



STODDARD, SOLOMON. *The Defects of Preachers Reproved, in a Sermon Preached at Northampton, May 19th, 1723.* By Solomon Stoddard., Late Pastor of Northampton. The Second Edition. Boston: Re-printed and Sold by Kneeland and Green in Queen-street. 1747. Small quarto.

Solomon Stoddard (1643-1728/29) American Congregational minister, graduated Harvard (1662) and was the first librarian at Harvard (1667-74), pastor at Northampton, Mass., 1672 until his death. He was followed in the pulpit by his grandson, Jonathan Edwards. "He urged ministers to speak frequently of hellfire, declaring that "if Sinners don't hear often of Judgement and Damnation, few will be converted." "As a minister he was very successful, promoting revivals of religion in Northampton in 1679, 1683, 1712, and 1718. He dominated his congregation, receiving from malcontents the nickname of "Pope"... Not so learned as the Mathers, he was more forceful as a writer and more original as a thinker. As an ecclesiastical statesman he was unrivaled in his generation." —DAB.

MATTHEW XXIII. 2, 3.

The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses Seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do. —

In these Words is a Direction given by Christ unto the People: Where we have

First, The Foundation of the Rule, The Scribes, and Pharisees sit in *Moses Seat*. Some take this as spoken of the Sanhedrim, who were the Successors of Moses and the Seventy Elders of *Israel*. Possibly that may be a Mistake, for several of the Sanhedrim were not Pharisees, *Act. 23. 3*. For the chief Priests did belong to that Society, *Act. 4.6*. And they are said to be Sadducees; but by Scribes and Pharisees I understand the principal Teachers among the *Jews*. The Priests and Levites were more especially devoted to the Study of the Law; *Deut. 33. 10. They shall teach Jacob thy Judgments, and Israel thy Law —*. Yet others that were Learned in the Law, were made Use of to instruct the People,

PAGE 2: and were chosen to be Rulers of the Synagogues. The Pharisees were of any Tribe; Paul, who was of the Tribe of *Benjamin* was a Pharisee by Education, as he tells *Act, 23.6. — I am a Pharisee, the Son of a Pharisee.*

Secondly, Here is the Rule given, What they bid you observe, that observe & do. This must needs be understood with that Limitation, when they teach according to the Mind of God. Sometimes they taught for Doctrines the Commandments of Men, & then it was sinful & dangerous to observe their Directions. If the Blind lead the Blind, both shall fall into the Ditch, *Mat. 15.14*. The Doctrine is,

DOCT. *There may be a great deal of good Preaching in a Country, and yet a great want of good Preaching.*

It is a Felicity to a People when there is good Preaching in the Land, yet there may in the same Land, be great Want of good Teaching. Some Things that are very useful may be plainly and fully taught, and other Things that might be as useful may be neglected; many sound Principles in Religion may be taught, and other Things that are of great Concernment unto Souls may be omitted. Ministers don't sufficiently do their Duty, if they preach many sound Truths, and do it convincingly and with good Affection, if they do it with great Clearness and Evidence, provided they neglect other Things that are needful to Salvation. And so it falls out sometimes that Men that make many good Sermons, are very defective in Preaching some other Things that they ought to preach. ...

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The Reason of the Doctrine is, Because some Preachers are Men of Learning and moral Men, and they have drunk in some Errors, and they want Experience. Learning and Morality will qualify Men

to make many good and profitable Sermons, much for the Edification of the Hearers. Learning qualifies Men to clear up many Principles of Religion; and a moral Disposition may fit Men zealously to reprove vicious Practices: But Men may be learned Men, yet drink in very corrupt Doctrines. Learning is no Security against erroneous Principles. The Pharisees and Sadducees were Men of liberal Education, yet leavened with many false Principles: Mat. 16.6. *Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.* And ver. 12. *Then understood they that he bid them not beware of the Leaven of Bread; but of the Doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.* Learning will not cure those Distempers of the Heart that do expose Men to false Opinions; Learning will not cure the Pride and Conceitedness of Mens Hearts. Men of Learning may lean too much to their own Understanding. Men of Learning may be led aside by reading erroneous Books. Learned Education will not deliver Men from carnal Reason: Men of corrupt Affections are very inclinable to imbibe bad Principles: Men of Learning may be blind Men. Christ says of the Pharisees, *They be blind, Leaders of the Blind,*

PAGE 6: Mat. 15.14. Most of the Errors in the World in Matters of Religion, have been hatched by Men of Learning, *Arius, Socinus, Arminius, and Pelagius* were learned Men: Errors in Religion have been generally the Off-spring of great Scholars, have been propagated by them. And Men may be moral Men that have no experience of the Work of God upon their Hearts. Men may be zealous Men against Drunkenness and Whoredom, that have no saving Knowledge of Christ. Many moral Men have no Communion with God; no Experience of a saving Change in their own Souls. Men may be very moral and have no Experience of a Work of Humiliation, or being bro't off from their own Righteousness, or a Work of Faith; of the Difference that is between the common and special Work of the Spirit; of the Difference between saving & common illumination, of the working of the Heart under Temptation, of the Way wherein godly Men are wont to find Relief. Every learned & moral Man is not a sincere Convert, and so not able to speak exactly and experimentally to such Things as Souls want to be instructed in. It is as with a Man that has seen a Map of a Country, or has read a great deal about it; he can't tell the Way between Town and Town, and Hundreds of particular Circumstances, as a Man that has travelled or lived there is able to do. Experience fits Men to teach others. A Man that has himself had only a common Work of the Spirit and judges it saving, is very unfit to judge of the State of other Men. Men would not put their Lives into the Hands of an unskilful Physician, or trust their Ship with an unskilful Pilot, or an intricate Case depending in the Law with an unskilful Lawyer.

USE I. *Of Examination;* Whether it be not thus in this Country? It is notoriously known by those that are acquainted with the State of the Christian World,

PAGE 7: that tho' there be many eminent Truths taught, yet there is a great want of good Preaching; whence it come to pass, that among Professors a Spirit of Piety runs exceeding low. But it is proper for us to take Notice how it is among our selves; and tho' it be very evident that there is a great deal of good Preaching in the Land, and the way of Salvation is preached with a great deal of Plainness & Power, and many Men are very faithful to declare all

the Counsel of God; yet there may be cause of Lamentation, that there is a great deal wanting in some Places: Some may be very much to blame in not Preaching as they ought to.

I. *If any be taught that frequently Men are ignorant of the Time of their Conversion, that is not good Preaching:* Some are of that Opinion, and its like they may drink it in from their Ministers. This is a Delusion, and it may do them a great deal of Hurt; it hardens Men in their natural Condition. *Paul* knew the Time of his Conversion; *At Midday, O King, I saw a Light from Heaven, above the Brightness of the Sun, Act. 26.13.* Men are frequently at a Loss whether their Conversion were true or not; but surely Men that are converted must take some Notice of the Time when God made a Change in them: Conversion is a great Change, from Darkness to Light, from Death to Life, from the Borders of Dispair to a Spirit of Faith in Christ. As for the outward Conversation, there is sometimes little Difference; Men might carry very well before; But as to the Frame of Mens Hearts, there is a very great Difference. Formerly they were under the reigning Power of Objections against the Gospel, when converted they receive it as a Divine Truth; before they were converted they were under a Sentence of Condemnation, now they have Peace with God through Jesus Christ. Men are generally a long Time seeking Conversion, labouring to get an

PAGE 8: Interest in Christ; and it would be much if when God reveals Christ to them, they should not take Notice of it when the Change is made; ten to one but Conscience will take Notice of it. When a Seaman comes into the Harbour, when a Prisoner is pardoned, when a Victory is obtained, when a Disease is broke, it would be much if Men should take no Notice of them. Conversion is the greatest Change that Men undergo in this World, surely it falls under Observation. The Prodigal knew well enough the Time of his Return to his Father's House: The Children of Israel knew the Time of their passing over Jordan.

2. *If any be taught that Humiliation is not necessary before Faith, that is nor good Preaching.* Such Doctrine has been taught privately and publicly, and is a Means to make some Men mistake their Condition, and think themselves happy when they are miserable: For Men must be brought off from their own Righteousness before they be brought to Christ. Men that think they have any Thing to Appease the Wrath of God and ingratiate themselves, will not accept the Calls of the Gospel in Sincerity. While People have a Foundation to build upon, they will not build upon Christ. A Self righteous Spirit is quite contrary to the Gospel: If Men be Self-righteous Men, they will not judge it fair for God to cast them off. Men that depend upon the Justice of God, will not depend upon the meer Mercy of God. Men that lay Claim to Heaven from their own Works, will not depend on that Plea that Christ has given his Life a Ransom for many, and has redeemed us from the Curse being made a Curse for us. Multitudes of Men are ruined by building upon a sandy Foundation. Men must see their Malady, before they see their Remedy. Men must be led into the Understanding of the Badness of their Hearts and the strictness of the Law, before they

PAGE 9 will be convinced of the Preciousness of Christ. Men that can heal their own Consciences, will not come to Christ for Heal-

ing. Men must be driven by Necessity indeed before they come to Christ. Tho' Men feel great Terrors and live a tormented Life, yet they will not come to Christ, till driven out of themselves. Men must feel themselves dead in Sin, in order to their believing a Rom. 7.9. *Sin revived, and I died.* Men must see themselves poor and miserable, wretched and blind & naked, before they receive that Counsel of buying of Christ Gold tried in the Fire, and white Raiment, Rev. 3. 17. 18.

3. *When Men don't preach much about the Danger of Damnation, there is want of good Preaching.* Some Ministers preach much about moral Duties, and the blessed Estate of godly Men, but don't seek to awaken Sinners and make them sensible of their Danger; they cry for Reformation: These Things are very needful in their Places to be spoken unto; but if Sinners don't hear often of Judgment and Damnation, few will be converted. Many Men are in a deep Sleep, and flatter themselves as if there was no Hell, or at least that God will not deal so harshly with them as to damn them, Psal. 36. 2. *He flattereth himself in his own Eyes, until his Iniquity be found to be hateful.* They need to be told of the Terrors of the Lord, that they may flee from Wrath to come: A little Matter will not scare Men, their Hearts are as hard as a Stone, as hard as a Piece of the nether Milstone, and they will be ready to laugh at the shaking of the Spear. Ministers must give them no Rest in such a Condition: They must pull them as Brands out of the Burnings. It is well if Thunder and Lightning will awaken them: They had need to fear that they may work our their Salvation with Fear and Trembling. Ministers are faulty when they speak to them with Gentleness, as *Eli* rebuked his Sons. Christ Jesus often warned them of the Dan-

PAGE 10: ger of Damnation: Mat. 5. 29, 30. *It is better that one of thy Members should perish, and not that thy whole Body should be cast into Hell.* Mat 7. 13. *Broad is the Gate and wide is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be that go in there at.* Mat. 13. 42. *The Angels shall cast them into a Furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of Teeth.* So also, Mat. 22. 13. Mat. 25. 41, 16. This for our Imitation. Christ knew how to deal with Souls, and *Paul* followed his Example. Men need to be terrified and have the Arrows of the Almighty in them that they may be converted. Ministers should be Sons of Thunder: Men had need have Storms in their Hearts, before they will betake themselves to Christ for Refuge: When they are pricked at the Heart, then they will say, *What must we do to be saved?* Men must be fired out of their Worldliness and Sloth: Men must be driven as *Lot was out of Sodom.* Reason will govern Men in other Things: but it is Fear that must make them diligently to seek Salvation: If they be but thoroughly convinced of their Danger, that will make them go to God and take Pains.

4. *If they give a wrong Account of the Nature of Justifying Faith; that is not good Preaching.* Justifying Faith is set forth in the Scripture by many figurative Expressions; coming to Christ, opening to him, sitting under his Shadow, flying to him for Refuge, building on him as on a Foundation, feeding on him, E'c. These Expressions do imply not only an Act of Understanding, but also an Act of the Will, accepting of him, depending on him. This Doctrine is despised by some, and Faith in Christ is said to be only a Perswasion of the Truth of the Christian Religion. This is the Way to make Multi-

tudes of carnal Men secure, and to flatter themselves as if they were in a good Condition: They say, they are not Heathens, Turks, nor Jews, but they believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, they hope they

PAGE 11: are Believers; but Multitudes of People have such a Faith that will fall short of eternal Life: Joh. 2. 23, 24. *Many believed in his Name, when they saw the Miracles that he did; but Jesus did not commit himself unto them.* Joh. 12. 42, 43. *Among the chief Rulers many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him.* The Faith of some Men is only a Perswasion from their Education: As Heathens do receive the Religion of their Fore-fathers by Tradition, so these do receive the Christian Religion from Hearsay. But true justifying Faith is wrought in Men by the mighty Power of God; 2 Thes. I. II. *That he would work in you the Work of Faith with Power.* Eph. I. 19. 20. *And what is the exceeding greatness of his Power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty Power; which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the Dead?* By justifying Faith, Men answer the Calls of God, relinquishing their own Righteousness, place their Dependance only on the Mediation of Christ; Heb. 6. 18. *They flee for Refuge, to lay hold on the Hope that is set before them.* Justifying Faith is a living Principle that sanctifies Men; Act. 15. 9. *Purifying their Hearts by Faith.* Many Men have a common Perswasion of the Truth of the Gospel, that are utterly destitute of Holiness: But true justifying Faith is always accompanied with an holy Life. Where there is Faith, there is every other Grace: Act. 26. 18. *Sanctified by Faith that is in me. ...*

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6. *If any teach Men to build their Faith about the divine Authority of the Scripture upon probable Signs, that it is not good Preaching.* There be many probable Ar-

PAGE 13: guments for the Authority of the sacred Scriptures; As the eminency of the Penmen, and they have had a mighty Efficacy to make a Change in the Hearts of Men; it is said there were many Miracles wrought for the Confirmation of the Doctrine of them; there has been an Accomplishment of many of the Predictions in them. These Arguments are preponderating and do outweigh all Objections that are brought against the Authority of them. These Considerations may well strengthen the Faith of the People of God; but these Things cannot be the Foundation of our Faith: it is only the certain Knowledge of their Authority, that can be the Foundation of Faith or any other Grace. Men cannot believe them to be infallibly true upon probable Arguments: Probable Arguments must be looked on but as probable and not convincing. Men must have infallible Arguments for loving God and believing his Word; the Foundation of believing the divine Authority of the Scripture, is the Manifestation of the Divine Glory in them. There is a self-evidencing Light in the Works of God: The Creation of the World shew God's Power and God-head, Rom. I. 20. It impossible that the World should be made by any but an infinite God. So there is a Self-evidencing Light in the Word of God; there are such Things revealed there as can be made known by none but God. I Cor. 2. 9. *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, nor hath it entred into the Heart of Man to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love him.* Those eter-

nal Rewards that are spoken of in the Scripture, those perfect Rules that are laid down there, those Accounts that are given of the Mercy of God, and the Justice of God, manifested in the Way of our Salvation, would never have been entred into the Heart of Man to conceive, if it had not been revealed by God; Men would never have thought of such a Way of Salvation, if it had not been declared by God.

PAGE 14: 7. *If Man preach for such Liberties as God doth not allow, that is no good Preaching.* There are many licentious Liberties that are taken by Men, in their Apparel, in their Drinking, in their Dancing, and other Recreations, and in their Discourses upon the Sabbath, and in their Dealings with one another; and if Ministers either vindicate or connive at them, they don't preach as they ought to do. Some Men are but lax Casuists, and they take too great a Liberty themselves, and so do their Wives and Children, and they are afraid to anger Men by reprovng some particular Evils that Men are addicted to, that do prevail in the Land. The Pharisees were such Casuists; Mat. 5. 43. *Ye have heard it hath been said of old, those shalt love thy Neighbour, and hate thine Enemy.* Men should be solemnly warned against all evil Carriages: and if this be omitted, it gives great increase to Sin in the Land. God complains of Ill against Teachers for not reprovng Sinners, Isai. 56. 10. *They are ignorant and blind, dumb Dogs that cannot bark.* If Men were duly reprovng for their Extravagancies, that would be a Means to reclaim them: Jer. 23. 22. *If they had stood in my Counsel, I had caused my People to bear my Words; then they should have turned them from their evil Way and from the Evil of their Doings.* Faithful Preaching would be beneficial two Ways; one Way as it would cut off Occasions of Anger, and prevent those Sins that bring down the Wrath of God on the Land; we should enjoy much more publick Prosperity: The other is, that it would deliver Men from those vicious Practices that are a great hindrance to Conversion. As long as Men live in Way of Intemperance, Injustice, and unsuitable Carriages on the Sabbath, it will be a great Impediment to a thorough Work of Conversion. There may be Conversion tho' Men are not broken off from Sins of Ignorance, but as long as they tolerate themselves in *Immoralities*, that will be a mighty Bar in the Way of their Conversion.

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USE. II. *See the Reason why there is so little Effect of Preaching.* There is much good Preaching, There is very good Preaching in *Old England*, yet there is great want of good Preaching, especially among the Conformists: And there is very good Preaching in *New-England*, and yet there is some want of good Preaching; especially in some Places: And this is one Reason that there is no more Good done.

There is a great Fault in Hearers, they are not studious of the Mind of God; they are Enemies to the Gospel: And when Christ himself preached among them, many did not profit by it. Yet some Preachers are much to blame, and tho' they do preach profitably many Times, yet they have great cause to be humbled for their Defects.

1. *For hence it is that there is so little Conversion.* There is great Complaint in one Country and in another, that there be few converted; it is apparent by Mens unsanctified Lives and their unsavoury Discourses. This is one Reason, there is a great deal of Preaching that doth not much promote it, but is an Hindrance to it. To tell Men that *they may be converted tho' they don't know the Time.* To teach that *there is no need of a Work of Humiliation to prepare them for Christ; and that Faith is nothing else but a Perswasion that the Gospel is true,* is the very Way to make many carnal Men hope that they are converted. It makes other preaching very ineffectual: It makes them think that it is needless to strive for Conversion. Such Preaching hardens Men in their Sins: The want of dealing plainly with Men is the Reason, why there is seldom a Noise among the *dry Bones*. In some Towns there is no such Thing to be observed for *twenty Years together.* And Men continue in a senseless con-

PAGE 18. dition, come to Meeting, and hear Preaching, but are never the better for it. In some Towns godly Men are very thin sown. Most of the People are in as bad a Condition as if they had never heard the Gospel: Go on in a still Way following their worldly Designs, carry on some what of the Form of Godliness, but mind little but the World and the Pleasures of this Life. The Scribes did not preach with Authority, Mat. 7. 29. *And they enter not into the Kingdom of God themselves, and them that were entring in they hindred.* Such Preaching is not mighty *to the pulling down of strong Holds.* Conversion-Work will fail very much where there is not sound Preaching.

2. *Hence many Men that make an high Profession, lead unsanctified Lives: They are not dealt plainly with; and so tho' they profess high, they live very low: They are not dealt roundly with; and they believe they are in a good Estate, and Conscience suffers them to live after a corrupt Manner.* Some of them live a proud and voluptuous Life, and they are not searched as they should be. If they were told their own, that would keep them from saying, that *they were rich & increased in Goods, and had need of nothing.* If they were rebuked sharply, that might be a Means *to make them sound in the Faith,* Tit. I.

13. It might make them not only to reform, but lay a better Foundation for eternal Life, than ever yet was laid. *Paul* was very thorough in his Work, and wherever he came he had the Fulness of the Blessing of the Gospel of Christ, Rom. 15. 29.

THE END

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; considering the result of their conduct imitate their faith. Heb. 13:7

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