No. 140.

On moral & positive duties.

A communion sermon.

4/30/1822
Psalm CXXIX, 6. — "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

It requires but a slight observation of mankind to learn, that they are disposed to divide their duties, and are willing to perform some, if on that account they may be excused from the performance of others. In the social world, as in the condition of society, the principle of division of labour is applied; and if one obeys some of the divine commands, it is thought he does enough. This is the spirit of selecting or making compromises with duty is very dangerous; it is extremely remote from the disposition manifested by David in the text, if he says, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have..."
respect unto all thy commandments. It is not I have respect unto some of them, but unto all of them.
not when I speak unto one another, that such as it may be convenient for one to obey, but when I re-
course the whole as obligation of divine to obey the Lord.
The principle we derive from this passage then is, that all the commandments of God are equally binding on us, so that we are not at liberty to choose any certain portion of them for our obedience to the neglect of the rest. This principle indeed is applicable in such a manner as may be disputable in the present occasion. We are thus day by day to celebrate an ordinance, the neglect of which has so long been a subject of complaint. That is, probably the complaint itself has come to be regarded as a matter of course, as a sort of old story, and nobody thinks it worth the while to regard. This mistake has in many cases been born of a misunderstanding of the nature of the duty, some regarding it as the only of insignificant guards, others regarding it as so excellent as every thing else, that they cannot feel prepared to approach it. It is therefore important that
the relative place in which duty of observing the office of manor holds among other duties should be pointed out, yet as nature explained, if this you will then be able to judge whether or not you are under an obliga-
tion to observe it.
And in order to see this subject in its true light, we must remember that religious duties of every nature are two different things. The former is the end of the latter, the very leading to that end. The one is valuable in itself, the other only on account of the good future it may or may not bring. This distinction corresponds in an great degree to the distinc-
tion between moral and positive duties, as they are called. Moral duties are those, which are of eternal sign,
changing obligation, which do not depend on any com-
mand, but are such as independently of them, their own nature, we are bound to perform. Positive duties
are those, which depend for their obligation entirely on the command of the lawgiver, who is the general as permitting means. For instance, duty, resignation, devotion to God, fidelity, integrity, gratefulness,

new to man, in short, the practice of all the virtues are what we call moral duties, because their obligation cannot be at all affected by any time, place, or authority; in the institutions of the law itself, the duties of the subject are what we call positive duties, because they would have existence, had they not been appointed or constituted by divine authority, as instrumental consequences to the duties. The same distinction, which is here applied, here begins, is found to preserve almost all the transactions of conscience. for the distinction, means, between the means and the end. Thus it is in agriculture; the corn and the furrow have means to obtain a good, plentiful harvest; the means which he uses to accomplish this are among his tools, to hasten the most conducive to the harvest of the corn which is his ground. If the harvest should spring up spontaneously of its own accord, he would doubtless share himself all the trouble and labor which he exerts; i.e., he says, if the end could be accomplished without the use of the means, he would neglect the means, but as they are indispensably connected with that he must employ the one to secure the other. But it is

with education. the end is, the progress toward information and knowledge, and every expansion of the mind is

for the young to make these parts in life with leisure to themselves of friends, with usefulness to others, acceptably to God. the means to attain all this are the deliberate use of books, the improvement of instruction, the giving up of good lessons in the steeple of memory. If I could be attained within the means, i.e., in and by without any effort of others, or the mind of children could be formed to, then doubtless parents and children might neglect the means, or all the expense of instruction might be spared. But God has

ordained it, that the means to the end are or bound to gather that you cannot have the one without the other; if you wish for information, learning, diligence and action must be applied. Thus may it be seen, this begins, there is the same from invaluable connexion between the means and the end. These two things should be ever kept in view; the having knowledge, with habits of instruments to having the mind; through different distinction, they are ultimately connected. If he would be

no friend to religion, the Lord endeavors to read manuals.
is that a good reason for slighting its obligations.

In instrumental duties, ask how much and in what means of cultivating religious affections? To this demand, if we are sincere, is that of thinking that it is easy enough to be good without attending to means of being good; of being satisfied with the chance of our social or every day duties, without taking heed of the helps by which we may raise our hearts to God which the heavenly ministration of the time.

After having made these remarks, it is to much

plainer does it. I would now ask you to observe particularly the moral class of duties; it has the ordinance of the Holy Scripture. It belongs to us to understand the class of virtues and virtuous duties, the divine duties on which are enjoined upon us solely on account of their subserving the accomplishment of a good purpose; in that purpose in this case is the cultivation of moral affections, the sentiments and resolutions. Persons are not necessarily good because they partake in this ordinance, any more than they are necessarily good because they go to meetings; but yet the participation in this ordinance is attended to moral

the right which may impress on this mind a deeper sense than they would otherwise have of the

growing in the devotion of listening to the instructions of the Holy Church and give a deeper impress of duty.

It is one of the distinguishing excellences of the true religion, that it imposes no formal ceremonial observances. It has no heavy system of forms upon the neck of its followers, nor does it institute any ceremonies to please itself in its virtue. This may religion is eminently distinguished as ceremonies of an external kind, it is so much the more perfectly excellent. The false systems of the

heathen could never be loaded with ceremonies that

springs of mystical symbols, are nothing else but virtuous acts, invented by the cunning to keep the more observant in obedience of fear. Examine the history of the world, you will find, that in all false and ungrounded schemes of religion, none
demonstrated excellence of the cultivation of the good qualities of the heart have ever held the heart in place.

The positive instrumental duties have always out-
weigh'd or outnumber'd the moral duties... The im-
perfection of Judaism is manifest by the combersome
service of the numerous train of rituals, and what it
was intended? And there were engines, only be-
cause the people were hurried to outstrip the de-
stiny of their imaginations; I would have destroy-
the multitude of those good acts, and the coldly
held to it by such an imposing parade of rites and ceremo-
nies, as were well adapted to act upon their per-
s, were united to their children's prejudices: these
things perplex'd the weakness of reason amongst
people, who could not be influenced by the simp-
licity of naked truth, & it is on this account that
St. Paul calls them 'weak & beggarly elements.'

But they had a higher & nobler aim. It struck down
all the burdens of expensive rituals, of Judaism, all
the ceremonies of observances, an orderliness of ritual
& expectation adher'd, respected its theme in the best
sense that there should be the dominion of His
religion, that it should reign over the affections
& bend the will, control the appetites, shackle the
sumers... It imposed no arbitrary ceremonies, no lar-
gel pilgrimages, no unmeaning fasts... To the young
who enquired of it, what is the first of great com-
mant, be healed, out - then shall perform var-
ious sacrifices, do, of ceremonies, but then shall
have the health by which all they meant to be in the
neighborhood... Now when such a religion as this
is presented to you, you cannot accuse it of
inducing any vain or superstitious observances.

You cannot deny, that it makes goodness to con-
form an outside show of ceremonies and per-}
formances.

And therefore when we urge it again and again to ad-
here to one of the last commands of it, 'do this in remem-
brance of me.' I do not fear, that you shall be
able to charge us with aspiring too much emo-
tional duties to the neglect of the higher moral
duties. I do not fear, that you shall be able
to say that we annihilate it, when again to the
most, annexe, condemn, while we neglect
the weightier matters of the law - judgment,
mercy. Nothing could be farther from the
generous spirit of the Son of God in them; they have enjoyed the bliss of eternal bliss, beholding the
Promised One. They are as simple, unostentatious, significant, as can well be imagined. As I have already observed, they are precisely the means of instruments of something better and brighter. Our Lord did not institute them for their own sake, or to ensure an unnecessary observance upon his followers, but solely for the sake of the good they might effect; the more and the might answer. It is with the obedience of the Son's subject, that we are at present concerned, of the great and leading feature of this battle, less is to maintain a column, prolonging perennially, of the life, suffering a death of the Savior; it was designed to carry us back through the track of his life, that we might remember him, in the midst of temptation in defiance of power, confronting the rise and humility of might, by that energy of divine teaching and event of the heart. It carries us to the garden of Gethsemane, savings before us the outline of its arrival, the
par. of the angel, struggling with agony, not commanding every man shall be silence, because it was his Father's will. It places us at the foot of the cross, savors us there the rood, for our merciful, love and gratitude, I am under at that direction to God, to devote, only after it had done its Master's bidding, through the trail of his ministry, and thus to him to love his head if need were, his spirit, a death of according a pain of every heart to conquer, truly this was the Son of God. But this was not to be, it hides us, but in one, that we might render the time assure amidst suffering, we can, coming forth in glory of power, of makes us feel that death who once a conqueror is, feel that death, who once a conqueror is, ascend from earth, of he vanishes from our sight, to be welcomed by angels and archangels to the throne of glory at the right hand of God. Such, then, are
the solemn scenes, in the Deity suffers us to impress upon our hearts, that it is no 
the mind’s call that occurs. In fact, the whole 
of his life, the whole of his example, the whole 
this doctrine, the whole of this divine character. 
And while it is the instrument of inculcating 
views of feelings, you will not, I say, 
that it is an useless ritual, an empty ceremony, 
thorough meaning. So, as I have said, it 
will not; and that among the class of pernicious 
instrumental abuses, it holds a high 
consideration with its virtual effects. 1. The means, but one of the means, 
that is not only one of the means, but one of the means, powerful of 
securing means, of the Deity’s effects, of combining 
all these sentiments, of views of duties, and are pernicious to us, as others.

Have these endeavours, my friends, to point out to 
your notice, and I persuade you, pay attention the follow 
ing particulars, viz., that there are two kinds of duties. 
confined upon us, moral or public duties, the one 
instituting the life of society, the other the means of 
religion, the one having to do 
with the bounds of goodness, the other consisting in 
personal acts of perfection; that the Deity, therefore, in 
the first of these, viz. the moral duties, it will make 
religion to consist in love to God and man, in living 
and doing good; in obeying the precepts of nature, and 
eaming of the example of nature; in not neglecting 
the latter class of duties, the purest moral, but 
that it regards them only as means, so that conse 
quently we are bound as much to obey in one 
example, as in the other.

And men, indeed, I appeal to the towns, of ask them, why, 
while they profess to believe in the Deity, they should 
not avow themselves of the truth of its doctrine, 
do it strengthen them in the conclusion 
regard for religion, and in the affections, or 
requires the heart of enthaud in the affections, or 
makes us feel, as well as convince, that this is the 
wick, that he is the recipient of heaven in miscal 
ination, that he came to bring the peace-reviving 
light of a religion from heaven, to the spirit of the
that the views of professors sometimes lay as stumbling blocks in the way of their election, and excite the ridicule of the profane scoffers, or who is glad to match all the dark spots he can find in the lives of these, we profess religion. It cannot stand admonition, to say, my God, that are deploring disgrace in the name by which we are called. But how long will you make the abuse of a thing an argument against its use? Because this ordinance has not wrought the happy effects that it ought in the lives of professors, if others, is that a sufficient reason why you should neglect to try its efficacy? Because others, while they have part in these, have not the command of it, have manifested that they had none of the spirit of it, is that a sufficient reason why you should persist in doing the command of it. This argument would judge of it too much. By all means let us desire to attend, and publish nothing on the Sabbath, because some vicious persons attend there too; as to refuse to celebrate the memorial of your Lord, be this is a sensible,  

repentance should have a firm residence than on the surface of the heart, it makes us heart-gnawing conscious, compels us to examine with the humble publican, "Is it be merciful to us?" the spirit of that obedience not only binds us to our duty, but makes us active, cheerful, vigorous in the performance of that duty, and brings us near to aspire to the purity of the life, to keep us to walk in the path, which is still bright with the glory of Christ's example. Do we in reality wish future views of feelings? Then let one entreat you to use as one of the means the memorial of our Saviour before you in these emblems. Do you objects, that this ordinance has not wrought these effects in all those who have given in the celebration of it, that many who are called members of the church know as little of the spirit of it as any other people? No, my sir. I acknowledge the unworthy truth, I could see sin or sin in places to think that as many would asip the area enemies to the cross of it. It is a real truth,
cause some who do join in the celebration bring disgrace on religion by giving the lie in the conduct to their professions. May let me earnestly warn you not to satisfy yourselves with slight or trivial excuses for neglecting so important a means of happiness as the observance of the Sabbath. While sincerely devout to live for the sake of the hope of the gift, why should you refuse to be thus in remembrance of him who brought it with this good tidings of great joy? Who then beguile not, in the language of the text, have respect not unto some, but unto all, the commandments of Christ. In short, these questions, of leave it to the benefit of your own consciences to answer them. March 3, 1829.

Most high and holy God, Creator Governor of the universe, we come before thee with the feeling of our own unworthiness and imperfections, confessing that we have not improved as we ought by the means of religion, especially by the solemn memorial of the death and sufferings of the Son. We have been called upon to celebrate. Give us, we entreat thee, a deeper sense of our duties, of our obligations to use all the means and instruments God has given us to effectuate his everlasting purposes. Cultivate unceasing attachment to the ordinances of religion, if we are sensible that then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect unto all thy commandments.
At home, March 31, 1822, afternoon.