No. 20.  
On objections to the Gospel.

March 5, 1820.
1 Cor. 1, 22. — "The Jews require a sign, & the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, & to the Greeks foolishness; but to them that are called, both Jews & Greeks, the power of God, & the wisdom of God."

In this passage, St. Paul has very comprehensively brought to view those prejudices against the Gospel were entertained by the unbelievers of his day. — When the religion of Jesus was first promulgated, there were few minds prepared to welcome it; & those who stood forth as its witnesses & advocates, found themselves compelled, at every step, to encounter objections as various as had been the education & previous habits of those, to whom it was proposed. They, who listened to the instructions of & his Apostles, brought with them all their false hopes, erroneous professions, & mistaken expectations; & instead of resigning them, instead of removing from their minds this load of rubbish,
they turned away disappointed - wanting, because the
new religion did not adapt itself to the errors & follies
of their hearts. Of these dispositions, we have striking
examples in the Jews & Greeks. The Jews, says
the Apostle, "require a sign." In this expression he
pourtrays the ruling passion of the nation - eager
in their expectations, & strong in their feelings. They,
who were once the chosen people of God, were now reas-
signed under the galling yoke of a foreign power; they
had lost in some degree that noble distinction, wh
before their dispensation had been as a separating wall
between them & every other people. While the feeling, wh
such a situation must have produced, is manifest, supple
that they waited impatiently for the ap-
pearance of the Messiah; - for when he did come, they
expected, as the Psalm says, 'He sign,' - i.e. they looked for
some signal display of power suited to their taste &
feelings, for something that should come to their minds with all the force of moral & divine
power, with the splendor of a mighty prince, prepared
to subdue the oppressor & rescue his people. Therefore, notwithstanding our Saviour's apostles &
works, the most evidential & convincing miracles, yet
this was not the kind of deeds with which they admired
or expected; it did not harmonize with those deep
& powerful associations, wh had long been nurtured
& cherished in their hearts. They accordingly went to
these eagerness, & disappointment expectation so
usually makes its refuge. They demanded more &
greater miracles. It was in this spirit, that the
Pharisees went to Jesus, & required of him a sign from
heaven. But Jesus knew them well, - predicted
a wicked & adulterous generation seeketh after a
sign; - then he alluded to his death & resurrection,
as a still brighter & stronger evidence of his divine
mission, than any other. But they ultimately reject
ed the whole: for their lofty hopes were brought
down to the ground, & their visions of conquest &
glory had vanished. Such was the obstacle to the natud
character of the Jews, present to the re ac-
tion of the Gospel. On the other hand, the Greeks
say St. Paul, "seek after wisdom," i.e. they demand
something more of the parade or learning & the invo
mality system than the Saviour presents. The Greeks
were a nation very much given to philosophical speculation. Whatever of moral or religious instruction they had received from their wise men, had come to them broken by subtle distinctions, or involved in a mist of obscure reasoning. This was contracted a love for discussion, for systems, recommended as they were by all the claims of eloquence. We can easily believe, that men, whose minds had been educated to such habits, to such a taste, would not rebel the simplicity, the plainness of the Gospel. A religion which came forth without any art, without any mystery, without any elaborate system of argumentation, would, we may suppose, appear very insipid & unattractive to men like the Greeks, who loved reasoning better than truth, the exercise of the understanding better than the purification of the heart. Had the Gospel been the power of God, or the wisdom of God, it would probably have admired it; but it was the power of God, the wisdom of God, that turned away from it, because they esteemed it foolishness. Such was the character of the two great classes of unbelievers described by Paul. Such the man from whom the yes & no, the only contempt of opposition from the rest, arising, not because it dashed entirely the strong spiritual current of his ambitions feelings, but from the Greek from his system, because it offered to him instead of discussion & disputation nothing but the plain, unvarnished account of a revelation from God to man.—So the one it was another, for the other it was foolishness; but says the Apostle, as if feeling strongly the dignity of the divinity of the religion he published & diffuse as he had suffered & labored so much, as if pressing in the might of its spirit above the petty, & prejudices of passions which wandered around it on earth—"but ye shall know the truth who are called (i.e to those who believe in its divine authority), both Jews & Greeks, it is the power of God the wisdom of God." Such, then, were the unbelievers of the first day, & such for the most part have been the unbelievers of succeeding times. Prosperity was first published to the world, when the thinness of con-
dence was present to the minds of men, they could not but see what was necessary to confirm the religion of wisdom, when men may use the expressions of its divinity, those around it, fresh & undiminished. If even then, men had minds so treasured by prejudice of being by disappointment, as to doubt its existence, finally to reject it, one wonders, that they have doubted & rejected in succeeding ages, when the lapse of time has in some degree moistened the impression of a part of that evidence, on which religion rests its claim to admiration. It was natural to expect that the religion of Jesus would never be without its opponents; so it has been. In every age there have been those who have professed their own wisdom to the wisdom of God, who have thought to distinguish themselves by doubting of that, and the faith of the faithful have severe & repeated; many to whom the Jews the God, has been a standing block, as many to whom the love of  it has been foolishness. It is true, they have not the same prejudices, the same objections, or the same spiritual, nor of this imperfection mankind are too often conscious. They have consequently fastened 

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ed to converse the ways of the Almighty, & then
the work of Omniscience, as if they could find
defects in that constitution of nature & of grace, as if
infinite wisdom has devised an infinite provision.
On this subject indeed, as on most others, there
are two extremes. Some men are ready to believe
without discrimination, & without question every
thing which comes to them under the borrowed name
of religion. Prepare willing to admit whatever ab-
strusity imagination may suggest, though it be
at war with the evidence of reason & their senses.
Others, on the contrary, with the careless, dancing
spirit of scepticism, will reject the most ration-
ally important doctrines, because they do not
fall in with some peculiar system, & they have
set up for themselves as the only standard of what
is true or right. As if there was no difference be-
tween that, the most visionary fiction is above
our comprehension, & that & this is contradictory
to our reason & senses. As if there was no differ-
ce between affirming a thing to be too great,
or too distant for our sight to reach the whole
of it, & affirming it to be that, which we see with
our own eyes, it is not. One extreme has a ten-
dency to forget another. Thus since many absurd-
things have been introduced under
the name of Try, although they are calculated
directly to subvert & destroy religion; since
many have substituted the delusions of their
own imaginations for the truths & doctrines of
the Saviour, have lighted up the works of fanat-
icism & called it the pure light of heaven;
others, disgusted with these absurdities, have
not only rejected them, but with them have
rejected the Saviour himself, careless of distinguish-
ing between the errors of fiction, & between
the inventions of man, & the truth of God. In
deed most of the objections, which have been raised
against our holy religion, have originated against
its corruptions & abuses. Unbelievers have found
themselves contending with a phantom, fashioned
forth by man, without the least counte-
nance or authority from Scripture. But besides the works of grace for the origin of which we must look to this source, there are others which come from a bad heart, from a perverse mind, from corrupt affections. These are new, as ancient days are, new as the daughter of Sodom is, an offence, while to others it is foolishness. There are a thousand dangerous associations, and before we are aware of it, may take a firm hold in our minds, and settle our faith in the God of Jesus. Our views may be too pure, our minds too aspiring, or we may wish to procure more indulgence for our sins, than the religion of the Bible will afford, or we may have too much of the self-sufficiency of false wisdom to be willing to learn in the school of them who died on the cross. Think, for a moment of the poverty of Jesus, of the meanness of his appearance, of his sufferings, of his death, of the simplicity of his instructions, of the spirituality of his religion, of the genius and design of his as unconnected with the wisdom of this world, with science, policy, government, interests, possessions.

pleasures. Why are these the circumstances which would probably attract the admiration or engender the affections of the great mass of mankind? And yet many, while they think of these things forget all the divine instructions, benevolent tenets, miracles, miraculous operations, all the proofs of celestial power and wisdom, which mark a branch of God's light around our holy religion. I had our Saviour appeared in the world with majesty of person, with royal victory, with all the envy and appendages of worldly wisdom, had he recommended his instructions by all the refinements of human policy and eloquence, had worldly pride been the sure reward of his followers, had worldly disgrace punished the inevitable portion of those who refused submission and obedience, then doubtless many, who now cannot give his religion a place in their hearts, because it seems to them too simple in their view, because it seems too small in their view,

would gladly have ranked under his banners and have shared in the honours and emoluments of his kingdom. Such a prince, the fascinations of mankind would have sprung forth to meet, 

and
to welcome, to such a Saviour they would never have estimated with, nor arranged in robes of state. Such a Messiah the Jews expected. If, because he was not such an one, because instead of the everlasting splendor of royal authority, he came to them humbled and unaffected, as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, with the bitterness of mourning was consigned him to a death of ignominy and shame. It is true, we have not the same prejudices, the same expectations from the countrymen of our Lord, nor so debased and blinded, but we have passions, feelings, and views, which may lead to results of a similar kind, though not so shocking and totally disgraceful. We are very much in love with that splendid with whatever excites delight, stirring emotions of pride, and admiration. We are easily impressed on whatever is great, formidable, commanding. We gaze with admiration on the high match of men's which power it are caught by the grace of his actions and the themes of praise in the mouths of the world. Nor the less, in all its simplicity, clinging affords no gratification to dispassionate feelings like these. It presents to our mind, what came to bring the instructions of God to man, the promises of mercy to wandering sinners; the glory of whose character was joined to redemption, universal gratitude, patient endurance, the sacrifice of his life in the cause of truth. There is something in all this too tame for humbleness, too enervating, to satisfy the proud feelings of our hearts. One perfectly mesh, if we do not confess it, that he of Nazareth possessed something more of the common attributes of vulgar greatness. Had he employed his miraculous power not in healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, in restoring the dead to life, but in gratifying the passions of the ambition of the few, in conquering envy and reviling friends, his name would doubtless have been regarded with more admiration were it by the corrupt and dishonest part of mankind in ages. I had be spent his time in granting his subjects profound and speculative, many who are enchanted with the forms of the palace of wisdom, and have listened to his instructions with far more ease, were it more due to that plain and solemn benediction repeated for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; or to that assurance so simple, yet so full
of important meaning, 

of the dead. Now such being the nature or object of the mission of our Saviour it is plain that in heasting out judgment and belief of the Spirit revelation of the character, office, dominion, and 

of God, we must direct our minds entirely of all worldly possessions. I do not confound together 

of the deceased or beyond the grave; is that excellence; was the sublime object of all the instructions 

of Jesus. That alone is true virtue, which arises 

from motives purely spiritual, from faith in God; 

from the hopes and prospects of a life to come; it 

is this alone which appeals to the prejudices, the 

passions, the interests of this world. This is the 

virtue with our Saviour practised himself, he recommends to his followers. By this he rose himself; it sought to raise them to true happiness and glory in an endless state of existence. And to effect this grand and momentous object, he has given the design exam- 

ple, the best instruction, enforced by the most 

evidence of a life after death, his own resurrection from 


will subdue all things to himself, abolish every grievance, destroy death itself, and establish universal eternal life, virtue, and happiness.

Now it is true these objects are the objects it can enter into the heart of man to conceive for they are high as heaven, and lasting as eternity. Yet we know after all, that they are not objects of most easily fix the attention, and draw the admiration of mankind. They are too spiritual, refined, they have not a grandeur enough about them, they do not give support to the meanest sags, the absorbing interests, which are called into action by the pursuits of gain, of honor, of ambition; the senses and the passions are too far off, their character to not those demands are given, is to tame, to call forth the active striving of the energies of a composed heart. No wonder then, if all the associations of passions are connected with worldly objects, only for fame, if our hearts beat only for amusements by ambitious hopes, if we spend all our time, all our strength in pursuit of the gay form.

Each step across our path through life, reveals that we turn away from the pure, simple spiritual religion of the Jews, and declare by our lives, if by nothing else, that we are none of the disciples of Him.

Thus we have seen, my friends, how passions and prejudices prevented the Jews and Greeks from receiving the Jews; that although we may not have the same passions and prejudices, yet we often have similar and equally violent ones. It becomes us therefore to set a guard on our hearts in this respect, to take heed that we are not seduced from the rock of our salvation by the delusive fancies of our fleshly hearts. There is a certain candour in the virtue of a spirit, which heads men to find their truest delight in the knowledge and practice of truth and goodness; this spirit as it were, we are bound to cultivate and cherish. And let us ever remember, that in the day of our Lord, he shall appear in the glory of his Father, to set the confusion of the wicked of unrighteousness to the eternal joy of his faithful ones, then we shall...
wish that we had thought less of the false splendid & the unsubstantial honours of earth. I once for once, of that glory and shall never fade, of that kingdom with endeweth forever. Then we shall feel that the Lord’s true truth what the Apostle declares it to be, “the power of God & the wisdom of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

Oct. 1819.

Others who are right & in whom is no darkness give us, we beseech thee, be prepared to receive the light & in all its purity & simplicity. May all be free from all false prejudices, & even before to receive the truth in the love of it. May there be among us a spirit of serious enquiry into the sacred word. May those who are asleep in unbelief be awakened to a sense of their duties & dangers. May we never be given up to a hardened unsearching mind, that most fatal state of the rational creatures made for their self & for endless improvement in truth & rightousness. Well then prepare & perfect us to every good work; may we taste in the duties of devotion the noblest pleasures; may we go away from this house enlightened & edified, & by the word of truth be conveyed to the heavenly kingdom. To thee the King begins to be manifested by the S. L. forever Amen.
At home, March 5th, 1820, afternoon.
At home, Jan. 10th, 1824, forenoon.