2 Corinthians - Commentaries by James Lampden Harris

Present Testimony Papers, By Faith Ye Stand

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

In the first recorded intercourse between the Lord and Moses, after Moses had pitched the tabernacle outside the camp, "when the Lord spoke with him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend," Moses was emboldened to ask, "Show me now thy way." Surely, as Moses himself afterward testifies, "His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He;" yet His way of dealing with His people after their failure, is strongly contrasted with man's way, and proves that "His way is higher than our way," and blessed in proportion to its highness. This way of God is remarkably carried out by the Apostle Paul in his conduct to the saints of Corinth. The manner in which the Apostle addresses himself to deal with them, distracted as they were by divisions, debating even the fundamental doctrine of the resurrection, and conniving at a gross outrage on moral decency, is replete with instruction. Before he utters one word of direct reproof, he seeks to establish their souls in the faithful grace of God. He thanks God for the grace given to them by Christ Jesus. He acknowledges their many gifts; needed indeed for the time, but not essential; because there would be no need of such gifts at the coming (or, revelation, marg.) of our Lord Jesus Christ. He leads their souls to him to confirm them blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, and reminds them of the faithfulness of God who had called them into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ. Surely this is the divine way. It is ever the way of man to reason from himself Godward, but the way of God is the reverse. He acts from himself and for himself. Christians are very apt to use the way of man, by reasoning from man to God -because the constitutional disease of Christians is unbelief. They are ready enough to doubt their own saintship; and when others would press on them their failures as a proof that they are not saints at all, they are thrown off their stability; and reproof and correction entirely lose their power.

In this Epistle, although we find the absence of direct reproof at the outset, it is remarkable, that in the very act of establishing their souls, there is indirect reproof. The Apostle, under the guidance of the Spirit, could at a glance survey their condition, and while he thanks God for the grace and gifts bestowed on them -there is a silent rebuke of their short-coming in the grace, and misuse of the gifts. The Apostle could not say to them as to the Philippians; "I thank God for every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now." He found cause indeed for thanksgiving in the grace of God to the Corinthians, but none for their fellowship in the Gospel. They lacked the stability in the grace of the Gospel which characterized the Philippians. Pride of knowledge and pride of gifts, made them forget that knowledge (at best but in part), and gifts of the highest order would cease at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was Christ himself, and not His gifts, which would confirm them blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ; and it was the fidelity of God who had called them to which they had to look, and not to the acquirements of their teachers.

After this (1 Cor. 1:10) the Apostle plainly tells them of the report which had reached him of the disorder among them but he makes no direct mention of authority -till the end of the fourth chapter. "Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod; or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?" Instead of using direct Apostolical authority, He addresses himself to their consciences pointedly and yet delicately. Thus, in the case of the incestuous person, he mentions the crime which they were tolerating as unheard of even among the Heathen {1 Cor. 5:1 }. They were puffed up instead mourning. He would have them act in concert with him -but he does not disturb them from their standing, as being unleavened. In the matter of going to law before the heathen tribunals, he shames them that they could not find a wise man among themselves to settle their disputes, and that they had forgotten their high destiny of judging the world; and then very justly indeed insinuates that there was defect in their apprehension of grace. Wearied almost, at the low tone of their questions, he interrupts his replies in the seventh chapter by the solemn and weighty sentence, vv. 29-32. The liberty resulting from knowledge he denies not, but he contrasts it with the thoughtfulness resulting from love, 1 Cor. 8. To the question raised as to his Apostleship, he appeals to their saintship as the seal of it, 1 Cor. 9. To guard them against the danger of relying on outward ordinances, 1 Cor. 10, he refers to the conduct of Israel, with the delicate introduction... "I would not have you ignorant, brethren." Again, after the admonition, "Let hum that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" -with what address does he allude to their special danger of becoming involved in idolatry by the desire of social intercourse. "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say." In noticing irregularities in their assemblies for worship (I Cor. 11), he praises them, first, for their general attention to his directions (v. 2); and when he has to advert to their gross disorder with respect to the Lord's supper, he commences thus: "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not." In treating of spiritual gifts, where their very folly had marred their very end and use -he commences, "I would not have you ignorant" (1 Cor. 12); and in correcting their grievous ignorance of the resurrection, he introduces his discourse with the declaration of the Gospel he had preached unto them.

Thus, where there was the fullest consciousness of authority, so that he might have carried it with a high hand, using the rod, there was the patient exercise of grace. His object was not the assertion of his authority, but the awakening of their conscience, and the calling out their faith into exercise. The immediate presence of the apostle at Corinth would doubtless have had the effect of silencing faction. He might have authoritatively ruled the many points in discussion, some bowing through real respect, others through fear; but this would have defeated his object. His authority, and with it himself, would have come in between their consciences and God; and thus he would have habituated them to bow to some present authority, and to feel it as a positive need, so that conscience and faith would never be exercised at all. The apostle, with unquestionable authority, and the full consciousness of the possession of it, saw the danger of this and avoided it. The history of the Church has too plainly proved the reality of the danger, by Christians doing that which the apostle avoided. They have themselves constituted an authority to which they bow, but by the acknowledgment of which they effectually hinder the exercise of faith and conscience. Is there an ordered and regulated society of Christians to be found which has not interposed its own authority, where the apostle would not introduce his, and in which personal influence is not extensively used? If personal influence ever could be safely used, it surely might have been by the apostle; but he acted in a manner even to lose it, because his object was Christ and the real blessing of saints, -not himself and a party of Christians. The presence and influence of the apostle had kept the Galatian Churches from allowing the introduction of the judaizing error. "It

is good to be zealously affected, always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you." It was his presence, and not faith and conscience, which had kept out the evil; so that when he was gone, there was no real barrier against the evil. In the Philippians, we find the happy contrast to this: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Here we find faith and conscience in exercise before God. It was not Paul, but God who worked in them. Happy the condition of saints when thus their souls are kept by faith in immediate contact with God. They will then readily own any authority, and profit by any ministry which is of God; but they will not allow either the one or the other to displace God.

The delay of the Apostle in carrying into execution his promised visit (1 Cor. 4:18-21), had laid him open to the suspicion of fickleness (2 Cor. 1:17), of being bold when away, cowardly when present, and of trying to terrify them by letters (2 Cor. 10:1, 10, 11; 12:14; 131, 2). In the second epistle, he explains his conduct; it was regulated "not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God." He had to wait upon God and to do the work of God, in God's way and God's time He might indeed apparently compromise his character for steadfastness in his purpose, but the grace of God and the well-being of Saints were more in his estimation than his own character. His intention was to have visited them before this, that they might have "a second benefit" -and what hindered? Nothing positive -as when Satan had hindered his intention of visiting the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:17, 18); but God "waiteth to be gracious," and he had to wait. Doubtless there was wholesome discipline in all this to the Apostle. His letter appeared to have had no effect in arousing the consciences of the Corinthians. It had been written out of much distress of soul (2 Cor. 2:4); and as he had received no tidings from Corinth as to how it had been received -this led to deeper anxiety -so as to make the Apostle for a moment to regret that he had written as he had done (2 Cor. 7:8). It was thus that he who had the fullest confidence, that he was "nothing behind the very chiefest of the Apostles," was made to feel in himself, that he was "nothing. " But how amply was his painful experience repaid by proving the God with whom he had to do, to be "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort"; and as the "God who cornforteth them that are cast down." Had he either acted at the outset authoritatively, or had his letter produced an immediate effect, the burst of adoring gratitude, in the commencement of the second epistle had never had a place. He must needs learn his own personal unworthiness, and then he would be able to use his authority not only powerfully but also discriminatingly, "having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."

How admirably does the apostle meet the charge of fickleness by urging that neither with him nor any man was "Yea" and "Nay." That was with God alone -"with Him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" -but man is properly dependent -it is his blessing and strength to be so -and for him to arrogate "Yea"and "Nay" to himself, would be mere obstinacy. And how many a man has persisted in his purpose when he has found it wrong, in order that he might appear consistent; but not so the apostle. The Corinthians might think him fickle, but there was no uncertainty in his testimony, in that which he preached to them. "But God is true: our word toward you was not Yea and Nay -for the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you was not Yea and Nay, but in Him was Yea." It was not the authority he had as an apostle which established him, but God; and the same God could alone establish them. He sought to lead their souls to God, and not to come in between their souls and God. "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God." How readily will saints rest on derived authority, even when such an authority is only pretended; but it would be dangerous to rest on it, even supposing it to be real. God is a Rock, the only Rock, the only one who can establish. It was to this Rock the apostle would lead the Corinthians He solemnly calls God to witness that it was to spare them he had not yet come to Corinth. There is patience with God; but there is severity also. What patience had God shown towards Israel during the long period of prophetic ministry, "rising early and sending" to them, "till there was no remedy," and then came "severity" -God she wed himself in judgment. The apostle had authority; but once and again he asserts that it was given to him "of God for edification and not for their destruction." It was of God, and therefore not to be questioned. Had he gone immediately to Corinth, he must have silenced every gainsayer by the direct exercise of his power, which would thus have been used for their destruction. On the other hand, the apostle dared not lord it over their faith. Submission to him personally, might have hindered the exercise of faith in God. He would indeed help their joy by leading their souls to God -but he dared not to come in between their souls and God, for "they stood by faith." There is no place for faith in God, where derived authority occupies the supreme place which of right belongs to God alone. In his preaching, the apostle guarded against the danger of the faith of his hearers resting "in the wisdom of man" in-stead of "in the power of God" -and the like danger he sought to avoid in his conduct. Orthodox confessions of faith, and even valuable ministry have often taken Christians off the ground "of standing by faith" -which can never be ordered or ruled, although it may be greatly helped. An apostle could infallibly denounce error and proclaim truth -he could also authoritatively correct irregularities in the Church-but he could not command faith. In order to lead the disciples to stand by faith, he acts in a parental character by seeking to get their souls into contact with God, and not to be awed into submission by the presence of apostolical authority. It is here we discern the divine way and order. God who alone is Omnipotent, declares his name to be "gracious and long-suffering" -however despised his name so declared might be. The apostle, in the consciousness of power derived from God, could even allow his power to be questioned, and himself to be insulted, rather than use his power "for destruction," when God had entrusted him with it "for edification. " Where there is power in the Church pretended to be of God, but really humanly derived, it is ever accompanied with the impatience of personal feeling -so as to require immediate bowing to its authority. Such humanly derived ecclesiastical power has for the most part been exercised against Christ not for him, for destruction and not for edification. Those who claim it take the very place which the apostle dared not take, as lords over the faith of the saints, so as to render it impossible for them to stand by faith, by this interposing their presumed authority. But this does not lessen the great sin of the professing body, in allowing the claims of derived authority to supersede the authority of God himself, over their consciences.

"By faith ye stand." Faith in a present God, able to meet the actual need of the soul, can alone produce healthful action in the saints. The exercise of Apostolical authority to punish the refractory, infallibly to declare the truth, or to correct irregularities, was most legitimate: but if this was all -if contumacy was silenced, truth acknowledged, and decorum restored, by the actual presence of the Apostle, this would afford no ground for their continuance in a healthy condition. When the authority which had produced the reformation ceased to be present, a relapse was almost certain to follow -or else (what has actually taken place in the Church generally) the establishment of an authoritative ministry. Christians have themselves settled that which the Apostle so anxiously sought to avoid, a formally ordered and recognized ministry, in order to produce the end which faith in God alone could produce. The Apostle used his authority for edification. He had gained his point when he had led their souls up to God, so as to act in the acknowledgment of the rightful supremacy of God over their consciences. He dared not put his authority in the place of their faith. He dared not transact that for them, which he would gladly do in concert with them. He would gladly "help their joy." Many among the Corinthians would readily allow him "to have dominion over their faith." This is what the saints have in all ages desired. They desire to be led by men, men of God indeed, but they desire to be led, and this when the higher leading of the Spirit of God is the privilege of each individual saint. There is no faith in attaching oneself to a gifted teacher, but there must be faith in order to be led

by the Spirit. The Apostle knew full well the readiness with which saints cling to the lesser and forego the higher blessing; and he desired so to use his authority for their edification as to lead them to their higher blessing -to stand by faith in God. He hesitated not to depreciate (if the expression be allowable) ministers; where the Corinthians were so ready to "glory in man." "These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that ye might learn in us not to think above that which is written." Where there was authority unquestionably from God, and service the most devoted to God, the Apostle could see the danger of man displacing God, to the great damage of the souls of saints; "for," says he, ye stand by faith." "The man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people." It was fitting that it should be so, because it corresponded with his ministry, his glorious ministry. But when the excelling glory of the new ministry was introduced, it was the ministry itself that claimed regard, not the minister. The glory of the ministry was of that order that it could only be in safe keeping in earthy vessels, "that the excellency of the power may be of God," and not of the vessel. When the ministry exalts the person of the minister, the ground of faith is lost -the man is admired rather than "the righteousness," and "the spirit," of which he is the minister. It is on the ground of that righteousness and that spirit that we have direct intercourse with God, and we "stand by faith." This is the great practical point. No present authority however legitimate, no creed however orthodox, no regulations however wise, can supply the place of standing by faith, which is the ground of all healthy action in the Church.

The Apostle gained his object with the Corinthians; he had so used his power that it was for their edification; but it was at the expense of deep exercise of soul, and at the risk of personal character in the very point where a man is most sensitive, so that nothing short of the consciousness of acting before God could have sustained him. The Corinthians, aroused as to their consciences, were turned to judging themselves before God. Their sorrow was godly, and it wrought so in them (2 Cor. 7:11 ad fin.), that the apostle could write to them on the subject of a contribution for the poor saints (2 Cor. 8; 9). The last four chapters of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians are very peculiar, but still bearing on the apostle's own conduct, which appeared to some so questionable as to lead them to speak most disrespectfully of him (2 Cor. 10:1). His weapons were "not carnal," such as human wisdom, eloquence, power, influence, but "mighty through God"; and as he had wielded them effectually to the restoration of many to the simplicity of faith, so, when the time came, these weapons would be found effectual "to revenge all disobedience." In this we discover an important "way" of our God. When faction and dissension have come in among Christians, accompanied by strife and personalities, they often seek redress among themselves -but this is not the way of God. He waits for a while, obedience to Him is thereby proved -and when the soul is brought into its right place before Him, the time is arrived for dealing with refractory or disorderly individuals. We must set ourselves right with God, before God will set us right one with the other. This is the way of God, hard to us, indeed, because of our readiness to view personal offense in a much stronger light, than that of the heart's departure from God.

Rare are the occasions in which a Christian can venture to answer a fool according to his folly -yet on the fitting occasion the Apostle turned "the carnal weapons" (for irony the most delicate must so be reckoned) with overwhelming power against those who had assailed him. What strange beings we are, readily succumbing to usurped authority which has no credentials from God, and at the same time questioning or fretting against that power which carries its own credentials as of God with it. What is it? Man hates to be brought into direct contact with God. This can only be done through faith in Jesus Christ -or else God comes into contact with men in judgment. How readily might the Apostle have vindicated himself from every ground of charge against him. He might have demanded maintenance, but he would not forego his privilege of preaching the Gospel freely. He might have appealed to the fruit of his ministerial labors, but he had rather glory in his infirmities. He might have broken silence as to the marvelous revelation vouchsafed to him, but he brings into prominence the messenger of Satan to buffet him. He might have gone to Corinth at once, to prove the steadfastness of his purpose; instead of writing. "Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you. This is the third time I am coming to you... I told you before and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time." He might have given them sensible proof of his power by its exercise in terrible discipline on themselves, but he had far rather that they should do "that which was honest," so that he needed not to exercise his power, although it left the question of his power unsettled. None but one conscious of divine power could have afforded to act in such a rummer. None but one reckless of his own character among men, and yet conscious of acting before God, could have marked out such a way for himself. None but one having as a single and supreme object, the glory of Christ in the saints, in other words their edification, could have been content to leave himself and his authority in so questionable a position.

It is written of the Lord Jesus himself -"In his humiliation his judgment was taken away." Satan and Pharisees, tempting Him, alike demanded proofs of His Sonship and Christhood, which it was not consistent for Him in having humbled himself, then to afford "His brethren" also (John 7) would have Him publicly show himself to the world-little thinking if He had done so, it could only have been in judgment. But Jesus waited -and still waits (and His appeal, with what full credentials! is still to the conscience of sinners), before He appears in the irresistible glory of His own person in judgment. He, conscious of His own essential glory, did not need external proof for His own satisfaction. He could allow all his pretensions to be questioned by others, because of that which He really was. He left his claims unvindicated, save to faith and conscience, because He knew there was a set time in the counsels of Eternity for the public vindication both of his own essential glory and of every claim which He had preferred. Thus conscious, "He was crucified through weakness. " Faith indeed looks to Him where He now is; Faith now owns the glory of his person, Faith rests on the value of his work -Faith owns his worth as the Lamb slain -Faith owns now that all power in heaven and earth is given unto Him as the glorified man; Faith bows now in the fullest acknowledgment of the name of Jesus., But Jesus himself is yet long-suffering, even though his long-suffering causes his own name to remain unvindicated, and his saints to continue in sorrow and trial. His long-suffering is to be accounted salvation. How marvelous, yet how gracious is thy way, Lord Jesus! and Thy "chosen vessel" did, according to his measure, follow Thee in this thy way! He was conscious of the authority which the Lord himself had given to him; and on the ground of this consciousness he could allow his authority to be questioned. He too was "weak" with his Master, leaving the demonstration of his power to the fitting time and season. He, too, knew of a demonstration to the soul far beyond that produced by the mightiest external proofs. "He that believeth on the Son hath the witness in himself; and the apostle could appeal to such a kind of testimony. "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you... examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates"; without proof answering to their seeking "a proof." The apostle appeals to their own consciences, if his authority was not commended there, the only resource must be in judgment. Were they in the faith? Was Jesus Christ in them, by revelation of the Holy Ghost? Then their own faith; the very consciousness of Christ in their souls, was the irrefragable proof of his apostleship-as he had before said. "The seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord." It was by the manifestation of the truth that he had commended himself to their consciences; and he could do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. God had once dealt with men by signs and wonders, with the most marked demonstration of his power; but conviction resulting from such evidence (such is man), lasted only so long as the demonstration itself of the power of God was before their eyes "He saved them from the hand of him that hated

them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy; and the waters covered their enemies, there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words-they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel." So again, He visited them in after-time, and with the like result. The Israel at the time the Day-spring from on high visited them, Jehovah Jesus, proved themselves to be the like faithless and perverse generation as their fathers in the wilderness. To this He speedily testified. Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them; "for he knew all men and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man." He left them indeed without excuse, because they rejected Him, coming as He did with all the credentials of Messiah. But there was deeper condemnation than this, "they had seen Him and believed not." "They had both seen and hated both Him and his Father." God has left man without excuse -He has appealed to their senses -He has appealed to their understanding. He now makes his last appeal in the Gospel of his grace to the consciences and affections of men -and if this is rejected, one solemn fact alone solves the phenomenon. "The God of this world hath blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them." Jesus, knowing His own essential glory, and the fullness that was in Himself, desired to be received on His own testimony rather than on the demonstration of His miracles. "Believe me, that I am in the Father and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very work's sake." Jesus presents himself and is presented in the gospel to our conscience and affections, and this on the ground of His own essential being. If this claim does not commend Him to us; in vain would be the outward attestation of his works. So His servant, Paul, conscious of the power given to him of the Lord, not anxious to prove it by judgment on others, sought to rouse the conscience of the Corinthian saints; and this being effected, he was content to leave his own pretensions in question, save that he was ready, in obedience to the Lord, to "use sharpness" when the time came. In this we find the real value of ministerial authority, it appeals to the conscience: the outward demonstration by the most convincing signs was quite a secondary thought in the mind of the apostle. When the conscience of the most disorderly saint is reached, what happy and gracious results follow; and when the consciences of many are so exercised as to prove them "clear in any matter," the weight of their sentences, apart from outward demonstration of power, will be felt by the disobedient and refractory -for it is sanctioned by the Lord himself.

There are two great hindrances to healthful action in the Church of God -assumption of authority, and leaning on authority. These are connected; but, whether united or separate, effectually hinder "standing by faith." Pretension to authority in the Church is generally found great, in proportion as it is lacking in divine credentials to the conscience. It never appeals to the conscience; it aims at domination over faith -it is used not for edification, but for destruction. Of this character is the authority claimed by Romanists and Anglicans for a presumed sacerdotal standing. It professes to be of God -it boasts of wonders -it is loud, authoritative, terrifying. It appeals to itself, not to conscience. That they are of God is the point of faith, and not faith recognizing divine power, commending itself to the conscience by manifestation of the truth. But there is a charm in this usurped authority -men, and men of superior mind and of high moral worth, will "suffer if a man thus exalt himself." Whence this phenomenon! It tends to lull all exercise of conscience towards God. It keeps man in his natural element of distance from God, while persuading him that he is honoring God. We have seen, at Corinth, authority most unquestionably of God refused, and usurped power acknowledged. The one appealed to the conscience to lead it into exercise before God; the other claimed subjection to itself and prevailed; and thus interposed itself between God and the conscience. Such usurped authority carries with it a strong conventional claim. Deference to it was early inculcated, and has grown with our growth, so as to become a settled habit. What if the holder of this presumed authority did not commend himself to our moral judgment? still there was a sacredness attached to his office. In many instances men who have had discernment to see through the hollowness of the claim, have been too impatient to satisfy themselves as to the truth, too busily occupied with the world to step out of their vocation to investigate, as they judge, a mere matter of opinion, dreading the alternative of infidelity if they rejected such venerable authority, and have tacitly allowed the claim on the ground of decent usage and legal acknowledgment, which they thoroughly despised in their hearts. "They put away a good conscience and make shipwreck of the faith" -for such is the force of educational prejudice, that, in the minds of the majority, the claims of the authorized minister and the claims of Scripture rest on the same basis; so that to undermine the one would be to jeopardize the authority of the other. And when from time to time an independent mind, disgusted by assumption of authority, has carried out its own thoughts, it has only found in skepticism relief from domination over faith. Alas -that it should be so, but of whom shall the blood of such be demanded? They, indeed, are in awful condemnation; for God holds every one responsible to himself to hear what He says. But God will not hold those guiltless who have, by means of their system, hindered the direct exercise of conscience before God. It was a serious charge the Lord had to make against Judah. "In thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents. I have not found it by secret search, but by all these." And it is a very solemn thought, that the great professing body has used authority so effectually to hinder the exercise of faith and conscience, as to leave apparently no alternative between submission to its authority and skepticism. However definite may be the interpretation, the principle applies to the great professing body -"In her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." Real Christians need serious warning as to the danger of allowing their faith to rest in the wisdom of man, instead of in the power of God. There may be large dominion over the faith tacitly allowed by Christians, even when such dominion is neither sought nor asserted by their teachers. Man is impatient under the sense of responsibility. He would persuade himself that he can do things by proxy, and thus relieve himself from care. The Solicitor cares for his worldly interests; the Physician for his health; and the Minister takes charge of his spiritual concerns. The Lord, in his ministry, and his servant subsequently warned against this tendency. We have the double warning -"Be not ye called Rabbi." "Call no man your father on earth" -and the direct acknowledgment of Christ Himself as Master of all, both of teachers and of taught, and confidential intercourse with the Father is the alone preservative. "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." "One is your Father, which is in heaven." "By faith ye stand." Relinquishing traditional authority, need not land us in skepticism. We assert the authority of God with whom we have to do; and if we claim independence from human authority, it is in order to be dependent on God. This is the point. On the one side, we find all that is merely conventional tottering; on the other, men promising themselves great things from the emancipation of man's will from the tradition of ages. The very shaking of conventional authority has given occasion for the assertion of authority (as of God) over the consciences of men in a more undisguised manner in this land, than at any period since the Reformation; and the very fact of its not being politically asserted, gives more validity to its pretensions. On the other hand, a philanthropical theory is attempting, vainly attempting, to control the emancipated will of man, in order to produce "peace on earth," and "good-will among men," but entirely disregarding the essentials of Christianity. Between these two sections -the "little flock" of God, to whom it is His good pleasure to give the kingdom, will be lost sight of. Happy for them, if, in the midst of the disruption of everything, they seek not unto visible authority, as the basis of their faith, but "build themselves up on their most holy faith." Happy for them, if when the mind of man, emancipated from traditional authority, is running again its wayward course to folly, in the vain profession of wisdom, they be found with their consciences exercised before God, standing by faith in Him, and holding to the unshaken, eternal, and invisible realities, which the Holy Ghost Himself reveals to them.

Presbutes

The Present Testimony 1:461-477 (1849).

clickbible.org