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# A SERMON

PREACHED ON LORD'S DAY,

*October 1st, A. D. 1812,*

AT THE HIGH HILLS OF SANTEE,

BEFORE THE

*Charleston Baptist Association*

AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,

AND

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

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BY JONATHAN MAXCY, D. D.  
President of the S. Carolina College.

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CHARLESTON, S. C.

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1812.

# A SERMON.

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I COR. XV. 57.

*“ Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

SIN is the only origin of all evil, natural and moral. It has divested man of his primitive glory, alienated him from God, and subjected him to suffering and death. The divine laws are all good, and in their nature calculated to promote and secure the highest happiness of all intelligent beings. Of course, these laws, if always and fully obeyed, would forever exclude from the universe, all sin and misery. Supreme love to God, is the essence of all true virtue; and the end of this, is happiness. The divine will or law, is therefore, the standard of virtue, and the rule of action for all rational, voluntary agents. These, therefore may with certainty calculate, that their ultimate happiness, will be exactly proportionate to their virtue in principle and practice. As conformity to the law of God, produces virtue and happiness, so conformity to it, produces sin and misery. Hence, all evil has originated in the mutability and defection of the creature, and not in an insufficiency of divine benevolence; much less in a positive, divine influence. All evils, both moral and physical, are so many evidences of the sin and degradation of man. He is now in a state of exile; in a land of bondage; an enemy to God, and to himself. All the evils of his troublesome, evanescent life, are comprised in sin and pain. These he constantly feels. His soul is filled with unhallowed desires, and with ungovernable appetites, at war with his reason and conscience.

Agitated by a thousand restless activities, he wanders abroad in this valley of desolation, dissatisfied with the present, tormented by the past, and anxious for the future. Born to trouble, he is a prey to himself, to others, and to all the elements of nature. Here he pines in poverty and famine; there he languishes in wealth and luxury; here, under the reign of liberty, he rushes into vice and licentiousness; there, under the stern sceptre of despotism, he sinks into a brute, and groans under the iron hand of oppression. In every part of the globe, through every period of life, he is exposed to evils which he cannot elude, and to injuries which he cannot redress. He perpetually pants after a happiness which he cannot find. Every object in creation, however alluring to his senses and imagination, fades away under his touch. For him, the privacy of retirement soon loses its charms; public honors wither on his brow; and all the pomp of grandeur sinks beneath him. He is indeed like "the troubled ocean, which cannot rest." All things animate and inanimate; every hope and every joy; health and sickness; poverty and wealth; all within and all without; every virtue and every vice; all proclaim the wretchedness, the guilt and impotence of man. He takes up his life in sorrow, carries it on in trouble, and lays it down in death. But shall he forever lie under the bondage of corruption? Shall the ceaseless flight of ages serve only to augment and perpetuate his misery? Shall not all those who believe in Christ, spring up from death vigorous and immortal? They will be more than conquerors through him who hath loved them, and will triumphantly exclaim, "Thanks be to God! who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

From these words, I shall exhibit the reasons of the christian's triumph over sin and death.

1. He has evidence that he is liberated from the reigning power of sin.—

The scriptures represent the unregenerate as in a state of servitude, and wholly governed by the principle of evil. "There is none righteous, no, not one." "There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God." "They are all gone out of the way; they

are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good; no, not one." Christ said, "Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin." Every thought of the imagination of man's heart, was pronounced by God, to be evil continually. "The heart of the wicked is fully set in him to do evil." The Apostle John says, "The whole world lieth in wickedness." The prevalence of evil in the heart of man, is represented in Scripture, as a kingdom, as a dominion, as a tyranny. Hence the apostle Paul speaks of sin as "reigning unto death." To those therefore, who continue in a state of nature, there is no hope of salvation and no cause of triumph. They are liable to receive "the wages of sin, which is death." It is the excellency of the gospel, that it brings into the souls of men, a principle of spiritual life, delivering them from the bondage of sin, and inspiring them with hopes of future felicity. To this Christ had respect, when he said, "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed." To the same transit from the bondage of sin, Paul had reference, when he said, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." He declares, that they "were by nature children of wrath even as others;" and adds, "But God, who is rich in mercy, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." To the same purpose he says to the Corinthians, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." The real christian therefore, is one who has experienced a renovation of heart; who has the witness in himself; who knows in whom he has believed, and rejoices that "because Christ lives, he shall live also." He realizes what the apostle Paul said to the Romans, "The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together with him. The believer has abundant reason to triumph over sin and death, because he feels the power of Christ in his heart; and has assurance, by the earnest of the spirit; that he shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and no more

be brought "into captivity to the law of sin." He considers natural death as a wise and necessary appointment in the divine economy. He considers the second death as the just punishment of sin, and is assured, that on him, that death shall have no power. The love of God is shed abroad in his heart, and while he feels the power of the world to come, he exclaims in the triumphant language of truth, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is by knowing him in the power of his resurrection; it is by receiving his testimony; it is by obeying his command; that we can rise above the infirmity of our reason and our senses, and possess a hope full of ardor, full of immortality. He who has fled to the Saviour for refuge, who has really believed on him according to the Scriptures, can view sin and death as vanquished enemies. He views death as the destruction of all his sin and sorrow; he stands aloft on the mountain of God, and with a confidence which no danger can shake, and an ecstasy which no language can express, exclaims, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Another reason of the christian's triumph over sin and death is, the evidence he has, that he is justified through Christ, and acquitted from condemnation.

Sin is the only thing which has ever rendered men obnoxious to divine justice, and exposed them to punishment. Hence we can entertain no hope of exemption from misery, unless we are pardoned by a special act of divine favour. Pardon implies the remission of punishment which may be justly inflicted. Hence pardon supposes and implies an acquittal from condemnation. The believer is made sensible of the remission of his sins, for "the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost." He is brought into the state in which the apostle represents the Corinthians, when they had embraced the gospel; "but ye are washed; but ye are sanctified; but ye are justified in the name of the

Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God." The apostle explains and enforces the true import of our text in the words of the subsequent verse—"The sting of death is sin." That is, death is an object of terror, and a source of misery, from no consideration except sin. The reason why we fear to undergo the change implied in death, is an apprehension, that it will leave us in a state of misery. This apprehension cannot predominate in the mind of him, who is justified by Christ, for he is assured as Paul was, that "to die is gain," and "to be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord." The apostle farther illustrates the meaning of the text, and says, "The strength of sin is the law." That is, the law points out the nature and consequences of sin, ascertains its desert, and denounces punishment. To the Romans Paul says, "I had not known sin but by the law." "Without the law sin was dead." "I was alive without the law." That is, while he was without a knowledge of the real nature of the law, and the punishment it threatened sin, he entertained hopes of salvation by the law; "but," says he "when the commandment came" in its true import and force, "sin revived," it started up like a tyrant holding him in bondage; "and I died;" That is, he gave up all hope of obtaining salvation by his own obedience to the law, and felt himself "shut up" under condemnation. How was he then to be delivered and justified? By the righteousness of Christ. For he declares thus of Christ, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood; to declare his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." He then who believes in Christ, trusts to his righteousness for salvation, is pardoned, acquitted from condemnation, and of course, can with propriety triumph over sin and death, exclaiming with the apostle, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

3. Another reason of the christian's triumph over sin and death, is the evidence he has, that his salvation is wholly by the grace of God.

From what has been advanced under the preceding articles, it appears, that he who is brought to believe on Christ, is convinced of the justice of his condemnation by the law, and deprived of all hope of obtaining salvation by it. Hence he knows and realizes that he is saved by grace. Grace is an exercise of favour. It implies that the person to whom it is manifested, is treated better than he has a right to demand. It means the bestowing of good, where evil is deserved, and may be justly inflicted. Deliverance, therefore, from the sentence of the law and salvation from sin, are the unmerited gifts of God. This reasoning abundantly corresponds with the language of scripture.—Says Paul, “if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void and the promise of none effect.” “It is of faith, that it might be by grace, and if by grace then it is no more of works, otherwise, grace is no more grace.” “By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” In the gospel plan of salvation, there is no such thing, as the blending of works and grace. Their nature, and their provinces are wholly distinct. “To him, says Paul, that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Believers can say in the language of truth, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us, that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Thus the christian, convinced from his own experience and the scriptures, that his salvation is by grace, has no confidence in himself; but places it all in God. Here is all his hope, and all his rejoicing. For he knows that God is faithful, by whom he was called to the fellowship of his son. If his salvation were left to his own wavering resolutions, and feeble efforts, he might well despair; he might well expect never to be free from the sting of death and the strength of sin; but as he knows, that he is kept by the power of God, he can with confidence consider himself as more than conqueror.—



4. Another reason of the christian's triumph is, the evidence he has of the resurrection of Christ.—

Our assent to the truth of this, is to be governed, though not exclusively, by the testimony of those who were eye witnesses. The fact, therefore, of Christ's resurrection, claims belief on the same ground as other historical facts. What then do we require in order to the belief of these? That there should be a sufficient number of witnesses, men of veracity, not governed by interested motives. In these respects, the accounts given by the evangelists and apostles carry irresistible conviction. Their conduct in asserting the resurrection of Christ, is utterly unaccountable on any supposition, except that of a firm belief, founded on the resistless evidence of their senses. Like plain honest men, they simply declared the fact. They persisted in declaring it. From what motives did they act? Did they seek for ease, or fame, or wealth, or honour? No; in asserting the resurrection of Christ, they sacrificed every thing usually esteemed among men. They exposed themselves to reproach and persecution, to poverty and distress. Would they have done these things, if they had not possessed sufficient evidence that Christ had risen from the dead? The immediate disciples of Christ, did not seem to understand him, when he repeatedly assured them, that he should die, and that he should rise again on the third day. When he was crucified they seemed to have despaired of the cause in which they had embarked. Could any thing but the clearest evidence dispel their doubts, and revive their confidence? When they saw their master hanging on the cross, suffering death, the greatest of all human calamities, could any trivial motive, could any probable testimony, induce them to engage again in his cause, and expose themselves to the vengeance of his murderers? Reason says, no; common sense and common experience say, no. What evidence then had the disciples which convinced them, dispelled their doubts, and recalled their hopes? I answer, the evidence of their senses. "To them, Christ after his passion, showed himself alive by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of

God." The apostle Paul had been a great enemy to Christ and to his followers. He persecuted them even unto strange cities. Yet violent and obstinate as he was, he was finally convinced of his error, and became a zealous supporter of the resurrection of Christ. He supposed this doctrine to be a fiction; a doctrine injurious to himself and his nation. We may therefore be assured that he did not embrace it without the most impressive evidence. This evidence he states thus—"For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins; that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day; and that he was seen of Cephas; then of the twelve; after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep; after that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles; and last of all he was seen of me also." This account was written by Paul, but a few years after the resurrection. He had all the means necessary to produce full conviction, and he received with joy the doctrine he had laboured to exterminate.

The evidences of the resurrection have been transmitted to us through the testimony of relators, and are as direct and full as the evidences of any fact recorded in history. I am persuaded that no man who sufficiently and candidly examines these evidences, can withhold his belief of the resurrection of Christ. If he can, he can disbelieve all history without exception. The resurrection of Christ, is the basis of Christianity. "If Christ be not risen, our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins." "But now is Christ risen." Of course the christian is assured that he shall be like him; that he shall be fashioned like to Christ's glorious body; and that with him, he shall live, and reign, and triumph forever.

5. Another reason of the christian's triumph over sin and death, is, the evidence he has, that all mankind shall be raised up from the dead.

For the knowledge of the resurrection of the body, we are wholly indebted to divine revelation. Our faith in this doctrine, rests exclusively on the testimony of God. It is not analogous to any known laws of nature, that

animal bodies once dead, should be reorganized and re-animated. These effects, however, can be produced by omnipotence, and require no greater power and wisdom than were exerted to form the first living body. The resurrection of the body is abundantly asserted in the scriptures, particularly in those of the New-Testament. Christ said, "The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall come forth." The apostle Paul says thus, "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept." The first fruits were a pledge and assurance of the subsequent harvest. In like manner Christ's resurrection is a pledge of the resurrection of the dead. "For, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The doctrine of the resurrection, constituted a chief part of the primitive apostolick preaching. In the fourth chapter of the Acts, it is said of Peter and John, that the priests and captains of the Temple, were grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus, the resurrection of the dead. In the eighteenth chapter Paul declares to king Agrippa that the Jews had accused him on account of his hope of the resurrection of the dead, and says, "why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead.?" To the Athenians the same Apostle preached "Jesus and the resurrection." To the Corinthians he said, "God hath both raised up the Lord, and will raise us up by his power."—There appear to be two resurrections spoken of in the scriptures. The first is described by Paul, thus, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be ever with the Lord." John the revelator describes the same, thus, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them, and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not till the thousand years were

ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God, and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."—The second and general resurrection is described thus by Christ. "The hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." John says, "I saw the dead small and great stand before God: and the Sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead that were in them." Thus it appears from the scriptures that all mankind will be raised from the dead. The resurrection of those who believe, in Christ, is taught more fully in the scriptures, than the resurrection of the wicked. The reason of this doubtless was, that believers, particularly in the primitive ages of the Church, might be encouraged to persevere. Paul says to the Romans, "if the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his spirit that dwelleth in you." To the Philippeins he says of Christ, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like to his glorious body." To the Corinthians, he says,—“As we have borne the image of the earthly we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” The christian, then, has great reason to triumph over sin and death; for he has a well grounded hope that his body will be raised up from death, freed from sin, rendered glorious, spiritual, incorruptible, and capable of endless felicity in heaven.

6. Another reason of the christian's triumph is, the evidence he has, that after the resurrection, he shall be admitted to complete eternal happiness in heaven.

It is evident from the scriptures, that believers immediately after death, enter into happiness. Paul said thus, "for me to die, is gain,—I am in a straight betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." "We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." The voice from heaven said to John, "Bless-

ed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth;" that is, their blessedness will commence as soon as they die. The state which intervenes between death and the final judgment, is in the scriptures, termed Hades. Into this state both the righteous and the wicked enter, though it is not the final state of happiness for the former nor of punishment for the latter. It was into this state that the soul of Christ entered after his crucifixion. The Apostle Peter applies the words of the Psalmist to him, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," or hades. Christ by descending into this region established his power in it. For says Paul, "For this cause Christ, both died and rose and revived that he might be Lord of the dead and living." Hence it follows that death does not destroy, nor even interrupt the kingdom of Christ. This kingdom reaches forward and is continued into the invisible state, and through that, to final happiness in heaven. Christ said thus, "I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build, my church and the gates of hell or hades, shall not prevail against it." What are we to understand by the gates of hades? Undoubtedly they mean death, because death lets us into the invisible world, the receptacle of departed souls. By the gates of hades not prevailing against the church; we are to understand that death neither destroys the soul, nor suspends its power and enjoyments; but only separates it from the body and introduces it into that world which will continue till the resurrection. Whatever was terrible in that state, has been removed by Christ. He has rendered the path luminous to all his followers. Believers will doubtless enjoy great happiness in this state; but when their bodies shall be raised incorruptible, and be united to their souls, their happiness will exceed all conception. It will be "a crown of life, and an eternal weight of glory." Just so sure as Christ has died, and entered the invisible state; just so sure we must die and enter that state; just so sure as he has risen, just so sure we shall rise; just so sure as he now reigns in glory, just so sure we shall reign with him, for we shall "see him as he is, and shall be like him." All real christians who die in faith will be brought forth from hades to the re-

surrection of life. Christ who is their king and their judge, will say unto them, "come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom, prepared for you, from the foundation of the world." They will then take possession of that inheritance which has been reserved in heaven for them, "an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."—Thus by the light of scripture we can trace the progress of those who embrace the gospel, not only through this world, but through death, through the invisible intervening world, and to the state of eternal glory in heaven. When they arrive at that mansion, beyond the reach of sin, and sorrow, and pain, and death, and hell; with what ecstasy will they adore that power, and wisdom, and goodness, which brought them out of all their tribulations, to a kingdom of pure delight; where sun and moon, and stars shall fade; and the Lord shall be their everlasting light, and their God and their glory!

Having brought into view the reasons of the christian's triumph over sin and death, I shall now close the subject by making one general remark, and giving it a brief illustration. The remark I would make is this—That the doctrines advanced in the preceding discourse, are peculiar and distinguishing to revelation; and that they are admirably adapted to man as a fallen, sinful being. Under the three first particulars, it was shown that the christian has reason to triumph over sin and death, from the evidence he has, that the reigning power of sin over his heart is destroyed; that he is justified and acquitted from condemnation, by the righteousness of Christ; and that his salvation is wholly from the grace of God. The writings of the ancient philosophers, tho' professedly designed for the reformation and happiness of man, contain no such doctrines as these. *These* are above all human wisdom. They apply to the heart, which is the seat of all man's wickedness. They are calculated to make the tree good, that the fruit also may be good. That religion can be of no real use to man, which does not inspire his heart with good principles. The first thing that real religion implies, is a renovation of the moral temper. If it did not proceed farther, it would

leave man in despair, as to final happiness; for he would feel himself a sinner, and liable to suffer the penalty of the divine law. The scriptures in the next place present the righteousness of Christ, by which the sinner is justified, accepted and pardoned. His fears are now allayed; and he has a hope, like "an anchor to the soul, sure and stedfast." He boasts no righteousness of his own, and is convinced that his deliverance has proceeded wholly from the free grace of God. This doctrine is calculated to humble his pride, and make him place all his dependence on God. Such is the excellency of the christian doctrine.

Under the three last particulars of the preceding discourse it was shown, that the christian had reason to triumph over sin and death, from the evidence he has, that Christ has risen from the dead; that all mankind will be raised, and that he shall finally be received into eternal happiness in heaven. These doctrines, like those just mentioned, are peculiar to revelation. Though they lie more out of the reach of common experience, because they are founded wholly on testimony; yet they are not less true, nor less firmly believed by the christian. It is sufficient for him, that they are contained in a system of doctrines exhibiting the most prominent features of a divine original. He assents to the resurrection of Christ, because he thinks it attested by a sufficient number of adequate witnesses; he assents to the resurrection of the body, because it is abundantly asserted in the testimony of God. For the same reason, he assents to the final happiness of the believer. It is not essential to a christian, that he should be able to comprehend the manner in which theological truths consist; nor the manner in which prophecied events and facts will take place. To all those things contained in the scriptures, beyond human comprehension, the christian assents solely on the testimony of God. This assent is denominated faith, and in its full extent implies a surrender of the heart and intellect to God. And hence it is that so much importance is attached to faith, and that it is ranked first in the catalogue of all moral and divine virtues. The exercise of faith, is perfectly reasonable and consistent. For man

in his present dark, imperfect state of existence, cannot comprehend all the truths which it is essential to his happiness to admit and practise. Hence Paul says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." It attaches on things invisible; it realizes their existence, so that they exert a governing influence on the heart and become principles of action. Hence the apostle says, "We walk by faith, not by sight." From what strong and exalted motives must he act, who firmly believes, that he shall be raised from the dead; and that if he endures to the end in virtue, he shall be saved? The preceding doctrines are calculated to alleviate the sufferings, sorrows and calamities of the present life. Receiving, experiencing and believing the truth, we shall be persuaded that "if this earthly house of our tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Of what vast importance then, is it, that we embrace the doctrines contained in the pages of inspiration? Here only, shall we find an unerring directory to the kingdom of eternal glory. Here only, are exhibited motives the most powerful to excite us to virtue, and to deter us from sin. Are there any here, whose views of happiness are limited to the present transitory scene? What will become of those pleasures, you so eagerly pursue? Of those honours in which you exult? Of those riches you amass? Of those splendours, in which you shine? Can these support you on the couch of disease, or in the hour of dissolution? Alas! all, all will vanish. They will leave you in sorrow and in death. How much better to embrace the gospel! to be governed in time by motives drawn from eternity! You will then find a Saviour, whose presence will be the strength of your heart; whose love will disarm the king of terrors; whose glory will shine through the gloomy valley. His almighty arm will support you in your departure from time, and his hand will place on your head a crown of eternal life.