

**THE THEOLOGY OF THE INTELLECT
AND OF THE FEELINGS: A DISCOURSE
DELIVERED BEFORE THE CONVENTION
OF THE CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS
OF MASSACHUSETTS**

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The Theology of the Intellect and of the Feelings: A Discourse Delivered Before the Convention of the congregational ministers of Massachusetts by Edwards A. Park

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EDWARDS A. PARK

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THE THEOLOGY OF THE INTELLECT AND OF THE FEELINGS.

A

D I S C O U R S E

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE CONVENTION OF
THE CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS
OF MASSACHUSETTS,

IN BRATTLE STREET MEETING HOUSE, BOSTON,

MAY 30, 1850.

BY

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When the author began to prepare the ensuing discourse, he intended to avoid all trains of remark adverse to the doctrinal views of any party or school belonging to the Convention. But, contrary to his anticipations, he was led into a course of thought which he was aware that some clergymen of Massachusetts would not adopt as their own, and for the utterance of which he was obliged to rely on their liberal and generous feeling. Although it is in bad taste for a preacher on such an occasion, to take any undue advantage of the kindness of his hearers, yet perhaps it is not dishonorable for him, confiding in their proverbial charity, to venture on the free expression of thoughts which he cannot repress without an injurious constraint upon himself.

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DISCOURSE.

THE STRENGTH OF ISRAEL WILL NOT LIE NOR REPENT: FOR HE IS NOT A
MAN THAT HE SHOULD REPENT.—1 SAM. 15: 29.
AND IT REPENTED THE LORD THAT HE HAD MADE MAN ON THE EARTH,
AND IT GRIEVED HIM AT HIS HEART.—GEN. 6: 6.

I HAVE heard of a father who endeavored to teach his children a system of astronomy in precise philosophical language, and although he uttered nothing but the truth, they learned from him nothing but falsehood. I have also heard of a mother who, with a woman's tact, so exhibited the general features of astronomical science that although her statements were technically erroneous, they still made upon her children a better impression, and one more nearly right than would have been made by a more accurate style. For the same reason many a punctilious divine, preaching the exact truth in its scientific method, has actually imparted to the understanding of his hearers either no idea at all or a wrong one; while many a pulpit orator, using words which tire the patience of a scholastic theologian, and which in their literal import are false, has yet lodged in the hearts of his people the main substance of truth. John Foster says, that whenever a man prays aright he forgets the philosophy of prayer; and in more guarded phrase we may say, that when men are deeply affected by any theme, they are apt to disturb some of its logical proportions, and when preachers aim to rouse the sympathies of a populace, they often give a brighter coloring or a bolder prominence to some lineaments of a doctrine than can be given to them in a well compacted science.

There are two forms of theology, of which the two passages in my text are selected as individual specimens, the one declaring that God never repents, the other that he does repent. For want of a better name these two forms may be termed, the theology of the intellect, and the theology of feeling. Sometimes, indeed, both the mind and the heart are suited by the same modes of thought, but often they require dissimilar methods, and the object of the present discourse is, to state some of the differences between the theology of the intellect and that of feeling, and also some of the influences which they exert upon each other.

What, then, are some of the differences between these two kinds of representation?

The theology of the intellect conforms to the laws, subserves the wants and secures the approval of our intuitive and deductive powers. It includes the decisions of the judgment, of the perceptive part of conscience and taste, indeed of all the faculties which are essential to the reasoning process. It is the theology of speculation, and therefore comprehends the truth just as it is, unmodified by excitements of feeling. It is received as accurate not in its spirit only, but in its letter also. Of course it demands evidence, either internal or extraneous, for all its propositions. These propositions, whether or not they be inferences from antecedent, are well fitted to be premises for subsequent trains of proof. This intellectual theology, therefore, prefers general to individual statements, the abstract to the concrete, the literal to the figurative. In the creed of a Trinitarian it affirms, that he who united in his person a human body, a human soul and a divine spirit, expired on the cross, but it does not originate the phrase that his soul expired, nor that "God the mighty Maker died." As it is a science, strict and severe, it aims not to be fascinating or impressive, but plain, instructive, defensible. Hence it insists on the nice proportions of doctrine, and on preciseness both of thought and style. Its words are so exactly defined, its adjustments are so accurate, that no caviller can detect an ambiguous, mystical or incoherent sentence. It is,

therefore, in entire harmony with itself, abhorring a contradiction as nature abhors a vacuum. Left to its own guidance, for example, it would never suggest the unqualified remark that Christ has fully paid the debt of sinners, for it declares that this debt may justly be claimed from them; nor that he has suffered the whole punishment which they deserve, for it teaches that this punishment may still be righteously inflicted on themselves; nor that he has entirely satisfied the law, for it insists that the demands of the law are yet in force. If it should allow those as logical premises, it would also allow the salvation of all men as a logical inference, but it rejects this inference and accordingly, being self-consistent, must reject those when viewed as literal premises.¹ It is adapted to the soul in her inquisitive moods, but fails to satisfy her craving for excitement. In order to express the definite idea that we are exposed to evil in consequence of Adam's sin, it does not employ the passionate phrase, "we are guilty of his sin." It searches for the proprieties of representation, for seemliness and decorum. It gives origin to no statements which require apology or essential modification; no metaphor, for example, so bold and so liable to disfigure our idea of the divine equity, as that Heaven imputes the crime of one man to millions of his descendants, and then imputes their myriad sins to him who was harmless and undefiled. As it avoids the dashes of an imaginative style, as it qualifies and subdues the remark which the passions would make still more intense, it seems dry, tame to the mass of men. It awakens but little interest in favor of its old arrangements; its new distinctions are easily introduced, to be as speedily forgotten. As we might infer, it is suited not for eloquent appeals, but for calm controversial treatises and bodies of divinity; not so well for the hymn-book as for the catechism; not so well for the liturgy as for the creed.

In some respects, but not in all, the theology of feeling differs from that of intellect. It is the form of belief which is suggested by, and adapted to the wants of the well-trained

¹ Note A.

heart. It is embraced as involving the substance of truth, although, when literally interpreted, it may or may not be false. It studies not the exact proportions of doctrine, but gives especial prominence to those features of it which are and ought to be most grateful to the sensibilities. It insists not on dialectical argument, but receives whatever the healthy affections crave. It chooses particular rather than general statements; teaching, for example, the divine omnipotence by an individual instance of it; saying, not that God can do all things which are objects of power, but that He spake and it was done. It sacrifices abstract remarks to visible and tangible images; choosing the lovely phrase that 'the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Jehovah's wings,' rather than the logical one that his providence comprehendeth all events. It is satisfied with vague, indefinite representations. It is too buoyant, too earnest for a moral result, to compress itself into sharply-drawn angles. It is often the more forceful because of the looseness of its style, herein being the hiding of its power. It is sublime in its obscure picture of the Sovereign who maketh darkness his pavilion, dark waters and thick clouds of the sky. Instead of measuring the exact dimensions of a spirit, it says, "I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes; there was silence and I heard a voice;" and in the haziness of this vision lies its fitness to stir up the soul. Of course, the theology of feeling aims to be impressive, whether it be or not minutely accurate. Often it bursts away from dogmatic restraints, forces its passage through or over rules of logic, and presses forward to expend itself first and foremost in affecting the sensibilities. For this end, instead of being comprehensive, it is elastic; avoiding monotony it is ever pertinent to the occasion; it brings out into bold relief now one feature of a doctrine and then a different feature, and assumes as great a variety of shapes as the wants of the heart are various. In order to hold the Jews back from the foul, cruel vices of their neighbors, the Tyrian, Moabite, Ammonite, Egyptian, Philistine, Babylonian; in order to stop their indulgence in the degrading worship of Moloch, Dagon,

Baal, Tammuz, they were plied with a stern theology, well fitted by its terrible denunciations to save them from the crime which was still more terrible. They were told of the jealousy and anger of the Lord, of his breastplate, helmet, bow, arrows, spear, sword, glittering sword, and raiment stained with blood. This fearful anthropomorphism enstamped a truth upon their hearts ; but when they needed a soothing influence, they were assured that " the Lord shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Thus does the theology of feeling individualize the single parts of a doctrine ; and, so it can make them intense and impressive, it cares not to make them harmonious with each other. When it has one end in view, it represents Christians as united with their Lord ; now, they being branches and he the vine-stock ; again, they being members and he the body ; still again, they being the body and he the head ; and once more, they being the spouse and he the bridegroom. But it does not mean to have these endearing words metamorphosed into an intellectual theory of our oneness or identification with Christ ; for with another end in view it contradicts this theory, and teaches that he is distinct from us, even as separate as the sun or morning star from those who are gladdened by its beams ; the door or way from those who pass through or over it, the captain from his soldiers, the forerunner from the follower, the judge from those arraigned before him, the king from those who bow the knee to him. In order to make us feel the strength of God's aversion to sin, it declares that he has repented of having made our race, has been grieved at his heart for transgressors, weary of them, vexed with them. But it does not mean that these expressions which, as inflected by times and circumstances, impress a truth upon the soul, be stereotyped into the principle that Jehovah has ever parted with his infinite blessedness ; for in order to make us confide in his stability, it denies that he ever repents, and declares that he is without even the shadow of turning. It assumes these discordant forms, so as to meet the affections in their conflicting moods. Its aim is not to