

The Authority of Christ

over the Individual, the Church, and the Nation*

By the Rev. James Dick M.A., 1892.

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* The following lecture was delivered in Belfast as the closing one of session, 1891-92, of the Theological Hall of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, by the Rev. James Dick, MA, Professor of Hebrew, Biblical Criticism, and Pastoral Theology.

The Reformed Presbyterian Synod's Committee on Covenant Renovation and National Reform unanimously requested Professor Dick to place the manuscript at their disposal for publication, in order to its extensive circulation. He consented; and the Lecture is published herewith.

It is sent forth in the hope that it may throw a little light on some of the most difficult problems now occupying the public mind, and so contribute to the progress of Christ's kingdom, and to the growing experience of its blessed privileges on the part of individuals, churches, and nations.

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If the work done during the Session of our Theological Hall that now closes has been rightly done, we have achieved at least some success and made some progress. Real success and real progress, however, in such work include something more, and something far more important, than advancing attainment in particular branches of the theological course. Increasing knowledge of Systematic Theology, of Church History, of Hebrew or of Greek Exegesis, such as can be tested or measured by examination, indicates real success and real progress only when such knowledge leads to or is joined with a broadening and deepening spiritual conception of the great purpose of the Gospel ministry. A growing intellectual acquaintance with the Oracles of God is good in itself, but a thousand times better is it when students deliberately and conscientiously undertake the studies necessary to such an acquaintance in order to qualify themselves for being ambassadors of Christ. That progress is real which brings the student to Christ's feet in self surrender; that study is successful, with a success wholly relevant to the issues with which the ministry is concerned, which prepares the student in mind and heart for doing some service for the King of Grace and Glory. Such progress can be tested only by results, perhaps long afterwards, and shall certainly be exactly estimated in the great final examination before the assembled universe on the great day.

The great mission which the minister of Christ has to fulfil is briefly described in Scripture as "preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom"- that is, declaring that "The Lord doth reign." Such an announcement as this delivered by the ambassador is a distinctly Gospel announcement. For it shows how God's reign, which, in the ordinary course of nature and of law, would be an absolute reign of terror to the transgressors, may become a reign of blessedness and life. In any case and in every case the Gospel is the proclamation of a King, and Gospel minister is a servant of a King. Whatever other form or aspect a revelation of grace may assume, that

revelation never ceases to be authoritative. The true minister or servant of Jesus Christ, who forms a proper conception of his office, is a man who profoundly reverences his Master's authority in the very smallest detail of duty. Accepting the unspeakable *honour* of being Christ's ambassador, he feels that he is bound by every moral and spiritual obligation to receive and deliver his Master's whole message with perfect fidelity, without the slightest curtailment or modification of the message to secure any worldly end, or even to secure any religious end, however apparently holy or beneficent. He feels that he is bound to guard every interest of his Master's truth, cause, and kingdom, committed to his trust.

Such being the Scriptural and Christian conception of a Gospel minister's relation to his Master, it may be asked, Is there anything to be added to this conception in order to represent the relation of a Reformed Presbyterian minister to his Master? For we must not forget that we have been teaching and studying as professors and students in connection with the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Does the Testimony of our Church require us to add some functions or some details of duty that are outside the Scriptural conception in order to realise a denominational conception? Ought a Reformed Presbyterian minister to be, in the purpose and effort of his life, more than honestly Scriptural and Christian? Ought he to be anything more than lovingly and faithfully obedient to Christ's will? Is he required or expected to undertake, or to pledge himself to, anything more than this? To all these questions we can safely answer, No. Our Church does not aim at anything beyond universal submission to Christ's will. But it does aim at realising the Scriptural conception of universal loyalty to Him. And no minister of any church, and no church, is entitled to do less than this.

For what purpose, then, does the Reformed Presbyterian Church exist? And what is the advantage of having a Theological Hall in connection with our Church? If we wish only to be Christian in

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our profession and position as a Church, why not join, or allow ourselves to be absorbed by, some of the Christian churches around us? Our reply is, We occupy a separate position as a church because we desire, we trust sincerely, to realise a fully Christian ideal of universal subjection to Christ our King on our own part, and to extend the knowledge and appreciation of that ideal among the churches around us. We could not join any of these churches without doing that which would be, from our point of view, equivalent to disobeying some of the Commandments of Christ, or opposing or disregarding some part of His authoritative revelation, and so coming short of the Christian ideal. Not that we charge any of the churches with deliberate or conscious disobedience; but that we find, in point of fact, that some of the most important principles of Christ's truth-notably the principle of His rightful dominion as Mediator over the Church and over the nation- are allowed to fall into abeyance or into oblivion, at least in all the larger Evangelical Churches. Passing, in the meantime, the principle of Christ's absolute authority in His Church - a principle which is being constantly violated by the introduction of audacious inventions of man into Divine worship, and by the pushing of Christ's own authoritative institutions into a corner- and looking at the principle of His Headship over the nation, we may conclude, without any tedious process of reasoning, that the church which sees Christ's law set aside by the nation, and His authority rejected, and His Kingly right trampled in the mire with disdain by every petty enemy, the church that admits and even argues for the principle that enemies of Christ have a right to be constituent members in that society in which God has declared that Christ has a right to be the Head, and in which therefore the will of Christ is the supreme and ultimate authority- the church that sees this monstrous wrong done to Christ, and stands by for generations without uttering one word of fearless denunciation, and without doing one single deed the object of which is to bring the

nation back to the throne of Christ in dutiful allegiance, has not, in this respect at least, a broad or intelligent or conscientious conception of Christian duty. We need, therefore, to maintain our denominational position that we may continue to utter a clear and faithful testimony for Christ the King, and to utter it all the more clearly and faithfully as others continue to become more careless about the fearful rebellion of the nation against Him, or to become more impatient of the restraints of our testimony against their criminal neglect. And as our church must continue to exist, our Theological Hall must exist, not only that the doctrines of Evangelical Christianity generally may be taught and embraced, but also that the candidates for the ministry on leaving the Hall may go forth under the solemn and joyful conviction that Christ is "King of kings and Lords of lords," and the minister is the King's ambassador to be guided by the King's will, and to labour for the world-wide acknowledgement of the King's reign.

We believe then that the Christian conception of duty is that which leads a man to fix his attention on the Lord of Glory, to mark earnestly the lines of graciously revealed method along which the Christ of God moves and would have His servants to move, and to follow Him wholly on those lines. We further believe that the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony is the result of a sincere and unworldly effort so to conceive of duty and so to move towards its performance. And as our Testimony owes its existence to a prevalent conviction of the fullness and importance of Christ's authority, so it justifies its existence by seeking to maintain the doctrine of that authority as over every man and over every institution of earth.

But it may be asked, Where do we find this doctrine of Christ's authority? And, if in Scripture, is it a prominent doctrine? Is it Divinely emphasised, and does it call for specially emphatic testimony, on the part of Christ's servants? The doctrine is in Scripture in many specific forms, and may be clearly traced through a thousand paths

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of legitimate and necessary inference. It is, in fact, a doctrine that is behind every sentence and in every sentence of gracious revelation addressed to man. And it is beyond all doubt one of the most prominent and emphatic doctrines of that revelation. It appears in the very earliest Gospel preached to the fallen- "He shall bruise thy head;" it prefaces the law- "I am the LORD thy God;" it brings in the New Dispensation also- "Unto you is born this day a Saviour who is Christ the Lord." The Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into His hand- all judgment, all power in heaven and earth- that all men should honour the Son even as the they honour the Father. "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." "God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

From all this it is clear that it is the Father's everlasting ordinance that Christ should be Lord of all, that His authority should be fully recognised and cordially submitted to, and that men in every relation and circumstance of life should be guided by His Word and will. We might conclude that the doctrine thus revealed could be easily understood and applied, and that from the general statement of Christ's universal authority all needful particulars could be easily inferred. And we might accordingly expect to see universal recognition of it among Christians. We find, however, in point of fact, that while few professing Christians question the general statement, very many ignore the authority of Christ when they come to details of individual life, or of church life, or of political life, and thereby limit, and limit very seriously and sinfully and disastrously, that authority which God has declared has no limit anywhere over the whole creation. It may therefore serve an important and necessary purpose for us to follow for a little while the thought of Christ's authority over the INDIVIDUAL, over the CHURCH, and

over the NATION, and to try to estimate Scripturally the corresponding duty of the individual, the church, and the nation to Him.

I. All things were created by Christ and for Him. Therefore the INDIVIDUAL was created by Him and for Him. This holds true not of some individuals here and there but of every member of the human family. There is one purpose in the creation of all that is comprehensively expressed by the two words "for Him" - an expression which goes beyond the implicit claim to authority over all founded on the creation of all, and which amounts to an explicit claim to employ them and control them as His absolute property for His own purpose. This authority or right over all men belongs to Him, not only as He is a person of the Eternal Godhead, but as he is the Mediator between God and man; for God gave Him in this latter capacity all power in heaven and on earth.

It is, of course, assumed that we are familiar with this statement of the doctrine of Christ's authority, and that it will be readily accepted by many Evangelical Christians. We mention it now in order, if possible, to awaken some thought as to the nature and extent of this authority, and as the obligations resting one very man to own it, and to submit himself in mind, heart, conscience, and life to the Divine Mediatorial King. No difficulty arises in our minds as to the formal statement of Christ's authority over those of His servants, official or other, in a spiritual sense, or of His authority in matters and relations spiritual and religious. But there we often stop, as though there were certain relations sustained by religious men to which the authority of Christ does not apply. Difficulties as to the extent of His authority do not arise from the doctrine, which we have seen is inherently reasonable even too the very limits to which it reached, but from prevalent ignorance of the doctrine, and from prevalent opposition in fact to the authority. Men so constantly ignore it, or set up so many claims against it, even on the plea of liberty of conscience,

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that it is often difficult for professing Christians to believe that the authority is supreme over every man, in every relation, in every circumstance, in every place, and in every period of life. Yet this is, in brief, the doctrine of Scripture and of reason.

If we consider the position of the Christian man, we can have no difficulty in admitting that Christ has a right to rule over him, for he is Christ's by the right of creation, of the Father's covenant gift, of redemption, and of the new creation. And in this case, as in all other cases, the authority is over the whole man without any limitation or modification whatsoever. The man is literally not his own - his own master or his own property. Above him and around him, to meet him in every upward and outward movement of his life, there are the sovereign claims of Christ's Kingly will. Beyond the requirements of Christ's will he cannot go, for Christ's will requires perfect love to God and love to our neighbour as to ourselves. A work of supererogation is, of course, impossible, because Christ requires the whole heart and soul and strength and mind of the man. And it will be time enough for him to think or speak of doing more in the way of life than Christ requires when he has done as much as Christ requires. We touch this point, not to meet specifically the Romish error on the subject, but to meet the evil principle of self-righteousness, which is latent if not patent to man, and out of which the Romish error sprang. For even Christians are liable to forget that God's Commandment is exceedingly broad - so broad, indeed that it covers completely the whole life of man at every point, and from the first to the last requires perfection. And the subtle working of the principle of self-righteousness leads us to set up practically another standard. Many Christians as they look around them find that certain things are required by the customs of the religious society in which they move. Certain elements or principles of conduct go to constitute such a religion as satisfies ordinary demands, and these ordinary demands are mistaken for the requirements of Christ. Such demands may

be, indeed, so far as they go, in accordance with Christ's requirements. But they are liable to be considered equivalent to all that Christ requires. And hence some people, complying with these demands, come to think they can do no more, and accordingly proceed to do many things that Christ *does not require* - in worship, for instance - and think they are doing God service, and even value and depend more upon the unrequired service than the service which is required. Is this not in spirit and in principle the exact equivalent among Protestants of the Romish doctrine of supererogation? Returning to the thought of the universality of the law of Christ, we may sufficiently dispose of this erroneous principle by saying that every hour spent in doing in religious service what Christ has not required is an hour spent in neglecting to do what He has required. If even the humble and conscientious Christian, who tries simply to obey his Lord and Master is, after all, an unprofitable servant, how much more unprofitable is he, however abundant his work, and however high his reputation for zeal, who, instead of adopting the methods of work prescribed by his Master, adds to those methods, or rather substitutes for them methods prescribed or devised by man, and even values the human above the Divine! A proper conception of the breadth and comprehensiveness of the Divine commands would lead us to the conclusion that *Christian* activity cannot by any possibility get beyond the range, or work outside the sphere, of Christ's authority.

Seeing that Christ's authority is absolute over the individual Christian, we hardly need to inquire what duty the individual Christian owes to Christ. The duty may be expressed in one word -- *submission*; and the submission must be as complete and unreserved as the authority is extensive. He has authority as Mediator, Divinely appointed, to speak for God to us, revealing the whole will of God for our salvation, and to speak to God for us and to act towards God for us. He has authority as the Prophet, Priest and King anointed by God to be the only Saviour of sinners. The duty

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of the sinner is to look humbly to Him, and to receive humbly from Him a free salvation. The further duty of the sinner saved by grace is to receive every word of instruction that Christ speaks, to believe and embrace every doctrine that Christ reveals, to maintain inviolate every principle of Christ's truth. His acceptance of Christ's authority must be the same in substance as that which found expression in the words of Israel's Covenant of old - "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." God requires nothing less than was thus promised, and will not approve of anything less. If Israel had responded to God's commands given by the hand of Moses, "We will profess and maintain all the essential doctrines; but as there are many things revealed that will probably cause and perpetuate division, and many things that will prove distasteful and unpopular, we will not maintain those things or lay any stress upon them or profess them" - if they had spoken thus, reason itself would condemn their unblushing audacity. If it were on record that they had spoken thus, Evangelical Christendom today would not have one word to say in extenuation of the irreverence and profanity. Yet strange to say there is no principle that has made more converts than the popular distinction between essentials and non-essentials. Many a well-meaning Christian is led away with the notion that some truths or principles in Christ's revelation are not essential. The divisions that exist in the Church are serious, and the rough and ready plan for healing divisions is to hold the essentials and say nothing about the non-essentials. Of course, such well-meaning people do not see that this plan, after all, leaves the divisions exactly where they were, save that two sections of the church, previously separate, are now formed into one material section by a sort of physical union without spiritual unity. Their union on such a basis does not even profess to be a union in which they see eye to eye: it is a union in which they agree permanently not to see eye to eye, for neither side is to teach or maintain the non-essentials. There is, however, a strong probability that they will

see eye to eye, after all, in agreeing to disregard some principle that on one side, at least, was formerly held and maintained that, at the time of the union was called non-essential, and that is now called non-existent. Thus there is a species of unity secured, but it is a unity with diminished attachment to the Saviour's truth. Probably this thought about non-essential doctrines is connected in men's minds or in their professions with the intention of advancing more effectually some doctrine or principle that is called essential. But Christ does not require any individual under heaven to let go one doctrine of the Christian system in order the better to promote the acceptance of another. It is not true thought but sentimental blundering that makes any one suppose such a thing possible. And it is not true morality or true obedience which can call any part of Christ's truth non-essential: it is disobedience and immorality. The folly of it and the presumption of it can be discerned at once if we lay it bare by simply supposing the sinner presenting the distinction to Christ Himself. Christ gives His word, and says to the sinner, "This is my will. If a man love Me he will keep my words." And the sinner replies, "Yes, Lord, this is Thy word, I admit; but there are many things in it that I need not profess or hold; there are doctrines that will greatly hinder Evangelistic work; they are not essential. I will hold all the essential doctrines, and it will be far better to say nothing at all about the rest; Thy work will go on much more successfully if I select the most popular doctrines and so avoid exciting prejudice." We can hardly suppose any man daring enough to speak to Christ in this way. And yet precisely in this way, though, of course, in a different, many a man speaks of Christ's truth to his fellow-men, and they agree among themselves to the deliberate mutilation of that body of truth which the Saviour authoritatively reveals, and which he has commanded His servants to maintain and defend even unto death. He has revealed no truth that is not essential for His purpose; and *His* purpose in giving the truth must be *our* purpose in receiving and

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professing it. There is not a trace of hint or suggestion in His Word itself that any man in any age of the world may for any purpose profess and maintain one truth less than Christ has revealed. Such a hint would be on Christ's part the virtual renunciation of his authority. And no man can adopt such a distinction among the doctrines of Christ without first renouncing Christ's authority in general, and then renouncing the authority that is behind the particular doctrines rejected. Christ requires authoritatively the acceptance and maintenance of all the doctrines of His revealed will, and all His authority is in every word that Christ speaks, to learn, and to obey.

There are, however, many individuals in the community who do not believe in Christ, and whose minds are not concerned with any thought about His authority. There is the large class of merely nominal Christians who lead Godless lives. To present the doctrine of Christ's authority to them is to present an unintelligible thought, or, at all events, a thought that their hearts dispose them to reject. And, in fact, being without a sense of Christian duties, responsibilities, and hopes, they live as though they had a perfect right to consider themselves for the present at least wholly independent of any form of Divine authority. Then there are infidels, who contemptuously reject the doctrine of Christ's authority or existence; Atheists, who deny the very being of God; Jews, who still despise and reject Jesus Christ as their fathers did; and many others even in Christian lands to whom the Bible is nothing and the authority of Christ nothing. Does their unbelief make His authority void? They say in effect that they will not have Him to reign over them. Or have they a right in any transactions or relations with their fellowmen to require that Christ's authority be set aside? Rebellion and disobedience are bad in themselves, but they are worse when they demand to be recognised as legitimate and right, and as having rights in the face of Christ's authority. And they are worst of all when

Christ's servants admit the alleged rights of the disobedient as against the claims of their Master. Yet this is done by professing Christians, and pleaded for, and even commended - for instance in the State. The so-called right of conscience are exalted and the law of Christ is put down, as if this were a holy thing to do. Of this, however, again.

Meanwhile let this fact of Scripture be constantly remembered, that Christ has not merely *power* over His enemies but *authority*. The various classes of ungodly men, however audacious and persistent their rebellion, are all bound to submit to Christ, to His Gospel, to His law. He holds them bound; and an intelligent conception of our duty and of Christ's rights will make us also hold them bound, and that too in such a way that they may not in any relation set up any claim of right against Christ's authority. No man can have any rights but those which God has given him; but God has never given to any man the right to rebel against Christ. He who insists upon his right to disobey Christ, and upon having that right respected and provided for even in legislation, insists upon a right which could have no existence in any rational or Scriptural moral system. Wherever any man goes, be he friend or enemy of Christ, the authority of Christ follows him. The Christian, the Atheist, the Jew, the Romanist, the infidel, the libertine, are all equally bound to bow before God's Anointed. The Christian bows and kisses the Son; the others, if they fail to do this, must bow and lick the dust.

II. When we pass to the consideration of Christ's authority over the CHURCH, we do not expect to find there any modification or diminution of the authority. For the church is a society founded in grace, and founded to illustrate to everlasting the power of grace in restoring man's perverted life to its proper course and purpose. God's will supreme was the principle of the first creation: God's will restored in Christ to supremacy is the principle of the new creation; and the Church exists to exemplify before the moral universe the blessed

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working of this principle. In the Church, if anywhere, self-will must be utterly abolished, that God's great purpose may be accomplished altogether in His own wise way. The Scriptural conception of the Church is that of a Kingdom of Heaven in which God's will is done, and the authority of God's Son is recognised is recognised by every mind and found in every institution. "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto nor diminish from it," was the rule for the Church in the wilderness. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," is the precisely similar and equivalent rule for the Church of the New Testament in the more extended wilderness of the disordered kingdoms of the world. Not the very smallest allowance was made in the Old Testament for either addition or diminution in the case of His institutions. Nor is the New Testament different in this respect, unless as its clearer revelation of Christ's gracious authority increases the obligation of the Church to obey. On this subject the teaching of Scripture is unmistakable. For instruction and for Government, as well as for the bestowal and sustaining of life spiritual and eternal, Christ is the sole Head of the Church.

Supposing, however, that the Scripture dealt only with the relation of the individual to Christ, and were wholly silent about Christ's authority over the Church, as such that authority would necessarily follow as an inference from the extent of His authority over the individual Christian. For the Church is composed of men who are bound to obey Christ in all things in every relation, and, therefore in their Church relation. As individuals, they have Him for their Head; as members of a spiritual organisation, they have Him for their Head still: therefore, the organisation of which every member, in that capacity, owes allegiance to Christ, has Christ for *its* Head too. What specific directions does this general obligation to submission on the part of the Church take? The obedient Church accepts and professes and maintains all the doctrines of Christ; it

accepts and observes all His ordinances of worship, or discipline, and of Government, so that the Church may be exactly what He would have it to be. Has the Church of Christ any right to swerve from this line of duty? Has it a right to alter His doctrines, or to add to or diminish the number of the doctrines to be believed and maintained? Has it a right to change His ordinances of worship either by dropping some Divine ordinances or by thrusting in human ordinances? Has it a right to be governed on a plan different from His? Has it a right to modify its discipline with the changing fancies or tastes of the times? God has given no right to do any of these things; and the Church cannot create such a right for herself; and the world or the devil cannot give such a right, though either may suggest and commend the effort to assert it. Hence the Church ought to aim at being always so conscientiously conformed to the Divine pattern in her profession and practice, that every detail of profession and practice will bear to be tested by the Divine Word. If the King Eternal were to pass through the Church, and take up her beliefs and institutions one by one, and ask, "Whence is this?" and we could honestly answer, "Thou hast appointed it; we have Thine own command or authority for it," He would approve and bless His faithful servants. If, on the other hand, we have to say about many things, "We thought they were not contrary to Thy Word, 'not expressly forbidden,' and likely to do good," can we expect His smile? Have we not rather deserved His frown! *He* never told His Church, but *Satan* did, that anything not expressly forbidden might be introduced.

When we turn from what ought to be to hear what history tells us *has been*, and to consider what is *now*, we learn how often and to what extent Christ's frown has been earned by a disobedient Church. The restlessness of sinful self-will was an almost constant element in the life of the Old Testament Church. Something dropped from the Divine ritual, or something added to it - a supposed improvement in either case - began the course of defection.

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Sometimes the defection went a great length, at other times it was providentially stopped at an early age. But in all cases the most apparently trifling liberty with God's authoritative appointment had in it the possibility of universal disobedience and rebellion, and had suspended over it the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. The history of the Old Testament Church is the history of the prevalent gloom of defection and disobedience, with occasional gleams of reformation, until at last the True Light appeared. And the Old Testament Church came to an end with this record, "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not;" "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Looking back over the Old Testament, we see the beneficent working of a spiritual power; but that power was not the power of human genius or invention, and it did not work by means of these as they wantonly changed God's ordinances. The whole power first and last was in God's own methods humbly adopted, and the whole glory of the dispensation belonged to the marvellous grace and patience of God, Who remembered His own covenant, although a stubborn and rebellious race was always forgetting it.

But all that dispensation is past and gone, it may be said, and there is nothing resembling it in the conduct of the Visible Church now. This feeling is precisely analogous to that of the Jews in the days of Christ's ministry. If they had been in the days of their fathers they would not, they thought, have stoned or killed the prophets. But these self-complacent rebels against God took the very Prince of Life, and with wicked hands crucified Him. So the New Testament Church quickly followed in the wake of the transgressors of old. The simple ordinances of spiritual worship did not satisfy. The mystery of iniquity began to work. Concessions were made to carnal tastes and desires, and so the great body of the early church became the anti-Christian Church of Rome. At every stage in the growth of that bloated system of self-will and corruption, transgressors would

doubtless look back self-righteously and condemn the transgressions of Israel of old in departing from the Lord. No thought of the possibility of their being transgressors themselves would arise to disturb the serenity of their self-complacency. And so the history of backsliding Israel repeated itself in backsliding Christendom.

Moreover, history is repeating itself still. The same principle of self will that dishonoured God by setting aside His ordinances in Israel and thereby brought disaster upon disaster on that people, the same principle that put out the light of Christian institutions in early Christendom, and covered the Church and the world with thick darkness during the middle ages, is abroad in the Church today. Even in Evangelical Churches at this moment men professing subjection to Christ are madly thrusting aside His authority, and subjecting the Church to human caprice. Doctrines and rights and practices for which no Divine warrant can be pleaded are multiplying in the Visible Church. Some so-called Protestant Churches are almost as Ritualistic and idolatrous and disobedient to Christ as Rome itself. And other Protestant Churches are following. There is a kind of procession - Rome leading the way, then Prelatic ritualism close behind, but rapidly shortening their distance, and then other Presbyterian Churches being drawn in because they admire the glitter and pomp of the procession without waiting to consider what is the beginning of it all and what is the end of it all. And while all this is going on Christ is standing by and saying, "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" "All day long I stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."

If the Visible Church of Christ did not take the first step in disobedient innovation, there would be no logical necessity for taking the second. But the moment the first step is taken to gratify the carnal taste at the expense of Christ's authority, it becomes logically necessary to take the second for the same purpose as soon as it is demanded, and so on to the end of the procession.

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In these days, so-called revivals are spoken of with eagerness, and are resorted to as essential to the progress of religion. But what is their character? Do they tend, or are they intended to increase reverence for the institutions of Christ? The genuine revivals of former times did this. They led to the purging of the Church from the corruption which self-will had brought in. But these modern revivals live and thrive upon the corruptions of self-will. If you take out of them the methods which man has invented, they die a natural death. What is urgently needed is a genuine revival by the Spirit of the Living God to sweep away the impudent inventions of human wisdom, to reveal Christ upon His throne in the Church requiring absolute submission to Himself and to His methods, and to awaken the conscience of His people to inquire sorrowfully what gracious institution they have diminished or abolished, and what human institution they have added to His worship, that they may commit neither the one sin nor the other any more.

III. If we consider, further, the authority of Christ over the STATE, we shall find the same united testimony of Scripture and reason to its universality and to the duty of national submission to Him. "The King of kings," "The Prince of the kings of the earth," "The Governor among the nations," - these are some of His titles, Divinely given, and, therefore, appropriately given. Kings are expressly commanded to serve and obey Him, and are threatened with His wrath and curse if they disobey Him. Nations are given into His hand - that they may subserve His purpose; and God requires them to obey His voice. The position of Israel as a nation may be taken as the type of what a nation's position before God ought to be. That nation was placed in a position of subjection to God. His law was to regulate the whole national life and action. The government was a theocracy or government of God - precisely what reason itself teaches us the government of a nation, as God's creature, ought to be still, with this difference, that

instead of having the actual presence of God in such a manner that He could be consulted on any difficulty that might arise, we have now the completed revelation of God's will that we might consult it. Moreover, the authority of Christ over the nation, like His authority over the Church, may be inferred from His authority over the individual. We have seen that His authority is over every individual - friend or enemy - in every relation of life. If the individuals in a land be associated as a society or community for purposes of government, then, as He has absolute authority over every member of the society, He has absolute authority over the society itself. That God should govern the nation by His law, and by His Son as the anointed King, is clear as Scripture and reason can make it.

What, then, is the duty of the nation to Christ? Observe, we do not ask, What is the duty of individuals in the nation who know Christ? but what is the duty of the nation as such? The nation as such ought to own Christ's authority, and to say, in words already quoted, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do." Can that obligation ever change? If a majority who reject Christ, or at least reject His authority in national action, get into power, can they change the obligation and set aside the claims of His law so that they shall be no longer bound? Can they dispose of Christ's authority so effectually that He shall have no right to punish them for disobedience? Not unless they cease to be His creatures, or change the unchangeable purpose and decree of God by which they were given over into the hand of the Son.

What would follow if the principle of obedience were adopted by the nation? First of all, every enemy of Christ would be deprived of the vote or other exercise of power over national affairs. Then every law on the statute book would be tried by the Divine law, and brought into harmony with it, or expunged. Then Christian morality would regulate every national and international transaction. Then efforts would be made to right every wrong, and to reform every abuse, to repress all tyranny

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and to succour the weak and helpless and oppressed. Then the nation would feel it to be a duty and privilege to promote the interests of Christ's spiritual kingdom by the influence of its legislation and resources, that through the accomplishment of His gracious purposes in the Church men might be blessed in Him, and all nations might call Him blessed. And over all would be Christ's excellency, and the sunshine of His blessing.

It may be said, This is a beautiful ideal, but not likely to be ever realised. But the question is not whether it is a beautiful ideal, but whether it is the *Scriptural* ideal of national duty and prosperity. If so, it is not a Christian thing to say that it can be hardly realised. It will be realised one day. Is it enough for us to say this and simply stand by and wait idly and disobediently for God's Providence to bring the time about? No, this is not enough. Knowing what the ideal is, we are bound to labour for its realisation, and bound to reject every principle, and avoid every action that would tend to retard such a consummation. The ideal is not apparently moving now toward realisation, because the inaction of the majority of professing Christians is in the way, preventing the return of the nation to Christ. But there is something worse still in the way - the false and mischievous principle that because there is difference of opinion in the nation, some being believers in Christ and some being openly and aggressively hostile to Christ, it would be wrong to try to introduce the law of Christ into such a divided society. Wrong to whom? Is it a wrong to an infidel, or a Jew, or a Papist to seek to have him governed by the beneficent law of Christ? And is it, can it be, in the estimation of any intelligent and serious Christian, a moral wrong to any of these men to prevent them from injuring Christ's authority and from hindering the progress of His kingdom? Is it safer to do a real wrong, or to perpetrate deliberately a real wrong, to Christ, than to do a fancied wrong to Christ's enemies?

But it may be further argued, indeed is further argued by many professing

Christians, that because there are differences of opinion among men as to what the law of Christ is or requires, and because we have no infallible arbiter to decide who is right, therefore it is useless to appeal to the Divine law at all. The law has been set aside, in fact, as impracticable, and it is argued that we need not think of having it restored. And this reasoning satisfies the great bulk even of Presbyterians! Perhaps the easiest way to expose and annihilate it is to tell the reasoner to go and bow before Christ and reason thus to Him. Let him dare to tell the King of kings that His law is impracticable, and that, therefore, it is better to ignore it, and to consent to the ignoring of it by others! And if he shrinks, as any honest Christian will, from such daring profanity, let him be sure that the reasoning is not inspired from heaven, but from hell.

Difference of opinion does not warrant the rejection of Christ's authority. He requires us to apply His law. And Christian intelligence and fidelity require us, instead of shirking a difficult duty, to study this law ourselves, and to insist that rulers shall make a determined effort to understand and be guided by this law of the God of the whole earth. To give way to the conviction or the feeling that God's will cannot be applied to national action, because one might interpret in one way and another in another way, is simply to rebel against God. By the very greatest stretch of imagination, however familiar we may have become with such maxims, we cannot suppose God saying to a nation so refusing to apply His law, "That is right and dutiful and wise." He says:-

*Now therefore, kings, be wise; be taught,
Ye judges of the earth:
Serve God in fear, and see that ye
Join trembling with you mirth.
Kiss ye the Son.*

This is the expression of God's will, and He is not going to revise or reverse it, and deny Himself, at the bidding of carnal reason and infatuated worldly policy. God's fixed purpose to have His Anointed obeyed by the individual, The Church, and by the

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nation, is declared on the words of another psalm - "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."

The doctrines thus briefly outlined - Christ over all, blessed for ever, and a blessing for ever to all them that obey Him - is the sum of the doctrine which the Christian ambassador goes forth to proclaim. Christ exalted and having a right to be honoured by the admiration, faith, confidence, love, submission, and service of men in every condition, because He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross - this is the marrow and fatness of the Christian Gospel. Christ having power over all flesh to give eternal life in a world in which no life can be without Him, and having all authority to give ALL THE LAWS for the regulation of that life in the believer and in the Church, and having sovereign dominion over the kingdoms of the world that He may command them for the good of His Spiritual Kingdom, the Church, and use them, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, to promote the accomplishment of His purpose and work of grace - blessed by Him, and calling Him Blessed if they fear Him; cursed by Him, and involuntarily glorifying Him in their destruction if they refuse to fear Him - this is glad tidings of great joy to all people. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that said unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"

This is the Christian Gospel. Is the Reformed Presbyterian Gospel different from this? Do we wish to add anything to that which our Gracious King has given us a commission to do? We do not wish to add to the Heavenly Gospel. And our published Testimony is the pledge of our unwillingness to have this Gospel of Christ's Kingdom diminished. It is only that Scripture message that we wish to deliver, and we dare not, as we hope in God's mercy, refrain from delivering it in all its

blessed fullness as we receive it from our King.

Is this a narrow Gospel? No; it is as broad as the infinite love and wisdom and righteousness of God. Is it a sectarian Gospel? No; it is the Gospel that will destroy sectarianism, for sectarianism arises out of self-will and innovation on Christ's doctrines. Is it a Gospel which will do any wrong to any interest of man? No; it is the Gospel that will turn earth into heaven by binding all ranks of men in one loving brotherhood, by binding them first by the sweet constraints of loving subjection to the throne of God.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church exists to keep this Gospel pure and entire. Is there any other Church that does this? If so, we shall be glad to join hand and heart with that Church. We do not know, however, of any Church but our own that openly protests against the nation's rejection of Christ. We do not know of one single resolution or memorial or action of any Court of the British Presbyterian Churches in which they profess a desire to bring the nation to Christ's feet. We do not know of a single act in which they denounce the sin of this nation in breaking Christ's Covenants at the Restoration, and its continued sin in persisting in the breach of those Covenants today. Yet members of these churches will tell us when we feel constrained to protest against a rebellious nation, and to separate ourselves from it, that they are taking the more excellent way of "voting for good men," and seeking reform in the direction of which we are speaking. For first, no good man ever yet solicited the votes of the electors in order to advocate the restoration of the nation to Christ's law. No vote was ever given or received for the purpose of purging the nation from its unholy confederacy with Christ's enemies. When we find a candidate for Parliamentary honours who will pledge himself heartily and honestly to urge upon the nation the Gospel of our Testimony, and when we find members of other churches willing to vote that the Gospel of our Testimony may be accepted by the

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nation, it will be time enough for us to consider whether voting side by side with Papists and other enemies of Christ be a more excellent way, or any holy way at all, to seek reform.

Again, we repeat that *our Testimony is Christian, no more than Scripturally Christian*, and we dare not make it less. How long must we maintain it? For ever. It is not a temporary, shifting Testimony, but a true Testimony to truth that is eternal. Circumstances may change, but Christ's authority, like Himself, is "the same yesterday and today and or ever." Our separate position as a Church may cease, but that can only righteously be when Christians of other denominations gather round us and join with us in joyful testimony to the right of our common Lord. And then there shall be loud voices in heaven and on earth saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ." But should our Christian Testimony and our separate position come to an end before the consummation is reached, we shall have proved ourselves criminally unfaithful to an infinitely important trust, and wholly unworthy of a precious heritage of Gospel truth and liberty.

"He that hath ears to bear, let him bear."