privileges run parallel with each other. Does he command us to take up our daily cross, to deny ourselves, to walk in the light, to be and to live holy? And has he not, with a view to silence all our objections against the performance of these duties, from any supposed inability of our natures, promised to give grace equal to our day; to help our infirmities; to enlighten our understandings, and sanctify our natures; and to give his mercy, and enable us "to find grace in every time of need?" A firm reliance, therefore, on the promises of God, all of which "are yea and amen, to the glory of God the Father," is essential to our growth in grace, to our stability in the paths of peace, and to our being buoyed up amidst the waves and billows of affliction.

It was one of the excellencies of Abraham's character, that "he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." While faith is wavering, the soul is unstable, and cannot receive the fulfillment of the promise. Whenever, therefore, we are tempted, from a consciousness of our own weaknesses or unworthiness, to doubt the promises of God, to question his fidelity, we may be met by the doctrine of the text, Be still, and know that God cannot deny himself. Whatever objections may originate from our past sinfulness, from our present ill deserts, or from our feebleness, they are all removed by a believing view of the infinite fulness of the "riches of his grace in Christ Jesus." We have only to bow down before his throne, submit our wills to his will, and rely, with a firm and persevering hand, upon the immutability of him who has promised never to leave nor forsake his faithful people.

But it is chiefly under dark and afflictive dispensations, that the fearful Christian is induced to question the merciful protection of his heavenly Father. Let such, however, recollect, that "though clouds and darkness are round about him, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." And let them also remember, that every twig of his rod, as well as every stroke of his hand, however heavy it may press upon them, they abiding faithful, shall he sanctified to their present and future happiness. We may well say to them, therefore,

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

While the waves are passing over them, let them believe in him who walketh upon the waters, who "holds the winds in his fist," and who "taketh up the isles as a very little thing;" and they shall be safe--they shall safely outride the storm, and arrive at the haven of eternal repose at last.

In all these several ways let us be still before the Lord of the whole earth. Ceasing to raise objections against his commandments, his doings, or his manner of working, or the faithfulness of his promises, let us obey with cheerfulness, submit to his ways with patience and resignation, follow the openings of his providence with peaceful and steady steps, and rely upon his promises with a firm and persevering faith. Happy those who thus submit themselves to the government of God without murmuring! Thrice happy all those who know him as their God, who feel that they are reconciled to his ways, who delight in his commandments, and who so "believe as to have the witness in themselves" that he is a God of truth and faithfulness; who daily walk in the light of his countenance, and are joyfully anticipating that day when "mortality shall be swallowed up of life," and when they shall participate in that pure and perennial joy which flows from God's right hand for evermore. "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."