

Andrew Fuller,

On pastoral ministry

[To the Rev. Robert Fawkner, at his ordination, at Thorn, Bedfordshire, Oct. 31, 1787.]

THE QUALIFICATIONS AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF A FAITHFUL MINISTER
ILLUSTRATED BY THE CHARACTER AND SUCCESS OF BARNABAS

“He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith;
and much people was added to the Lord.”— Acts xi. 24.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

It is a very important work to which you are this day set apart. I feel the difficulty of your situation. You need both counsel and encouragement; I wish I were better able to administer both. In what I may offer, I am persuaded you will allow me to be free; and understand me, not as assuming any authority or superiority over you, but only as saying that to you which I wish to consider as equally addressed to myself.

Out of a variety of topics that might afford a lesson for a Christian minister, my thoughts have turned, on this occasion, upon that of example. Example has a great influence upon the human mind: examples from Scripture especially, wherein characters the most illustrious in their day, for gifts, grace, and usefulness, are drawn with the pencil of inspiration, have an assimilating tendency. Viewing these, under a Divine blessing, we form some just conceptions of the nature and importance of our work, are led to reflect upon our own defects, and feel the fire of holy emulation kindling in our bosoms.

The particular example, my brother, which I wish to recommend to your attention is that of Barnabas, that excellent servant of Christ and companion of the apostle Paul. You will find his character particularly given in the words I have just read.

Were we to examine the life of this great and good man, as related in other parts of Scripture, we should find the character here given him abundantly confirmed. He seems to have been one of that great company who, through the preaching of Peter and the other apostles, submitted to Christ soon after his ascension; and he gave early proof of his love to him, by selling his possessions, and laying the price at the feet of the apostles for the support of his infant cause. As he loved Christ, so he loved his people. He appears to have possessed much of the tender and affectionate, on account of which he was called “Barnabas – a son of consolation.” Assiduous in discovering and encouraging the first dawnings of God’s work, he was the first person that introduced Saul into the company of the disciples. The next news that we hear of him is in the passage which I have selected. Tidings came to the ears of the church at Jerusalem of the Word of the Lord being prosperous at Antioch, in Syria. The church at Jerusalem was the mother church, and felt a concern for others, like that of a tender mother towards her infant offspring. The young converts at Antioch wanted a nursing father; and who so proper to be sent as Barnabas? He goes; and, far from envying the success of others, who had laboured before him, he “was glad to see the grace of God” so evidently appear; “and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” As a preacher, he does not seem to have been equal to the apostle Paul; yet so far was he from caring about being eclipsed by Paul’s superior abilities, that he went in search of him, and brought him to Antioch, to assist him in the work of the Lord. It may well be said of such a character, that he was a “good man, and full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith.” Oh that we had more such ministers in the church at this day! Oh that we ourselves were like him! Might we not hope, if that were the case, that, according to God’s usual manner of working, more people would be added to the Lord?

There are three things, we see, which are said of Barnabas in a way of commendation: he was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith.” Thus far he is held up for our example: a fourth is added, concerning the effects which followed: “and much people was added unto the Lord.” This seems to be held up for our encouragement. Permit me, my dear brother, to request your candid attention, while I attempt to review these great qualities in Barnabas, and by every motive to enforce them upon you.

I. HE WAS A GOOD MAN. It were easy to prove the necessity of a person being a good man, in order to his properly engaging in the work of the ministry: Christ would not commit his sheep

but to one that loved him. But on this remark I shall not enlarge. I have no reason to doubt, my brother, but that God has given you an understanding to know him that is true, and a heart to love him in sincerity; I trust, therefore, such an attempt, on this occasion, is needless. Nor does it appear to me to be the meaning of the evangelist. It is not barely meant of Barnabas that he was a regenerate man, though that is implied; but it denotes that he was eminently good. We use the word so in common conversation. If we would describe one that more than ordinarily shines in piety, meekness, and kindness, we know not how to speak of him better than to say, With a degree of emphasis, He is a good man. After this eminence in goodness, brother, may it be your concern, and mine, daily to aspire!

Perhaps, indeed, we may have sometimes heard this epithet used with a sneer. Persons who take pleasure in treating others with contempt will frequently, with a kind of proud pity, speak in this manner: Aye, such a one is a good man; leaving it implied that goodness is but an indifferent qualification, unless it be accompanied with greatness. But these things ought not to be. The apostle Paul did not value himself upon those things wherein he differed from other Christians; but upon that which he possessed in common with them – charity, or Christian love. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity; I am nothing.”

My dear brother, value the character of a good man in all the parts of your employment; and, above all, in those things which the world counts great and estimable. More particularly,

1. Value it at home in your family. If you walk not closely with God there, you will be ill able to work for him elsewhere. You have lately become the head of a family. Whatever charge it shall please God, in the course of your life, to place under your care, I trust it will be your concern to recommend Christ and the gospel to them, walk circumspectly before them, constantly worship God with them, offer up secret prayer for them, and exercise a proper authority over them. There is a sort of religious gossiping which some ministers have indulged to their hurt; loitering about perpetually at the houses of their friends, and taking no delight in their own. Such conduct, in a minister and master of a family, must, of necessity, root out all family order, and, to a great degree, family worship; and, instead of endearing him to his friends, it only

exposes him to their just censure. Perhaps they know not how to be so plain as to tell him of it at their own houses; but they will think the more, and speak of it, it is likely, to each other, when he is gone. I trust, my brother, that none of your domestic connexions will have to say when you are gone, He was loose and careless in his conduct, or sour and churlish in his temper; but rather, He was a good man.

2. Value this character in your private retirements. Give yourself up to “the word of God, and to prayer.” The apostle charged Timothy, saying, “Meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them;” or, “be thou in them.” But this will never be, without a considerable share of the good man. Your heart can never be in those things which are foreign to its prevailing temper; and if your heart is not in your work, it will be a poor lifeless business indeed. We need not fear exhausting the Bible, or dread a scarcity of Divine subjects. If our hearts are but kept in unison with the spirit in which the Bible was written, every thing we meet with there will be interesting. The more we read, the more interesting it will appear; and the more we know, the more we shall perceive there is to be known. Beware also, brother, of neglecting secret prayer. The fire of devotion will go out if it be not kept alive by an habitual dealing with Christ. Conversing with men and things may brighten our gifts and parts; but it is conversing with God that must brighten our graces. Whatever ardour we may feel in our public work, if this is wanting, things cannot be right, nor can they in such a train come to a good issue.

2. Value it in your public exercises. It is hard going on in the work of the ministry, without a good degree of spirituality; and yet, considering the present state of human nature, we are in the greatest danger of the contrary. Allow me, brother, to mention two things in particular, each of which is directly opposite to that spirit which I am attempting to recommend. One is, an assumed earnestness, or forced zeal, in the pulpit, which many weak hearers may mistake for the enjoyment of God. But though we may put on violent emotions—may smite with the hand, and stamp with the foot—if we are destitute of a genuine feeling sense of what we deliver, it will be discerned by judicious hearers, as well as by the Searcher of hearts, and will not fail to create disgust. If, on the contrary, we feel and realize the sentiments we deliver, emotions and actions will be the natural expressions of the heart; and this will give weight to the doctrines, exhortations, or reproofs which we inculcate; what we say will come with a kind of Divine authority to the consciences, if not to the hearts of the hearers. The other is, being under the

influence of low, and selfish motives in the exercise of our work. This is a temptation against which we have especial reason to watch and pray. It is right, my brother, for you to be diligent in your public work; to be instant in season and out of season; to preach the gospel not only at Thorn, but in the surrounding villages, wherever a door is opened for you: but while you are thus engaged, let it not be from motives of policy, merely to increase your auditory, but from love to Christ and the souls of your fellow sinners. It is this only that will endure reflection in a dying hour. The apostle Paul was charged by some of the Corinthian teachers with being crafty, and with having caught the Corinthians with guile; but he could say, in reply to all such insinuations, in behalf of himself and his fellow-labourers, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

4. Value it in the general tenor of your behaviour. Cultivate a meek, modest, peaceful, and friendly temper. Be generous and humane. Prove by your spirit and conduct that you are a lover of all mankind. To men in general, but especially to the poor and the afflicted, be pitiful, be courteous. It is this, my brother, that will recommend the gospel you proclaim. Without this, could you preach

with the eloquence of an angel, you may expect that no good end will be answered.

5. Prize the character of the good man above worldly greatness. It is not sinful for a minister, any more than another man, to possess property; but to aspire after it is unworthy of his sacred character. Greatness, unaccompanied with goodness, is valued as nothing by the great God. Kings and emperors, where that is wanting, are but great "beasts, horned beasts," pushing one at another. When Sennacherib vaunted against the church of God, that he would "enter the forest of her Carmel, and cut down her tall cedars," the daughter of Zion is commanded to despise him. God speaks of him as we should speak of a buffalo, or even of an ass: "I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest." Outward greatness, when accompanied with goodness, may be a great blessing; yet, even then, it is the latter, and not the former, that denominates the true worth of a character. Once more,

5. Value it above mental greatness, or greatness in gifts and parts. It is not wrong to cultivate gifts; on the contrary, it is our duty so to do. But, desirable as these are, they are not to be compared with goodness. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," says the apostle, "and yet show I unto

you a more excellent way;” viz, charity, or love. If we improve in gifts and not in grace, to say the least, it will be useless, and perhaps dangerous, both to ourselves and others. To improve in gifts, that we may be the better able to discharge our work, is laudable; but if it be for the sake of popular applause, we may expect a blast. Hundreds of ministers have been ruined by indulging a thirst for the character of the great man, while they have neglected the far superior character of the good man.

Another part of the character of Barnabas was that,

II. HE WAS FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. The Holy Spirit sometimes denotes his extraordinary gifts, as in Acts xix., where the apostle Paul put the question to some believers in Christ whether they had received the Holy Spirit; but here it signifies his indwelling and ordinary operations, or what is elsewhere called “an unction from the Holy One.” This, though more common than the other, is far more excellent. Its fruits, though less brilliant, are abundantly the most valuable. To be able to surmount a difficulty by Christian patience is a greater thing in the sight of God than to remove a mountain. Every work of God bears some mark of Godhead, even a thistle, or a nettle; but there are some of his works which bear a peculiar likeness to his holy moral character: such were the minds of men and angels in their original state. This will serve to illustrate the subject in hand. The extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit are a communication of his power; but in his dwelling in the saints, and the ordinary operations of his grace, he communicates his own holy nature; and this it was of which Barnabas was full. To be full of the Holy Spirit is to be full of the dove, as I may say; or full of those fruits of the Spirit mentioned by the apostle to the Galatians; namely, “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness.”

To be sure, the term *full* is not here to be understood in an unlimited sense; not in so ample a sense as when it is applied to Christ. He was filled with the Spirit without measure, but we in measure. The word is doubtless to be understood in a comparative sense, and denotes as much as that he was habitually under his holy influence. A person that is greatly under the influence of the love of this world is said to be drunken with its cares or pleasures. In allusion to something like this, the apostle exhorts that we “be not drunken with wine, wherein is excess; but filled with the Spirit.” The word “filled,” here, is very expressive; it denotes, I apprehend, being overcome, as it were, with the holy influences and fruits of the blessed Spirit. How necessary is all this, my brother, in your work! Oh how necessary is “an unction from the Holy One!”

1. It is this that will enable you to enter into the spirit of the gospel, and preserve you from destructive errors concerning it. Those who have an unction from the Holy One are said to “know all things; and the anointing which they have received abideth in them, and they need not that any man teach them, but as the same anointing teacheth them all things, and is truth, and is no lie.” We shall naturally fall in with the dictates of that spirit of which we are full. It is for want of this, in a great measure, that the Scriptures appear strange, and foreign, and difficult to be understood. He that is full of the Holy Spirit has the contents of the Bible written, as I may say, upon his heart; and thus its sacred pages are easy to be understood, as “wisdom is easy to him that understandeth.”

It is no breach of charity to say, that if the professors of Christianity had more of the Holy Spirit of God in their hearts, there would be a greater harmony among them respecting the great truths which he has revealed. The rejection of such doctrines as the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the total depravity of mankind, the proper Deity and atonement of Christ, justification by faith in his name, the freeness and sovereignty of grace, and the agency of the Holy Spirit, may easily be accounted for upon this principle. If we are destitute of the Holy Spirit, we are blind to the loveliness of the Divine character, and destitute of any true love to God in our hearts; and if destitute of this, we shall not be able to see the reasonableness of that law which requires love to him with all the heart; and then, of course, we shall think lightly of the nature of those offences committed against him; we shall be naturally disposed to palliate and excuse our want of love to him, yea, and even our positive violations of his law; it will seem hard, very hard indeed, for such little things as these to be punished with everlasting destruction. And now, all this admitted, we shall naturally be blind to the necessity and glory of salvation by Jesus Christ. If sin is so trifling an affair, it will seem a strange and incredible thing that God should become incarnate to atone for it; and hence we shall be very easily persuaded to consider Christ as only a good man, who came into the world to set us a good example; or, at least, that he is not equal with the Father. The freeness and sovereignty of grace also, together with justification by imputed righteousness, will be a very strange sound in our ears. Like the Jews, we shall “go about to establish our own righteousness, and shall not submit to the righteousness of God.” It will seem equally strange and incredible to be told that we are by nature utterly unfit for the kingdom of God; that, therefore, we must be born again; that we are so bad that we cannot even come to

Christ for life, except the Father draw us; yea, and that our best doings, after all, are unworthy of God's notice. It will be no wonder if, instead of receiving these unwelcome and humiliating doctrines, we should coincide with those writers and preachers who think more favourably of our condition, and the condition of the world at large; who either deny eternal punishment to exist, or represent men in general as being in little or no danger of it. And having avowed these sentiments, it will then become necessary to compliment their abettors (including ourselves in the number) as persons of a more rational and liberal way of thinking than other people.

My dear brother, of all things, be this your prayer, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me! "If once we sink into such a way of performing our public work as not to depend on his enlightening and enlivening influences, we may go on, and probably shall go on, from one degree of evil to another. Knowing how to account for the operations of our own minds, without imputing them to a Divine agency, we shall be inclined, in this manner, to account for the operations in the mind of others; and so, with numbers in the present age, may soon call in question even "whether there be any Holy Spirit."

2. Being full of the Holy Spirit will give a holy tincture to your meditation and preaching. There is such a thing as the mind being habitually under the influence of Divine things, and retaining so much of a savour of Christ as that Divine truths shall be viewed and expressed, as I may say, in their own language. Spiritual things will be spiritually discerned, and if spiritually discerned, will be spiritually communicated. There is more in our manner of thinking and speaking upon Divine truth than perhaps, at first sight, we are aware of. A great part of the phraseology of Scripture is by some accounted unfit to be addressed to a modern ear; and is, on this account, to a great degree laid aside, even by those who profess to be satisfied with the sentiments. Whatever may be said in defense of this practice, in a very few instances, such as those where words in a translation are become obsolete, or convey a different idea from what they did at the time of being translated, I am satisfied the practice in general is very pernicious. There are many sermons, that cannot fairly be charged with untruth, which yet have a tendency to lead off the mind from the simplicity of the gospel. If such Scripture terms, for instance, as "holiness, godliness, grace, believers, saints, communion with God," &c., should be thrown aside as savouring too much of cant and enthusiasm, and such terms as morality, virtue, religion, good men, happiness of mind, &c., substituted in their room, it will have an amazing effect upon the

hearers. If such preaching is the gospel, it is the gospel heathenized, and will tend to heathenize the minds of those who deal in it. I do not mean to object to the use of these latter terms, in their place; they are some of them Scriptural terms: what I object to is putting them in the place of others, when discoursing upon evangelical subjects. To be sure, there is a way of handling Divine subjects after this sort that is very clever and very ingenious; and a minister of such a stamp may commend himself, by his ingenuity, to many hearers: but, after all, God's truths are never so acceptable and savoury to a gracious heart as when clothed in their own native phraseology. The more you are filled, my brother, with an unction from the Holy One, the greater relish you will possess for that savoury manner of conveying truth which is so plentifully exemplified in the Holy Scriptures. Further,

3. It is this that will make the doctrines you preach, and the duties you inculcate, seem fitted in your lips. I allude to a saying of the wise man: "The words of the wise are pleasant, if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips." It is expected that there should be an agreement between the character of the speaker and the things which are spoken. "Excellent speech becometh not a fool." Exhortations to holiness come with an ill grace from the lips of one who indulges himself in iniquity. The opposite of this is what I mean by the doctrines and duties of religion being fitted in your lips. It is this that will make your face shine, when you come forth in your public labours, like the face of Moses when he had been conversing with God in the holy mount.

4. It is this that will give a spiritual savour to your conversation in your visits to your friends. Though religious visits may be abused; yet you know, brother, the necessity there is for them, if you would ascertain the spiritual condition of those to whom you preach. There are many faults also that you may discover in individuals which it would be unhandsome, as well as unfriendly, to expose in a pointed manner in the pulpit, which nevertheless ought not to be passed by unnoticed. Here is work for your private visits; and, in proportion as you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you will possess a spirit of love and faithfulness, which is absolutely necessary to successful reproof. It is in our private visits also that we can be free with our people, and they with us. Questions may be asked and answered, difficulties solved, and the concerns of the soul discussed. Paul taught the Ephesians, not only publicly, but "from house to house." Now it is

being full of the Holy Spirit that will give a spiritual savour to all this conversation. It will be as the holy anointing oil on Aaron's garments, which diffused a savour on all around him.

5. This will also teach you how you ought to behave yourself in every department you are called to occupy. It will serve instead of ten thousand rules; and all rules without it will be of no account. This it is that will teach you to be of a meek, mild, peaceful, humble spirit. It will make such a spirit be natural to you. "As touching brotherly love," said the apostle to the Thessalonians, "ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another."

6. In short, it is this that will denominate you the man of God. Such was Barnabas, and such, my brother, was your predecessor, whose memory is dear to many of us;¹ and such, according to all that I have heard, was his predecessor, whose memory is equally dear to many here present.² Each, in his day, was a burning and shining light; but they shine here no more. May you, my brother, and each of us, be followers of them, as they also were of Christ!

Another part of the character of Barnabas is,

III. HE WAS FULL OF FAITH. It may be difficult to ascertain with precision the real meaning and extent of this term; but, I should think, in this connexion it includes, at least, the three following ideas: – having the mind occupied with Divine sentiment; being rooted and grounded in the truth of the gospel, and daily living upon it. The first of these ideas distinguished him from those characters whose minds are void of principle; the next, from such as are always hovering upon the borders of scepticism; and the last, from those who, though they have no manner of doubts about the truth of the doctrines of the gospel, yet scarcely ever, if at all, feel their vital influence upon their hearts and lives. Let us review each of these a little more particularly.

1. His mind was well occupied, or stored, with Divine sentiment. How necessary is this to a gospel minister! It is to be feared that many young men have rushed into the work of the Lord without any decided principles of their own; yea, and have not only begun in such a state of mind, but have continued so all through their lives. Alas! what can the churches expect from such characters? What can such a void produce? How can we feed others with knowledge and understanding if we ourselves are destitute of them? To say the least, such ministers will be but

¹ The Rev. David Evans.

² The Rev, William Butfield.

“unprofitable servants.” But this is not all; a minister that is not inured to think for himself is constantly exposed to every false sentiment, or system, that happens to be presented to him. We sometimes hear of a person changing his sentiments; and, doubtless, in many cases it is just and right he should change them: but there are cases in which that mode of speaking is very improper; for, in reality, some persons have no sentiments of their own to change; they have only changed the sentiments of some one great man for those of another.

2. He had a firm persuasion of the truth of that gospel which he preached to others. He was rooted and grounded in the gospel. The great controversy of that day was whether the gospel was true; whether Jesus was the Messiah; whether he, who so lately expired on the cross, was the Son of God; and whether his death was the way to obtain eternal life. There were great temptations for a person who should view things through a medium of sense to think otherwise. The popular opinion went against it. To the Jews it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Those who adhered to the gospel, thereby exposed themselves to cruel persecutions. But Barnabas was full of faith;” he was decidedly on the Lord’s side; he “believed on the Son of God,” and had the “witness “of the truth of his gospel “within himself.”

Preaching the gospel is bearing a testimony for God; but we shall never be able to do this to any good purpose, if we be always hesitating and indulging a sceptical disposition. There is no need of a dogmatical, overbearing temper; but there is need of being rooted and grounded in the truths of God. “Be not carried about,” said the apostle to the Hebrews, “with strange doctrines: it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.” But he elsewhere condemns the character of those who are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

3. That gospel which he preached to others he himself lived upon. “The word preached,” we are told, “did not profit some, because it was not mixed with faith in them that heard it.” This will equally hold good in the case of the preacher as of the hearer. If we mix not faith with the doctrine we deliver, it will not profit us. Whatever abilities we may possess, and of whatever use we may be made to others, unless we can say, in some sort, with the apostle John, “That which we have seen with our eyes, and looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life—that declare we unto you,” our own souls may, notwithstanding, everlastingly perish! This is a very serious matter, and well deserves our attention as ministers. Professors in the age of Barnabas might be under greater temptations than we are to question whether Jesus was the true

Messiah; but we are under greater temptations than they were of resting in a mere implicit assent to the Christian religion, without realizing and living upon its important truths.

The studying of Divine truth as preachers rather than as Christians, or, in other words, studying it for the sake of finding out something to say to others, without so much as thinking of profiting our own souls, is a temptation to which we are more than ordinarily exposed. If we studied Divine truths as Christians, our being constantly engaged in the service of God would be friendly to our growth in grace. We should be “like trees planted by the rivers of waters, that bring forth fruit in their season,” and all that we did would be likely to “prosper.” But if we study it only as preachers, it will be the reverse. Our being conversant with the Bible will be like surgeons and soldiers being conversant with the shedding of human blood, till they lose all sensibility concerning it. I believe it is a fact that, where a preacher is wicked, he is generally the most hardened against conviction of any character whatever. Happy will it be for us if, like Barnabas, we are “full of faith” in that Saviour whom we recommend – in that gospel which it is our employment to proclaim.

IV. We now come to the last part of the subject, which is held up by way of encouragement: AND MUCH PEOPLE WAS ADDED UNTO THE LORD. When our ministry is blessed to the conversion of sinners, to the bringing them off from their connexion with sin and self to a vital union with Christ; when our congregations are filled, not merely with professors of religion, but with sound believers; when such believers come forward and offer themselves willingly for communion, saying, “We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you;” then it may be said that “much people is added unto the Lord.” The connexion between such additions, and eminency in grace and holiness in a minister, deserves our serious attention.

I think it may be laid down as a rule, which both Scripture and experience will confirm, that eminent spirituality in a minister is usually attended with eminent usefulness. I do not mean to say our usefulness depends upon our spirituality, as an effect depends upon its cause; nor yet that it is always in proportion to it. God is a Sovereign; and frequently sees proper to convince us of it, in variously bestowing his blessing on the means of grace. But yet he is not wanting in giving encouragement to what he approves, wherever it is found. Our want of usefulness is often to be ascribed to our want of spirituality, much oftener than to our want of talents. God has frequently been known to succeed men of inferior abilities, when they have been eminent for holiness,

while he has blasted others of much superior talents, when that quality has been wanting. Hundreds of ministers, who, on account of their gifts, have promised to be shining characters, have proved the reverse; and all owing to such things as pride, unwatchfulness, carnality, and levity.

Eminency in grace, my brother, will contribute to your success in three ways:

1. It will fire your soul with holy love to Christ and the souls of men; and such a spirit is usually attended with success. I believe you will find that, in almost all the great works which God has wrought, in any period of time, he has honoured men of this character, by making them his instruments. In the midst of a sore calamity upon the murmuring Israelites, when God was inclined to show mercy, it was by the means of his servant Aaron running with a censer of fire in his hand, and standing between the living and the dead! The great reformation that was brought about in the days of Hezekiah was by the instrumentality of a man “who wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God;” and then it follows, “and in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.”

There was another great reformation in the Jewish church, about the time of their return from Babylon. One of the chief instruments in this work was Ezra, “a ready scribe in the law of his God” – a man who had “prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” – a man who “fasted and prayed at the river Ahava,” previously to his great undertaking – a man who was afterwards “sorely astonished, and in heaviness, and would eat no meat, nor drink water, but fell upon his knees, and spread out his hands unto the Lord his God, on account of the transgressions of the people.” Another great instrument in this work was Nehemiah, a man that devoted himself wholly to the service of God and his people, labouring night and day, and was not to be seduced by the intrigues of God’s adversaries, nor yet intimidated by their threatenings; but persevered in his work till it was finished, closing his labours with this solemn prayer and appeal, “Think upon me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.”

Time would fail me to speak of all the great souls, both inspired and uninspired, whom the King of kings has delighted to honour: of Paul, and Peter, and their companions; of Wickliff, and Luther, and Calvin, and many others at the Reformation; of Elliot, and Edwards, and Brainerd,

and Whitefield, and hundreds more whose names are held in deserved esteem in the church of God. These were men of God; men who had great grace, as well as gifts; whose hearts burned in love to Christ and the souls of men. They looked upon their hearers as their Lord had done upon Jerusalem, and wept over them. In this manner they delivered their messages; “and much people were added unto the Lord.”

2. Eminency in grace will direct your ends to the glory of God, and the welfare of men’s souls; and where this is the case, it is usually attended with a blessing. These are ends which God himself pursues; and if we pursue the same, we are “labourers together with God,” and may hope for his blessing to attend our labours; but if we pursue separate and selfish ends, we walk contrary to God, and may expect God to walk contrary to us. Whatever apparent success may attend the labours of a man whose ends are evil, all is to be suspected; either the success is not genuine, or, if it be, it is not in a way of blessing upon him, nor shall it turn out, at last, to his account. It must be an inexpressible satisfaction, brother, to be able to say as the primitive ministers and apostles did: “James, a servant of God – Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ– We seek not yours, but you.”

3. Eminency in grace will enable you to bear prosperity in your ministry without being lifted up with it; and so contribute towards it. It is written of Christ, in prophecy, “He shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear the glory.” He does bear it indeed; but to bear glory without being elated is no easy thing for us. I am often afraid lest this should be one considerable reason why most of us have no more real success in our work than we have; perhaps it is not safe for us to be much owned of God; perhaps we have not grace enough to bear prosperity.

My dear brother, permit me to conclude with a word or two of serious advice. First, “Watch over your own soul, as well as the souls of your people.” Do not forget that ministers are peculiarly liable, while they keep the vineyard of others, to neglect their own. Further, “Know your own weakness, and depend upon Christ’s all-sufficiency.” Your work is great, your trials may be many; but let not your heart be discouraged. Remember what was said to the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness; “and the reflection which he makes upon it, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” Finally, Be often looking to the end of your course, and viewing yourself as giving an account of your stewardship. We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and give account of the

deeds done in the body. Perhaps there is no thought more solemn than this, more suitable to be kept in view in all our undertakings, more awakening in a thoughtless hour, or more cheering to an upright heart.

I have only to request, my dear brother, that you will excuse the freedom of this plain address. I have not spoken so much to instruct you in things which you know not, as to remind and impress you with things which you already know. The Lord bless you, and grant that the solemnities of this day may ever be remembered with satisfaction, both by you and your people!

SERMON VIII.

[To the Baptist Church at Cannon Street, Birmingham, at the ordination of Rev. Thomas Morgan
to the Pastoral Office. June 23, 1802.]

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THE OBEDIENCE OF CHURCHES TO THEIR PASTORS EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” – Heb. xiii. 17.

IT is not usual, I believe, for ministers in their ordinary labours to dwell upon the obligations of the people of their charge towards them. They feel, probably, that on such a subject they might be suspected of partiality to themselves; and if such a suspicion were indulged, however just and proper their admonitions might be, they would be but of little use, and might operate to their disadvantage.

Nor is it a subject that a humble and holy man would ordinarily choose, even though there were no danger of misconstruction; he had rather inspire in his people the love of Christ and of one another, hoping that if this prevailed, it would constrain them to whatever was proper towards himself. It does not follow, however, that this species of Christian duty ought never to be insisted on the glory of God, the success of the church, and the spiritual advantage of individuals will be found to be involved in it. No man could more strenuously renounce an undue assumption of power than the apostle Paul; in many instances, he forbore to insist upon the authority that Christ had given him; yet, when addressing the churches in the behalf of others, he uniformly insists upon the treatment which private members owe to their pastors, as well as upon other relative duties. To this I may add, if there be any one time in which an exhortation on this subject is peculiarly seasonable, it is when the relation between pastor and people is publicly solemnized. I shall, therefore, proceed to explain and enforce the exhortation which I have read to you.

I. Let us endeavour to ascertain WHEREIN CONSISTS THAT OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION WHICH IS REQUIRED OF A PEOPLE TOWARDS THEIR PASTOR. The very terms *rule*, *obey*, and *submit* may be grating in the ears of some; and true it is that there have been great abuses of these things; a great deal of priestly domination has been exercised in the name of Christ. Yet there must be rule in the church of Christ as well as in other societies. Without this, it would not be a body, growing up unto him in all things which is the Head, even Christ; but a number of scattered bones. Or, if all aspired to rule and guidance, the question of the apostle would here be applicable – “If the whole were an eye, where were the hearing? But now hath God set the members, every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” Christian ministers are called overseers, as having the oversight of the flock, and the principal direction of its concerns.

The church of Christ, however, is not subject to a despotic government. Ministers are forbidden to “lord it over God’s heritage.” The power that was given them, and all other officers, ordinary or extraordinary, – was for edification, and not for destruction. There are three things which are necessary in order that the authority of a pastor be legitimate and unobjectionable; namely, that he be freely chosen by the church; that the standard by which he rules be not his own will, but the will of Christ; and that the things which he urges on others be equally binding on himself.

First, It is necessary that your pastor be freely chosen by you to his sacred office. If he had been imposed upon you by any human authority, against or without your own consent, I should not be able to prove, from the Scriptures, that you were bound to obey or submit to him. Should it be alleged that pastors are represented as the “gifts of God,” and such as the “Holy Spirit hath made overseers;” I should answer, True; but the Holy Spirit performs this work, not immediately, but mediately, by inclining the hearts of his people to choose them. No one, indeed, pretends that it is done immediately. Human choice is, in all cases, concerned; and the only question is, whether it be by that of the people, or of some one, or more, that shall choose on their behalf. The primitive churches elected their own officers. The apostles ordained them; but it was by the suffrage of the people. The power of election was with them; and with them it continued during the purest ages of the church. If the primitive pastors had been chosen by the apostles, it had also been their province to have rejected or silenced them, as occasion should

require; but when false teachers arose among the Corinthians and the Galatians, we do not find these churches, not even the purest part of them, applying to the apostle, but the apostle to them, for their removal. The false teachers of the primitive times ingratiated themselves with the people, and despised the apostles; an incontestable proof this, to every one acquainted with human nature, where the powers of election and rejection lay. If your pastor, I say again, had been imposed upon you by any human authority, against or without your own consent, I should not be able to prove, from the Scriptures, that you were bound to obey, or submit to him. But it is not so. You have heard him and known him; and from an observation of his spirit and conduct, and an experience of the advantages of his ministry, you have chosen him to watch over you in the Lord.

Secondly, The rule to which you are required to yield obedience and subjection is not his will, but the will of Christ. Pastors are that to a church which the executive powers, or magistrates, of a free country are to the state – the organs of the law. Submission to them is submission to the law. If your pastor teach any other doctrine, or inculcate any other duties, than what Christ has left on record, obey him not; but while urging these, it is at your peril to resist him; for, resisting him, you resist him that sent him. It is in this view, as teaching Divine truth and enforcing Divine commands, that the servants of God, in all ages, have been invested with Divine authority. Of the sons of Levi, it was said, they shall teach Jacob “thy judgments,” and Israel “thy law;” and, upon this ground, it was added, “Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands; smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.” Here lay the sin of Korah and his company, of Elymas the sorcerer, and of Alexander the coppersmith: they each, by resisting the servants of God in the proper execution of their work, resisted God, and brought upon themselves the sorest of judgments.

Thirdly, The things which he urges upon you are equally binding upon himself. When he exhibits to you the only name given under heaven, among men, by which you can be saved, and charges you, on pain of eternal damnation, not to neglect it, remember his own soul also is at stake. And, when he exhorts and warns you, if he himself should privately pursue a contrary course, he seals his own destruction.

There are, it is true, those who lade men – with heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, to which they themselves will not put one of their fingers; these, however, are not the commands of Christ. Instead of being the commands of Christ, which are not grievous, except to unholy men, these are merely human traditions; but though they were allowed to be otherwise, the inconsistent conduct of ministers would not exempt either them or you from obligation. Should we enforce the will of Christ upon you, while living in the neglect of it ourselves, woe be unto us! Yet this will fall upon our own heads. If we be wicked, depose us from our office; but while we are in it, let not the word of the Lord be disregarded on our account.

Let me point out a few particulars, brethren, in which it is your duty and interest to obey him whom you have chosen to have the rule over you, and to submit yourselves.

1. With respect to his public ministry. Do not fly in the face of plain-dealing from the pulpit. Good sense, as well as the fear of God, will, I trust, preserve your pastor from dealing in personal reflections, or any thing designed to offend; but do not be unwilling that he should come close to cases and consciences. You may as well have no minister, as one that never makes you feel. I hope the house of God will continue to be to you what it has been – a rest in times of trouble, a house of consolation; but do not go with a desire merely to be comforted. Go, as well, to learn your failings and defects, and in the hope of having them corrected. It is not the mere hearer, but the doer of the word, that is blessed in his work. I hope you will always exercise your judgments as to what you hear, and compare it with the oracles of God; but if you attend preaching merely as judges of its orthodoxy, you will derive no advantage to yourselves, and may do much harm to others. It is the humble Christian, who hears that he may be instructed, corrected, and quickened in the ways of God, who will obtain that consolation which the gospel affords.

2. With respect to his private visits. You do not expect him to visit you in the character of a saunterer, but of a pastor; and if so, it becomes you to be open to a free exchange of sentiments on your best interests. No minister is always alike prepared for profitable conversation, and some much less so than others; but if he perceive in you a desire after it, it will be much more easily introduced. Be free to communicate your cases to him. It will assist him in his preaching more than a library of expositors; and if, while you are conversing with him, he should be directed to impart to you the mind of Christ, as suited to your particular case, do not treat it lightly, but submit yourselves to it.

3. In presiding in your occasional assemblies. When you meet together as a Christian church, for the adjustment of your concerns, he is entitled to your respect. Every society places so much authority in its president as shall be necessary to check disorderly individuals, and to preserve a proper decorum. It will doubtless become him, especially while he is a young man, to be gentle and temperate in the exercise of authority; and it will no less become you to submit to it. When churches enter into disputes with heat and bitterness— when all are speakers, and respect is paid to no one more than to another – they debase themselves below the character even of civilized societies.

4. In the private reproofs which he may have occasion to administer. You do not wish that your pastor should deal in personal reflections from the pulpit; yet there are cases in which reproof requires to be personal; he must, therefore, if he discharge his duty, be free and faithful in telling you of what he sees amiss in you. It has long appeared to me that there are some species of faults in individual members which are not proper objects of church censure, but of pastoral admonition; such as spiritual declensions, hesitating on important truths, neglect of religious duties, worldly anxiety, and the early approaches to any evil course. A faithful pastor, with an eye of watchful tenderness, will perceive the first symptoms of spiritual disorder, and, by a timely hint, will counteract its operations; whereas if nothing be said or done till the case requires the censure of the church, the party may be excluded, but is seldom recovered. You may easily suppose this to be a self-denying work for your pastor; he had much rather visit you with a smile of affectionate congratulation; yet it may be of the first importance to you and to the church. Do not render this disagreeable part of his work more disagreeable by an irritable and resentful disposition; but receive reproofs with candour. “Correction may be grievous to him that forsaketh the way; but he that hateth reproof shall die.”

II. Let us observe THE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH THIS OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION ARE ENFORCED.

These you will perceive are partly taken from the regard you bear to yourselves – “they watch for your souls;” partly from your sympathy with them – “that they may do it with joy, and not with grief;” and even that part which seems to respect their comfort ultimately concerns your own; for if they discharge their work with grief, “that will be unprofitable for you.” Give us your serious and candid attention, brethren, while we review these important motives.

1. Your pastor “watches for your souls.” Your salvation, let me presume, will be his great concern; and, while pursuing this, you may well be expected to concur with him, and submit yourselves to him in the Lord. You would submit to a surgeon who was performing an operation to save your life; or to a counsellor who should offer you his advice for the security of your property; or to a commander who should lead you forth to save your country: but these are inferior objects, when compared with your soul. Observe the force of every term.

They “watch.” The word literally signifies to keep awake. Here it denotes vigilance. Ministers are as watchmen on the walls or in the streets of a city, by whose care and fidelity the inhabitants enjoy security. Their work is to rise early, to sit up late, and to eat the bread of care; for so it is that God giveth his beloved sleep. Aware of your temptations and dangers, he must be continually on the watch, that he may be ready to give the alarm. He may be thinking, and caring, and praying for you, – when you think but little of him, and perhaps, in some instances, when you think but little of yourselves. Do not hinder him, but help him in his work.

They watch for you. Recollect that you are watched on all sides, but not in this manner. Satan watches you; but it is that he may seize his opportunity to destroy you. He watches you as a wolf does a sheep-fold; but your pastor, as a faithful shepherd, to protect and save you. The world also will watch you, and that with the eye of an enemy, waiting for your halting; but he with the tender solicitude of a father, to do you good. Do not oppose him in this his important work.

They watch for your souls. If your pastor were stationed to watch over your health, property, or life, and should discharge his trust with skill and fidelity, you would think him worthy of your esteem; but it is not for these things that he is principally concerned. He would doubtless be happy to do you good in any way; but neither of these employments is his peculiar province. You employ other persons to watch for you in such matters. Nothing less than your immortal interests must engage his attention. He watches for that compared with which kingdoms and empires are but trifles; for that which if gained, all is gained; and which if lost, all is lost, and lost for ever. Do not resist him in his work, but concur with him.

They watch as those that must give account. How important a station! There is an account for every one to give of himself; but a pastor has not only to do this in common with his people, but must also give account of them. At his hands the chief Shepherd will require it. And what will be the account of your pastor? Will he be able to say, concerning you, “Here I am, and the children

whom the Lord hath given me?" Oh that he might! But it is much to be feared that some of you who are this day committed to his charge will in that day be missing! And what account will he then have to give? Will he not have to say, Lord, some of them have neglected thy word; some have resisted it; some have reproached me for preaching it; some have deserted it and turned aside after lying vanities; some, who have continued, have not received the love of the truth, that they might be saved: hearing, they have heard, and not understood; seeing, they have seen, and not perceived; their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed? And what if, when interrogated, he should not be able to acquit himself? What if it should prove that he did not warn you, nor seek after you, nor care for you? Ah, then you will perish, and your blood will be required at his hand! Who, alas! who is sufficient for these things? At all events, for your own sake, and for his sake, do not hinder him in his work. Woe unto him if he preach not the gospel! and woe unto you if you oppose him in it! Do not object to his dealing faithfully, both in and out of the pulpit, so that it be aimed for your good. Do not hinder him in the work of reproof, by siding with transgressors. In short, if you have any regard to your own souls, or the souls of others, obey the counsels of Heaven, which are communicated to you through his ministry, and submit yourselves.

2. The discharge of this his work will be either joy or grief, according to the spirit of the people among whom he labours. You do not wish, I dare say, to grieve and distress a servant of Christ. Better would it be never to have chosen him than to break his heart; yet such things are!

If, in his public preaching, he have a zealous, modest, attentive, wise, and affectionate people, constant and early in attending, candid and tender-hearted in hearing, and desirous of obtaining some spiritual advantage from all they hear, you cannot conceive what joy it will afford him. He will pray for you, and preach to you, with abundantly the more interest. And this being the case, it may contribute not a little to the success of his labours; for God works not only by the word preached, but by the effects of it in the spirit of believers. The apostle supposes that some, on whom the word itself had no influence, might yet be won by the chaste conversation of the godly females. But if he have a slothful, selfish, cold-hearted, cavilling, conceited, and contentious audience, what a source of grief must it be to him! The meekest of men was overcome by such a people, and tempted to wish that God would kill him out of hand, rather than continue to cause him thus to see his wretchedness.

If, in adjusting the concerns of the church, every individual consider that others have understanding as well as himself, and have the same right to be heard and regarded; if all strive to act in concert, and never oppose a measure from humour, but merely from conscience, or a persuasion that it is wrong; such things to a pastor must needs be a source of joy. But if pride and self-will prevail, they will produce confusion and every evil work; and this, if he have any regard to religion or to you, will be the grief of his soul.

If the deacons whom you have chosen to be helpers in the truth be wise, faithful, active, and tender-hearted, ready to stand by their pastor in every right cause, willing to impart the counsel of maturer years, and careful to preserve the purity and peace of the church, his duties will be discharged with joy. But if they mind earthly things, and leave all to him, or though they should be active, yet if it be with the spirit of a Diotrephes, instead of diminishing his load, they will increase it, and render his work a daily grief.

If, in the exercise of discipline, there be a unity of heart, a willingness to follow God's word, whoever may be affected by it – if, like the tribe of Levi, you in such matters “know not your father, nor your mother, nor acknowledge your brethren, nor know your own children; but observe God's word, and keep his covenant” – this, to an upright man, will be a source of joy and solid satisfaction. But if, whenever a censure requires to be inflicted, no unanimity can be obtained – if regard be had to friends and family connexions, to the setting aside of Christ's revealed will – nothing will be done with effect. The zeal of a few will be attributed to prejudice; and the person concerned, instead of being convinced and humbled, will be hardened in his sin. Thus the work of the ministry will be a burden of grief.

Finally, If you be a spiritual, affectionate, and peaceable people, your pastor will perform his work with joy; but if you be carnal and contentious – if there be whisperings, swellings, tumults, party attachments, jealousies, antipathies, scandals – alas! he may sow, but it will be among thorns; he may preach, but it will be with a heavy heart.

3. You cannot cause the work of your pastor to be grievous but at your own expense: it will be “unprofitable for you.” It is to no purpose that you have a pastor ordained over you in the Lord, unless his ministry be profitable to you. Every thing, therefore, which promotes this end should be carefully cherished; and every thing that hinders it, as carefully avoided. But profit under a ministry greatly depends, under God, upon mutual attachment. I do not mean to

commend that fondness and partiality that would render you the devotees of a man, or incapacitate you for hearing any other preaching than his. They that cannot edify save under one minister give sufficient proof that they do not truly edify under him. But there is an attachment between a pastor and a people that is highly necessary; as, without it, attendance on public worship would, in a great measure, cease to be an enjoyment. This attachment, my brethren, should begin with you, and he cherished by a course of kind and faithful treatment; delicately meeting his wants, gradually inspiring his confidence, tenderly participating in his afflictions, and I may add, if occasion require it, affectionately suggesting to him his faults and defects. By these means, he will insensibly be attached to you, in return; and will prefer preaching at home to all his occasional labours in other places. By an acquaintance with your cases, his preaching will be seasonable and savoury, proceeding from the fulness of his heart. Of such words it may well be said, How good they are! But I need not enlarge upon these things to you. Never, perhaps, were they more fully exemplified, than in the person of your late affectionate and beloved pastor. You loved him for the truth's sake that dwelt in him; and he, on the other hand, was not only willing to impart unto you the gospel of God, but his own soul also, because ye were dear unto him. May the same spirit be cherished between you and your present pastor!

Love is the grand secret to make you all happy. Love, however, is a tender plant; a slight blast of unkindness will greatly injure it. If you grieve him through inadvertency, come to an early explanation. If unkindness be repeated, his attachment to you will be weakened, and then yours to him will be the same. This will be followed by various misunderstandings, slights, distances, and offences, the issue of which may be a rooted antipathy; and when this enters, all profit under a ministry is at an end. If he could preach like an angel, all were in vain, so far as relates to your advantage.

From these remarks, you see and feel, my brethren, that if your pastor perform his work with grief, it will be at your expense; or that every kind of treatment that wounds his spirit undermines your own welfare. Study, therefore, by all means, to render it his joy, which will turn to your account: study, by a constant discharge of kind offices, to endear yourselves and your families to him; by an inviting intimacy in spiritual things, to know and be known by him; and by a holy, humble, and uniform conduct in the world and in the church, to enable him to look the enemies of religion in the face, while he proclaims its holy efficacy.

The reward of a true pastor is in the people of his charge, in their sanctification and salvation. What else is his hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Do not withhold from the labourer his hire! You may be his hope, without being his joy; and his hope and joy for a season, without being his crown of rejoicing in the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming: but need I say that this will be unprofitable for you? If he have a full reward of his labour, you must be his hope, and joy, and crown. Brethren, consider what I have said, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

LIV. – PASTORS REQUIRED TO FEED THE FLOCK OF CHRIST.

“Feed my sheep.” – John xxi. 16.

THE conversation which passed between our Lord and Peter, of which the text forms a part, was designed to administer reproof, and to communicate forgiveness. The cutting question was calculated to wound him to the quick; the kind direction amounted to a full forgiveness. He might expect he had lost his office – but no – he shall be restored – “Feed my sheep.”

There are a few things suggested by these words which have of late made some impression on my mind; particularly, the love of Christ to his people– my own duty as a pastor– and the character necessary for you to sustain, if you would thrive under the word. Let me notice,

I. THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO HIS PEOPLE, discovered in this charge to Peter. – You are to view him as a shepherd – the good Shepherd of the sheep – the chief Shepherd. The time also is worthy of notice; he had just laid down his life for the sheep; nay more, he had taken it again (Heb. xiii. 20); and being now about to leave his flock in the world, as sheep among wolves, he commits them to his under-shepherd. There is a close connexion between his having died for them and his desire to have them fed; which is afterward recognised by the apostle Paul, in his farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus “Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Observe three things in particular:

1. The interest he claims in them: – “My sheep” – “my lambs.” They are his as given him by the Father, John x. 29. They are his as having purchased them with his blood, Acts xx. 28. And they are his as being the travail of his soul, the reward of his death, which “satisfied” him.

2. The qualification he requires in their shepherd – Love! He would not trust them with one who did not love him. One who did not love him, a hireling, would starve them, or poison them, and flee in a time of danger, John x. 12. Give him the fleece, the flock may care for themselves. But if we love Christ, we shall love his people for his sake. We shall feel a subordinate interest in them. It is by this a good shepherd is distinguished from a hireling, John x. 11. Love will inspire vigilance and boldness in feeding the flock, and defending them from danger. David was a genuine shepherd, when he risked his life to save a lamb.

3. The provision he has made for their being fed. – Under-shepherds cannot furnish the pasture; the utmost we can do is to lead you into it. But Christ does more. He not only provides shepherds, but pasture – the gospel, of which he is the subject.

II. THE DUTY OF A MINISTER TO HIS PEOPLE. – It is to “feed” them. The word here rendered “feed” signifies the whole duty of a shepherd, and not merely to supply them with food – to govern them, protect them, to care for them; or (as Peter himself expresses it) “to take the oversight of them.” To discharge this duty as it demands is a great matter.

1. It requires that we be divested of a selfish spirit. The description of an idol shepherd, by Zechariah, (xi. 16, 17,) has of late been much on my mind. Two evils hang over him who is his own idol, or who wishes to be idolized by his people – a blast on his labours, and a mind void of judgment.

2. It requires that we be conversant with the gospel. How else can we lead others into it? If we be worldly-minded, we shall feed your evil principles and propensities, but not your graces; at best, only your mental faculties. Many are thus fed by ingenious, speculative preachers. But we must feed your best principles – your faith, hope, and love. Lord! who is sufficient for these things?

III. THE CHARACTER NECESSARY FOR YOU TO SUSTAIN IN ORDER TO THRIVE UNDER THE WORD. – You must be Christ’s sheep, or you will not know his voice, the gospel will not be the food you will relish. If you are his sheep, you will enter in at the door. Christ is the door. You will know his voice, and follow him. You will enter his fold, uniting yourself to his people; and you will go in and out, and find pasture. You will enter into the spirit of the church, as described by Solomon: “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest; where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon,” &c.

Sustaining this character, you will not famish for want of food. The gospel is rich pasture. Having led you into it on earth, may I be able at last to give an account, both of you and myself, with joy, and not with grief!

LXII.

[Charge delivered to a young Minister at his Ordination.]

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SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE NECESSARY FOR THE MINISTRY

“He was a burning and a shining light.”-John v. 35.

In addressing you, my dear brother, on this solemn occasion, I shall not undertake so much to communicate any thing new as to remind you of what you know, and have felt already. You are aware that there are two main objects to be attained in the work of the Christian ministry -*enlightening the minds* and *affecting the hearts* of the people. These are the usual means by which the work of God is accomplished. Allow me to remind you that, in order to the attainment of these objects, you yourself must be under their influence. If you would enlighten others, you must be “a shining light” yourself. And if you would affect others, you yourself must feel; your own heart must “burn” with holy ardour. You must be “a *burning* and a *shining* light.”

It is not enough that you should be what is called a *popular preacher*. A man may have gifts, so as to shine in the eyes of the multitude, almost as bright as he does in his own eyes; and yet possess little or nothing of *spiritual* light -light, the tendency of which is to transform the heart. So also a man may burn with zeal, as Jehu did, and yet have little or no true love to God, or affection for the souls of men. *Spiritual light* and *holy love* are the qualities which Christ commends.

You will give your candid attention, my dear brother, while I endeavour to remind you of the necessity of each of these, in the different parts of your important work:-in the great work of preaching the gospel -in presiding in the church -in visiting your people-and in your whole demeanour through life.

I. In the great work of PREACHING THE GOSPEL.-O my brother, in this department we had need resemble the living creatures mentioned by Ezekiel, (chap. i. 18,) “full of eyes.” We had almost need, in one view, to be made up of pure intellect-to be all light. I shall not attempt to decide how much knowledge is necessary, of men and things, of past and present

times, of the church and the world; but shall confine myself to two or three particulars, as specimens.

1. How necessary is it to understand in some good degree *the holy character of God!*-It is this to which you will find that men in general are blind. They conceive of God as if he were such a one as themselves And hence they fancy they are not enemies to him. You will have to point out the true character of God, that the sinner may see his own deformity, and not have the enmity of his heart concealed from his eyes. A just view of the holy character of God will also be one of the best preservatives against error in other respects. Almost all the errors in the world proceed from ignorance of the true character of God. To what else can be attributed the errors of Socinianism, Arianism, and Antinomianism? From degraded views of God's character arise diminutive notions of the evil of sin-of its just demerit-of our lost condition-of our need of a great Saviour-and of the work of the Spirit. O my brother, may you shed abroad this light with unsullied lustre! And, in order to this, commune much with God in private; since there is no way of knowing the true character of another so well as by personal, private intercourse.

2. A knowledge of *Christ, as the Mediator* between God and man, is necessary.--"This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Here, also, men are greatly ignorant. He is in the world, and the world knows him not. It must be our concern, as ministers, to know him; and, comparatively speaking, "to know nothing else" and this that we may diffuse the knowledge of him to others. The glory of Christ's character is such that if he were but viewed in a true light, and not through the false mediums of prejudice and the love of sin, but through the mirror of the gospel, he must be loved, John iv. 29, 39-42. Here, my brother, we need to be intimately acquainted with Christ, that we may be able on all occasions to give him a just character-that we may be able to tell of his dignity, his love, the generous principles of his undertaking, and how nobly he executed the arduous enterprise.

3. A knowledge of *human nature as created* is necessary.-We shall be unskilful workmen, unless we are acquainted with the materials on which we have to work. It is not more necessary for a surgeon or a physician to understand the anatomy of the human body, than it is for ministers to understand what may be called the anatomy of the soul. We had need enter into all the springs of action. In particular, we must be very careful to distinguish between primary and criminal passions. God habitually addresses the former, and so should we, but not the latter;

the latter being only the abuse of the principles implanted in our nature. To be more explicit, God has created us with the love of possession, but the excess of this love becomes covetousness and idolatry. God has implanted within us a principle of emulation; but the abuse of this is pride and ambition. God has created us with the love of pleasure; but this indulged to excess becomes sensuality. Now the gospel never addresses itself to our corrupt passions; but the word of God is full of appeals to those principles of our nature with which we are created. For example; in his word, God addresses himself to our love of possession; and points to “an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away”-to the principle of emulation; and presents to our view “a crown”-to our love of pleasure; and informs us that “in his presence there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.” And, in short, in the same way, he addresses the principles of zeal, love, hatred, shame, fear, revenge, &c. And so must we.

4. A knowledge of human nature *as depraved* is necessary.-Without this knowledge, we shall be unable to trace and detect the workings of a wicked heart. Sin is a deceitful thing, and we are apt to be imposed upon by its specious names. Parsimoniousness is called frugality; prodigality, generosity; bitterness of spirit in reproof, fidelity; and resentment, a becoming spirit. We need therefore to know the root of the disease, and the various ways in which it operates. In order to effect a cure, the knowledge of the disease is indispensable; and in order to attain to this knowledge, we must study the various symptoms by which the disorder may be distinguished.

5. A knowledge of human nature *as sanctified by the Spirit* is necessary.-Without this, we shall be unable to trace the work of God in the soul; and unable to fan the gentle flame of Divine love in the genuine Christian, and to detect and expose the various counterfeits.

You will need also, my brother, a heart *warmed* with Divine things, or you will never be “a burning and a shining light.” When we are thinking or preaching, we need to *burn*, as well as shine. When we study, we may rack our brains, and form plans; but unless “our hearts burn within us,” all will be a mere skeleton-our thoughts mere bones; whatever be their number, they will be all dry-very dry; and if we do not feel what we say, our preaching will be poor dead work. Affected zeal will not do. A gilded fire may shine, but it will not warm. We may smite with the hand, and stamp with the foot, and throw ourselves into violent agitations; but if we feel not, it is not likely the people will-unless, indeed, it be a feeling of disgust. But suppose there be

no affectation, nor any deficiency of good and sound doctrine; yet if in our work we feel no inward satisfaction, we shall resemble a mill-stone-preparing food for others, the value of which we are unable to appreciate ourselves. Indeed, without feeling, we shall be incapable of preaching any truth or of inculcating any duty aright. How can we display the evil of sin, the love of Christ, or any other important truth, unless we feel it? How can we preach against sin, without feeling a holy indignation against it? It is this that will cause us, while we denounce sin, to weep over the sinner. Otherwise, we may deal in flings and personalities; but these will only irritate; they will never reclaim. O! If ever we do any good in our work, it must be the effect of love to God and love to men-love to the souls of men, while we detest, and expose, and denounce their sins. How could Paul have pursued his work with the ardour and intenseness which he manifested, if his heart had not burned with holy love?

II. Spiritual light and holy love are equally necessary in PRESIDING IN THE CHURCH OF GOD.

Wisdom and love are necessary, calmly to lay down rules of discipline-to solve difficult questions-to prepare and digest, in concurrence with the deacons, such matters as require to be laid before the church-to nip little differences in the bud-to mediate between contending parties, &c. My brother, think of the example of the Lord Jesus, who, in his intercourse with his disciples, saluted them with this benediction-"Peace be with you!" The great art of presiding in a church, so as to promote its welfare, is to be neutral between the members, always on the side of God and righteousness, and to let them see that, whatever your opinion may be, you really love them.

III. These qualities are necessary in the more private duty of VISITING THE PEOPLE.

A considerable part of the pastoral office consists in visiting the people, especially the afflicted. Paul could appeal to the elders of the church at Ephesus, that he had taught them publicly and "from house to house." It is of great consequence that, in your pastoral visits, you should preserve the character of "a burning and a shining light." Pastoral visits should not degenerate into religious gossiping-a practice in which some have indulged to the disgrace of religion. Unused to habits of reflection, they feel no relish for solitude; and therefore, to employ the time which hangs so heavy on their hands, they saunter about to see their friends, and to ask them how they are. Nor is this the worst. Satan promptly furnishes a subject where there is such

a dearth; and hence gossiping has generally produced tales of slander, and practices which have proved a scandal to the Christian name! I trust, my brother, you know the preciousness of time too well to squander it away in idle visits. And yet visiting is an essential part of your work, that you may become acquainted with the circumstances, the spiritual necessities of your people. They will be able to impart their feelings freely and unreservedly; and you will be able to administer the appropriate counsel to much better purpose than you possibly can from the pulpit, and with greater particularity than would be becoming in a public address. Only let us burn while we shine. Let a savour of Christ accompany all our instructions. A minister who maintains an upright, affectionate conduct, may say almost any thing, in a way of just reproof, without giving offence.

IV. Spiritual light and holy love are necessary in YOUR WHOLE Demeanour THROUGH LIFE. May you, my brother, shine in holy wisdom, and burn with ardent love. You will need them, wherever you go-in whatever you engage -that you may walk as one of the children of light.

Allow me to point out a few things which I have found of use, to conduce to these ends:-

1. *Read the lives of good men*-the lives of such men as God has distinguished for gifts, and graces, and usefulness. Example has a great influence. The Scriptures abound with such examples. And, blessed be God, we have some now.

2. *Study the word of God, above all other books, and pray over it.*-It is this will set our hearts on fire. There are no such motives exhibited any where as there-no such exhibitions of wisdom and love.

3. *Read men, as well as books, and your own heart,* in order that you may read others.- Copyists, you know, are generally bunglers. There is nothing that equals what is taken immediately from the life. We need always be making our observations, wherever we are, or wherever we go. If we get a system of human nature, or experience, or any thing else, from books, rather than from our own knowledge, it will be liable to two disadvantages. First, It is not likely to be so near the truth; for systems which go through several hands are like successive copies of a painting, every copy of the preceding one is more unlike the original-or like the telling of a tale, the circumstances of which you do not know of your own personal knowledge: every time it is repeated there is some variation, and thus it becomes further removed from the

truth. Thus Agrippa showed his wisdom, when, instead of depending on the testimony of others, he determined to hear Paul himself. Secondly, If it be correct, still it will not be so serviceable to *you* as if it were a system of your own working. Saul's armour might be better than David's sling; but not to him, seeing he had not proved it.

4. *Live the life of a Christian*, as well as of a minister.-Read as one, preach as one, converse as one-to *be profited*, as well as to profit others. One of the greatest temptations of a ministerial life is to handle Divine truth as ministers, rather than as Christians -for others, rather than for ourselves. But the word will not profit them that *preach* it, any more than it will them that hear it, unless it be "mixed with faith." If we study the Scriptures as Christians, the more familiar we are with them, the more we shall feel their importance; but if our object be only to find out something to say to others, our familiarity with them will prove a snare. It will resemble that of soldiers, and doctors, and undertakers with death; the more familiar we are with them, the less we shall feel their importance. See Prov. xxii. 17, 18; Psal. i, 2, 3.

5. *Commune with God in private*.-Walking with God in the closet is a grand means, with his blessing, of illuminating our minds and warming our hearts. When Moses came down from the mount, his face shone bright, and his heart burned with zeal for the honour of God and the good of his people. Alas! alas! for want of this . . . See Jer. x. 21.

6. Hold forth the word of life, not only by precept, but by *a holy practice*.-"Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." Without this, in vain will be all our pretensions to being "burning and shining lights."

My dear brother, allow me to conclude with an earnest prayer, that you may long continue a "burning and a shining light" to this church; and that, after having "turned many to righteousness," you may shine as a distinguished star in the firmament for ever and ever!

**ON AN INTIMATE AND PRACTICAL
ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE
WORD OF GOD**

Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments (Ezra 7:10)

My dear brother, the long and intimate friendship which has subsisted between us will, I hope, render any apology unnecessary for my occupying this situation upon this solemn occasion. I should certainly have felt a pleasure in hearing some senior minister; but with your desire, on the ground of intimate friendship, I feel disposed to comply. I feel a *peculiar* pleasure in addressing you, for I can speak to you as a friend—a brother—an equal—an acquaintance, with whom I have often taken sweet counsel and walked to the house of God. You will not, I am sure, misinterpret my freedom, or suppose that I wish to assume any superiority over you or to dictate to you. You expect me to insist upon the importance of the work in which you are engaged. And for this purpose I have directed my attention to the passage I have read and would recommend to you the example of Ezra.

Example has a strong tendency to excite us to emulation. And in Ezra the scribe you have the character of an eminent servant of the most high God held up to your admiration and imitation. Ministers in the New Testament are called “scribes, instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,” and in Ezra you have the character of “a ready scribe.” There are four things in his character upon which I shall discourse, and which I would recommend to you.

1. Seek the law, or will, of God.

I need not inform you, my brother, that the *law*, in the Old Testament especially, is commonly to be understood as synonymous with the *Scriptures*, the *word*, or the *revealed will* of God. The *Scriptures* were then as commonly called “the *law* of the Lord” as they are now called “the *word*

of God.” So the term is to be understood here. To “seek the law of the Lord” is the same as to ascertain his mind and will in his sacred word.

You are to “feed the people with knowledge and understanding,” but you cannot do this without understanding yourself. Your lips are to “keep knowledge,” and the people are to “seek the law at your mouth.” But, in order to communicate it to them, you must seek it at the mouth of God.

1. *Seek it, my brother*

It will never be found without. It is a mine, in which you will have to dig. And it is a precious mine, which will well repay all your labour.

2. *Seek it at the fountain-head*

You feel, I doubt not, a great esteem for many of your brethren now living, and admire the writings of some who are now no more, and you will read their productions with attention and pleasure. But whatever excellence your brethren possess, it is all borrowed and it is mingled with error. Learn your religion from the Bible. Let that be your decisive rule. Adopt not a body of sentiments, or even a single sentiment, solely on the authority of any man—however great, however respected. Dare to think for yourself. Human compositions are fallible. But the Scriptures were written by men who wrote as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Human writings on religion resemble preaching. They are useful only so far as they illustrate the Scriptures, and induce us to search for them for ourselves.

3. *Seek the will of God in every part of the Bible*

It is very true that some parts of the Bible are more interesting than others. But “*all* Scripture is profitable” and necessary. Do not take this part and leave that. Some people foolishly talk of Arminian texts and Calvinistic texts, as if Scripture were repugnant to itself! That system, whatever it be called, cannot be the right one, that rejects any one part of Scripture whatever.

4. *Seek it perseveringly*

Do not reckon yourself so to have found it as to be self-sufficient. Be open to conviction from every quarter. Seek it by reading, by meditation, by prayer, by conversation, by all the means that offer. Do not reject information from an inferior, or even an enemy. In the study of the Scriptures you will always be a learner.

2. Prepare your heart to seek the law of the Lord

There is a preparation of heart in which we are wholly *passive*, which is, in the strictest sense, the work of God, and, without this, woe be to any of us that should dare to set up for teachers of his law and gospel! But there is also a preparation of heart in which we are *active*; and this is the preparedness intended in the text. In this, even, God is the cause: he actuates, but then we act. Of this preparation we have to speak, and it consists in prayer, and self-examination, and mediation. Your work is a *course*, and for this you must prepare by “girding up the loins of your mind” □ a *fight*, and you must “put on the whole armour of God.” The work of God should not be entered upon rashly. God frequently brings his servants through a train of instructions and trials that they may be fitted for it. Moses was forty years at court and forty years a shepherd. These were his days of preparation. Christ prepared his disciples by his instructions during his life, and previous to their great work they prepared themselves, Acts 1.

Such preparation of heart is not only necessary for your *entrance* into the pastoral office, but also for your *continuance* in it. You will find that every exercise requires it. You do not need being guarded against that erroneous notion of so trusting to the Spirit as to neglect personal preparation for your public labours. But this preparedness is not only requisite for speaking the truth in public, but as well for seeking it in private. Let all your private meditations be mingled with prayer. You will study your Bible to wonderful advantage, if you go to it *spiritually-minded*. It is this which causes us to see the beauty and to feel the force of many parts of Scripture, to which, in a carnal state of mind, we are blind and stupid. If we go to the study of the Bible wise in our own conceits and self-sufficient, we shall get no good. When we would be taught from God’s Word, we must learn as little children.

Again, if we go to the Bible merely, or chiefly, to find something to say to the people, without respect to our own souls, we shall make but poor progress. My brother, study divine truth as a *Christian* and not merely as a *minister*. Consider your own soul as deeply interested, and dread the thought of cultivating others, while you suffer your own heart to remain uncultivated. If you study divine truth as a Christian, your being constantly engaged in the study will promote your growth in grace. You will be like “a tree planted by rivers of water.” You will not only bring forth fruit for the people, but your leaf shall not wither, and whatever you do shall prosper. But if merely as a minister, the reverse. I believe it is a fact, that where a minister is wicked, he is the most hardened against conviction of any character.

3. Keep the law

“Do it.” The apostle Paul, in writing to Timothy, is very particular as to personal religion, in a bishop, or pastor. “Take heed to *thyself*, and to the doctrine.” □ “Keep *thyself* pure.” □ “Be thou *an example* of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Observe, too, the connection in which this exhortation stands □ “Let no man despise thy youth,” plainly intimating that a holy example will render even youth respectable. Your Lord and Master both *did* and taught the will of God.

1. *Dread nothing more than recommending that to your people to which you do not attend yourself*

You may preach with the fervour of an angel. But if your practice, your habitual deportment, be inconsistent, all you do will be in vain.

2. *More is expected from you than from others*

A wicked preacher is of all characters the most contemptible. Even the profane despise him.

3. *You will attend to practical preaching*

But how can you either exhort or reprove, if your people should ever have it in their power to say, “Physician, heal thyself!”, “Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself!”

4. Attend not only to such duties as fall under the eye of man, but walk with God in your family and in your closet

It will require all your wisdom to bring up your children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” And if you rule not well in your own house, you cannot expect to maintain a proper influence in the church of God. Beware also of omitting secret devotions. Conversing with men and things may brighten your gifts; but communion with God is necessary to improve your graces.

4. Teach in Israel the statutes and judgments of God

It is not for me to dictate to you what doctrines you are to teach or what precepts you should enforce. But I hope you will evince your sincerity by preaching in the main such things as in your confession of faith you have just avowed—not however to the neglect of other points, which could scarcely be expected to be introduced in such a document. The more you are acquainted with the word of God, the more you will find it abounds with truths, reviving truths too, which seldom or never have a place in confessions of faith. But, passing this, allow me to give you a few general hints on the subject of teaching.

1. Let Christ and his apostles be your examples

Teach as they taught. It would be worth while to read over the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, if it were only to discover their manner of teaching. Dare to avow every truth which they avowed. And address your audience in such language as they addressed to theirs, and that without softening it down, or explaining it away.

2. Give every part of the truth its due proportion

Preach every truth in the proportion in which it is introduced by God in his word. You will find some people attached to one class of truths and others to another class. But be you attached to *all*. If you are habitually dwelling upon one truth, it must be to the neglect of others. And it is at your peril to keep back *any* part of the counsel of God! If you preach not the great doctrines of

the gospel, such as the entire depravity of our nature, the atonement of Christ, the work of the Spirit, etc., the people of God will be famished. If you preach these doctrines to the neglect of close practical addresses, they will be in danger of a religious surfeit. If you preach doctrinally, some may call you an Antinomian. If you preach practically, others may call you a legalist. But go on, my brother. This is a kind of dirt that won't stick. Preach the law evangelically and the gospel practically, and God will bless you and make you a blessing.

3. *Dare to teach unwelcome truths*

The Christian ministry must be exercised with affection and fidelity. Study not to offend any man. Yet, keep not back important truth, even if it do offend. You must not enter the pulpit to indulge your own temper. But neither are you at liberty to indulge in the humour of others. Be more concerned to commend yourself to the *consciences* of your people than to their good opinion.

4. *Give Scriptural proof of what you teach*

Do not imagine that mere assertion will do. Evidence ought to form the body of your discourses. Such expressions as “*I say*,” uttered in the most magisterial tones, will, after all, *prove* nothing except the unwarrantable confidence of the preacher.

5. *Consider yourself as standing engaged to teach all that hear you*

[Teach all] □ rich and poor, young and old, godly and ungodly □ “warning the wicked, lest his blood be required at your hands.” Seek the salvation of every man's soul. This was the apostolic method □ “warning every man, and teaching every man in wisdom.” Whether every individual of your congregation *will accept* your message is another question. *Your* concern should be, not to intermeddle with what is not revealed, but to “preach the gospel to every creature,” and to pray for *all*, as Paul did for Agrippa and his court, without distinction: “I would that...*all that hear me* this day were..altogether such as I am.”

6. *Teach privately as well as publicly*

Make your visits among your people subservient to instruction and edification. Take the example of Paul [in] Acts 20:20. Let a savour of Christ accompany you in your intercourse with your flock. This will greatly contribute to your public usefulness.

My brother, seek the law of God□seek it with a prepared heart□reduce it to practice□and teach it diligently. And you will be, not only, like Ezra, a “ready” scribe, but “a scribe well-instructed in the kingdom of God.”

LXIV.

MINISTERS APPOINTED TO ROOT OUT EVIL, AND TO CULTIVATE GOOD.

“I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and to build, and to plant.”-Jer. i. 10.

This language, my brother, is not in every sense applicable to the present occasion. The prophet’s was an extraordinary, yours is an ordinary office. His was to be exercised over nations and kingdoms, yours over a church and congregation. Yet, even in his case, there was no civil power-he was no pope-nor was he invested with the authority of a modern bishop. All the power he had pertained to his office as a prophet; he had no secular authority; he pulled down and built up *prophetically*. And though you have no such power as this, by extraordinary inspiration, yet, in a way of declaring the truths of God’s word, “whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted, and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained.”

Your labour is less than the prophet’s was, but the nature of your work is much the same; and the same spirit of faithfulness is required over a few things as over many things.

Your work is divided into two parts. One is, to discourage evil: “to root out, to pull down, to destroy, and to throw down.” The other is, to encourage good: “to build, and to plant.”

The imagery, you perceive, is of two kinds-that of a house, and that of a garden.

The church is God’s house, God’s building; and you are appointed to be a labourer “together with God,” to pull down, and destroy, and throw down the rubbish, and then to build upon a new and good foundation.

The church is also God’s garden; and you are appointed to work in it, and keep it in order, to root out the weeds, and to plant and cultivate the goodly fruit.

Give me your attention, my dear brother, while I inquire what are the evils you are to oppose, and the good you are to encourage, and the methods to be adopted in pursuing these objects. Let us,

I. Inquire WHAT ARE THE EVILS AGAINST WHICH YOU MUST CONTEND, AND THE METHODS YOU ARE TO ADOPT IN THEIR OPPOSITION.

1. *By your public ministry root out errors in doctrine.*-Overturn them-not by empty declamation, but by solid Scriptural evidence-not by the wild fury of a bigot, but with the pure love of the Christian pastor, whose care it should be to preserve his charge from things that tend to the ruin of their souls. Particularly, if you love *God*, you will be concerned to root up every thing that opposes the glory of his character and moral government. Vindicate the ways of God to men against all their hard thoughts and speeches. Vindicate his law, both in its precepts and penalty. You have observed, I doubt not, that this is the foundation for the grace of the gospel. If you love *Christ*, you will root up those principles which degrade his dignity and set aside his atonement. If you love *your people*, you will root up those principles which endanger the salvation of their souls; such as self-righteousness and presumptuous hope. There is plenty of work to remove the covering and to pull down the vain expectations of sinners . . . You have seen, and will see, many whose habitual deportment proves them enemies to the cross, who yet entertain hopes of heaven: try and find out the delusive ground of their hope, and expose it; only be careful to avoid personalities, which will irritate rather than convince.

2. *By leading the church, in the exercise of faithful discipline, root out evil-doers.*-Churches which in former years have been respectable and prosperous are fast falling into decay for want of discipline. Some have pleaded the parable of the wheat and tares as an excuse for negligence in discipline; but this is a perversion. The field is the *world*, not the *church*. The application of the principle to the church would render all the rules of the gospel superfluous.

3. *By rendering your occasional visits subservient to the purposes of conviction and correction.*-You may in this way root up many evils which you cannot by either of the other means. There are cases which you cannot touch in the pulpit, on account of their singularity and minuteness, without being personal, which, as I just said, will irritate rather than reclaim. There are also cases which do not fall under church censure, which yet should come within the cognizance of a faithful pastor. This, I confess, is a difficult part of your work; and some, for fear of giving offence, have declined it: but suppose offence were given, if you are in the path of duty, what have you to fear? Some will say, "If such and such persons are offended, the cause will sink." Then let it sink. You may safely leave that, however, to Christ; if it should therefore sink, he will not blame you. But what cause must that be that is upheld by such unworthy means? After all, however there is a way of managing these things by which offence is seldom

or ever given. The great secret is to mingle love with your fidelity. This was Paul's method with the Corinthians. Consider the peculiar temptations and constitutional or educational tendencies of the party, and mingle counsel and encouragement with censure. We proceed to inquire.

II. WHAT IS THAT GOOD WHICH YOU ARE TO ENCOURAGE, or what is the work denoted by building and planting? This is a much more agreeable part of the subject than the other, though not more necessary.

In general, encourage and impart *just sentiments*. The truth has ever been God's honoured instrument in doing good. Encourage and cultivate *holy tempers* and *dispositions*. Labour to build up your people in these things. That is not always the best ministry that draws the most followers, but that which does the most good. When I see a company of modest, humble, upright, lovely, diligent, holy people, I see the best evidence of a good minister. But let me be a little more particular.

First, AS A BUILDER-

1. *Be sure that you lay a right foundation.*-Christ is the foundation of God's laying, the foundation of the apostles and prophets; and you must lay him, as the foundation of faith and holiness. All true holiness is built upon faith in Christ. Many preachers who profess to entertain a great regard for a holy life, and deal much in moral declamations, omit this part of their work.

2. *See that your materials be fitly framed together*, Eph. ii. 21. Three things belong to this: (1.) That the materials be *hewed* and *squared*. What would a company of proud, self-willed, prejudiced professors do together with the godly? These sins must be cut off. They ought to be like the stones of the temple before you lay them in the house of God. (2.) That they be *formed by the same rule*. The stones must not only be cut even, but so as to fit the foundation and each other, or they cannot be fitly framed. Whatever variety there may be in some respects, there must be uniformity in others. No society can exist without similarity of views. Our hearts must be renewed after the image of Christ; and if they fit and fall in with his gospel and government, they will fit one another. But all attempts to build men into religious society without this will be vain. "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" &c.-See 2 Cor. vi. 14-18. "How can two walk together except that they be agreed?" (3.) That, in being placed in the building, *every one be put in that situation for which he is formed.*-Some have splendid gifts, and are like stones in the front of the building, for

ornament and strength. Others have more private excellences; but, though less conspicuous, they may not be less useful. Some are like Barnabas, affectionate; and excel in seeking out obscure humble inquirers, Acts ix. 27. Others are wise in counsel and grave in deportment. Every gift should be so disposed of as that it shall be of the greatest use to the whole, otherwise the building will not be fitly framed together. Where offices are filled with men because they are men of property, it is often otherwise.

3. *So frame the whole as that it may be a fit habitation for God.*-It must be God's house, not yours. Beware that you go not about it as Nebuchadnezzar went about Babylon.-"This is the house which *I* have built"-this is *my* house! I trust you have no greater desire than that God would take up his abode with you. Well-build you but upon his foundation, and by his rule, and he *will* dwell with you. All buildings are with a view to habitation.

Secondly, AS A PLANTER, prepare the soil by searching and convincing doctrine.-Sow "wholly a right seed." When you see the plants growing up, give attention to them. Cultivate them by every means, and pray that they may be watered by the Holy Spirit.

Allow me a word or two, my brother, particularly applicable to yourself individually.

1. While you root out and pull down, and build and plant, in *God's* house and vineyard, *do not overlook your own*. Personal religion is of the utmost importance to a minister.

2. Take into consideration that you are "a labourer together with God." He that employs you will reward you. Look, my brother, beyond the grave for your reward. We have but little here; but if we had much, it would be an awful thing to receive that for our reward!

LXV.

MINISTERS SHOULD BE CONCERNED NOT TO BE DESPISED.

“Let no man despise thee.”-Titus ii. 15.

My brother, I feel a pleasure in the work of this day, partly from the love I bear to you, and partly from the love I feel towards the church. I trust you will receive a word of advice on this solemn occasion with candour and attention.

You will observe the passage is not an address to the people, not to despise their minister; but to the minister, not to be despised by the people. If you ask how you are to prevent this, I answer, Contempt is not a voluntary feeling. It is not in the power of men to despise *some* characters. They may dislike them; they may affect to ridicule them; but they cannot in their hearts despise them. If a minister conducts himself in character, no man will be able to despise him. This, then, is the sentiment which I wish to impress upon you.

Your work as a pastor may be distinguished into three departments-the pulpit, the church, and the world-in each of which I hope you will so conduct yourself as that no man shall be able to despise you. Let me offer to your consideration a few particulars under each.

I. What concerns you IN THE PULPIT, or in the work of preaching the gospel.

1. *Avoid all affectation in your manner.*-Do not affect the man of *learning* by useless criticisms: many do this, only to display their knowledge.-Nor yet the *orator*, by high-sounding words, or airs, or gestures. Useful learning and impressive delivery should by no means be slighted; but they must not be affected, or men will be sure to despise you.

2. *Avoid self-seeking in your ends.*-Preach not yourself, but Christ Jesus. Seek not the approbation of men for yourself, but for your doctrine. Study to commend the gospel to the consciences of your hearers, rather than to your own orthodoxy, or ingenuity, or zeal, to their admiration. If, instead of your endeavouring to secure their reception of the gospel message, you are concerned to recommend yourself to their applause, you will be sure to be despised.

3. *Avoid vulgarity and love wit.*-Though the pulpit is not the place for affected pomposity, neither is it the place for mean and low language. Few men are more contemptible

than those who study to introduce vulgar nonsense and jocosse anecdotes, to make people laugh. Sound speech, sound sense, and the greatest seriousness, adorn the pulpit. Without these, you will be despised.

4. DO NOT ADVANCE SENTIMENTS WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO SUPPORT THEM BY SCRIPTURE EVIDENCE.-Many content themselves with assertions without proof, and make vehemence supply the place of evidence. But this will cause you to be despised by men of understanding.

5. BEWARE THAT YOU DO NOT PREACH AN UNFELT GOSPEL.-If you do, it will be seen, and you will be despised. It will be seen that, though you affect to be in earnest, you do not feel; and that you scarcely believe your own doctrine. We may get into a habit of talking for the truth, and pleading for holiness, and yet be dead ourselves; and if so, we shall be sure to be despised.

6. *Let not the fear of man deter you from declaring the whole counsel of God.*-Insist on every Divine truth and duty. Where interest or friendship stand in the way, it may be trying; but if you yield, the very parties to the whom you yield will despise you. Speak but the truth in love, and speak the whole truth, and you will commend yourself to every man's conscience, when you can do no more.

7. *Never degrade the pulpit by indulging in personalities.*-These are for *private* admonition. "Rebuke with all authority;" but let your personal rebukes be private. To introduce them in the pulpit is unmanly, and would render you despicable. Let us apply the language.

II. To your behaviour IN THE CHURCH, and AMONG YOUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS.

1. *Do not lord it over God's heritage.*-You will have to preside in the church, and direct its measures; but never assume the lordly priest. Expect your judgment, in some cases, to be overruled, and learn to yield with cheerfulness when the measures you wish to introduce appear to be opposed to the opinion and desires of the majority of your brethren. It is not with a minister of the gospel as with a minister of state-that he must have a majority, or he cannot stand his ground. If we "look on the things of others," we may, in non-essentials, after speaking our minds, yield and be happy. But if we are determined to carry every point which appears to us

desirable, in spite of the opinion of our brethren, though we may not always succeed, we shall invariably be despised for the attempt.

2. *Yet have a judgment of your own.*-This will become you on every subject; and where it is of importance you ought to be firm and resolute. A minister must not be borne down by the capriciousness of a few. He who is easily turned aside from a good object, and will bear insult without a proper manifestation of his displeasure, will be despised as much as a lordly high priest. If a minister be not firm, discipline will, in many cases, be neglected. People have their friends, and relatives, and favourites; and very few, though the operation be bloodless, have sufficient regard for rectitude to act upon the principle of the sons of Levi.-See Exod. xxxii. 17-29. But you must, or you will be despised.

3. *Do not affect the gentleman in your visits.*-Do not assume airs of consequence, and take liberties in families, as if, because you are a minister, you are therefore superior as a man. I do not say, do not *be* a gentleman; but do not *affect* the great man. Real gentility, and urbanity, and politeness are no mean or despicable attainments. There was much Christian politeness in the apostle Paul. But the affectation of the fine gentleman is great folly; and no men are more despised than those who strut about with lordly dignity, and give themselves consequential airs. You had much better feel yourself a Christian, and consider that you are associating with your fellow Christians, or with those who expect you to exhibit a pattern for their imitation.

4. *Yet preserve a dignity of manner and demeanor.*-There is no occasion for you, in order to avoid the affectation of gentility, to sink into low buffoonery, vulgarity, or drollery. My brother, the fear of God, and a deep sense of religion, will effectually preserve you from these extremes, and render you respectable, instead of contemptible.

5. *Beware of being a loiterer.*-Do not acquire a habit of wandering about and doing nothing. Visit, and visit "from house to house." But look well to your visits: "*preach* from house to house." There is work enough in a congregation for a minister to do; but nothing renders him more contemptible and despised than a habit of religious gossiping. Let us apply the text.

III. To your general deportment IN THE WORLD.

1. *Let your conduct correspond with your preaching.*-Men will watch you. You may put off the preacher in mixed company; but you must never put off the man of God-the Christian.

Whatever you may be in the pulpit, if in the world you be frothy, vain, contentious, captious, unfeeling, unjust, or make engagements you cannot fulfill, you will be despised. On the contrary, consistency of character will wear, and live down opposition.

2. *Never be ashamed of religion in any company.*-There is no need to introduce it on all occasions, and in all companies. This would render you despised one way. But be not the subject of cowardly timidity. That would render you equally, if not more, despicable. There is nothing in true religion but what admits of a rational defence. There wants nothing to defend religion but firmness of mind. But if you are ashamed of the cause you have espoused, its opponents will heartily despise you.

To CONCLUDE.-If the contempt of men be such a matter of dread, how much more the contempt of *God!* Then so conduct yourself that you may not be ashamed, and not be despised, at *his* coming!

LIX. – MINISTERS FELLOW LABOURERS WITH GOD.

“We are labourers together with God.” – 1 Cor. iii. 9.

MY dear brother, in every address of this kind I wish to be understood as assuming no kind of authority whatever; but simply as concurring in the work of the day, and as presenting to the consideration of my brother in the ministry a few observations suited to the occasion.

The words we have selected afford us an important view of the Christian ministry– co-operators with God! Not, indeed, as co-ordinate, but as subordinate. We labour under him. It is not our husbandry, nor our building, but God’s; and the design of the apostle was to cut off the vain-glorying in men to which the Corinthians were so addicted, saying, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas. Yet it affords a most honourable and animating view of the Christian ministry – fellow labourers with God! I shall consider the passage in two views; viz. as affording us a directory as to the nature of our work, and an encouragement in our performance of it.

1. As affording US A DIRECTORY AS TO THE NATURE OR OUR WORK.

Our work is a labour.– If any man enter upon the ministry from a desire to live an easy, idle life, he is under a great mistake. He may make such a life of it, but he will not fulfil his work. And let him take heed lest he be rejected at the last: “Cast ye out the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.” A proper discharge of the Christian ministry must be a labour. This will appear if we consider a few of the principal parts of which it is composed.

1. A leading part of this work consists in our becoming acquainted with the mind of God in his word. – We must “labour in word and doctrine.” We cannot “feed the people with knowledge and with understanding,” unless we possess them. Truth is a well – full of water, but deep. A mine– rich, but requiring much labour to dig up the precious ore. Such a depth is there in the word of God, that inspiration itself does not supersede the necessity of close application, Psal. xxvii. 4. We must be perpetually inquiring and searching, 1 Pet. i. 10-12. We must “give ourselves” to the word of God and prayer. The very angels are perpetually gospel students, “desiring to look into” the things that are revealed. Unless we labour in this way, there can be no proper food or variety in our preaching. “Meditate on these things: give thyself wholly to them.” The truths of God’s word are worthy of being our meat and drink . . . Digging in these mines is

very pleasant work when we can enter into them. But there are seasons when it is otherwise; and yet we must go on, though we scarcely know how; this is labour.

2. Another part is communicating the mind of God so as to apply it to the cases of the people.— It belongs to the work of the ministry to apply truth to the circumstances and consciences of the hearers, as well as to teach it; and, in order to this, we must study men as well as things. We must trace the workings of a depraved heart, in order to detect its shiftings and subterfuges – the doubts and difficulties of a desponding heart, in order to remove them, and to point out the way of life – and the general operations of a gracious heart, in order to distinguish between genuine and spurious religion, lest, while we comfort the real Christian, we should soothe the hypocrite.

For these important purposes, it is necessary that we should avail ourselves of two grand sources of information – experience and observation. That which is derived from these sources is taken from life, and is generally more profitable than that which is copied from even the most judicious writings of men, at second-hand. But all this requires labour. I may add, much of the labour that attends this part of our work arises from the state of those with whom we have to deal, and our want of success. In preaching to sinners, we have to attack the strong holds of Satan – ignorance, prejudice, pride, self-righteousness, hardness of heart, unbelief, and aversion from God. Our work here is like having to dig through a rock of flint – we have much labour, and make slow progress. Sometimes we espy a downcast look and a falling tear, and this inspires courage; but these hopeful appearances often subside. Many a character, of whom we have hoped well for years, is still hanging between God and the world, and we know not what will be the issue. These are the things which occasion those pains of labour of which the apostle speaks: “My little children, of whom I travail in birth, until Christ be formed in you.”

3. Another part of our ministry consists in following up the work of preaching, by close conversation in our private visits. – Paul taught at Ephesus “from house to house.” It is painful and laborious to a feeling mind to tell persons of their faults, and yet we cannot fulfil our duty without. To introduce personal reflections in public, where no answer can be made, and where the tendency is to expose rather than to reclaim, is mean and unmanly; but it is not so in private; there we must be faithful, and, in order to be faithful, we must be personal. But this is hard work. Ministers, as well as other men, have their feelings. They love peace, and they wish to retain the

friendship of their people. But if a minister tell the truth, there is great danger of his being counted an enemy, and treated as such. Faithful reproof, therefore, must be self-denying work. The grand secret, I think, to render this part of our work as easy as possible, is to love the souls of the people, and to do every thing from pure goodwill, and with a view to their advantage – “speaking the truth in love.” The man that can be offended by such treatment, and leave his place in the house of God, can be no loss to a minister or to a congregation.

4. Another part of our work is, presiding in the church in the character of a pastor. – And this is labour, Those who preside in a large community find it very difficult to manage amidst such a variety of spirits and tempers; and those who preside in a small one may find it still more difficult, where individuals are of more consequence, and therefore, perhaps, more assuming and litigious. A large church is like a large family, in which there is a necessity for constant labour and continual attention, to keep things in proper order. But a small church may be compared to a little boat, floating on the waters – a single wrong movement may upset it. In either case we had need be endued with righteousness, godliness, faith, love, meekness, patience, and forbearance. The less we have of self-importance and of tenaciousness in carrying a point, and the more of respect and disinterested regard for our brethren, the less labour will it be to us.

Having considered the Christian ministry under the idea of a labour, I may observe that we are further directed as to its nature, by considering ourselves as “labourers together with God.”

By this we are taught to labour in the same cause and to the same ends as God. God, in all his operations, keeps certain important ends in view, and we must join with him: for example – to glorify his Son . . . to abase the sinner . . . to alarm the wicked . . . to comfort the believer . . . and we must unite with God in all this. We must habitually exalt the Saviour and humble the pride of man. Our constant message must be – it shall be well with the righteous, but it shall be ill with the wicked. We must never comfort those whom God would alarm. When God brings a sinner under concern, it is our business to forward the work. If a man tell me he is a great sinner, it is not for me to soothe him, and to persuade him that he sees things in too strong a light; but rather to convince him that he is a much greater sinner than he conceives, and that the heart of man is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” The only comfort I am authorized to offer him is, by pointing him to a great Saviour – one who is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, and who will never cast out any that apply to him for mercy. It is

dangerous, as soon as we perceive concern, to smile and tell the party that this is a good sign, and all will soon be well. It is a good symptom, if it be genuine; but if, before we can ascertain the reality of the repentance, we begin to soothe and console the sinner, we shall be in danger of causing him to be satisfied, instead of urging him to an application where alone he ought to take up his rest; and, instead of being labourers together with God, we shall be found to be labouring against him. God calls him to mourning, and weeping, and lamentation; and it is at our peril to comfort him by any thing short of an exhibition of the free grace of the gospel. We proceed,

II. To consider the passage as affording us, not only a directory as to the nature of our work, but AN ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE DISCHARGE OF IT. – And this is derivable from the latter clause– “labourers together with God.” If we be with God, God is with us; and that is the greatest encouragement we can have. “Lo! I am with you always, to the end of the world.”

1. If we be with God, God will be with us to assist us in our private labours. – There is much in the prayer of the apostle Paul on behalf of Timothy – “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit.” It is this that will sweeten our labour. Solomon speaks of a joy in labour, and certainly, of all labour, none is so productive of joy as digging in the mines of everlasting truth – especially when the Lord Jesus is with our spirit.

2. God will be with us in blessing our public labours. – Had Moses gone to the rock without God, he might have spoken, and have smitten it, but it would not have cleaved asunder: the rock would have broken the rod, rather than the rod the rock. The same may be said of our labours on the hearts of men. But with God we shall “do valiantly.” “The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God.” God, we may be certain, will not labour in vain; and if we labour with him, neither shall we. “Thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and always maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us.” My brother, if we be faithful labourers, we shall in no wise lose our reward.

LX. – THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL,
AND THE MANNER IN WHICH IT OUGHT TO BE PREACHED.

“Praying, for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ,
– that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” – Col. iv. 3, 4.

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MY dear brother, I have chosen this passage, on the present occasion, as expressing not the whole of your work, but an important part of it – preaching the gospel. For the discharge of this, an apostle besought the prayers of his brethren, and so should we.

The words imply that, to do justice to the gospel, or to preach it as it ought to be preached, we need a special Divine influence, and consequently the prayers of our brethren. I wish at this time to call your attention to the work itself – the manner in which the gospel ought to be preached; and then to offer a few motives to your consideration.

I. I shall call your attention to THE MANNER IN WHICH THE GOSPEL OUGHT TO BE PREACHED.

It is not my wish to dismay your spirit, but yet I desire to impress you with a sense of the importance of the work of the ministry, that, like the apostle, you may cry to Him who alone can give you strength to discharge it. That we may form some idea of the manner in which the gospel ought to be preached, it is necessary to consider some of its leading properties. We may mention four or five: –

1. The gospel is a message which implies a disagreeable and heavy charge against those to whom it is addressed, and therefore requires great faithfulness. – It supposes that all mankind are the enemies of God, and exposed to his righteous displeasure. You will have to do with the wicked as well as with the righteous, and you must not flatter them. It is at your peril to say any thing soothing to the wicked. It will be very painful to keep them at a distance, and to exhibit to them the threatenings of God’s word against them. They will be trying to shift the blame, and to invent excuses; but you must follow up your charges. Their hearts may rise against you, and they may be displeased with your preaching; but you must not desist.

If we could go with a message of approbation and applause – if we could tell our auditory that they are amiable and virtuous beings, with only a few imperfections, which God will doubtless overlook – it might be much more pleasing and agreeable to ourselves as men. We can

feel no pleasure in accusing our species. But woe unto us if we speak not the truth! The wicked will perish, and their blood will be required at our hand! Ezek. iii. 16-21. Then beware of softening matters, either with the unconverted or the backslider. Beware of giving up the authority of God over the heart, and of allowing either that the heartless services of the unconverted are pleasing to him, or if not, that the fault is not in them. Beware of countenancing their own views of themselves, that they are poor pitiable creatures instead of sinners. The wound must be probed, or your patient will be lost! O! if we preach the gospel as we ought to preach it, what fidelity is here required! You must, my brother, side with God against an ungodly world. You must follow the windings of their evil hearts; you must detect them in all their refuges of lies, that they may flee to the only refuge set before them in the gospel. However it may pain you, or offend your hearers, if you would preach the gospel as you ought to preach it – you must be faithful.

2. The gospel is a message in which we have truth and justice on our side; and therefore see ought to be firm and fearless of consequences. – Speak boldly, Eph. vi. 19, 20. If a man's cause be bad, it must render him timid; but to be timid in the cause of God and truth is unworthy. When, however, I recommend boldness, I do not mean that which is opposed to modesty and respectful feeling, nor yet that dogmatical rant which deals in assertion without evidence; but that which is opposed to mercenary fear and cowardice. You must not calculate consequences as they respect this life. If you would preach the gospel as you ought to preach it, the approbation of God must be your main object. What if you were to lose your friends and diminish your income; nay, what if you lose your liberty, or even your life – what would this all be, compared with the loss of the favour and friendship of God? Woe unto us, if we shun to declare any part of the counsel of God! He that is afraid or ashamed to preach the whole of the gospel, in all its implications and bearings, let him stand aside; he is utterly unworthy of being a soldier of Jesus Christ. Sometimes, if you would speak the whole truth, you may be reproached as unsound and heterodox. But you must not yield to popular clamour. If you have truth on your side, stand firm against all opposition.

3. The gospel is a message full of importance, and therefore you must be in earnest. – If your message respected the health of your hearers, or their temporal interest, or their reputation, it would be thought important. But what are these compared with the salvation of their souls!

Salvation by Jesus Christ is God's last remedy--his ultimatum with a lost world, Mark xvi. 16; Acts iv. 12. There remaineth no other sacrifice for sins. Then do not trifle on such subjects as these, lest you lose your own soul. What can be thought of you if you employ your time in making pretty speeches, and turning elegant periods, instead of endeavouring to "save yourself and them that hear you!" What if, instead of beseeching sinners to be reconciled to God, you should crack jokes before them, to excite a laugh! What can be thought of you if you trifle with principles, and join the sneer of the poet, when he says,

"Bout modes of faith let graceless zealots fight
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right!"

Your hearers will doubtless conceive that you are insincere, and that you do not believe the message you are appointed to deliver.

4. The gospel is a message that abounds with deep wisdom, and therefore we ought to possess a deep insight into it, and to cultivate great plainness of speech. – The gospel is "a mystery," and a mystery that requires to be made manifest. A mystery is something hidden, or secret. Such are the great things of God. They are "hid from the wise and the prudent, and revealed unto babes." – "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God." Much of it, indeed, was hidden from Old Testament believers, Eph. iii. 5. Nor is it known even to New Testament believers but by the Spirit, 1 Cor. ii. 7. Nor is it fully comprehensible to any; for it is called "unsearchable riches." "Great is the mystery of godliness." Even angels make it their study. Then to make these things manifest must require great insight into them, and great plainness of speech. Do not be content with superficial views of the gospel. Read and think for yourself on every subject. Read the Bible, not merely for texts, but for Scriptural knowledge. Truth attained in this way is like property– it will wear the better for having been acquired by dint of industry. To preach the gospel as we ought to preach it requires, not the subtilty of the metaphysician, but the simplicity of the Christian.

5. The gospel is a message of love, and therefore it ought to be preached with great affection.– Never were such messages of love announced to the world before. "God so loved the world," &c. "Come ye out from them, be ye separate," &c. This is fitly called "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." It is an overflow of his blessedness. To preach these things with an

unfeeling heart is not to preach “as we ought” to preach. Cultivate the affectionate. Not indeed an affectation of feeling, but genuine feeling. Christ wept over sinners, and so must we. If we trifle with men, or be careless about their salvation, or deal forth damnation with an unfeeling heart, we do not preach “as we ought.”

II. Let me offer A FEW MOTIVES to this duty of preaching the gospel as it ought to be preached.

1. Consider the examples held up for your imitation. You have Peter . . . Paul . . . John . . . in each of whom these things are exemplified. Nay, more— you have Christ. Nor have you examples in distant ages only; but you have seen some, even among you . . . Pearce!

2. Consider the examples exhibited for your warning. Some have sunk into indolence and self-indulgence; sauntering about and gossiping, instead of preaching, from house to house; and there has been an end of them. Some have risen into pride and priestly insolence, and there has been an end of them. Some have trifled with the truth, and God has given them up to destructive error. Others have plunged into political speculations, which have eaten up all their religion: aiming to govern the world, they have lost the government of their own souls, and of their peculiar charge.

3. Consider the effects that may follow. – If you were deputed to negotiate a peace between the contending powers of Europe, you would tremble lest the curses of many should fall upon you. My brother, be faithful, and you shall receive a crown. If you be not, the eternal curse of God awaits you!

LXI – THE WORK AND ENCOURAGEMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER.

“His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” – Matt. xxv. 21.

SUCH is the solemn and important charge, my brother, allotted you, that if you were to contemplate it merely as it relates to its difficulties, you might shrink at the thought of it; but I rejoice to say you enter upon your pastoral work under favourable auspices. You have the hearts of your people; and that point gained is more than a thousand. You could never expect to do them good, unless you were interested in their affections.

I feel a pleasure in complying with your desire that I should address you on the present interesting occasion, and shall request your candid attention to a few observations founded on a part of the parable of the talents.

It is worthy of notice, that, as our Lord approached the close of his ministry, his preaching partook of an increasing solemnity. This chapter concludes his ministerial discourses, and is all upon the subject of the last judgment. The parable of the virgins, and that of the talents, both lead to the same point. And these are followed by a solemn representation of the final judgment. The world is convened, and the Son of God distributes everlasting salvation to his people, and everlasting destruction to his enemies.

Such was the close of our Saviour’s ministry; and from one of these representations I shall address you, that you also may be prepared for his second coming.

The occasion of the parable of the talents is given by Luke. He tells us, that when our Saviour came near to Jerusalem, many thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. But it was a temporal kingdom that occupied their minds; and, in order to destroy their vain conceits, our Lord described himself under the parabolical form of a certain nobleman, who went into a distant country to receive a kingdom, and delivered his goods to his servants in trust, of which trust, or of the manner in which they had fulfilled it, they were each one to give an account. This was, in effect, saying to his disciples, “It is true, I am going to receive a kingdom, but not here; and you shall partake of that kingdom, but not yet.” Thus he led them to expect that until his

second coming their business was not to amuse or agitate themselves about what post of honour they should occupy, but to bend their attention to a solemn and important trust committed to them.

We may remark here, (1.) The talents do not mean grace, but gifts, or things to be improved. Grace is that by which we improve them. One man had a talent, and yet turned out an unprofitable servant. He never had the grace of God in truth, but had a gift or trust imparted to him, for the abuse of which he was finally condemned. (2.) These talents are dispensed in different degrees – some have five, some two, and some one. (3.) Every man is called to occupy what he has – and must give an account of it – and no more. He that had two talents received the approbation of his lord, just as he who had five.

We may collect, from the whole, the important work of the Christian ministry, and the encouraging motives to a faithful discharge of it.

I. We have an interesting view of THE WORK OF A CHRISTIAN MINISTER. You are here represented as a servant – you are required to be a good and faithful servant – and you must not make light of your charge, though it extend only to a few things.

1. You are a servant of God. – You are intrusted with a portion of his property, of the use or abuse of which, another day, you will have to render an account. God has put a talent into your hands, and says, “Occupy till I come.”

Many things might be mentioned as included in the talents intrusted to you, as time, property, knowledge, influence, opportunity: for all these you must give an account. But we pass over these as common to you and others, and shall confine our attention to those which are peculiar to us as ministers. There are two in particular which constitute our ministerial trust – the gospel of Christ, and the souls of the people.

The gospel of Christ. – This is impressively recommended by Paul to Timothy, in the close of his First Epistle “O Timothy! – (and Paul never dealt in interjections without feeling his subject to be one of vast importance) – O Timothy! keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.” The gospel is a most sacred trust, and you must keep it. Not keep it back, but keep it safe; hold it fast in your mind and your ministry. The best way to hold fast the truth as a minister is to live upon it as a Christian. Attempt to keep it any where but in your heart, and it will go. If it be merely in the

memory, it is not safe. He that is reasoned into the truth may be reasoned out of it. It is living upon the truth as a Christian that will cause the heart to be established with grace.

The souls of the people. – These also are a part of the property committed to your trust, of which you must give an account. You may say, perhaps, There's such a one, and such a one – they have attended my ministry; but I have never been able to discover any thing in them friendly to the cause of Christ. – But the question which may be addressed to you is, Did you warn them? Did you deal faithfully with them? In a word, Did you discharge your trust? – If you have, your soul shall be delivered, and their blood shall be on their own heads. But if not, though they perish in their iniquity, their blood will be required at your hands. My brother, you must “watch for souls as those that must give an account.” – You may have to allege, with regard to others, They would not receive the doctrine I taught; they were always opposing it, always cavilling at it, and have often caused my heart to ache. But the question for your consideration is, Did you teach them in love? Did you bear and forbear with them? If they have gone astray like lost sheep, have you searched after them with a desire to restore them? Did you preach “publicly, and from house to house?” – My brother, let it be your concern to give your account “with joy, and not with grief.”

2. You are not only a servant of Christ, intrusted with an important charge; but are required to discharge that trust as a “good and faithful servant.” The term “good” stands opposed to “unprofitable.” A good and faithful servant is a profitable servant. True, we cannot profit Christ absolutely, but we may relatively: he has an interest in the world, and we may profit that – a people, and we may profit them: and he will consider every thing done to them for his sake as done to him; and thus you may be a profitable servant. It is not enough that you do no harm. It is true, many are injurious; but others, who are not injurious, are “cumberers of the ground,” and as such are unprofitable, and as such will be cast out. The servant in the parable is not cast out for what he did, but for not doing what he ought to have done. – You are to be a “faithful” servant. Faithfulness is absolutely required of a servant of Christ. You are not required to be successful: your Lord and Master was not very successful; but he was faithful, and so must you be. There is great need of faithfulness. People love that their ministers should “prophesy smooth things.” They love a flesh-pleasing, flattering doctrine. This may not be true of all, but it is of many. They love preaching that soothes, and that cherishes hope and comfort, and ease and peace, whatever

be their character and their state hence multitudes will tell you that they cannot profit under a preacher, when the whole secret is that they cannot be comforted in their sins. Probably, if the preacher were to comfort them, it must be at the expense of the gospel; he must preach false doctrine, and cry, Peace, when there is no ground for peace. So do not you. They may complain that you do not feed them: well, nor should you: you are not required to feed men's lusts, but their graces. Be faithful.

Still your faithfulness must be tempered with love. There is such a thing as unfeeling fidelity— and preaching at people rather than to them. Our Lord himself, who is a perfect pattern of faithfulness, and was particularly severe against the hypocritical Pharisees, yet wept over sinners, even while denouncing judgments against them. “Speak the truth in love.”

3. You must not think it beneath you, though your lot should be to take the charge of “a few things.” – I have often thought of this passage in reference to a small people, and these perhaps chiefly poor. I am aware that it is flattering to human vanity to have large congregations, and on some accounts it is also desirable; but should it be otherwise with you, – if yours should be only a small congregation, consisting of a few people, and these chiefly poor, and this for many years to come, – what then? . . . Just think of the commendation of your Lord, “Well done, good and faithful servant; forasmuch as thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Is not this enough? And ought we not, as ministers, to be more concerned to execute well that trust which we have than to be always seeking after a larger? I abhor the spirit that shall send for an orator, merely for the purpose of gathering a respectable congregation. A faithful discharge of the trust which God gives us is the way to have that trust increased. Instead of being anxious for a large charge, we have reason to tremble lest we should be found unfaithful in that which we have. There are times in which the spirits of a minister will flag, on account of the fewness of his hearers. The sight of empty pews must prey on his peace and comfort. But be not discouraged; remember that the thinnest assembly is made up of immortal beings, and chiefly perhaps of those who are yet in their sins; and you have an object of greater magnitude within the possibility of your compass than was ever presented to the grasp of an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Buonaparte. The salvation of one soul is of more worth than the temporal salvation of a world – a soul, purchased by the Son of God himself. Think of this, my brother, and be not discouraged, even though you should have

comparatively few to hear, unless, indeed, the cause exist in your own deficiency. Be “faithful over a few things,” and you shall eventually be “ruler over many things.”

I proceed to consider,

II. THE IMPORTANT MOTIVES which are here presented to us for the discharge of our trust.

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1. You will receive the approbation of your Lord. – Place yourself in idea, my brother, before your Lord and Master, at the last day, and anticipate the joy of receiving his approbation. This is heaven. We should not study to please men so much as to please God. If we please him, we shall please all who love him, and, as to others, they are not on any account worthy of being pleased at the expense of displeasing God. It is doubtless gratifying to receive the “well done “of a creature; but this in some cases may arise from ignorance, in others from private friendship; and in some cases men may say, “well done,” when, in the sight of Him who judges the heart, and recognises the springs of action, our work may be ill done. And even if we have done comparatively well, we must not rest satisfied with the approbation of our friends. Many have sat down contented with the plaudits of their hearers, spoiled and ruined. It is the “well done” at the last day which we should seek, and with which only we should be satisfied. There have been young ministers, of very promising talents, who have been absolutely nursed to death with human applause, and the hopes they inspired blighted and blasted by the flattery of the weak and inconsiderate. The sound of “well done” has been reiterated in their ears so often, that at last (poor little minds!) they have thought, Surely it was well done; they have inhaled the delicious draught, they have sat down to enjoy it, they have relaxed their efforts, and, after their little hour of popular applause, they have retired behind the scenes, and become of little or no account in the Christian world; and, what is worse, their spirituality has declined, and they have sunk down into a state of desertion, dispiritedness, and inactivity, as regards this world, and of uncertainty, if not of fearful forebodings, as to another – My brother, you may sit down when God says, “Well done!” for then your trust will be discharged; but it is at your peril that you rest satisfied with any thing short of this. Keep that reward in view, and you will not, I trust, be unfaithful in the service of your Lord.

2. Your honour and happiness in the world to come shall be greatly enlarged. – If you have been “a good and faithful servant” here, you shall “rule” there; and if here you have been faithful over “a few things,” there you shall be a ruler over “many things.” There will be a glorious

augmentation of honour and blessedness. The language is figurative. The idea may be expressed by an allusion to David's worthies, who followed him in his trials, and whom he promoted when he came to the throne those who, to procure him a little water, fought their way through the opposing army, were highly rewarded. And so Jesus assured his apostles, "Ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Of course we are not to understand this literally; but the idea conveyed appears to be this – That a faithful discharge of the trust committed to us in this world will contribute to our honour and blessedness in the world to come. In fact, if this idea is not conveyed, it will be difficult to determine what is.

Nevertheless, the best services we can render are mingled with sin, and therefore, instead of deserving a reward, need forgiveness. The reward we shall receive will be a reward of grace, not of debt. Were it not for the sake of Christ, nothing we do could be accepted, there being so much sin cleaving even to our best services. The Lord accepted Abel and his offering. First he accepts our persons for the sake of Christ, and then our services. And our services, being accepted, become also rewardable for his sake: our future honours are a part of Christ's reward. If you are instrumental in saving a soul, it will be impossible for you to meet that soul in heaven, and not rejoice over it; it will, in fact, be your crown of rejoicing. So your honour and blessedness will form a part of Christ's reward.

It is an unscriptural and irrational notion, that all will have an equal degree of happiness in heaven. All will be perfectly happy, but some will not have so large a capacity for happiness as others. Every vessel will be full, but some vessels will contain more than others. "One star differeth from another star in glory." The apostle Paul must enjoy more in heaven than a soul caught up from infancy; since part of the happiness of heaven will consist of remembrance of the past But the diversity most important for our consideration is that which will arise from the manner in which we have performed our trust. In proportion to the degree of fidelity with which we have discharged the trust committed to us in this world will be the honour and happiness conferred upon us in the next.

3. You will participate in that joy of which your Lord partakes: – "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." You will "sit down with him on his throne." Whatever the joy is that was "set before

him,” and for which he “endured the cross, despising the shame,” in that joy, if you have “run with patience the race which is set before you, looking unto him,” you shall partake. That which rejoices Christ’s heart will rejoice yours – the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. He will not rejoice alone; but admit to his joy all those who have had any share in the great work to accomplish which he humbled himself unto death.

My brother, let this thought encourage you amidst all your trials– that you are to enter into the joy of your Lord. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set clown with my Father in his throne.”

LXII – ON PREACHING CHRIST, ETC.

“We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.”— 2 Cor, iv. 5.

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A REMARK which I once heard from the lips of that great and good man, the late Mr. Abraham Booth, has often recurred to my recollection. “I fear,” said he, “there will be found a larger proportion of wicked ministers than of any other order of professing Christians! “It did not appear to me at the time, nor has it ever appeared since, that this remark proceeded from a want of charity, but rather from a deep knowledge of the nature of Christianity, and an impartial observation of men and things. It behoves us, not only as professing Christians, but as ministers, to “examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith.” It certainly is possible, after we have preached to others, that we ourselves should be cast away! I believe it is very common for the personal religion of a minister to be taken for granted; and this may prove a temptation to him to take it for granted too. Ministers, being wholly devoted to the service of God, are supposed to have considerable advantages for spiritual improvement. These they certainly have; and if their minds be spiritual, they may be expected to make greater proficiency in the Divine life than their brethren. But it should be remembered, that if they are not spiritual, those things which would otherwise be a help would prove a hinderance. If we study Divine subjects merely as ministers, they will produce no salutary effect. We may converse with the most impressive truths, as soldiers and surgeons do with blood, till they cease to make any impression upon us. We must meditate on these things as Christians, first feeding our own souls upon them, and then imparting that which we have believed and felt to others; or, whatever good we may do to them, we shall receive none ourselves. Unless we mix faith with what we preach, as well as with what we hear, the word will not profit us. It may be on these accounts that ministers, while employed in watching over others, are so solemnly warned against neglecting themselves: “Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock,” &c. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.”

Preaching the gospel is not the only work of a Christian minister; but it is a very important part of his duty, and that which, if rightly attended to, will be followed by other things. To this, therefore, I shall request your attention.

You cannot have a better model than that which is here held up to you. The example of the apostles and primitive ministers is for our imitation. Three things are here presented to our notice; what they did not preach – what they did preach – and what they considered themselves.

I. WHAT THE APOSTLES DID NOT PREACH: – “We preach not ourselves.” It might be thought that this negative was almost unnecessary; for, except a few gross impostors, who would ever think of holding up themselves as saviours, instead of Christ? “Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?” Very true, in this gross sense, few men in the present day will be found to preach themselves. But self may be an object of preaching without being expressly avowed, and even while with the tongue Christ is recommended. And there is little doubt that self is the great end of numbers who engage in the Christian ministry For example:

1. If worldly advantage be our object, we preach ourselves. – It is true there is but little food for this appetite in our congregations. Yet there are cases where it is otherwise. Men have made their fortunes by preaching. And if this have been their object, they have had their reward. If this had not been a possible case, Paul would not have disavowed it as he does: “Not for a cloak of covetousness, God is witness.”

2. If we make the ministry subservient to a life of ease and indolence, we preach ourselves rather than Christ. We may get but little for our labour, and yet, being fond of a life of sloth, (if a life it can be called,) it may be more agreeable to us than any other pursuit. It is from this disposition that many ministers have got into the habit of spending a large part of every week in gossiping from house to house; not promoting the spiritual good of the people, but merely indulging themselves in idle talk. I might add, it is from this disposition and practice that a large proportion of the scandals among ministers have arisen. Had there been no danger from these quarters, we should not have met with another of Paul’s solemn disavowals: “Our exhortation was not of uncleanness.” Such a declaration as this was not without meaning. It describes the false teachers of those times, and of all times.

3. If the applause of our hearers be the governing principle of our discourses, we preach ourselves, and not Christ. To be acceptable is necessary to being useful, and an attention to manner with this end in view is very proper; but if the love of fame be our governing principle, our whole ministry will be tainted by it. This subtle poison will penetrate and pervade our exercises, till every one perceives it, and is sickened by it, except ourselves. It will inflate our composition in the study, animate our delivery in the pulpit, and condescend to fish for applause when we have retired. It will even induce us to deal in flattering doctrine, dwelling on what are known to be favourite topics, and avoiding those which are otherwise. It is a great matter to be able to join with the apostle in another of his solemn disavowals:” For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know,— nor of men sought we glory.”

4. If our aim be to make proselytes to ourselves, or to our party, rather than converts to Christ, we shall be found to have preached ourselves, and not him. We certainly have seen much of this species of zeal in our times – “Men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” Nor do I refer merely to men who would be thought singularly evangelical, and even inspired of God – who are continually holding up themselves as the favourites of Heaven and the darlings of Providence, and denouncing judgments on all who oppose them; and the tenor of whose preaching is to persuade their admirers to consider themselves as the dear children of God, and all who disapprove of them as poor blind creatures, knowing nothing of the gospel. Of them and their followers I can only say, “If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” But men who have paid great attention to the Scriptures, and who have preached and written many things on the side of truth, have nevertheless given but too evident proof that the tenor of their labours has been to make proselytes to themselves, or to their party, rather than converts to Christ.

II. WHAT THE APOSTLES DID PREACH: – We preach “Christ Jesus the Lord.” This is the grand theme of the Christian ministry. But many have so little of the Christian minister about them, that their sermons have scarcely any thing to do with Christ. They are mere moral harangues. And these, forsooth, would fain be thought exclusively the friends of morality and good works! But they know not what good works are, nor do they go the way to promote them. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Preach Christ, or you had better be any thing than a preacher. The necessity laid on Paul was not barely to preach, but to preach Christ. “Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel!” Some are employed in

depreciating Christ. But do you honour him. Some who talk much about him, yet do not preach him, and by their habitual deportment prove themselves enemies to his cross If you preach Christ, you need not fear for want of matter. His person and work are rich in fulness. Every Divine attribute is seen in him. All the types prefigure him. The prophecies point to him. Every truth bears relation to him. The law itself must be so explained and enforced as to lead to him Particularly,

1. Exhibit his Divinity and glorious character. – The New Testament dwells much on his being the Son of God – equal with God. It was this that heightened the gift of him, John iii. 16. Hence the efficacy of his blood, 1 John i. 7. Hence the condescension of his obedience, and the dignity of his priesthood, Heb. iv. 14-16. Hence the greatness of the sin of rejecting him, John iii. 18; and of apostacy, Heb. x. 29.

2. Hold up his atonement and mediation as the only ground of a sinner's hope. – It is the work of a Christian minister to beat off self-righteous hope, which is natural to depraved man, and to direct his hearers to the only hope set before them in the gospel. Be not concerned merely to form the manners of your congregation, but bring them to Christ. That will best form their manners. The apostles had no directions short of this: "Repent, and believe the gospel." They never employed themselves in lopping off the branches of sin; but laid the axe to the root. Your business with the sins of mankind is, to make use of them to convince your hearers of the corruption of their nature, and their need of a radical cure.

3. Hold up the blessings of his salvation for acceptance, even to the chief of sinners. – "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." The gospel is a feast, and you are to invite guests. You may have many excuses and refusals. But be you concerned to do as your Lord commands. And when you have done your utmost, there will still be room. Dwell on the freeness, and fulness, and all-sufficiency of his grace, and how welcome even the worst of sinners are, who, renouncing all other refuges, flee to him.

4. Preach him as "the Lord," or Lawgiver, of his church, no less than as a Saviour. – Christ's offices must not be divided. Taking his yoke, and learning his spirit, are connected with coming to him. Believers are "not without law unto God, but under the law to Christ."

The preaching of Christ will answer every end of preaching. This is the doctrine which God owns to conversion, to the leading of awakened sinners to peace, and to the comfort of true Christians. If the doctrine of the cross be no comfort to us, it is a sign we have no right to comfort. This doctrine is calculated to quicken the indolent, to draw forth every Christian grace, and to recover the backslider. This is the universal remedy for all the moral diseases of all mankind We proceed to notice,

III. IN WHAT LIGHT THE APOSTLES CONSIDERED THEMSELVES: – “Your servants for Jesus’ sake.” Ministers are not the servants of the people in such a sense as implies inferiority, or their having an authority over them. On the contrary, what authority there is is on the other side “Obey them that have the rule over you.” Nor are ministers the servants of the people in such a sense as to be directed by them what to preach. In these respects one is their Master, even Christ. But ministers are the servants of their people, inasmuch as their whole time and powers require to be devoted to their spiritual advantage – to know them, caution, counsel, reprove, instruct, exhort, admonish, encourage, stimulate, pray, and preach. Study to promote their spiritual interests as individuals, and their prosperity as a people.

Nor should ministers think it too much to lay themselves out in this work. They do it “for Jesus’ sake.” This was the motive addressed to Peter. “Lovest thou me? – Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs.” – “Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Let Christ be not only the theme of my remaining ministry, but the exaltation of him and the enlargement of his kingdom the great end of my life! If I forget THEE, O my Saviour, let my right hand forget; if I do not remember THEE, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!

LXIII. – THE INFLUENCE OF THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST ON THE MIND AND WORK OF A MINISTER.

“The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit.” – 2 Tim. iv. 22.

IN addressing you, my brother, on this interesting portion of Scripture, I shall simply offer a few remarks on the blessing desired, and consider its influence on the discharge of the Christian ministry.

I. Let us offer a few remarks on THE BLESSING DESIRED. – If we were addressing ourselves to persons who were strangers to experimental religion, we might despair of being understood on this part of the subject; and even among Christians it is more easily felt than accurately described. We know nothing of Divine influence but by its effects. We know we are created, but we know nothing of creative power. We know we are supported, but we can only feel ourselves upheld. We know Christ promised to be with his servants to the end of the world, and I hope we have felt the effects of it. We feel our wants hitherto supplied, our strength renewed, and our work in some measure succeeded; and we are taught to what to ascribe it But more particularly,

1. The blessing here desired is something different from gifts. – God has favoured you with gifts; but so he did Judas. Many shine and figure away with these, with whose spirits the Lord Jesus Christ holds no communion. Gifts are the gold of the temple; but communion with Christ is that which sanctifieth the gold. Without this, gifts will be injurious both to you and to your people.

2. This blessing is more than grace itself, considered as inherent. – I need not tell you that our graces have no separate subsistence. We are the branches living on the Vine. Paul said, “I live” – (and surely he had a right to say so, if any man had!) – and yet he checks himself, and adds, – “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

3. It is a blessing which you shall enjoy in common with your Christian brethren. – It is not peculiar to you as a minister, but common to all Christians. And is it the better (you may ask) for this? Yes, it is. The best blessings are those common to Christians, Psal. xxvii. 4; Phil. iii. 8. The Romish priests have contrived to secure the cup exclusively to themselves; but it was not so from the beginning: “Drink ye all of it.” And not only the cup, but the thing signified, is common to all Christians. And the blessings which are common to Christians as such are of the greatest importance to us as ministers. If we study, and pray, and preach merely as ministers, we shall make poor work of it; but if as Christians, we shall prosper We proceed,

II. To consider THE INFLUENCE OF THIS BLESSING ON THE DISCHARGE OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY. – Knowing that without him we could do nothing, our Lord has assured

us, “Lo! I am with you always, to the end of the world.” And now, by his strengthening us, we can do all things Observe,

1. It is this that will render the doctrine of Christ familiar to us, and our favourite theme. – The Spirit of prophecy is called the *Spirit of Christ*, because it testified of his sufferings, 1 Pet. i. 11. And if Christ be with our spirit, though only in an ordinary way, it will lead us to delight in the doctrine of Christ, Eph. iii. 17, 18. When Christ dwells in the heart, see what follows! This is the unction by which we know all things. And this is the doctrine which God blesses to the building of his church.

2. It is that which gives a Divine energy to our preaching. – It imparts a much greater energy than the greatest eloquence, natural or artificial. And though it will not in itself convert sinners, yet God usually honours such preaching. And it is a means of conversion. The apostle “so spoke that a great multitude believed.” And where such preaching does not convert, it yet commends itself to the conscience. “They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he (Stephen) spoke.” Apollos, who was “fervent in the Spirit,” by his preaching “mightily convinced the Jews.” The preaching of Paul was “not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power.”

3. It is this that will render our visits profitable. – It is difficult to turn conversation into a savoury and useful channel. But if the Lord Jesus Christ be with our spirit, all difficulty will vanish. Without this every thing will be forced and constrained; and we shall feel especially at a loss in our directions to inquirers.

4. It is this that will sustain your heart under trials. You are aware you must expect these. You will see things in your people towards God that will grieve you. This will enable you to reprove them in love. You will see things in them toward each other that are decidedly wrong. This spirit will cause you to be a peace-maker. You will experience painful things towards yourself: some will not receive your doctrine; some will misconstrue your conduct, and pervert your statements: but if the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, you will not sink under the heaviest trials. You may have to lament your want of success. But go on, and be of good cheer. If the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, though Israel be not gathered, you shall not go unrewarded.

LXIV. – HABITUAL DEVOTEDNESS TO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY.

“Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” – I Tim. iv. 15, 16.

My dear brother, you will find many things in these Epistles worthy of your attention. With a view of showing the connexion of the text, let us notice what is said in the preceding verses.

Ver. 12. Timothy was a young man, and was charged to let no man despise his youth. But how could he prevent that? By being “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Then, whoever might dislike him, no one could despise him.

Ver. 13. It is supposed that Paul expected shortly to see Timothy, when he would have many things to say. Meanwhile he directed him how to spend his time to good purpose. In reading. – God knows all things; but we must receive ere we impart. Exhortation. – He was not to hide, but to communicate his knowledge of Divine things, as he received it: the reading of a minister should be for his people, that he may be furnished with sentiments suited to their cases. Exhortation seems to be that kind of teaching which is from house to house, consisting of counsels, cautions, &c. Doctrine. – He was to dig in this mine, that he might enrich others.

Ver. 14. He was supposed to have a gift, an extraordinary gift, foretold in prophecy, by some of the New Testament prophets, and imparted by the laying on of hands. Yet even this was a talent to be improved, and not neglected. Then how much more ordinary gifts!

Ver. 15. This verse expresses how his gift was to be improved. It is a shameful abuse of the doctrine of Divine influence to allege it as a reason for neglecting diligent study for the pulpit. Yet such things are; and the advocates of this perversion can quote Scripture for it; as – “Take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given to you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.” But this has no application to pulpit exercises, or ordinary ministrations. It was very suitable for the persecuted Christians; for how could they know what to answer, before they were questioned by their persecutors: it was therefore greatly calculated to encourage them, and relieve them from all

anxiety. But to apply this direction to our ordinary ministrations is a shameful perversion. See Eccles. xii. 9-11.

Give me your attention, my dear brother, while I endeavour to illustrate the different branches of the exhortation of the text, and consider the motives held up to enforce it.

1. Let us endeavour to ILLUSTRATE THE EXHORTATION.

The things on which you are called to meditate are what you “read,” the things to which you “exhort,” and the “doctrine” of Christ. Or on the Scriptures – on the precepts contained in them, and on the doctrines to be deduced from them.

“Meditate on these things.” – There is a depth in them that requires it. You may read the Scriptures a hundred times over, and yet be only on the surface, far from having fathomed them. They are able to make us wise, through faith; but to believe without searching argues great indifference, and is building without a foundation. The Scriptures were always considered a deep mine, even when they consisted of only the five Books of Moses. David meditated in the law of the Lord “day and night.” It was to his spiritual growth as water is to a tree.

Do not imagine you understand enough of the Bible; or because you have assented to a few truths, therefore you are in possession of all. – Paul desired to know yet more. Angels desire to look into the things revealed there. David intimates that the law contains “wondrous things,” and prays that his mind might be enlightened to comprehend them. A spiritual state of mind is the best expositor, and more is discovered with it, in a few verses, than in whole chapters without it.

Do not be content with general truth. – Study the Scriptures minutely, and for yourself, and pray over your study. This will make it your own; and it will be doubly interesting to yourself and your people, than if you adopt it at second hand. – Read and think, not merely as a minister, but as a Christian.

“Give yourself wholly to them.” – No man can excel in any art or science, but by giving himself wholly to it. Why is it one understands law? Because he gives himself wholly to it. Why is it another understands physic? Because he gives himself wholly to it. Why do rulers understand government? Because “they attend continually upon this very thing.” And though Divine knowledge differs in some things from that which is natural and worldly, yet not in this. It is by constant application and use that our senses discern truth from error, and good from evil, Heb. v. 14. And you must not only give your whole time to this study, but your whole heart.

“Be thou in them.” – It is a shocking thing to be engaged in a work which is against the heart. It is not what we think officially, but spontaneously, that proves what we are: not what we do at certain appointed seasons; but the bent of our minds in common, in our leisure hours, when we sit in the house, or walk by the way. Engaging in the work without the heart is the forerunner and cause of many scandals. Time hangs heavy on their hands – they saunter and gossip from place to place – scandalize and listen to scandal – and not seldom terminate their career by impurity.

“Take heed to thyself.” – It were an awful thing to guide others to the right way, and not walk in it ourselves. See that all is right between God and your own soul. Public religion, without that which is private and personal, is worse than no religion. We had better be any thing than preachers of the gospel, unless we be personally interested in it.

“And to thy doctrine.” – There is great danger of going off from the gospel – perhaps in submission to great authorities, or to please the people. That minister who makes the taste of his hearers the standard of his preaching may go on, and succeed in pleasing them and himself; but, at the coming of his Lord, it will be said to him, Thou hast had thy reward!

There is also danger of going off from the gospel by leaning to our own understanding. Consult your own understanding; but remember you are liable to err; therefore do not lean to it, in opposition to the Scriptures.

Finally, “Continue in these things.” – That only is true religion which endures to the end.

IL Let us consider THE MOTIVES BY WHICH THE EXHORTATION IS ENFORCED.

1. Your growth in gifts and graces will be hereby apparent. – “That thy profiting may appear to all.” The meaning is much the same as the parable of the talents – five, by improvement, gaining other five. It holds true in temporal things even, Prov. xxii. 29. There is, however, this difference between their pursuits and yours they labour to obtain an earthly good; you a heavenly, spiritual, and eternal one. If worldly profit or honour were your object, you might study the embellishments of style, or the arts of the partizan; but if you would be the servant of God, your heart must be in your work. A diligent minister will be a useful one.

2. Your own salvation is involved in it: – “Thou shalt save thyself.” This language does not denote that we are the cause of our own salvation any more than of the salvation of others. But as we may be instrumental in the latter, so we may be active in the former, Acts ii. 40. Take refuge

in the Saviour you recommend to others. The expression may also have reference to that particular kind of salvation which consists in being delivered from the blood of souls.

3. The salvation of your people may be involved in it. – A spiritual, diligent minister is commonly a fruitful one, and a blessing to his people. Consider these exhortations, and the motives by which they are enforced, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. Thus thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.

LXV. – AFFECTIONATE CONCERN OF A MINISTER FOR THE SALVATION
OF HIS HEARERS.

“We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.” – 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

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MY dear brother, you have requested me to address you on your appointment to the important office of pastor over this people; and I know of nothing more impressive on the subject of the Christian ministry than this whole chapter, both as to what a minister should not be, and as to what he should be. Not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile, nor as pleasing men; but gentle, affectionate, laborious, disinterested, holy. Let us, however, confine ourselves to the words we have selected as a text, in which the apostle compares his own ministrations and those of his colleagues to the gentle solicitude of a nurse, whose concern is to impart warmth and strength to her children. “So we, being affectionately desirous,” &c. Three things here require your attention: the feeling of a true minister of Christ towards the people of his charge – the subject-matter of his ministry – and the manner in which he must dispense it.

1. THE FEELING OF A TRUE MINISTER OF CHRIST TOWARDS THE PEOPLE OF HIS CHARGE. – This is an affectionate concern after their salvation, one of the most important qualifications for the ministry. True, it is not the only one. There are gifts, both natural and acquired, which are necessary, since, without them, we cannot be said to be “apt to teach.” But this qualification is that without which the greatest gifts, natural and acquired, are nothing as to real usefulness. Genius may amuse, but “love edifieth.” A strong mind and a brilliant imagination may excite their admiration, but this will attract the hearts of the people. Look at the men who have been the most honoured; and you will find that they are not the brightest geniuses, but the humble and affectionate.

Look at the example of Paul. – Observe how he felt towards his poor, unbelieving countrymen, who sought his life: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved.” Even his zeal for the conversion of the Gentiles bore an aspect towards his brethren after the flesh: “I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the

Gentiles, I magnify my office; if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.” He speaks as a humane seaman would in a wreck; who, when he found he could not save all, would do what he could, plunging into the sea and saving at least some of them. Here, my brother, is an example for your imitation, towards the unbelieving part of your hearers.

See also how he felt toward those Christians who had sinned.— Witness his Epistles to the Corinthians. How anxious he was to reclaim them! how dissatisfied with any thing short of their restoration! looking upon them as lost children, 2 Cor. ii.; xiii. 2.

Look at the example of John towards the rising generation.— “I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in the truth.” – And look at the example of our apostle, in connexion with the text, towards all to whom he wrote. He could not be satisfied with any reward short of their eternal salvation. All other hope, all other joy connected with them, he considered as of small account; and he looked forward to them as constituting the brightest jewels in his future crown.

Most of all, look at the example of your Lord and Saviour. – How did the kindness and love of God our Saviour appear! What did he not forego, and do, and suffer! May the love of Christ constrain you!

II. Consider THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF HIS MINISTRY: – The gospel of God.”

1. It is a blessed errand to go on. Good news to a lost world. Angels were visited with wrath, but men with the cup of salvation. There is a pleasure in being an almoner, even of earthly blessings: but you have the unsearchable riches of Christ to impart; you are the herald of peace, and pardon, and reconciliation. How a man, bearing such tidings from an earthly sovereign, would be hailed by a number of convicts!

2. But what is the gospel? It is not merely the privilege of believers; for then it would not be for every creature. It is a declaration of what Christ has done and suffered, and of the effects; exhibiting a way in which God can be “just and the justifier of the ungodly.” It is not merely to convince of sin, but also to point to the remedy.

3. Make a point, then, of distinctly and habitually preaching the gospel. Do not suppose your people are so good, and so well informed, as not to need this. Visit the sick, and you will be astonished how little they know, compared with what it might reasonably be expected they should know. Many sermons are ingenious essays; but if they bear not on this great object, they

are not the gospel. Woe unto you if you preach not the gospel! Do not suppose I have any particular suspicion that you will not. But I feel the importance of the exhortation, “Preach the gospel.” Study the gospel— what it implies, what it includes, and what consequences it involves. I have heard complaints of some of our young ministers, that though they are not heterodox, yet they are not evangelical; that though they do not propagate error, yet the grand, essential, distinguishing truths of the gospel do not form the prevailing theme of their discourses.

I love a sermon well laden with Christian doctrine. I love to find young ministers well learned in the Scriptures. Then their preaching will not be dry, but good news and glad tidings. Complaints have been made of some preaching as too doctrinal; and a preference has been manifested for experimental and practical preaching; but that doctrinal preaching which I would recommend should include both. The doctrines of the Scriptures, Scripturally stated, are calculated to interest the heart, and to produce genuine evangelical obedience. You need not fear that you shall be limited. You may take a wide range. There is a great variety of subjects which may be introduced; as – the purity and spirituality of the law, the evil of sin, the wrath of God against it, and many others: but then all these naturally lead to an explicit declaration of “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.”

III. Consider THE MANNER IN WHICH A MINISTER SHOULD DISPENSE THE GOSPEL: – “Willingly;” and so as, while imparting the gospel, to impart their own souls with it. Some have supposed that it is the matter, and not the manner of preaching, that God blesses. But I see no ground for this distinction. I allow that the matter is of the first importance; but the manner is not of small account. For example: the apostle prays that he might make the gospel manifest, as he ought to speak,” Col. iv. 4. And this relates to manner, not to matter. You may preach even the gospel dryly. It must be preached faithfully, firmly, earnestly, affectionately. The apostle so spoke that many believed. Manner is a means of conveying truth. A cold manner disgraces important truth. “Willingly.” – Where the ministration of the word is connected with external honours and great temporal advantage, there is no test of this; but where it is attended with self-denial, there is “Our own souls.” – This is expressive of the deep interest the apostles and their colleagues took in the gospel, and their earnest desire that their hearers should embrace it. Hence we speak of pouring out our souls in prayer. How would you feel in throwing out a rope to a drowning man, or in lighting a fire in a wilderness to attract the attention of one who was

dear to you, and who was lost? How did Aaron feel during the plague, when he stood between the dead and the living? O my brother, enter into these feelings. Realize them. Let them inspire you with holy, affectionate zeal. Souls are perishing around you; and though you cannot “make an atonement for the people’s sins,” yet you can publish one, made by our great High Priest; and, receiving and exhibiting this atonement, you may hope to save yourself and them that hear you.

LXVI. – THE NATURE AND ENCOURAGEMENTS OF THE MISSIONARY WORK.

[Substance of the Charge delivered to the first Missionaries of the Baptist Society at the parting Meeting at Leicester, 1793.]

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“Peace be unto you: as my Father sent me, so send I you.” – John xx. 21.

MY very dear brethren, every part of the solemnities of this day must needs be affecting; but if there be one part which is more so than the rest, it is that which is allotted to me, delivering to you a solemn parting address. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that the hope of your undertaking being crowned with success swallows up all my sorrow. I could myself go without a tear, so at least I think, and leave all my friends and connexions, in such a glorious cause. Impressed, therefore, with these sentiments, I can the more readily and cheerfully part with you.

My dear brethren, let me address you in the words of our Lord Jesus to his disciples, “Peace be unto you: as my Father sent me, so send I you!” The whole of this language was sweet, especially considering the troubles of their hearts to whom it was primarily addressed.– The preface is sweet: “Peace be unto you” – as if he had said, All is well as to the past, and all shall be well as to the future. – The commission itself is sweet. Nothing could well be more grateful to those who loved Christ than to be employed by him on such an errand, and to have such an example to imitate.

There is to be sure a great disparity between your mission and that of Christ. He came to offer himself a sacrifice for sin, and by his blood to obtain eternal salvation for poor lost sinners. Yet, notwithstanding this disparity, there are various points of likeness between your undertaking and that of your Lord and Master. I shall single out three or four, which I would wish to impress upon your minds. These are – the objects you must keep in view – the directions you must observe – the difficulties you must encounter – and the reward you may expect.

First, There is an analogy between the OBJECTS of Christ’s mission and those of yours. The great objects of his mission were to glorify God, and to seek and to save lost souls; and yours are the same. Men and devils have dishonoured God; they had virtually called him a hard master; had thrown off his yoke, and represented him, in the punishment of sin, as a Being whose ways

were not equal, But Christ by his obedience and death rolled away these reproaches. By the former, that is, by making it his meat and drink to do the will of his Father, he proved in the face of a rebellious world that his yoke was easy and his burden light. By the latter, that is, by enduring the full penalty of the Divine law without a murmuring thought, he manifested its equity, declaring in effect that God was in the right, and that man deserved to fall a sacrifice to his justice. You also, my brethren, have to glorify God, and that both by your cheerful obedience to his will, and by patiently enduring affliction. The heathen will judge of the character of your God, and of your religion, by what they see of your own character. Beware that you do not misrepresent your blessed Lord and his glorious gospel. It is a great encouragement to be engaged in the same cause with Christ himself. Does he ride forth as on a white horse, in righteousness judging and making war? Rev. xix. You are called, like the rest of the armies of heaven, to follow him on white horses, pursuing the same glorious object, that India may be conquered by his truth. May you be able at the close of your lives to say, after the example of your Lord, "I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Christ was sent of the Father, not only to glorify his name, but to seek and to save that which was lost; and such, my brethren, is your errand. Go then after your Saviour's example, go in pursuit of the lost sheep; follow after them, search and find them out, that they may be brought home to his fold, from the dark mountains whither they have wandered, and gathered from the dreary deserts whither they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day; that they may be delivered from the errors and abominations of the heathen, and be brought to the knowledge and enjoyment of God.

Secondly, Christ, in the execution of his mission, was UNDER THE DIRECTION OF HIM THAT SENT HIM, and you must be the same. As Mediator, he always acted as the Father's servant. Though a Son, and as such equal with God, yet in his official capacity he learned obedience. It is emphatically said of him, he both did and taught; and in both he inflexibly adhered to the directions of him that sent him. "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him who sent me."— "I have not spoken of myself, but the Father who sent me; he gave me commandment what I should say, and what I should speak."

Christ acted as the Father's servant; and you are the servants of Christ. There is a woe upon any minister if he preach not the gospel of Christ, but especially upon those whose business it is

to preach the gospel among the heathen. Among us, if you do not preach the gospel of Christ, others will; but there all, under God, will depend upon you. When the Lord first planted the Israelites in Canaan, he planted them wholly a right seed. Be exceedingly careful to follow this example. See that the doctrines you teach, and the duties you inculcate, be not yours, but his who sent you. A right seed is necessary to a profitable harvest. You must likewise do the will of Christ as well as teach it, and that after his example. He pleased not himself. Perhaps no men must expect to have their wills so often crossed, or to meet with so frequent calls for self-denial, as those who embark in such an undertaking as yours. This leads me to observe,

Thirdly, Christ, in the execution of his mission, had GREAT DIFFICULTIES AND TRIALS to encounter, and you must expect the same. The trials of your Lord were partly from pain, and partly from contempt. Great were the hardships he had to undergo. Foxes had holes, and birds had nests, but he had not where to lay his head. And, notwithstanding all that your brethren can do to make you comfortable, you may expect to taste of the same cup. Your Lord was also exposed to contempt. He is mad, said they, why hear ye him? If these things were done to the green tree, what may be expected of the dry? But Jesus “endured the cross, and despised the shame.” May you be enabled to follow his example. He met with trials, not only from open enemies, but from pretended friends. Those who ate of his bread lifted up the heel against him. Betrayed, denied, and forsaken, he yet persevered; nor did he desist till he could declare, “It is finished.” Then, when he could appeal to him who sent him, saying, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do,” then he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost! What an example for you to follow!

Fourthly, Christ was not sent forth in his undertaking without a PROMISE OF SUPPORT IN IT, AND A GLORIOUS REWARD FOR IT. It was predicted of him, “He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have brought forth judgment unto victory.” This implied that he would meet with much to discourage him. If many waters could have quenched his love, it had been quenched; but Divine Omnipotence supported him. And as his Father sent him, so sends he you. Faithfully has he promised to be with you always to the end of the world. The Divine Father promised him souls for his hire; that he should see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. And herein, as the Father sent him, so sends he you. You also shall have your reward. The joy set before him encouraged him to endure the cross; you also shall enter into the joy of the Lord.

Keep that joy in your view. For “it is a faithful saying, If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” Hearken to the promise of your Lord and Master, for his sayings are very true, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit down with me in my throne, as I also have overcome, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

Go then, my dear brethren, stimulated by these prospects. We shall meet again. Crowns of glory await you and us. Each, I trust, will be addressed at the last day, by our great Redeemer, “Come, ye blessed of my Father; – these were hungry, and you fed them; athirst, and you gave them drink; in prison, and you visited them;--Enter ye into the joy of your Lord.” Amen.

LXVII. – THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY A GREAT WORK.

[Sketch of a Sermon addressed to two Missionaries and their wives.]

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“I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you!” – Neh. vi. 3.

MY dear young friends, it would have been more agreeable to my feelings if this address had been delivered by one of our brethren in London. I submit, however, the more cheerfully, from the persuasion I have that you will receive what I say in love. I shall found a few observations on the words I have read. Let us review the occasion of them.

We may consider the chapter as a fulfilment of what Daniel had foretold about a hundred years before. “The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”

It shows, in a striking light, how all great undertakings for the church of God are accompanied with difficulties and strong oppositions. When Judah returned, all their difficulties seemed at an end: they imagined, now they were liberated, they had only to go to work and rebuild the temple; but they soon discovered that they had new enemies.

The conduct of Sanballat and Geshem shows how the most iniquitous designs are concealed under friendly pretences. “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages – but they thought to do me mischief.”

The answer of Nehemiah discovers a union of wisdom and firmness. He saw through their designs, but did not reveal his suspicions. His answer would have been proper even had they meant as they said.

But wherein was the greatness of the work of Nehemiah? The building of a wall would not seem to be a mighty matter. But then it must not be considered in itself, but in its effects – it was to secure a city, where the worship and cause of God were to be carried on for ages; and in this view it was a great work, and greatly interested the hearts of the godly. Hence the people had “a mind to work,” night and day, with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. In short, with respect to the principle, it was the same as that which has attracted the hearts of the godly in all

ages – love to Zion, or the cause of God. It was that which dictated the 137th Psalm, when times went ill; and the 29th chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, when things went well. Such was the public spirit of those times.

But, passing the work of Nehemiah, I shall not be thought to misapply the subject if I apply it to the work in which you are engaged. You have a great work, and you may expect great difficulties and oppositions in its execution, and great encouragements. It is a work which will occupy your whole attention.

I. Let me remind you of a few things relative to THE GREATNESS OF YOUR WORK. – Such a view of it may, in one sense, dismay you, and induce you to exclaim, “Who is sufficient for these things?” But in another sense it is necessary; and remember, for your encouragement, that they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”

1. It is the work of saving souls. – Light as this is made of by the world, it is great. The temporal salvation of an empire is great and interesting; but the salvation of one soul exceeds all this for the soul is capable of eternal happiness or misery. “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?”

2. It is the work of introducing the gospel where it has never been. – There is great importance attaching to this, whether in a country, city, town, or village. It is lighting a candle which may burn for ages. When Paul and Silas first entered Europe, they might have no conception of the effects. But what they taught was a light that has never been extinguished.

3. It is a work to which you may expect great opposition. – Satan will dispute every inch of ground with you, and his opposition will be varied. It is true, your brethren who have gone before you have had difficulties to encounter which you will probably escape; but do not expect that all opposition has ceased. The more God blesses you, the more opposition you may expect, not from Brahmins only, and Hindoos, but from Europeans. Expectations of ease and honour are utterly unworthy of a Christian missionary.

4. It is a work that must occupy your whole attention. Nehemiah could not be diverted from his work, nor must you. You must not go With a divided heart. You may wish to attend to other things; but every thing must be done in subserviency to your great work. Never lose sight of this. If politics or worldly speculations invite your attention, you must reply, “I am doing a great work: why should the work cease whilst I come down to you?” Always consider an attention to

any thing that would divert you from the grand object you have in view as “going down;” and Say, I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down.

II. But while yours is unquestionably a great work, it is also a work IN WHICH THERE ARE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENTS. – Under this head we may remark,

1. It is a work the foundation of which has been laid at a great expense. – When God would save a nation, he sent Moses and Aaron: he gave Egypt for them. When he would restore them, he sacrificed Babylon. But to lay the foundation of this work he sacrificed his Son!

2. It is a work which occupies a first place in the designs of God. – All his other works are subservient to this. They were not only made by Christ, but for him. The revolutions of empires are permitted for the sake of the people of God. Babylon was raised up to chastise them, and destroyed to deliver them. The invasion of Britain and other nations was permitted for the gospel’s sake; and who can tell but this may be the end which God intends to answer in permitting British armies to subdue India? Even slavery itself may be permitted for the gospel’s sake.

3. It is a work in which the hand and heart of God will be with you. – If ever you incline to despond, remember “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it.”

4. It is a work which involves the happiness of your species.– Whence spring all the miseries of mankind? “Whence come wars and fightings?” From the state of their hearts. The gospel is the remedy, and the only remedy, Psal. lxxvii.

III. Let me conclude with a few REMARKS: –

1. The greatest work requires attention to a multitude of little things. – It is composed of little things. Great works are not accomplished by a single exploit, but by a series of labours – by leaving no stone unturned. Look at Nehemiah. He inquires, weeps alone, prays, speaks to the king, obtains favour and a commission; but still he returned to labour, even in the night, and took a calm and deliberate view of the work; and when he communicated his intentions, his friends joined him; and thus, by a multitude of operations, the work is accomplished. He was laborious, firm, disinterested, patient, and persevering; and looked for his reward to God.

2. A great work may be hindered and stopped by little things. – Little follies will spoil the whole, Eccles. x. 1; such as the dispute of the disciples who should be the greatest; and little

discords; and self-will. A great character will imitate Him who “pleased not himself.” Abraham’s condescension to Lot is a fine example.

My dear sisters, yours is a great work. In the first ages, there were women who helped to advance the good cause; and we are indebted nearly as much, under God, to the services of your sex as to those of our own. It is for you to strengthen the hands of your companions, by a cheerful demeanour under their various discouragements, by conversing with the native females, by keeping order in the family, by setting an example of modesty and affection, by economy and industry. – You may be of service on your voyage. It was remarked of one of our dear sisters, during her voyage, by an officer, that he never saw her equal in sweetness of disposition, calmness, kindness, and firmness in danger. This was a powerful recommendation of the gospel. – You may be members of a large family – conform to its rules; make yourselves useful; beware of jealousy, whisperings, envies.– You may be called to preside in a small station – conduct every thing in the fear of God. Bear and forbear, and forgive. Keep near to God. Seek your own happiness and interest in that of the whole.

Dear brethren and sisters, we shall be with you in heart. We shall pray for you. And we trust we shall meet you in the world above. Meanwhile my brethren and companions, assembled to bid you farewell, will cordially unite with me in the fervent prayer – Remember them, O our God, for good! – The Lord Jesus Christ be with their spirits!

LXVIII – FAITH IN THE GOSPEL A NECESSARY PREREQUISITE TO PREACHING IT.

[Sketch of a Sermon addressed to the Students of the Bristol Education Society.]

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“We believe, and therefore speak.” – 2 Cor. iv. 13.

THE words immediately preceding those on which I shall found a few observations on the important work of the ministry are a quotation from the 116th Psalm. David, under his troubles, believed in God, and therefore spoke. And the apostles, under persecutions and reproaches, believed in the gospel, and therefore spoke. They spoke boldly in the name of Jesus, whatever might be the consequence. They might be slain, as Christ was. But then like him, too, they would be raised, ver. 14. If they suffered with him, they would also reign with him.

I shall comprise what I have to offer under two heads of discourse – the subject-matter of the Christian ministry, and the necessity of believing it.

1. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY. – It is that which we have believed. It is of the first importance to a messenger to know his errand. Without this, whatever be our talents, natural or acquired, we are unqualified for the Christian ministry. Without this, the most fascinating eloquence is in danger of becoming an engine of mischief. The subject-matter of the apostle’s preaching is variously described: it is called “the faith” – “the truth” – “the truth as it is in Jesus” – “Christ crucified” – “the gospel” – “the word of reconciliation,” &c. In these descriptions, we see our work.

It does not follow that the dictates of reason and conscience are to be rejected or disused in preaching. The light of nature itself teaches some truth – such as the being of God, the accountableness of man, the fitness of doing to others as we would they should do to us, our being sinners, or what we ought not to be. These are truths which the gospel supposes, and which require to be enforced in subserviency to it.

But several important particulars do follow; as,

1. That we must not deal in curious speculations, which have no foundation in the Scriptures.– Some have been turned aside by such an indulgence to false hypotheses, and made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. A large proportion of the objections to Divine truth

are of this kind “How can a man be born when he is old?” “How are the dead raised, and with what body?” How can one be three, and three one? How could Christ be both God and man? How can the certain efficaciousness of grace consist with free agency and the accountableness of man? Paul would not answer such questions as these by opposing conjecture to conjecture, but in the spirit of the text “We believe, and therefore speak.”

2. That we must not deal in private impulses or impressions, which have no foundation in the Scriptures. – One founds a doctrine on his own experience; but experience ought to be judged by the Bible, not the Bible by experience. “The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.” – Another swears that, as God liveth, such a thing is true; but what does this prove, save the impudence and profanity of the preacher?

3. That the person and work of Christ must be the leading theme of our ministry. – In this, if we be Christians, we have believed; and this we must preach to others. For example: We must preach him as Divine. How else could we know whom we had believed? We must preach him as having assumed our nature, and thereby qualified himself to be our Saviour, Heb. ii. 14, 15. We must preach him as dying for our sins, &c., 1 Cor. xv. 1-4. We must preach him as the Saviour of the lost, taking the place of the chief of sinners. We must preach him as the only way of acceptance with God. “Being justified freely by his grace, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In short, he is suited to all our wants. To whom else shall we go? He hath the words of eternal life. So preach Christ.

Every sermon, more or less, should have some relation to Christ, and bear on his person or work. This is the life of all doctrine, and it will be our own fault if it is dry. Do not consider it as one subject among others, but as that which involves all others, and gives them an interest they could not otherwise possess. Preach not only the truth, but all truth, “as it is in Jesus.” However ingenious our sermons may be, unless they bear on Christ, and lead the mind to Christ, we do not preach the faith of the gospel.

As all doctrinal religion meets here, so does all practical. – The Scriptures draw every thing from the dying love of Christ. “Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” – “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” – “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he

was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” – “Let this mind be in you which was in our Lord Jesus Christ.” – “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for its: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” – “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church.”

The same may be said of experience. – Christian experience clings to Christ and his gospel. The religion of some, who talk of experience, goes to idolize their own feelings and admire their supposed graces. But true Christian experience thinks little of self, and much of Christ, John vi. 68.

II. THE NECESSITY OF BELIEVING THE GOSPEL before we preach it: – “We believe, and therefore speak.” It does not follow that every believer should be a preacher; but every preacher ought to be a believer; for,

1. This is the only motive that will render preaching a delight. – How can we discourse on subjects which we do not believe? If we have not tasted the grace of God, we shall feel no pleasure in proclaiming it to others. Is it any wonder that faithless preachers call preaching “doing duty?” or that they preach other men’s sermons? and that in delivering them they are uninterested by them? But if we speak because we believe, our preaching will be the utterance of a full heart, and our work its own reward. We must taste of truth as Christians, before we preach it. Studying it merely as ministers will never do. Believing belongs to us as Christians.

2. It affords ground to hope for usefulness to others. What effect will the sermons of those ministers have, who, by their frothy conversation, loose deportment, or avaricious spirit, are always counteracting them? The hearers will say, and say truly, He does not believe his own doctrine. He may talk of truth, or of holiness and practical religion; but all is vain. – If, on the other hand, we feel and practise what we preach, this must at least recommend it to the conscience; and it often does more. The one resembles a man persuading you to embark on board his vessel, assuring you it is safe, while he himself stands on the shore. The other has embarked himself and all he has; and, like Moses to Hobab, invites you to accompany him.

3. It will render the work of the ministry compatible with common honesty. – The world has long accused ministers with being hypocrites. This is malicious enough; but while men engage in this work from indolence, avarice, pride, or any other worldly motive, rather than from the

principle expressed in the text, they are furnished with a pretext for such reproaches. If we believe not ere we speak, we only deceive, and the sooner we throw off the deception the better.

4. No other motive will bear the test. – What an account will faithless ministers have to give when asked, “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?” One may have to answer, The vanity of any parents led them to educate me for the ministry, and when I grew up I was fit for nothing else. – Another may have to answer, My own vanity influenced me: having a taste for learning, and public speaking, and esteeming it a reputable and genteel mode of life, I took to it. – Another may have to say, It was my own conceit and arrogance: having a large portion of native effrontery, I made my way, and was caressed by the people. – Oh how different these from the apostles! “We have believed, and therefore speak.”

But why do I thus speak? I am not addressing a society which pretends to train graceless characters for the ministry, or to make men ministers by mere education. They are aware of the necessity of their pupils being believers; and if any of them prove otherwise, they have deceived their patrons. They do not so much as pretend to impart gifts; but merely to improve those which Christ appears to have imparted. They wish to enable the aged and experienced part of our ministers, like Aquila and Priscilla, to expound to the younger brethren the way of the Lord more perfectly.

And as to you, my young brethren, I have no particular jealousy of you; only as we ought to be jealous with a godly jealousy, “looking lest any one fail of the grace of God.” You are likely, another day, to occupy stations of much greater importance than if each were a minister of state. Our churches look to you. Many aged ministers are gone. Those that remain will soon follow. God has begun a great work in our day. May you take it up, and carry it on. It is but the other day since we were youths, looking up to those who are now no more. Now the load lies on us. Soon it must lie on you, or on some others. Should you prove yourselves unworthy, God will find others. Deliverance will arise from some other quarter. O men of God, “Flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart!”

I ought not to conclude without recommending to the audience that Saviour whom we have believed. We have found rest for our souls. Come ye. Forsake the world and your own

righteousness. We have worn his yoke, some of us for forty years, and it has never galled us. Take his yoke, and learn of him, and you shall find rest for your souls. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

LXIX.— THE YOUNG MINISTER EXHORTED TO MAKE FULL PROOF OF HIS MINISTRY.

[Sketch of a Sermon addressed to the Students of the Stepney Academical Institution.]

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“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.” – 2 Tim. iv. 5, 6.

BEING requested to address a word of exhortation to my younger brethren, I doubt not but I shall be heard with candour and attention; and that not only by those immediately addressed, but by all my younger brethren in the ministry. You will not suppose, then, that I mean to compare myself to an apostle, or you to evangelists; but the work is in substance the same, whether it be in the hands of extraordinary or ordinary men: and as Paul argued the importance of Timothy’s work from his own approaching dissolution, I may be allowed to enforce it upon you from kindred considerations; namely, that many of your elder brethren are gone, and others are going the way of all the earth.

You will not expect me, my dear young men, to discourse to you on the advantages of literary acquirements. I might do so indeed, and that from experience. I know the value of such acquirements, both by what I have been enabled to attain, and by the want of that which I have not attained; but it is more congenial with my feelings to speak of things of still greater importance. Three things in particular are suggested by the passage which I have read, and these I shall recommend to your serious attention; namely, the work itself to which you are devoted – the duties inculcated as necessary to the discharge of it – and the considerations by which it is enforced.

I. THE WORK ITSELF to which you are devoted. – It is called a “ministry.” The word signifies, as you are aware, *service*. The leading character of a minister is that of a servant. This is an idea that you must ever bear in mind. It is a service, however, of a special kind. Every Christian is a servant of Christ, but every Christian is not a minister of the gospel. A deacon is a servant, as the word also signifies; but his service respects temporal things; yours is that on

account of which the office of deacon was appointed, that you should “give yourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” It is that which Jethro assigned to Moses – “Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God.” Your living under the gospel dispensation renders this a pleasant work: it must, if you enter into the spirit of it, be pleasant to study and impart the gladdening doctrine of salvation.

I have observed two extremes relative to this work; one on the part of ministers themselves, and the other on the part of the people. That on the part of ministers has been an abuse of their office of ruling, a fondness for power, aspiring to the exercise of dominion over their brethren. It has always grated in my ears to hear such language as this: – *My church, my deacons, &c.*, as if churches were made for them, rather than they for churches. Do not emulate this empty swell. True greatness will revolt at it. He that will be great, let him be the servant of all. Think of the woe denounced against the idol shepherd: “The sword shall be upon his arm, and his right eye shall be darkened.” Think especially of him who said, “I have been amongst you as one that serveth.”

The extreme on the part of the people is this: from the idea of ministers being servants, some of them seem to have imagined that they are their masters. It is true they have a Master, and one to whom they must give account; but it is not to the people of their charge. As Christians, they are accountable to one another, the same as other Christians; but as ministers, to Christ only. In serving the church of God, you will act as a faithful steward towards his lord’s family; who renders service to them all, but is accountable to his lord only. Serve the church of Christ for his sake.

II. Let me direct your attention to THE DUTIES INCULCATED AS NECESSARY TO THE DISCHARGE OF THE MINISTRY. These will be found to consist in four things: –

1. Vigilance. – “Watch thou in all things.” This is a general quality that is required to run through all our work. If any of you enter the ministry as furnishing you with a genteel post in society, you will be at best a drone, and had better be any thing than a preacher. You are watchmen, and must be awake when others are asleep.

2. Patience. – “Endure afflictions.” If you cannot bear these, you had better let the ministry alone. If you be good ministers of Jesus Christ, you will not only be afflicted in common with

others, but the afflictions of others will become yours. “Who is offended, and I burn not?” You must care for all, and expect on some occasions, when you have done, to receive evil for good.

3. Activity in the great work of evangelizing men: – “Do the work of an evangelist.” Without considering you as evangelists in the full import of the term, there is a portion of the work pertaining to that office which is common to us all as ministers. Wherever Providence may station you, my dear young men, be concerned to evangelize your neighbourhood. Look at the situations of a number of the ejected ministers, and see if the effects of their evangelical labours do not remain to this day. Who can look over the churches in Cambridgeshire, without seeing in them the fruits of the labours of Oddy and Holcroft? Who can review those of Bedfordshire, and not perceive in them the effects of the labours of Bunyan – labours for which he suffered twelve years’ imprisonment? The same remarks might be made respecting other parts of the kingdom. Emulate these men of God in evangelizing your respective neighbourhoods.

Fidelity in discharging your trust: – “Make full proof of thy ministry.” The word means thoroughly to accomplish that which you have undertaken. Such is the import of Col. iv. 17, “Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” Were you to present a soldier with a sword, and bid him make full proof of it, he could not misunderstand you. Would you see an example, look at that of the great apostle in the context: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

But here allow me to be a little more particular. If you would make full proof of your ministry, you must attend,

(1.) To personal religion. – This is often inculcated by the apostle. – “Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock.” – “Take heed to thyself and to thy doctrine,” &c. Many people will take our personal religion for granted; as though a man who teaches others must needs be religious himself: but woe unto us if we reason in this way! Tremble at the idea of being a graceless minister – character, it is to be feared, not very unfrequent! To what is it owing that some of our churches have been prejudiced against an educated ministry? I may be told, to their ignorance; and in part it is so; but in part it is owing to other causes. The lightness, the vanity, the foppery, and the irreligion of some young men have produced not only this effect, but an abhorrence of the very worship of God, as by them administered. Who were ever known to be prejudiced against a Pearce, a Francis, or a Beddome, on account of their education? If there

were individuals of this description, let them be disregarded as ignorant, and let them be told that vicious characters are found among the uneducated as well as the educated. But be it your concern, my dear young men, to shun these evils. The instructions which you receive, if consecrated to Christ, will be a blessing to you; but if your object be to shine before men, they will be a curse.

(2.) Let the time allotted you for education be employed in acquiring a habit of useful study. – To make full proof of your ministry, you must give yourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word. “Meditate on these things, and give yourselves wholly to them;” and this to the end of your lives. Let no one imagine that he will leave his present situation fully qualified for the work. If, by prayer and a diligent application to study, you acquire such a habit of close thinking as that on entering the work it shall be your delight to prosecute it, this is all that will be expected of you. It is for the want of this habit of study that there are so many saunterers, and have been so many scandals amongst ministers.

(3.) In every stage of literary improvement be concerned to have it sanctified and subordinated to God as you go on. On this depends its utility. It were desirable that the study of languages and sciences should commence in early youth, and that religion should come after it to make the last impression, seeing it is this that ordinarily stamps the character. Could we be certain that the faith of Christ, and the gifts suited to the ministry, would follow an early education, this would be our course; but as this cannot be, our dread of an unconverted ministry makes us require religion as the first qualification. Only pursue learning that you may be better able to serve the Lord, and all will be well. It is thus that our brethren in India, though their attainments were not made in the earliest stages of life, have retained their spirituality and increased in usefulness. Let me conclude by noticing,

III. THE CONSIDERATION WITH WHICH THESE EXHORTATIONS ARE ENFORCED: – “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.” This language denotes an anxiety in the apostle that the work of God might go on when he should have fallen asleep; and if we be worthy of the name of Christian ministers, we must feel a portion of the same. Dear young men, to you we look for successors in the work. It is not for me to say how long your elder brethren may continue; but we have seen stars of no ordinary magnitude set within a few years! It seems but yesterday since they were with us, and we were the juniors

amongst them. Now we are obliged to take their place; and you, beloved youths, will soon have to take ours. We do not wish to hold ourselves up as your examples; but the cause in which we have been engaged, and in which the Lord has not frowned on our attempts, we do most earnestly recommend to your tender and solicitous regards.

Your elder brethren may be spared a little longer, and yet be able to do but little more. We feel the force of the wise man's counsel; may you feel it too— "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

LXX. – IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS CONSIDERED
AS THE GIFT OF CHRIST.

[Sketch of a Sermon addressed to the Church at Moulton³ on the Ordination of Mr. (now Dr.) Carey, August 1, 1787.] Page | 103

“Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” – Psal. lxxviii. 18.

SOME think it refers to God’s goings forth in behalf of his people Israel, leading them forth to victory, taking their enemies captive, and enriching them with the spoils. Suppose it be so, we are warranted to consider it as mainly referring to Christ, for so the apostle Paul has applied it, Eph. iv. 8.

The apostle not only applies it to Christ, but proves it applicable. Thus he reasons, ver. 9, 10, “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended,” &c. The captivity which he led captive was our spiritual enemies who had led us captive – Satan, death. And, having obtained the victory, he proceeds to divide the spoils. Gifts to men. – As David made presents. And hence comes our ordinances, ministers, &c. There was a glorious fulfilment immediately after his ascension, in a rich profusion of gifts and graces to his church, like David’s presents. Here it is “received;” in Ephesians “gave.” He received that he might give, received the spoil that he might distribute it. But as I wish to appropriate the passage to the work allotted me, the whole of that to which I would at this time call your attention will be contained in two things:

1. THE GREAT BLESSING OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

1. Ministers are *received for* and are *given to* you by Christ. – As men, and as sinful men, ministers are as nothing, and wish not to make any thing of themselves; but as the gifts of Christ it becomes you to make much of them. (1.) If you love Christ, you will make much of your minister, on account of his being his gift. A gift designed to supply Christ’s absence in a sort. He is gone, (“ascended,”) but he gives you his servants. By and by you hope to be with him, but as yet you are as sheep in the wilderness. He gives you a shepherd. (2.) If you fear God, you will be

³ The nine which follow this were addressed to other churches on the ordination of their respective pastors.

afraid of treating your pastor amiss, seeing he is the gift of Christ. God took it ill of Israel for despising Moses, Numb. xii. 8. He is my servant.

2. Ministers are not only given to but received for you of God the Father, as a covenant blessing, among the spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. In this view consider that Christ received nothing at his Father's hand but what cost him dear – cost him his life. Or if the allusion be to the dividing of the spoils, suppose we say, He received them as a conqueror receives the spoils at the hand of the foe. Your minister was one of those who, like yourselves, were brands consuming in the fire. Christ took him from your enemies, and gives him to you. Make much of the gift on this account. “This I received of the Amorite.”

3. Consider your unworthiness of such a blessing. You are men, mere men, and, what is more, rebellious men, who had joined with Satan. And must you share the spoils! It is not usual to divide the spoils amongst rebels Men that put him to death had these gifts given to them. And we should all have done the same. Some of you, it is likely, have been vile and abandoned characters, and yet, &c.

4. The end of it: – “That the Lord God might dwell among them.” “But will God indeed dwell with men?” God had not dwelt with the world, nor in it, while sin bore the rule; but Christ's mediation was for the bringing it about. “Will God indeed dwell with men?” He will; and how? It is by the means of ordinances and ministers. A church of Christ is God's house, and where any one builds a house it is a token that he means to dwell there. What a blessing to a village, a country, for God to build a house in it. It is by this that we may hope for a blessing upon the means to the conversion of our children and friends, and for the edification of believers.

II. POINT OUT SOME CORRESPONDING DUTIES AS ANSWERING TO THESE YOUR PRIVILEGES.

1. Constant and diligent attendance at the house of God. If the house of God be God's dwelling, let it be yours, your home. If God gives you a pastor, do you thankfully receive and prize him. He hath not dealt so with every village.

2. Cheerfully contribute to his support. Christ has given you freely, and you ought to give him freely. Consider it is not as a gift, but as a debt; and not as done to him, but to Christ.

3. Follow those things which make for peace, with which the presence and blessing of God are connected.

4. Shun those things that tend to provoke the Lord to withdraw his gifts, and to cease to dwell among you.

LXXI. – NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” – John xiii. 34, 35.

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THE counsels of a dying friend have peculiar weight; those especially which arise from love, and a regard to our well-being. Such was this. It was the counsel of the greatest and best Friend we have; and the advice is calculated, more than any thing else, for our good. And what better than this can I advance on the present occasion? To enter into all the particular duties of a people to a minister and to one another would be far too wide a field. If therefore I dwell on the principle, I hope it will suffice, and prove beneficial. If you ask, What are our duties to our minister? I answer, Love him. If you ask, What are our duties to each other? I answer, Love one another. Learn this lesson well, and every thing else will follow. We shall endeavour to ascertain wherein consists the nature of Christian love, and why it is called a new commandment – to consider its importance in Christian society – and to state a few means and motives to cherish it.

I. Let us endeavour to ascertain THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE, AND WHY IT IS CALLED A NEW COMMANDMENT. – We may remark,

1. It is not mere good neighbourhood, or civility between man and man. – We may meet as neighbours, and practise the little civilities dictated by a sense of propriety, and regard each other indifferently; and yet be strangers to love.

2. It is not mere friendship. – This belongs to us as men. Heathens are capable of this. But there is no religion in it. It is not Christian love.

3. It is not mere respect on account of religion. – I never remember being without that. That was found in Saul to David, and at times in Pharaoh to Moses, and in Balaam to Israel. But there was no religion in it – no love.

4. It is not mere party attachment. – A good man will, of course, unite himself with that denomination of Christians whose sentiments he believes to be nearest the truth; but he will not limit his affection to a party, but love all who love Jesus Christ. A man may be a zealous

partizan, and the party whose cause he espouses may be nearest the truth, but he, nevertheless, may be destitute of love.

5. It is not that excessive and mistaken attachment which shall lead us to idolize and flatter a minister, or to exempt each other from the exercise of faithful discipline. This, in fact, is hatred. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.”

6. It is not mere benevolence itself. – There may be that without Christianity.

Then what is Christian love?

It is complacency in the Divine image. – It is a union of heart, like that of Ruth to her mother-in-law. Christian love is love for Christ’s sake.

This last remark, I suppose, furnishes a clue for its being called “a new commandment.” The old commandment required *benevolence*, or love to our neighbour; but this is complacency in Christ’s image, or the love of Christians as such. And being introductory to the New Testament or gospel dispensation, under which the church should be composed of believers only, it is suited to it. Personal religion is now to be the bond of union. This was (never so expressly required before. This is more than love to our neighbour, or benevolence; this is brotherly love, or complacency in each other as brethren in Christ, Rom. xii. 10; Heb. xiii. 1. This is genuine charity, 1 Cor. xiii.

II. Let us consider THE IMPORTANCE of this principle in Christian society. – This new commandment is the most extensive of any that could be given. Love is a most comprehensive principle; it is the fulfilling of the whole law; it is the grand cement that unites the spiritual building. Without this, any wind will blow it down. More particularly,

1. With respect to the duties of social religion. – Only love your pastor, and every thing of consequence will follow. You will attend early and constantly on his ministry. You will pray for him. You will take well his brotherly admonitions. And if you see faults in him, you will not unnecessarily expose him; but if the nature of the case allow, mention them to him alone. You will, in return for your spiritual privileges, cheerfully impart to him of your natural good things. You will, in a word, treat him respectfully, tenderly, and with affectionate fidelity. Only love your brother, and you will cast in your lot with him, and the house of God will be sweet to you. You will consider yourselves as intimately united to Christians, and, after the interruptions of

business or the world, you will rejoice, as did the primitive disciples, to return to “your own company.” The return of opportunities will be welcomed. You will have an interest in each other’s prayers. You will give and receive reproof. You will be kind to the poor, and particularly to those of “the household of faith.” You will sympathize with the afflicted. You will “bear one another’s burdens.” You will bear and forbear, and forgive.

2. With respect to its privileges and advantages. These are nothing without love. To be “fellow citizens with the saints,” to unite at the Lord’s table, and a variety of other privileges, without love, will be privileges in name only. With love, the company, counsels, and prayers of Christian friends will be valued; but not otherwise.

III. Let us mention a few MEANS AND MOTIVES to cherish this Divine principle.— As means,

1. Avoid those things which tend to damp it, — as sarcastic speeches, and unkind reflections.

2. Be concerned to be spiritually-minded yourselves, or others cannot love you as Christians.

If any err from this rule, let us beware that we do not make their conduct the rule of our own, returning evil for evil.

Consider as motives,

1. The love of Christ. — “As I have loved you, so love ye one another.” Let your love be ardent and self-denying.

2. This may comfort you under the world’s hatred. — If you be like Christ, the world will hate you, John xv. 17-19. Then when they hate you do not be without any source of comfort; but love one another.

3. Brotherly love is the grand recommendation of religion. — Young beginners are drawn by it. But if they cannot perceive this, they will be damped and discouraged, and the Holy Spirit will be grieved.

4. All love to one another will turn to our own account. — While self-love defeats its own ends, this will be sure to benefit us. Seek another’s good, and in it you shall find your own. “By this ye shall know that ye have passed from death unto life, because ye have love one to another.”

LXXII. – CHRISTIAN CHURCHES FELLOW HELPERS WITH THEIR PASTORS
TO THE TRUTH.

“We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.” – 3 John 8.

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THE ordination of elders over the churches was a practice among the primitive Christians, Acts xiv. 23. And I hope it will never be dispensed with in our churches. Besides being sanctioned by apostolical example, it is a guard against the introduction of improper characters, who, by getting an artificial majority in a church, may intrude themselves on a people to their great injury. Hence the exhortation, “Lay hands suddenly on no man.” It also furnishes an opportunity of solemnly addressing both parties on the intimate relation into which they have entered. In compliance with this custom, I would affectionately address the members of this church on the present interesting occasion.

The language of the text, I allow, has respect to Christian missionaries; but that which is said of them, and the treatment due to them, will in a great degree apply to settled pastors; for,

1. They went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles; and these give up all worldly prospects and pursuits for Christ’s name’s sake, and to serve your spiritual interests.

2. They were engaged in a great work, even the evangelization of the world; and so are these. God promised Canaan to Abraham, but Israel must take it; and the world to Christ, but Christians must conquer it. “Go ye into all the world,” &c. Of this army, Christian missionaries and ministers are the leaders.

3. They wanted help from their brethren, and it was to the honour of private Christians to help them; for in so doing they became fellow helpers, not to them only, but also “to the truth.” And so do these need help, and it is for you, by helping them, to be fellow helpers to the truth.

To illustrate and enforce the duty which is here enjoined upon you, we shall take a view of the work of a pastor, and observe, as we go along, how you are to be fellow helpers in it.

In general, it is spreading the truth. – This is a name by which the religion of the Bible is very properly designated, since it is not only true, but emphatically the truth; being the only true doctrine ever given to the world under the name of religion. All that went before it were false,

and tended to mislead and destroy the souls of men, on the true character of God and of men, and on the true way of salvation.

The apostle spoke not the language of conjecture, but of assurance; as one having been in a mine, coming to the light of day: “We believe and are sure.”

It is the work of your pastor to spread the heavenly truth, and yours to be fellow helpers to the truth. Particularly,

1. It is his Work to PREACH THE GOSPEL to you. – There are many ways in which you may be his fellow helpers.

1. In your prayers to God for him. – I have lately read of a man who despised the prayers of a people. But so did not Paul. “Brethren, pray for us.” – “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.” Prepare the way to God’s house by prayer. Do not expect to profit else. It is a great mercy that God sends to us by men like ourselves; men whose everlasting interests are involved in their doctrine. But they are sinful creatures, subject to temptations in common with others, and to some peculiar to themselves; they therefore need your prayers.

2. By an early and constant attendance, and spiritual attentiveness to the word, you may be fellow helpers. What an effect do empty pews, and yawning, sleepy hearers, produce! How delightful for a minister to enter his pulpit, as Paul speaks of coming to Rome, – in the hope of being comforted by the faith of his hearers! Rom. i. 12. Where faith is seen to glisten in the eyes of an attentive audience, it produces feelings and thoughts more interesting and affecting than could ever have been produced in the study; while the contrary has a tendency to chill and freeze the feelings of the soul, and to reduce a minister to a situation resembling a ship locked in by islands of ice near the poles.

3. By rendering his circumstances as easy as possible, so that his mind may not be harassed by worldly cares, you may be fellow helpers. – I never felt it a hardship to be dependent on a people who loved me. I have thought it an honour to be so supported. The expressions of love are sweet. But if love be wanting, all goes wrong. Little is done, and that little is not done heartily.

4. By enabling him by your habitual deportment to speak strongly as to the holy effects of religion, you may be fellow helpers. – He will wish to be able to point the world to the people of his charge, and say– There are my epistles of commendation, known and read of all men! And to

address you boldly in their hearing, in the language of the apostle – “Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” But if your conduct does not answer the description, who will believe him?

II. Another part of your pastor’s work is VISITING HIS PEOPLE FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, AND ENCOURAGING HOPEFUL CHARACTERS TO STAND FORWARD ON THE LORD’S SIDE.– And in this you may be fellow helpers.

1. By welcoming him, and teaching your children and servants to respect him. – Much depends on this. They will form their opinion of him by the sentiments they hear you express towards him; and if they do not think highly of him, it cannot be expected they should profit under his ministrations. On the contrary, if they witness in you a high esteem for his character and his talents, they will attend his ministry greatly prepossessed in his favour, and with minds prepared to receive his instructions.

2. By noticing those in the congregation who are inquiring after the way of salvation, and directing them to the good old way, you may be fellow helpers. – There are some who, like Barnabas with Saul, get acquainted with and assist converts in the Divine life, and introduce them to the church, Acts ix. 27. Such persons are great blessings in a church, and great helpers to the pastor. Be friendly with the poor; encourage the modest and timid; visit the sick, and converse and pray with them. This will strengthen the hands and cheer the heart of your pastor, and greatly promote the interests of the truth.

III. Another part of his duty is THE MAINTENANCE OF A STRICT AND FAITHFUL DISCIPLINE. And in this you may be fellow helpers. He must reprove, and rebuke, and sometimes separate from the church some of whom he once thought well. This is a painful duty. But it is a duty, and it is your duty to stand by him. Say to him, as the people said to Ezra, “Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.” Do not consult relationship, or worldly interests, or private friendships. Do not weaken his reproofs by siding with the sinner. Act in unison. “Have no fellowship with such a one, no, not to eat!”

You especially who are deacons, you must be fellow helpers. You must be to your pastor as Aaron and Hur were to Moses. Encourage him to advise with you. It is customary in some of our churches, and I wish it were in all, for the pastor and deacons to meet and consult on the affairs

of the church an hour or two, some evening immediately preceding the monthly meeting of the church. These meetings, in connexion with the stated meetings of the church, constitute a happy union of Christian wisdom with Christian liberty.

Thus, my dear brethren, I have pointed out, very briefly and plainly, a few ways in which you and your pastor may be fellow helpers to the truth. Consider what I have said as dictated by love and a desire for your own welfare, and for the promotion of the cause of our common Lord; and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

LXXIII. – ON CHRISTIAN STEDFASTNESS.

“We live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” – 1 Thess. iii. 8.

IF I wished to be impressed with a pattern of a Christian minister, I would study the second chapter of this Epistle; and if I wished to see a pattern of a Christian people, I know not where I could look, better than to the church of the Thessalonians, chap. i. 5-10. They were a very amiable people, but greatly persecuted; and this excited the sentiments and conduct expressed in the third chapter.

The amount of the text is, that stedfastness in a Christian people is the life of a Christian minister. We shall notice, therefore, the nature of Christian stedfastness, and its influence on the happiness of a minister.

I. Let us inquire WHAT IS THAT SPIRIT AND CONDUCT IN A PEOPLE EXPRESSED BY “STANDING FAST IN THE LORD.”

We may remark in general, (1.) The language supposes they are “in the Lord.” It may be thought, perhaps, my hearers, that I should take this for granted of you. And I hope I may of some, and of many; but can I of all? It will not be wise for you to take it for granted. It will be well if there be no profane person among you, as Esau. There is great force in that exhortation – (Heb. xii. 15) “Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” Beware therefore what members you receive. If the world be allowed to mingle with the church, it will soon become corrupt Rome National churches And even the best formed churches are liable to impositions, and in danger of imbibing a worldly spirit. (2.) The language itself is military. Its import is similar to the advice of the apostle to the Corinthians: “Watch you, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” It supposes the army of the Lamb subject to many onsets from opposing forces, which tend to break their ranks and to put them to flight. This is the object of Satan, who knows that if an army be thrown into disorder, it is defeated. The great onset of that day was persecution. We have of late years been exempted from this in public; but still we may expect family and individual persecution. They that will live godly, and thus oppose the current of public opinion and public practice, must still expect to suffer persecution. But the

chief things against which we are called to make a stand are the temptations of the world. Then let me be a little particular here, and apprise you of your danger in three quarters— in doctrine, discipline, and spirit.

1. Beware of being moved from the simplicity of Christian doctrine. – Christian doctrine is the foundation on which the church is built. Christians feel it to be so, and therefore will follow it wherever it is preached. The church has been attacked by infidelity, by gross corruptions, by false candour, and spurious zeal. If we be rooted and grounded in Christian doctrine, we shall not be materially wrong in any thing. The doctrine of the cross involves and will draw after it all evangelical truth, and holy discipline, and holy practice. But if that be given up, all will go to ruin. For example, If you give up the Divinity and atonement of Christ, the life-blood of Christianity is gone, and you become a dead, putrid mass. Or if, without openly rejecting these truths, you yet, under the specious pretences of candour, liberality, and charity, give up their importance, their effect will be the same. They that hold the truth with a loose hand will soon let it go; and they that receive not the love of the truth will soon be given up to believe a lie. – Or if, under the pretence of being favourable to practical religion, you make light of its leading principles, the effect will be the same. This would be razing the foundation to rear the structure, or tearing up the root to produce the fruit. – Or if you introduce such notions of the gospel as are at variance with the holy government of God, you in fact introduce another gospel. Such are a kind of religious gluttons, with a large appetite, but no spiritual taste. They may call themselves orthodox, and count all those who differ from them enemies to the gospel, and stun you with their effrontery; but what saith Paul? – “Many walk, of whom I tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.”– Or if you reduce the doctrine of the gospel to mere speculation, you will become conceited and litigious, thinking you know something while you are deplorably ignorant; and the effect will be the same. O my brethren, we beseech you by the love of Christ, and by the miseries and mischiefs occasioned by corrupt doctrine in the churches, “stand fast in the Lord!” Next to doctrine,

2. Beware of sinking into a relaxed discipline. – As an army without good order and discipline cannot stand their ground, so neither can a Christian church. Great forbearance should doubtless be exercised in small matters. There would be endless divisions if a uniformity of opinion were required in minor things. In such things we must bear and forbear. But we must be

firm and resolute in opposition to much of the liberality and candour of the present age. The church at Ephesus is commended because she “could not bear them which were evil.” There are not only wicked characters, but evils even in good men, from which the church is to be purged. There is plenty of work to be done by those who are spiritual. Many churches have sunk into ruin by slothfulness, and by worldly policy – retaining opulent sinners from a dread of losing their patronage, or from perverted notions of our Saviour’s meaning when he told the Jews that they who were without sin should cast the first stone, or from false tenderness, and sometimes from a wish to be excused in their own turn; thus agreeing together to tempt the Lord. My brethren, stand fast here. Whatever pleas may be urged, have no merely nominal members; but all effective men, whose hearts are with you, and whose prayers are with you. If any habitually absent themselves, try and restore them; but if they will not return, dissolve the union. If any man set himself against discipline, such a man had better be out of the church than in it. If any man forsake the gospel, restore him if you can; but if you cannot, where the bond of union is broken the form is not worth preserving, nor ought it to be preserved. The candour of modern times has in it a large portion of indifference to truth and uprightness, and is in direct contradiction to the counsel given to the seven Asiatic churches.

3. Beware of sinking into a worldly spirit. – This is a great temptation. In times of outward ease and affluence, many individuals have been carried away, and many churches melted down and lost in worldly conformity. The most dangerous feature of this evil is, that it may prevail in a person, and yet he shall maintain a respectability of character. Let a man fall into gross immoralities, and the world will soon let you know. But “men will praise thee when thou doest well for thyself.” And therefore many are entrenched in this evil, and yet fancy themselves good Christians all the while. This is one of the grand onsets of your mighty foe. My brethren, stand fast! We proceed,

II. To consider THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN STEDFASTNESS ON THE MIND AND LABOURS OF A FAITHFUL MINISTER.

There is something supposed in this as well as in the former part, of the subject; viz. that the minister be a man of God; otherwise, so long as you stand fast with him, he will be regardless whether or not you “stand fast in the Lord.” This is a good rule for trying the spirit. See that in all your stedfastness you have an eye to the Lord, and to his cause. Where a minister preaches

himself, so long as a people stand fast with him, he will praise them, and they will be sure to be the people of God! But the life and joy of a true minister of Christ will be, that you “stand fast in the Lord.” If your minister be the friend of God, as I trust he is, he will join with me in charging you to stand fast with him no longer, and no further, than he stands fast “in the Lord.” If he leave Christ, in doctrine or in practice, it is at your peril to follow him We may notice the influence of Christian stedfastness on a minister,

1. In his manner of preaching. – The effect on the mind is very great. If the people are often absent, late, inattentive, or sleepy, it is death to him. But if constant, early, attentive, affectionate, and spiritual, it is life.

2. In the matter of his preaching. – Christian stedfastness will enable your minister to state all the genuine effects of the gospel, and to point to you as exemplifications without fear of contradiction. But except you “stand fast in the Lord,” in vain will your minister present to the attention of his hearers, for their admiration, the church as the building of God, Psal. cxxvii. 1. My brethren, enable your pastor to refer to you as his “epistles,” his letters of recommendation, “known and read of all men.”

3. In the success of his ministry. – This greatly depends on the co-operation of his people, on their knowing one another, and provoking one another to love and good works, and on each one being willing to take some part in active service. This would be convincing to sinners, winning to inquirers, encouraging to your fellow Christians, and life to your minister. But if every thing be left to him, his heart will die, and his work will die in his hands.

It is not difficult to account for this, for your sanctification and salvation are his reward. If we have not this, what have we?

After all, my brethren, this is of greater concern to you than to your minister. For if he be faithful, he shall have his reward, whatever become of you. Though Israel be not gathered, yet will he be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and his God shall be his strength. His loss may be made up, but yours will be irreparable.

LXXIV. – CHURCHES WALKING IN THE TRUTH – THE JOY OF MINISTERS.

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” – 3 John 4.

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THE connexion of pastor and people, in dissenting churches, is altogether voluntary. There are no bonds to bring them together, or to keep them together, but love. The great point, therefore, in this connexion, is the maintaining of brotherly love, and to render each other holy and happy. You wish to render your minister happy, or you can expect no religious happiness yourselves. I have selected the text as pointing out the course of conduct that will accomplish this end. “Walk in the truth.”

I take it for granted that your minister can adopt the language of the text. If, indeed, he were a mercenary or an ambitious man, many other things would afford him much greater pleasure. But I trust, in this respect, his heart is one with the apostle’s. In pursuing this subject, I shall,

1. Offer SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE DUTY ITSELF OF WALKING IN THE TRUTH. – In order to this, we may observe that the truth is of a practical nature; other truths may be speculative, but not this. But what is truth? To this question I would reply generally and particularly.

1. In general – (1.) The truth is a system of love and goodness– an overflow of Divine blessedness. Then walk in love to the church, and bear good-will even to enemies. (2.) The truth is a system full of joy – “good news, and glad tidings of great joy.” Then be cheerful and happy, not morose and gloomy. (3.) The truth is a system of reconciliation. Then let it be your concern to live peaceably, and to exercise forgiveness. (4.) The truth is a system of amazing condescension. Then “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (5.) The truth is a system of purity – “a highway of holiness.” Then “be ye holy, in all manner of conversation.” (6.) The truth is a system full of importance. Then be you in earnest. “Strive earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.”

2. More particularly – (1.) Divine truth includes the existence of God, as a Being of infinite excellence and glory; “holy, just, and good.” Then live in the love and fear of God. (2.) It includes the Divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. Then make them, and not interest, or inclination, or fashion, the rule of your faith and practice. (3.) It includes the guilty and lost

condition of men as sinners. Then, in all your dealings with God, approach him in that character – as ill and hell-deserving. (4.) It includes the doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ. Then remember that you are “not your own,” but his. (5.) Divine truth teaches us, that if we are saved, it is in consequence of sovereign and discriminating grace. It traces our salvation to electing love, and informs us that the great end that Christ had, in laying down his life, was “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” And to walk in this truth is to be such people, to be distinguished by zeal and uprightness. Let it never be asked concerning us, “What do ye more than others?” (6.) It includes the doctrine of efficacious grace – “My people shall be willing in the day of my power.” – “The righteous shall hold on his way.” – Then to walk in this truth is to prove that grace is efficacious by a perseverance in all holy conversation and godliness. (7.) It includes the doctrine of eternal life, as infinitely outweighing all the pleasures and all the ills of the present life.” I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.” Then be dead to the world, and alive to God. Look not at the things that are seen and are temporal; but at those which are unseen and eternal.

My brethren, if the truth thus dwell in you, and operate, you will naturally be attentive to all relative duties; you will love your pastor, for the truth’s sake which he preaches; and if you love him, you will make a point of attending his ministry, of contributing to his support, and of consulting his peace and happiness in every possible way. – And if the truth dwell in you, you will also love one another, for the truth’s sake. You will watch over one another in the Lord, and follow the things that make for peace.

II. I proceed to notice THE CONNEXION BETWEEN SUCH A COURSE OF CONDUCT IN A PEOPLE, AND THE JOY AND HAPPINESS OF A MINISTER.

1. If he be an upright man, it will be the great object of his life that the people of his charge should be con formed to Christ; and it must needs be a matter of joy to see this great end answered. He must needs rejoice over the prosperity of those with whom he travailed in birth, till Christ was formed in them.

2. Such a course of conduct in a people would greatly assist a minister in his public work. – It recommends his preaching to the world. It speaks louder than language, when he can say of his people, “Ye are my epistles, known and read of all men.” It enables him to be bold in declaring

the holy efficacy of truth; and to answer the enemies in the gate, who would reproach the grace of God as tending to licentiousness.

3. Your sanctification and salvation are his great reward: – “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming?” As to any other reward, you well know that the prospects of Dissenting ministers, generally speaking, are any thing but inviting. And if his pecuniary reward were ten times greater, if he be a Christian, it would not satisfy him. It is not yours, but you, that must make him happy. He will long to present you before the throne, and to be able to say, “Here, Lord, am I, and the children which thou hast given me.”

Young people, your minister longs also for your salvation. He looks upon you as rising plants, destined, he hopes, to occupy the places of those who must soon die. You have no conception how much you can add to his joy.— He can have no greater joy than to see you walking in the truth. Then do not disappoint him. Remember that his joy and your joy are involved in the same course of conduct. Then, while others wander in the mazes of error, be it your concern to walk in the truth.

LXXVI. – ON CULTIVATING A PEACEFUL
DISPOSITION.

“Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace.” – Rom. xiv. 19.

MY dear brethren, in complying with your request to address you, on the present occasion, I shall study plainness of speech. I shall not divert your minds with curious speculations, or irrelevant remarks, but endeavour at least to recommend such things as I conceive your circumstances immediately require; and for this purpose I have selected the text as the foundation of a few observations: “Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace.”

There is scarcely any blessing more desirable than peace – true, well-grounded peace. It is so intimately connected with prosperity, that the Hebrew word which is commonly translated “peace” signifies also *prosperity*. “Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.” The Hebrew word is the same in both instances.

I am requested on the present occasion to give you a word of advice, as respects your deportment to your pastor and to one another. All I shall attempt will be to explain and to enforce the exhortation contained in the text; and if peace be with you, prosperity will follow as a matter of course.

I. EXPLAIN THE EXHORTATION. – In general, I may observe, we do not wish you to be so fond of peace as to sacrifice truth to preserve it. If your pastor desert those grand essential truths which he has this day confessed, you ought to desert him, or rather to desire that he would leave you. – Nor do we mean that you are to maintain peace at the expense of righteousness – a peace consisting in the neglect of discipline, and the passing over of such evils as ought to be exposed and reprov'd. It is the glory of a man to pass over an injury done to himself, but not to be pliable in matters which relate to God’s glory. It is lamentable, however, to reflect that in general men are less severe against sin towards God than against an injury done to themselves. The rule of Scripture is this: “First pure, then peaceable.” Let this be your rule.

Some of the observations I have to make will more immediately respect your conduct towards your pastor; and others your conduct towards one another.

First, Endeavour by all means to preserve a good understanding with YOUR PASTOR. His peace of mind is essential for his happiness and your “edification.”

1. Let your stated attendance on his ministry be constant and candid .– If you are negligent, or late, it will affect his peace of mind. He will think his labours are unacceptable And if you should discover any mistakes in his preaching, consider human frailty. Do not talk of them to others, nor among yourselves; but to him, and that with modesty and tenderness.

2. Let the vigilance you exercise over his conduct be characterized by the same tenderness and candour. – Enemies will watch him with a desire for his halting; but do not you. Be not hasty in taking up or falling in with reports to his disadvantage.

3. Let your contributions for his support be distinguished, not only by their liberality, but also by the cheerfulness with which they are given – Let it be a tribute of love Do not imagine that your contributions entitle you to scrutinize and dictate in his family arrangements His being a minister does not destroy his privilege as a man. Ministers also have peculiar feelings in reference to such subjects. If one of you were to intermeddle with the domestic arrangements of another, you would be told to mind your own concerns, and not to interfere with his, seeing he does not come to you for what he has. But your minister would feel a delicacy on this point, and a difficulty, which it should be your study to render unnecessary. And, after all, you have no more right to inspect his concerns than he yours.

4. Let your exercise of discipline be prompt, and such as shall preserve him from prejudice. – Always unite with him, that he may not have to endure all the prejudice and odium consequent on strict discipline. In many cases you may relieve him altogether from the painful duty, and thus prevent his ministrations from being rejected. Take as much of this from him as you can, “that the gospel of Christ be not hindered.”

These are some of the things an attention to which would greatly contribute to his peace of mind and to your edification.

Secondly, Let me exhort you to endeavour, by all means, to preserve peace among ONE ANOTHER.

1. Be careful to cultivate a spirit of love. – There is nothing more conducive to peace than this. Provoke not one another to anger, but “to love and good works.” Be examples of love,

striving who shall excel in acts of kindness and sympathy. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

2. Beware of sin. – There is nothing more opposed to Christian peace than this. Where this is nourished, peace will be banished; for though it be private, it will work, and work mischief. It will be a wedge, gradually widening the breach between God and your souls, and between one another.

3. Beware of a disputations temper. – Debates may be productive of good But they too often originate in captiousness and pride. Think of the account of them in God’s word. “A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.” – “If any man consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words; whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth. From such withdraw thyself.”

4. Avoid a spirit of groundless jealousy. – Godly jealousy is necessary, when we consider what we all are, and by what influences we are surrounded. But an ill opinion of others is the source of much mischief. From this suspicious disposition, words are misconstrued, and actions imputed to wrong motives. If we indulge in this, we shall be unable to believe one another, or to place confidence in the most explicit declarations. “Jealousy is cruel as the grave!” It devours the happiness of those who cherish it. How opposed to true charity! Charity suspecteth no evil, hopeth the best, believeth the most favourable representations . In general, a spirit of jealousy would seem to indicate a dishonest heart. Its possessors seem to know themselves to be bad, and therefore think none others can be good. Probably this made Satan so suspicious of Job’s sincerity. Beware lest you imitate him! – and lest your suspicions should originate in the same cause!

5. Beware of a spirit of envy. – The members of a church are like the stars. One excelleth another. Then beware of envy. Saul envied David for his superiority, when David “behaved himself wisely.” Some excel in gifts and graces, and consequently obtain a greater degree of esteem. Beware of envy. Some exceed others in worldly property, and consequently, though not always deservedly, receive greater respect. But beware of envy. Do not imagine that religion cancels the obligation to treat men according to their rank and station in society. Let not envy

lead you to think much of every instance of respect shown to a superior, and to reflect, If I had been rich, he would have visited me! Certainly, a minister should visit all his flock; but there may be reasons, apart from outward circumstances, why one shall be visited more than another. “Charity envieth not.”

6. Do not intermeddle with each other’s temporal affairs. – What I just now said respecting your conduct towards your pastor, I would repeat concerning your conduct towards one another. Different people have different ways of managing their domestic affairs; and if your brethren do but act so as to be honourable in the world, what right have you to interfere? If indeed their deportment be inconsistent with their character as professed Christians, and in any sense involve the honour of God; if, for example, they be indolent, and disgrace the cause – or extravagant, and therefore become unable to pay their just debts – then, indeed, it will be right to interfere; but even then it is neither friendly nor wise to make their faults the topic of common conversation.

7. Guard against a touchy temper. – Charity is not soon angry.

“For every trifle scorn to take offence;
It either shows great pride or little sense.”

8. Repeat no grievances, especially when, acknowledged. – “He that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.”

9. Strive to heal differences. – It is a great honour to be a peace-maker. True, it is often very difficult; for “a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.” But by how much the more difficulty there is, by so much the more honour will there be. Do not abandon the attempt for a few hard sayings. Those who interfere in an affray commonly receive a few blows from both sides. But do not be discouraged. Pray, and try again. And let the saying of our Lord, “Blessed are the peace-makers, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” weigh more with you than a little temporary difficulty and discouragement.

10. Encourage no talebearers.– Persons that make it their business, and feel it their delight, to go about telling secrets to the disadvantage of their neighbours, deserve the deepest marks of censure. Are you at variance with a brother? Mark the man who by his insinuations and innuendoes would make the breach wider, and shun him. There are cases indeed, in which, in our own vindication, we are compelled to speak to the disadvantage of others; but to blacken the

character of another unnecessarily, and intentionally to widen a breach existing between friends or neighbours, is infernal! If blessed are the peacemakers, cursed are these peace-breakers, and peace-preventers! One cannot always shut one's doors against such characters, but we can and ought to shut our ears against them; and if we do this, we shall deprive them of their excitement and their highest gratification. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth." And if you would not encourage talebearing in others, be sure you are not guilty of it yourselves. If you hear one speak ill of another, don't go and tell him, unless indeed it affect his moral character, and the cause of religion; and never assist in propagating evil reports.

11. Be ready to forgive. – Without this heavenly temper we cannot expect to live long in peace. There is a very mistaken notion of honour existing among men, as if it, lay in not yielding, but in resenting an injury; whereas it is very plain that true honour consists in the very opposite. "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." Our own interest should lead us to this; for in some things we shall need the forgiveness of our brethren; and, what is of greater consequence still, we all need the Divine forgiveness. But Christ assured his disciples, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses."

These, my brethren, are some of the dispositions, the cultivation of which will make for peace. Some of them may appear to you little; but great rivers flow from little springs. "How great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

These things you are to "follow after." Sometimes you may be inclined to despair of obtaining peace by any means. But be not discouraged – "follow after."

II. Having thus explained the exhortation of the apostle, I shall endeavour to ENFORCE IT.

1. Consider how invaluable a blessing peace is. – It is closely connected with church prosperity; for the heavenly Dove "flies from the abodes of noise and strife." And to soul prosperity. – "Live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." See the blessedness of peace in those churches which have been careful to cultivate it and see the wretched state of those where peace has been infringed upon "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down," &c.

2. Consider what it cost our Lord Jesus Christ to obtain it. – Peace between us and God – between us and all holy intelligences – was brought about by Christ; and all our peace with one another is the price of his blood. “It pleased the Father, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself.”

3. Consider its influence on spectators. – Friends enemies other churches young converts!

LXXVII. – CHRISTIAN CHURCHES ARE GOD’S BUILDING.

“Ye are God’s building.” – 1 Cor, iii. 9.

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WHO can help admiring the disinterested spirit of the apostle Paul? The Corinthians were divided into parties, at the head of each of which was some great man. Paul himself was one. But he disdained such a distinction. “Who is Paul? or who is Apollos’?” “Ye are God’s building.” – The emphasis of the text is here. “Ye are God’s husbandry, God’s building;” Not ours. Then be not called after our name, but God’s. We are rather yours than you ours, ver. 22.

The building here alluded to is that of the temple, ver. 16, 17. The apostle expatiates upon the same idea in Eph. ii. 20-22, which may be considered as the key to the text, and of which, in discoursing from it, I shall avail myself. “Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ – himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together, for a habitation of God, through the Spirit.”

This description will apply either to the Christian church at large, or to a particular church. There are four things observable in the apostle’s account of a building, each of which is applicable to a Christian church: it must be reared on a good foundation – it must be fitly framed together – it is supposed at present to be incomplete, but in a growing state – and the end for which it is built is, that it may be a habitation of God, through the Spirit.

I. IT MUST BE REARED ON A GOOD FOUNDATION. – On Jesus Christ, himself being the chief corner-stone. This is the foundation that God hath laid in Zion, Isa. xxviii. 16. And all after builders must follow his example. The Jews refused it. They went on to build; but they were no longer “God’s building.” – The doctrine of Christ crucified was the foundation of the apostolic churches, and continued so for ages. When this doctrine was deserted and corrupted, men might call themselves the church, and greatly increase; but they ceased to be “God’s building.” – This was the foundation laid at the Reformation; and while these continued, though accompanied with “wood, hay, and stubble,” God blessed the churches. But when these reformed churches went off into a mere heathen morality, God forsook them. They were no longer “God’s building” Look at particular churches. It is this doctrine that God blesses for conversion. The building will not rise

without it. Where Christ is left out as the foundation, he will say, as he did to the Jews of old, “As for your house, it is left unto you desolate.” I trust, my brethren, your minister will lay this foundation, and exalt the Saviour, and that you will encourage him in so doing.

II. IT MUST BE FITLY FRAMED TOGETHER. – A building is not a mere assemblage of a heterogeneous mass of materials. This were a heap rather than a building. There are three things necessary to a building’s being fitly framed: –

1. The materials must be prepared before they are laid in it. Such were the orders concerning Solomon’s temple. There was to be no noise there, I Kings vi. 7. You are few in number, my brethren; but do not be so anxious after increase as to lay improper materials. What if you could obtain hundreds of members, and they men of property; yet if they were haughty, self-willed, and worldly, how could they fit in with the humble, meek, and heavenly-minded?

2. That they be formed by the same rule. It is not enough that the roughnesses and protuberances of their characters should be smoothed down and polished off; they must be made to fit the foundation and each other: if the members of churches fit in with the foundation – with Jesus Christ, in his gospel, government, and spirit – there would be little danger of disunion among themselves. The great means of promoting religious union among Christians is, not by dispensing with disagreeable truth, but by aspiring to a conformity to Christ. Religious uniformity is like perfection in other things; we are not to expect it in this world; still it is our duty to aspire after it. There is no union any further than we agree; and no Christian union any further than that in which we agree is the mind of Christ. It will be of no account to be of one mind, unless that mind be the mind of Christ. The way therefore to promote Christian union is for each to think more, to read more, to pray more, to converse more, on the principles of the doctrine and example of Christ. God builds by rule. He conforms to the image of his Son; and so must you. The house must not be built according to your fancy, or your inclination, but according to the rules contained in the word of God. “See thou make all things according to the pattern.” – “Keep the ordinances as they are delivered unto you.” A neglect of holy discipline is the bane of the present age; but you must exercise a holy vigilance here, or you will not be God’s building.

3. That each shall occupy his proper place in the building. Some are formed to teach; others to be taught; some to lead; others to be led: some to counsel; others to execute. See that each is in his place, the situation for which he is formed, or you will not be God's building.

III. It is supposed at present to be INCOMPLETE, BUT ADVANCING: – “It groweth unto a holy temple.” This is applicable to the church at large: it resembles Solomon's temple – widest at the upper end, 1 Kings vi. 6. The church has been widening from the commencement, and will still extend. And may we not hope that there will be some resemblance to this in particular churches I If you would answer to the spiritual model – be chaste, not admitting any rivals in your affections; zealous, spiritual, and faithful– and you will be God's building, and you must increase.

IV. THE END FOR WHICH THE BUILDING IS REARED: – “For a habitation of God.” When men build a house, it is that it may be inhabited. So it is with God. If you are God's building, it is that you may be the habitation of God. This is a vast blessing. “Will God in very deed dwell with men?” Yes. Christ “gave gifts to men, that the Lord might dwell among them.” He hath given you a pastor – that he might dwell among you

LXXVIII. – THE SATISFACTION DERIVED FROM A CONSCIOUSNESS THAT
OUR RELIGIOUS EXERCISES HAVE BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY GODLY
SIMPLICITY.

“Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.” – 2 Cor. i. 12.

SUCH was the declaration of Paul, in behalf of himself and his brethren; and a great thing it was to be able to say, especially when accused of being crafty and designing men. That they were so accused is evident from the twelfth chapter; and the declaration of the text nobly repels all such insinuations.

I do not mean to assume this language in behalf of myself or my brethren; but would rather apply it in a way of self-examination. By “fleshly wisdom” is meant the wisdom of this world, worldly policy, that wisdom which has carnal and worldly ends in view, or is aimed and exercised for our own interest, honour, or gratification. By “the grace of God” is meant that holy wisdom which is from above, or that line of conduct which the grace of God teaches “simplicity and godly sincerity.”

I. Let us state A FEW CASES IN WHICH THESE OPPOSITE PRINCIPLES WILL, ONE OR THE OTHER OF THEM, INFLUENCE OUR CONDUCT. – It may be too much to say that all men are governed by the one or the other. Some have neither. Their way is fleshly; but it is fleshly folly. The principles of the text, however, are very common. Particularly,

1. In preaching the gospel. – We are mostly governed by one or other, as ministers.

They give a character to the matter of our preaching. If we are influenced by the former, our preaching will partake of the wisdom of this world. It will savour of the flesh. There will be little or no spirituality in it. It will favour some other gospel. But if we are influenced by the latter, our preaching will savour of Christ and heaven. It will be wisdom, but not the wisdom of this world. The doctrine we preach will not be selected to please the tastes of our hearers, but drawn from the Holy Scriptures. We shall declare “the whole counsel of God.”

These principles will also give a character to the manner of our preaching. – If we are influenced by the former, our preaching will be merely an art, with “enticing words of man’s wisdom.” But if by the latter, it will be characterized by simplicity; not thinking of ourselves, but of Christ and the salvation of souls.

Finally, These principles will give a character to our motives. – If we are influenced by the former, we shall study to be approved of men, and to have it understood that we are men of consequence. “Giving it out that he was some great one.” But if by the latter, we shall seek, “not yours, but you.” The love of God, of Christ, and of souls will constrain us.

1. In reading the Scriptures, and hearing the gospel. Here, also, we are for the most part governed by one or the other of these principles.

There is the spirit of the world, and the Spirit which is of God. It is of great consequence with which spirit we take up our Bibles. – If with the former, it will be no wonder that we err, and stumble, and perish. “A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.” Paine read the Scriptures to pervert and vilify them. We may be acquainted with the original languages, and be able to criticise texts; and yet not discern the mind of the Spirit. “Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned.” This will be especially the result, if we form a system of our own, and go to the Scriptures to have it confirmed, instead of deriving it in the first place from the unerring oracles. But if we are influenced by the opposite principle, we shall pray, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” And, coming with the simplicity of children, we shall have the mind of the Spirit revealed to us, Matt. xi. 25.

So in hearing the gospel. – If we hear merely as critics on the preacher, full of conceit and fleshly wisdom, whatever the preaching may be, it will do us no good. – But if we hear as Christians, in simplicity and godly sincerity, we shall hear the word to profit. Take heed how ye hear, lest by and by you become regardless of what you hear, or even prefer the flesh-pleasing doctrines which lead to perdition, 2 Pet. ii. 1-3.

3. In church fellowship and discipline we are governed by one or other of these principles. Particularly, In receiving members. – If We are governed by the former, we shall catch at the rich, and covet respectability, and be more ambitious to increase in number than in conformity to Christ. – But if by the latter, we shall rejoice in the accession of the meanest Christian, and of Christian graces, though they shine in those whom the world despise.

In choosing officers. – If we are governed by the former principle, ministers will be chosen on account of their popularity, and deacons on account of their opulence. But if by the latter, we shall fix our eye stedfastly on the qualifications required in Scripture; and if we cannot find men who attain to the full standard, we shall be so much the more concerned to choose those who approach the nearest.

In exercising discipline. – If we be governed by the former, we shall be concerned to be great and respectable. If by the latter, we shall strive after conformity to Christ. If by the former, our discipline will be partial, screening our favourites. But if by the latter, we shall be no respecter of persons, but act with impartial fidelity, with a single eye to the glory of God.

4. In deciding in our various worldly concerns we are commonly influenced by one or other of these principles. If by the former, the question will be, in all cases, – Is it wise? Is it politic? What will people say? But if by the latter, the question will be, – Is it right? The former is the spirit of all worldly men, and all mere nominal Christians; the latter, of the genuine Christian. If we are governed by the former, in forming our various connexions, the question will be, – Will this promote my worldly interests? But if by the latter, the question will be, – Will it contribute to the prosperity of my soul? My friends, think of the fruits of Lot's well-watered plain; and shudder at the thought of choosing situations for yourselves or your children, without a supreme regard to the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

II. Observe THE SATISFACTION ARISING FROM BEING ABLE TO ADOPT THE LANGUAGE OF THE APOSTLE. – He speaks of his consciousness of simplicity and godly sincerity, as a matter of rejoicing, yea, of singular rejoicing. Wherefore?

1. The testimony of a good conscience is sometimes the only testimony we have in our favour. – It was nearly so with the apostle at Corinth. The world may be offended, and bad men may influence even good men to join a wrong cause. This was the case at Corinth. Thus Judas led away the disciples with respect to Mary. But if we can say as Paul in the text, this will bear us up under all the misapprehensions and misconstructions of the world, or even of our brethren. Thus Enoch was supported. Doubtless he had to endure the world's scorn; but "he had this testimony – that he pleased God."

2. The testimony of such a conscience is an echo to the voice of God. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God."

3. The testimony of a good conscience will support us in death. – But if we have not this, how shall we bear to die, and to appear in judgment?

My friends, if your minister can adopt the language of Paul, and feel a consciousness of being governed by the best of principles, still this will avail for himself only: it will not avail you. He may be pure of your blood; but are you? If you perish, and your minister be guiltless, where will the guilt lie then?

LXXIX. – THE REWARD OF A FAITHFUL MINISTER.

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” – 1 Thess. ii. 19.

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I DO not know any part of the Scriptures in which we have a more lovely picture of a true pastor and true Christians than is contained in this chapter. Though the picture is drawn by the apostle himself, he could appeal to God for its correctness. It exhibits him and his brethren as bold in proclaiming the gospel; sincere in their doctrine; acting as in the sight of God; faithful to their trust, and to the souls of their hearers; unostentatious; gentle and affectionate; disinterested; and consistent in their deportment, not only among unbelievers, where even hypocrites will preserve appearances, but also among the people of their charge. Let ministers look at this picture, and at themselves.

We have also the character of primitive Christians. They received the gospel, not merely as the message of the apostles, but as “the word of God;” it wrought in them effectually; and they were the determined followers of the very earliest Christians, though at the risk of persecution, and even of death. The apostle sums up all by a solemn appeal to them and to God, that if he and his brethren had any reward in their labours, it consisted in their salvation: “What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye?”

The import of this passage is, that the salvation of his hearers is the reward of a faithful minister. In discoursing on this interesting subject, I shall endeavour to explain it – account for it – and apply it.

I. I shall endeavour to EXPLAIN THE OBJECT WHICH EVERY FAITHFUL MINISTER ACCOUNTS HIS HOPE, AND JOY, AND CROWN. It is you, even you, in the presence of the Lord. There are two things designed by the apostle in this language: –

1. To disclaim all sordid and mercenary ends on his part. – It is “not yours, but you.” Of course we have a hope, and expect a reward of some kind. They that run must have a prize, a joy, a crown; but it is not any thing carnal or worldly. Men may, indeed, engage in the ministry with the desire of obtaining lucre or fame; or from the love of power, or the love of ease: but not so Paul; not so any true minister of Jesus Christ. As to Paul, he had voluntarily resigned every thing

of this kind, for the sake of the gospel, as those to whom he wrote very well knew. The language, therefore, peculiarly became his lips. And no true minister of Christ, though supported by the people, (and it is fit that those who devote their lives to an object should be supported in it,) will enter on the work for the sake of this; nor will he be satisfied with this alone, however liberal.

2. Another object of the apostle was to show the necessity of true religion, and a perseverance in it, in them. There are some who are our hope, who are not our joy; and others who are our hope and joy too, for a time, who will never be our crown; who hold not out to the end, and therefore will never be our rejoicing in the presence of the Lord, at his coming. Some are under serious impressions, and excite a hope and joy, like that felt at the sight of blossoms in the spring, which yet are afterwards blighted. There are some that have even made a public profession, and yet, like the thorny and stony-ground hearers, produce no fruit. The object desired, therefore, is not only your setting out, but your holding on, walking in the truth, and holding fast your profession to the end. Then, indeed, you will not only be our hope and joy, but our crown of rejoicing.

II. I shall endeavour to ACCOUNT FOR ITS BEING SO:

1. If we are faithful ministers, we shall be of the same mind as Christ. – And this was the reward which satisfied him, Isa. liii. 11. He endured all things for the elect's sake; and so shall we, if we be of his mind.

2. If we are faithful ministers, our love to Christ will make us rejoice in every thing that honours him. – The highest honour to which John the Baptist aspired was to be the Bridegroom's friend; and to see him increase was enough, though at the expense of his own popularity. This fulfilled his joy! What labour and pains will men take at an election to procure votes for the candidate to whom they are attached! And how grateful to him to see his friends, each on the day of election, bring with him a goodly number of votes! Much more we, if we be faithful ministers, shall, in the day of the Lord, be admired in all them that believe, and that love his appearing.

3. If we be true ministers of Christ, we shall love the souls of men as he loved them. – And this accounts also for the language of the text. All of You have souls of infinite value. Some of you are the children of those whom we have loved, and with whom we have taken sweet counsel, and walked to the house of God in company, but who are now no more. And what is our hope now? Why, that you may follow in their steps. It is strange that we should long to present you

with them before the throne! Some of you have professed to be the spiritual children of your pastor; and you are his hope, and his joy too. See to it that you form a part of his crown.

III. Allow me to APPLY THE SUBJECT. --You may think this subject mostly concerns ministers; but be assured you have a deep interest in it.

1. If it be our duty to obtain volunteers for Christ, it is your duty to give us an answer.-- God is saying, by us, "Choose ye, this day, whom ye will serve."

2. If your salvation be our reward, still is it no concern of yours that we should be rewarded?-- You would scorn to deprive your servants of their wages, or your minister of his salary; but this is not enough; this will not satisfy us; you must not put us off with your money; for we seek not yours, but you. The salvation of your souls is the only reward which will satisfy a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.

3. The personal interest you have in this matter is far greater than ours. -- If we be faithful, our loss will be made up in the approbation of God. Though you be not gathered, we shall not go unrewarded. But your loss will be irreparable.

4. You must be presented in some way,-- if not as our joy and crown, as rebellious children, to be dealt with as such. We shall have to say of you, These our hearers were stubborn and rebellious, and would not listen to our message of love. They would not come to Christ that they might have life.

LXXX. – MINISTERS AND CHURCHES EXHORT ED TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN
LOVE.

[Sketch of an Ordination Sermon addressed to both Pastor and People.⁴]

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“By love serve one another.” – Gal, v. 13.

MY brethren, having been requested on this solemn occasion to address a word of exhortation to both pastor and people, I have chosen a subject equally suitable for both.

I. I shall begin by addressing a few words to you, my brother, the PASTOR of this church.

The text expresses your duty – to “serve” the church; and the manner in which it is to be performed “in love.” Do not imagine there is any thing degrading in the idea of being a servant. Though you are to serve them, and they you, yet neither of you are to be masters of the other. You are fellow servants, and have each “one Master, even Christ.” It is a service, not of constraint, but of love; like that which your Lord and Master himself yielded. “I have been among you as one that serveth.” Let the common name of minister remind you of this The authority you exercise must be invariably directed to the spiritual advantage of the church. You are invested with authority; you are to have the rule over them, in the Lord; but not as a “lord over God’s heritage.” Nor are you invested with this authority to confer dignity on you, or that you may value yourself as a person of consequence; but for the good of the church. This is the end of office “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” But, more particularly,

1. You must serve the church of God, by feeding them with the word of life. – This is the leading duty of a minister. “Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season.” This will be serving them, as it will promote their best interests. For this end you must be familiar with the word. “Meditate on these things: give thyself wholly to them.” It is considered a fine thing with some to have a black coat, to loiter about all the week, and to stand up to be looked at and admired on the sabbath. But truly this is not to serve the church of God. Be concerned to be “a

⁴ As were also the two which follow it.

scribe well instructed in the things of the kingdom.” Be concerned to have treasures, and to bring them forth. I would advise that one service of every sabbath consist of a well-digested exposition, that your hearers may become Bible Christians. Be concerned to understand and to teach the doctrine of Christianity “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Be careful, particularly, to be conversant with the doctrine of the cross; if you be right there, you can scarcely be essentially wrong any where. Cut off the reproach of dry doctrine, by preaching it feelingly; and of its being inimical to good works, by preaching it practically.

And do all this in love. – Your love must be, first, to Christ, or you will not be fitted for your work of feeding the church, John xxi. 15-17. Also to the truth, or your services will be mischievous, rather than useful. And to Christians, for Christ’s sake, Acts xx. 28. And to the souls of men, as fellow men and fellow sinners. If love be wanting, preaching will be in vain.

2. You must feed the church of God, by watching over them. – “Be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.” Watch over them, not as a vulture, to destroy them; but as a good shepherd, who careth for the sheep. If you are compelled to reprove, beware that your reproof be conveyed, not in ill temper, but in love; not to gratify self, but to do your brother good.

3. You must serve them, by leading them on in all spiritual and holy exercises. – Lead them by your example. “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Visit them. You have as much need to pray with them and for them in private, as to preach to them in public. And you must do all this in love. An affectionate example and deportment will draw them on.

II. Let me now address myself to THE CHURCH. – You also must serve your pastor, as well as he you, and this in love. You must seek his good, as well as he yours.

1. Be assiduous to make him happy in his mind. – If he discharge his work with grief, it will be unprofitable for you. If you be touchy, and soon offended, or cold and distant, it will destroy his happiness. Do not be content with a merely negative respect. Be free, open, kind, inviting to friendly and Christian intercourse and conversation; and be early and constant in your attendance on public worship.

2. Be concerned to render him as easy in his circumstances as possible. – If he serve you in spiritual things, is it such a great thing that he partake of your carnal things? I hope he does not

covet a haughty independence of you; but neither let him sink into an abject dependence. Worship not with – offer not to God – that which costs you nothing. It is the glory of Dissenting churches, if they voluntarily make sacrifices for the maintenance of the true religion among them.

3. If there be any thing apparently wrong in his conduct or his preaching, do not spread it abroad, but tell him of it alone. – You may have mistaken him, and this will give him an opportunity of explaining, or, if he be in fault, this will give him an opportunity of correcting himself.

And do every thing in love. – Love will dictate what is proper on most occasions. It will do more than a thousand rules; and all rules without it are nothing.

To the deacons let me say, Be you helpers in every thing-whether agreeable or disagreeable. To the congregation generally, I would say, You also have an interest in the proceedings of this day. My brother considers you as part of his charge. His appointment by the church is with your approbation. He will seek the good of you and your children. Then teach them to respect and love him

LXXI. – MINISTERIAL AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.

“That I may be comforted with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” – Rom. i. 12.

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THE communion of saints was thought of such importance among the early Christians as to become an article of faith; and where the spirit of it is preserved, it is a charming part of the Christian religion. The text gives us a brief description of it. Paul longed to see the Roman Christians, of whom as yet he had only heard, that he might impart to them some spiritual gift, that they might be established. His faith would comfort them, and theirs would comfort him.

We are here naturally led to inquire what there is in the faith of a minister to comfort Christians— what there is in the faith of private Christians to comfort ministers – and what there is in the common faith of both to comfort each other.

Let us then inquire,

I. WHAT THERE IS IN THE FAITH OF MINISTERS TO COMFORT PRIVATE CHRISTIANS. – For when Christians see their ministers, they naturally expect to hear something concerning the faith; and Paul seems to take this for granted. There are three things in the faith of a minister calculated to comfort private Christians:

1. Its being Scriptural and decided. – If antisciptural, we might comfort the sinner and the hypocrite; if speculative, we might amuse a few ingenious minds; but we could not comfort the Christian. Nor must we be undecided. To see a minister who is decided, on Scriptural grounds, is to see a guide who is well acquainted with his map, and who knows his map; or a pilot well acquainted with his chart. The reverse will be stumbling and most distressing. If a guide now tells you this is the way, then that, and is at a loss which to choose, it must occasion fear and distrust, instead of comfort.

2. Its being considered, not far themselves only, but as a public trust to be imparted. – Paul considered himself a debtor to others; an almoner, possessing the unsearchable riches; “as poor, yet making many rich.” In fact, the very afflictions of ministers, as well as their consolations, are sent to produce this effect, 2 Cor. i. 6.

3. Its being a living principle in their own souls, 1 Tim. iv. ti. Without this, whatever be our attainments, our ministrations will not ordinarily edify Christians. We must preach from the heart, or we shall seldom, if ever, produce any good in the hearts of our hearers.

II. WHAT THERE IS IN THE FAITH OF PRIVATE CHRISTIANS TO COMFORT MINISTERS.

– Ministers must receive, as well as impart; and should be concerned to do so, in every visit, and in all their intercourse with their people. Now the faith of Christians contributes to the comfort of ministers, in its being, its growth, and its fruits.

1. It furnishes them with sentiments and feelings in their preaching which nothing else wilt. – A believing, spiritual, attentive, affectionate audience, whose souls glisten in their eyes, will produce thoughts in the pulpit which would never have occurred in the study. On the other hand, if a minister perceive in his hearers, and especially in those of whom he should expect better than, unbelief, wordliness, carelessness, or conceit, he is like a ship locked up near the pole.

2. In the faith of Christians, ministers see the travail of the Redeemer's soul. – And this, if they love him, will be a high source of comfort to them.

3. In the faith of Christians, ministers often see time fruit of their own labours. – They often pray for their people, of whom they "travail in birth" until Christ be formed in them. Such fruit, therefore, of their anxiety and their labour, is very encouraging.

4. The faith of Christians is a pledge of their future salvation. – A Christian minister must love his people, and in proportion as he loves them he will feel concerned for their eternal happiness. Well, here is a pledge of it, and this cheers him. Your minister looks around, and feels tenderly attached to you as friends, and as the children of dear friends now with God; and sometimes he enters into the spirit of the apostle, who wished himself accursed, after the manner of Christ, for his brethren, his kinsmen after the flesh. Your faith therefore, as a pledge of eternal glory, must needs comfort him.

III. WHAT THERE IS, IN THE COMMON FAITH OF BOTH, TO COMFORT EACH OTHER. –

Common blessings are best. Let us not desire great things – the wreath of honour, or a crown. Amidst all this, the sweet singer of Israel desired and sought after "one thing," and that was a common blessing, Psal. xxvii. 4. Extensive attainments, even mental acquisitions, are comparatively poor. An apostle would sacrifice them all for a common blessing – the knowledge of Christ, Phil, iii. 8. These blessings are common to the meanest Christian.

1. Its unity. – Those who have never seen each other, men of different nations and manners, when they come to converse on Christ and the gospel, presently feel their faith to be one, and love one another; and this is a source of great delight. As a Hindoo said of some of the missionaries, newly arrived, “They cannot talk our language; but we see all our hearts are one: we are united in the death of Christ.”

2. The interesting nature of the truths believed – “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” – “God manifest in the flesh.” – “There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” – “He that believeth on him is not condemned.” Christ is come; atonement is made; the way of access to God is opened; our sins are remembered no more; we are no more strangers and foreigners; we live in hope of eternal life. These are things which, if we be in ignorance and unbelief, will have no effect upon us; or if we be in doubt and darkness, like the two disciples going to Emmaus, we shall commune and be sad; but if our faith be in lively exercise, our hearts will burn within us, and time will glide sweetly on.

LEARN, from the whole, 1. The necessity of faith to Christian communion. – Unbelievers, or, which is the same thing, merely nominal Christians, are non-conductors. Neither ministers, nor others, can receive or impart without faith.

2. The necessity of the communication of faith to profitable visits. – We may not always be able to maintain Christian conversation. We are men, and must sometimes converse as such. But Christian visits will be of this kind. It is delightful when they are of this description; and, to promote this, we should avoid large, promiscuous parties.

3. What will heavenly communion be! – No darkness – no discord – no carnality – no pride – no imperfection!

LXXXII – MINISTERS AND CHRISTIANS EXHORTED TO HOLD FAST THE GOSPEL.

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” – 1 Tim. i. 13.

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THIS Epistle was written on the near approach of death, and is very solemn. It is addressed to Timothy, and as such is doubtless especially applicable to ministers; but it is by no means exclusively so, since all Scripture is given for the sake of the Church.

I. Let us notice THE EXHORTATION ITSELF. – “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me,” &c. The gospel is here denominated “sound words,” and “a form of sound words;” and requires to be “held fast in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

1. The gospel is called “sound words.” – Much has been said of sound words, and every one reckons his own creed to be such. I would only observe, that sound words must be true words, and words suited to convey the truth. All other systems are hollow. We must be more concerned about their being true, than fine or harmonious. We must beware of specious words, which are often vehicles of error. The words which the Holy Ghost teaches are the standard of soundness. So much regard as we pay to them, so far are we orthodox, and no further.

2. The gospel is called “a form of sound words.” – The word signifies a brief sketch, or first draft; such as artists sketch when they begin a painting. Paul intimates that he had given Timothy such a sketch – a compendium, or epitome. Whether he had given him any thing of the kind, different from what we have, we know not; but what he wrote to him and others contains such a form, expressed in different ways. As – “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” – “Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” – We have one of the forms in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xv. 1-4. And a still more perfect one in his Epistle to the Romans, chap. iii. 24, 25.

The term implies two things: – (I.) That what the apostles taught was a sure guide. We are quite safe here. Where will men go, if the apostles’ doctrines are treated as mere opinions? These are the genuine criterion of orthodoxy. Keep within these lines, and you are safe. They are able,

through faith, to make you “wise unto salvation.” By these, the man of God may be – “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” – (2.) It implies that what he taught, though it contained the outline of truth, and as much as was necessary for the present, yet is not the whole. It was only an outline, only a sketch, for Timothy and all other Christians to fill up, and to meditate upon. Paul did not know all. Angels do not. It will require eternity to reveal all. There is plenty of room for meditation; only let us keep within the lines which the apostles have sketched out.

3. The gospel, as a form of sound words, must be “held fast.” – This supposes that we do, at least, hold the faith. Alas! many do not. Some have hold of a wholly false doctrine, and hold it fast too. Some are Gallios, perfectly indifferent, and hold fast the world, or any thing rather than the gospel. Nay more, it is to be feared that many who talk and profess much about doctrines, and Scripture doctrines too, yet do not hold them fast. We must find the gospel, as Philip and Nathanael found the Messiah, and then we shall hold it fast. They sought out Jesus, and compared his character and pretensions with the descriptions of the Messiah in the prophecies; and were convinced from examination. If, instead of being convinced of the truth from actual personal research, we receive the notions of others, without examination, upon their representations, even if these notions should be correct, we shall be in danger of not holding them fast. Many will try to wrest the truth from us. Persecutions – temptations – and false doctrines, sanctioned by fashion and the appearance of learning, have occasionally made sad havoc with the truth, and forced many a one who held it loosely, many a one who received his faith at second-hand, instead of drawing directly from the fountain, and who therefore never fully comprehended it, to give it up.

4. The gospel must be held “in faith and love.” – There is such a thing as a bigoted and blind attachment to doctrines, which will be of no use, even if they be true. The word does not profit, unless it be “mixed with faith.” And there is such a thing as a sound creed, without charity, or love to God and men. But the gospel must be held in faith and love. The union of genuine orthodoxy and affection constitutes true religion.

II LET US ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION.

1. Consider the inestimable value of these sound words. – They are the words of eternal life. There is nothing in this world equal to them. They are the pearl of great price.

2. They have been held in such esteem that many of the best of men have sacrificed their lives, rather than part with them. – And shall we cowardly desert the truth, or shun the avowal of it, merely lest the indifferent should call us bigots, or infidels, or enthusiasts? There is not a more dangerous foe to the truth than indifference. Then “hold fast” the form of sound words.

3. They are the only principles that can meet the exigences of perishing sinners. – All besides, however plausible, will flatter, and allure, and deceive, and destroy the soul.

4. They are the only source of a holy life. – People foolishly discard doctrines under the pretence of exalting practice; but holy doctrine is the source and spring of a holy life. What has the church become where these doctrines are given up? And what have those Dissenters become who have embraced another gospel? Mere men of the world.

5. They are the only source of real happiness. – They inspire a peace and joy in health, a cheerful acquiescence under affliction, and a hope in death and the prospect of futurity, to which all are strangers who are building on any other foundation than that laid in the Scriptures by the apostles, even Jesus Christ – himself being the chief corner-stone.

LXXV. – CHURCHES SHOULD EXHIBIT THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL.

“These things saith he ... who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.” – Rev. ii. 1.

My dear brethren, that part of the solemn exercises of this day which you have allotted to me, is to give a word of advice to you, as a church of Christ. I confess it is with pleasure I accept of this service, partly because I see you once more happily united in the choice of a pastor, and partly because I believe you will receive the word of exhortation with candour and attention.

The language of the text, though figurative, is sufficiently explained in the preceding verse: “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.” The allusion in the latter figure is doubtless to the candlestick in the Jewish tabernacle, which was made of solid gold, Exod. xxv. 31-37; Zech. iv. 2. It is described as a candlestick with a bowl, or fountain, from which oil was conveyed, through pipes, to the several lamps which branched out from it.

It is observable, that, under the Old Testament dispensation, the church is represented as one candlestick, though with divers branches; but under the New as seven distinct candlesticks: which may denote the different kinds of church government under the different dispensations. Under the first the church was national, and so was represented by one candlestick. Under the last the churches were congregational; and the seven churches are represented by seven distinct candlesticks.

The gospel is “a light shining in a dark place.” . . . To view God as having lighted up a candle to a benighted world is a cheering thought; and to consider yourselves as instrumental in holding it forth – as being that to the gospel which a candlestick is to the candle – is as interesting as the other is cheering.

You may consider yourselves, therefore, brethren, as INSTRUMENTS IN HOLDING FORTH THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL TO A BENIGHTED WORLD. This is the thought I propose to dwell upon, and this only.

The end of your existence, as a church of Christ, is to “hold forth the word of life.” There are two ways of doing this, to both which I hope you will religiously attend: First, By supporting the preaching of the gospel and, secondly, By recommending it in your spirit and practice.

1. By SUPPORTING THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL. – I scarcely need inform you that to do this you must support him that preaches it: and now give me your attention while I mention a few different ways in which it is your duty, interest, and honour to support your pastor:

1. By a diligent and constant attendance on his ministry – if possible, at all the services of the sabbath, and in the week. And those who live in neighbouring places may support the cause essentially by receiving their minister at their houses, for the purpose of village preaching.

2. By a free and affectionate carriage towards him. Treat him as a friend and a brother. If in his preaching he should occasionally make a mistake, do not magnify it. Do not make him an offender for a word. You are as likely to mistake in judging as he is in advancing a sentiment. If you perceive faults in his deportment, do not whisper them about, but kindly mention them to him. Do not give ear to every report concerning him. He has a right to expect this as a brother, but especially as an elder. “Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father.” That is, an elder in office; and though your pastor may be your junior in years, he is your elder in office, and as such has an especial claim on your forbearance and protection. Ministers are the objects of envy, and if every report against them were encouraged, they would be unable to stand their ground. – Under trials and afflictions, especially, you should manifest great tenderness towards them. God often afflicts ministers for the good of the people – that they may be able to comfort those who are afflicted; surely then it becomes the people to be very affectionate towards them under their trials. You that are officers in the church should especially be concerned to bear up his hands, as Aaron and Hur stayed the hands of Moses.

3. By treating him with becoming respect, and teaching your children and servants to do the same. – This will conduce to your own advantage. So long as he deserves your respect, you ought to show it; and no longer ought he to continue to be your pastor.

4. By acknowledging his instrumentality in your edification. – There is great danger of extremes here. Some are always feeding a minister’s vanity by telling him how well he preached at this time and that; and, by the by, at the same time displaying their own vanity, by wishing

him to consider what good judges they are of an ingenious discourse! Others, to avoid this extreme, will never speak to him in the language of encouragement. Surely there is a way of acknowledging ourselves to have been edified and profited, which does not tend to feed a minister's vanity, but to encourage him in his work.

5. By giving him a place in your prayers. – Think much on the greatness of his work. It is to enlighten a benighted world. Pray that he himself may be enlightened. It is to “feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Pray that he himself may be fed. It is to stand between God and men. Pray that he may be kept humble. It is to disturb the carnal security of men. Pray that he himself may be kept awake. It is to break the hard heart. Pray that he may be tender-hearted. It is to rouse the listless soul to action. Pray that he may be alive himself. It is to trace the windings of the human heart, and to describe the genuine operations of grace in the true believer. Pray that he himself may increase in Christian experience. From what your pastor has this day heard, methinks I hear him sigh and say to himself – “Who is sufficient for these things?” Think of this, my brethren, and you will not forget him in your near addresses to God.

6. By not hindering, but helping him, in the exercises of his pastoral office. – Be not of a touchy temper, so as to prevent him from freely giving you advice and caution, and even reproof. It would be to his dishonour to deal in personal reflections in the pulpit; but out of it, it will be to your dishonour to be offended with plain and close dealing. If you are of such a temper that you cannot bear to be told of your faults, you will hinder him in the discharge of his office. Be at the same time also willing to take your share in the exercise of discipline. In cases of personal offence, it may be well for your pastor in some instances to be excused, lest the parties contract a prejudice against him, and so prevent the success of his ministrations. But where he cannot be excused, be you always ready to join him, to stand by him, to sanction and encourage him in the execution of the laws of Christ; even though the offenders be among your relatives and acquaintance. Let the deacons in particular stand by him; and never let a church censure have so much as the appearance of being passed by the influence of the minister. The address of the elders of Israel to Ezra, in a most painful case of discipline, will furnish you with a good example: “Arise, for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.”

7. By liberally contributing to the support of his family. – It is to the honour of Protestant Dissenters that what they contribute to their ministers they contribute freely, without constraint; but it is greater honour still, if they contribute liberally. Consider your minister's salary, not as a gift, but as a debt; and not as done to him, but to Christ. Give liberally, or you will lose the liberal reward. Give it as due to the cause of Christ, or Christ will take no favourable notice of it. A generous and punctilious regard to God's servants, even in their temporal character, was a feature of the great reformation in the days of Nehemiah, chap. xii. 43-47.

II. We proceed to observe, that the end of your existence, as a church of Christ, is to “hold forth the word of life” by RECOMMENDING IT IN YOUR SPIRIT AND PRACTICE. “Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” This is a powerful way of preaching the gospel. It speaks louder than words – louder than thunder. Your ministers may assure those who are strangers to religion that religion is a matter of infinite importance, and you may say so too; but if they see you light and frothy in your conversation, indifferent and negligent in your duties, do you think they will believe you? No, (say they,) they don't believe it themselves! Again, you may tell them what an evil and bitter thing sin is; but if they see you loose and vain in your deportment, you cannot expect them to believe you. You may dilate upon the vanity of the world; but if you are covetous and oppressive, what will your servants and workmen say? You may assure the gay and thoughtless that religion is the happiest life; but what can they think, if they see you melancholy in the service of God, and cheerful only when engaged in other pursuits! There are various Divine truths, besides the above, which you believe, and which you wish others to believe. For instance, justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; then disprove the calumny that this doctrine leads to licentiousness, by letting them see that your personal righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. The near relation of Christians to God as their Father; then be of a child-like disposition. The work of the Holy Spirit; then bear its fruits. Efficacious grace; then prove it by your perseverance There are three things I would here recommend as to your spirit, and then draw to a close.

1. Cultivate a humble, savoury spirit, rather than a censorious or a curious one. – A curious and censorious temper is almost always the mark of a little mind, and has no tendency to recommend the gospel. A humble, savoury Christian will speak the loudest.

2. Cultivate a peaceful, sincere, affectionate spirit to each other. – “Be ye all of one mind.” – All of a piece, like the golden candlestick. If jarring, and strife, and contention be kindled among you, the scandal will not be confined to you, but will extend to the whole body, yea, to religion itself. It is in a time of peace that a people are prosperous. The heavenly Dove “flies from the abode of noise and strife.” Let me especially recommend you,

3. To cultivate godly sincerity. – If there is any one leading idea held forth in your being compared to a golden candlestick, it seems to be this. The candlestick was to be all gold – no washing, no deception; yea, of beaten gold– that no part should be hollow. It was what it appeared to be – the same within as without. Let this be your character. The great art of church government is to love in sincerity.

My brethren, Christ walketh among you! This should – (1.) Impress you with fear. – His eye is upon you! (2.) Inspire you with courage. – What could you do without him? (3.) Induce you to imbibe his spirit. – A meek and benevolent spirit to all mankind.

Appendix:

Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation

Finally, *From what has been advanced, we may form a judgment of our duty, as ministers of the word, in dealing with the unconverted.* The work of the Christian ministry, it has been said, is to *preach the gospel*, or to hold up the free grace of God through Jesus Christ, as the only way of a sinner’s salvation. This is, doubtless, true; and if this be not the leading theme of our ministrations, we had better be any thing than preachers. “Woe unto us, if we preach not the

gospel!” The minister who, under a pretence of pressing the practice of religion, neglects its all-important principles, labours in the fire. He may enforce duty till duty freezes upon his lips; neither his auditors nor himself will greatly regard it. But, on the contrary, if by *preaching the gospel* be meant the insisting solely upon the blessings and privileges of religion, to the neglect of exhortations, calls, and warnings, it is sufficient to say that such was not the practice of Christ and his apostles. It will not be denied that they preached the gospel; yet they warned, admonished, and entreated sinners to “repent and believe;” to “believe while they had the light;” to “labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life;” to “repent, and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out;” to “come to the marriage supper, for that all things were ready;” in fine, to “be reconciled unto God.”

If the inability of sinners to perform things spiritually good were natural, or such as existed independently of their present choice, it would be absurd and cruel to address them in such language. No one in his senses would think of calling the blind to look, the deaf to hear, or the dead to rise up and walk; and of threatening them with punishment in case of their refusal. But if the blindness arise from the love of darkness rather than light; if the deafness resemble that of the adder, which stoppeth her ear, and will not hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely; and if the death consist in alienation of heart from God, and the absence of all desire after him there is no absurdity of cruelty in such addresses.

But enforcing the duties of religion, either on sinners or saints, is by some called *preaching the law*. If it were so, it is enough for us that such was the preaching of Christ and his apostles. It is folly and presumption to affect to be more evangelical than they were. All practical preaching, however, is not preaching the law. That only, I apprehend, ought to be censured as preaching the law, in which our acceptance with God is, in some way or other, placed to the account of our obedience to its precepts. When eternal life is represented as the reward of repentance, faith, and sincere obedience, (as it too frequently is, and that under the complaisant form of being “*through* the merits of Christ,”) this is preaching the law, and not the gospel. But the precepts of the law may be illustrated and enforced for evangelical purposes; as tending to vindicate the Divine character and government; to convince of sin; to show the necessity of a Saviour, with the freeness of salvation; to ascertain the nature of true religion; and to point out the rule of Christian conduct. Such a way of introducing the Divine law, in

subservience to the gospel, is, properly speaking, preaching to the gospel; for the end denominates the action.

If the foregoing principles be just, it is the duty of ministers not only to exhort their carnal auditors to believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls; but IT IS AT OUR PERIL TO EXHORT THEM TO ANY THING SHORT OF IT, OR WHICH DOES NOT INVOLVE OR IMPLY IT. I am aware that such an idea may startle many of my readers, and some who are engaged in the Christian ministry. We have sunk into such a compromising way of dealing with the unconverted as to have well nigh lost the spirit of the primitive preachers; and hence it is that sinners of every description can sit so quietly as they do, year after year, in our places of worship. It was not so with the hearers of Peter and Paul. They were either “pricked in the heart” in one way, or “cut to the heart” in another. Their preaching commended itself to “every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” How shall we account for this difference? Is there not some important error or defect in our ministrations? I have no reference to the preaching of those who disown the Divinity or atonement of Christ, on the one hand, whose sermons are little more than harangues on morality, nor to that of gross Antinomians on the other, whose chief business it is to feed the vanity and malignity of one part of their audience, and the sin-extenuating principles of the other. These are errors the folly of which is “manifest to all men” who pay any serious regard to the religion of the New Testament. I refer to those who are commonly reputed *evangelical*, and who approve of addresses to the unconverted. I hope no apology is necessary for an attempt to exhibit the Scriptural manner of preaching. If it affects the labours of some of my brethren, I cannot deny but that it may also affect my own. I conceive there is scarcely a minister amongst us whose preaching has not been more or less influenced by the lethargic systems of the age.

Christ and his apostles, without any hesitation, called on sinners to “repent, and believe the gospel;” but we, considering them as poor, impotent, and depraved creatures, have been disposed to drop this part of the Christian ministry. Some may have felt afraid of being accounted legal; others have really thought it inconsistent. Considering such things are beyond the *power* of their hearers, they seem to have contented themselves with pressing on them things which they *could* perform, still continuing the enemies of Christ; such as behaving decently in society, reading the Scriptures, and attending the means of grace. Thus it is that hearers of this

description sit at ease in our congregations. Having done their duty, the minister has nothing more to say to them; unless, indeed, it be to tell them occasionally that something more is *necessary* to salvation. But as this implies no guilt on their part, they sit unconcerned, conceiving that all that is required of them is “to lie in the way; and to wait the Lord’s time.” But is this the religion of the Scriptures? Where does it appear that the prophets or apostles ever treated that kind of inability which is merely the effect of reigning aversion as affording any excuse? And where have they descended, in their exhortations, to things which might be done, and the parties still continue the enemies of God? Instead of leaving out every thing of a spiritual nature, because their hearers *could* not find in their hearts to comply with it, it may safely be affirmed they exhorted to *nothing else*; treating such inability not only as of *no account*, with regard to the lessening of obligation, but as rendering the subjects of it worthy of the severest rebuke. “To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they *cannot* hearken; behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach, and they have no delight in it.” What then? Did the prophet desist from his work, and exhort them to something to which, in their present state of mind, they *could* hearken? Far from it. He delivers his message, whether they would hear, or whether they would forbear. “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.” And did this induce him to desist? No: he proceeds to read their doom, and calls the world to witness its justice; “Hear, O earth! behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it,” Jer. vi. 10-19. Many of those who attended the ministry of Christ were of the same spirit. Their *eyes were blinded*, and their *hearts hardened*, so that they COULD NOT BELIEVE; yet, paying no manner of regard to this kind of inability, he exhorted them “to believe in the light while they had the light.” And when they had *heard and believed not*, he proceeded, without hesitation, to declare, “He that rejected me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

Such also were many of Paul’s hearers at Rome. They *believed not*; but did Paul, seeing they *could not* receive the gospel, recommend to them something which they *could* receive? No; he gave them “one word” at parting: “Well spake the Holy Spirit by Esaias the prophet unto our

fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive. For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”

When did Jesus and his apostles go about merely to form the *manners* of men? Where do they exhort to duties which a man may comply with and yet miss of the kingdom of heaven? If a man “kept their sayings,” he was assured that he “should never see death.” In addressing the unconverted, they began by admonishing them to “repent and believe the gospel;” and in the course of their labours exhorted to all manner of duties; but all were to be done *spiritually*, or they would not have acknowledged them to have been done at all. Carnal duties, or duties to be performed otherwise than “to the glory of God,” had no place in their system.

The answer of our Lord to those carnal Jews who inquired of him what they “most do to work the works of God,” is worthy of special notice. Did Jesus give them to understand that as to believing in him, however willing they might be, it was a matter entirely beyond their power? that all the directions he had to give were that they should attend the means and wait for the moving of the waters? No: Jesus answered, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” This was *the gate at the head of the way*, as the author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* has admirably represented it, to which sinners must be directed. A *worldly-wise* instructor may inculcate other duties, but the true *evangelist*, after the example of his Lord, will point to this as the first concern, and as that upon which every thing else depends.

There is another species of preaching which proceeds upon much the same principle. Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, are allowed to be duties, but not *immediate* duties. The sinner is considered as *unable* to comply with them, and therefore they are not urged upon him; but instead of them he is directed to “pray for the Holy Spirit, to enable him to repent and believe;” and this it seems he *can* do notwithstanding the aversion of his heart from every thing of the kind. But if *any* man be required to pray for the Holy Spirit, it must be either sincerely, and in the name of Jesus; or insincerely, and in some other way. The latter, I suppose, will be allowed to be an abomination in the sight of God; he cannot therefore be

required to do this; and as to the former, it is just as difficult and as opposite to the carnal heart as repentance and faith themselves. Indeed it amounts to the same thing; for a sincere desire after a spiritual blessing presented in the name of Jesus is no other than “the prayer of faith.”

Peter exhorted Simon to pray, not with an impenitent heart that he might obtain repentance, but with a penitent one that he might obtain *forgiveness*; and this no doubt is the only way in which it was to be obtained, “through Jesus Christ.” “*Repent*,” saith he, “and pray to God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” Our Saviour directed his disciples to pray for the “Holy Spirit;” but surely the prayer which they were encouraged to offer was to be *sincere*, and with an eye to the Saviour; that is, it was “the prayer of faith,” and therefore could not be a duty directed to be performed antecedently and in order to the obtaining of it.

The mischief arising from this way of preaching is considerable. First, It gives up a very important question to the sinner, even that question which is at issue between God and conscience on the one hand, and a self-righteous heart on the other; namely, whether he be obliged *immediately* to repent and believe the gospel. “I could find nothing in the Scriptures,” says he, “that would give me any comfort in my present condition; nothing short of ‘repent and believe,’ which are things I *cannot* comply with: but I have gained it from my good minister. Now my heart is at ease. I am not obliged *immediately* to repent and sue for mercy in the name of Jesus. It is not therefore my sin that I do not. All I am obliged to is to pray God to help me to do so; and that I do.” Thus, after a bitter conflict with Scripture and conscience, which have pursued him through all his windings, and pressed upon him the call of the gospel, he finds a shelter in the house of God! Such counsel, instead of aiding the sinner’s convictions, (which, as “labourers with God,” is our proper business,) has many a time been equal to a victory over them, or at least to the purchase of an armistice. Secondly, It *deceives* the soul. He understands it as a compromise, and so acts upon it. For though he be in fact as far from sincerely praying for repentance as from repenting, and just as unable to desire faith in Christ as to exercise it, yet he does not think so. He reckons himself very desirous of these things. The reason is, he takes that *indirect* desire after them, which consists in wishing to be converted (or any thing, however disagreeable in itself) that he may escape the wrath to come, to be the desire of grace; and being conscious of possessing this, he considers himself in a fair way at least of being converted. Thus

he deceives his soul; and thus he is helped forward in his delusion! Nor is this all: he feels himself set at liberty from the hard requirement of *returning immediately to God by Jesus Christ, as utterly unworthy*; and, being told to pray that he may be enabled to do so, he supposes that such prayer will avail him, or that God will give him the power of repenting and believing in answer to his prayers; prayers, be it observed, which must necessarily be offered up with an impenitent, unbelieving heart. This just suits his self-righteous spirit; but, alas, all is delusion!

“You have no relief then,” say some, “for the sinner.” I answer, If the gospel or any of its blessings will relive him, there is no want of relief. But if there be nothing in Christ, or grace, or heaven that will suit his inclination, it is not for me to furnish him with any thing else, or to encourage him to hope that things will come to a good issue. The only possible way of relieving a sinner, while his heart is averse from God, is by lowering the requirements of heaven to meet his inclination, or in some way to model the gospel to his mind. But to relieve him in this manner is at my peril. If I were commissioned to address a company of men who had engaged in an unprovoked rebellion against their king and country, what ought I to say to them? I might make use of authority or entreaty, as occasion might require; I might caution, warn, threaten, or persuade them; but there would be a point from which I must not depart: *Be ye reconciled to your rightful sovereign*; lay down arms, and submit to mercy! To this I must inviolably adhere. They might allege that they *could* not comply with such hard terms. Should I admit their plea, and direct them only to such conduct as might consist with a rebellious spirit, instead of recovering them from rebellion, I should go far towards denominating myself a rebel.

And as Christ and his apostles never appear to have exhorted the unconverted to any thing which did not include or imply repentance and faith, so *in all their explications of the Divine law, and preaching against particular sins, their object was to bring the sinner to this issue*. Though they directed them to no means, in order to get a penitent and believing heart, but to repentance and faith themselves; yet they *used means with them* for that purpose. Thus our Lord expounded the law in his sermon on the mount, and concluded by enforcing such a “hearing of his sayings and doing them” as should be equal to “digging deep, and building one’s house upon a rock.” And thus the apostle Peter, having charged his countrymen with the murder of the Lord of glory, presently brings it to this issue: “Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”

Some years ago I met with a passage in Dr. Owen on this subject, which, at that time, sunk deep into my heart; and the more observation I have since made, the more just his remarks appear. “It is the duty of ministers,” says he, “to plead with men about their sins; but always remember that it be done with that which is the proper end of law and gospel; that is, that they make use of the sin they speak against to the discovery of the *state* and *condition* wherein the sinner is, otherwise, haply, they may work men to formality and hypocrisy, but little of the true end of preaching the gospel will be brought about. It will not avail to beat a man off from his drunkenness into a sober formality. A skilful master of the assemblies lays his axe at the root, drives still at the heart. To inveigh against particular sins of ignorant, unregenerate persons, such as the land is full of, is a good work; but yet, though it may be done with great efficacy, vigour, and success, if this be all the effect of it, that they are set upon the most sedulous endeavours of mortifying their sins preached down, all that is done is but like the beating of an enemy in an open field, and driving him into an impregnable castle not to be prevailed against. Get you, at any time, a sinner at the advantage on the account of any one sin whatever; have you any thing to take hold of him by, bring it to his *state* and *condition*, drive it up to the head, and there deal with him. To break men off from particular sins, and not to break their hearts, is to deprive ourselves of advantages of dealing with them.”

When a sinner is first seized with conviction, it is natural to suppose that he will abstain from many of his outward vices, though it be only for the quiet of his own mind: but it is not for us to administer comfort to him on this ground; as though, because he had “broken off” a few of “his sins,” he must needs have broken them off “by righteousness,” and either be in the road to life, or at least in a fair way of getting into it. It is one of the devices of Satan to alarm the sinner, and fill him with anxiety for the healing of outward eruptions of sin; while the inward part is overlooked, though it be nothing but sin. But we must not be aiding and abetting in these deceptions, nor administer any other relief than that which is held out in the gospel to sinners as *sinner*s. And when we see such characters violating their promises, and falling anew into their old sins, (which is frequently the case,) instead of joining with them in lamenting the event, and assisting them in healing the wound by renewed efforts of watchfulness, it becomes us rather to probe the wound; to make *use* of that which has appeared for the detecting of that which has not appeared; and so to point them to the blood that cleanses from all sin. “Poor soul!” says the

eminent writer just quoted, “it is not thy sore finger, but thy hectic fever, from which thy life is in danger!” If the cause be removed, the effects will cease. If the spring be purified, the waters will be healed, and the barren ground become productive.

I conclude with a few remarks on the *order* of addressing exhortations to the unconverted. There being an established order in the workings of the human mind, it has been made a question whether the same ought not to be preserved in addressing it. As, for instance, we cannot be convinced of sin without previous ideas of God and moral government, nor of the need of a Saviour without being convinced of sin, nor of the importance of salvation without suitable conceptions of its evil nature. Hence, it may be supposed, we ought not to teach any one of these truths till the preceding one is well understood; or, at least, that we ought not to preach the gospel without prefacing it by representing the just requirements of the law, our state as sinners, and the impossibility of being justified by the works of our hands. Doubtless, such representations are proper and necessary, but not so necessary as to render it improper, on any occasion, to introduce the doctrine of the gospel without them, and much less to refrain from teaching it till they are understood and felt. In this case a minister must be reduced to the greatest perplexity; never knowing when it was safe to introduce the salvation of Christ, lest some of his hearers should not be sufficiently prepared to receive it. The truth is, it is never unsafe to introduce this doctrine. There is such a connexion in Divine truth, that if any one part of it reached the mind and find a place in the heart, all others, which may precede it in the order of things, will come in along with it. In receiving a doctrine, we receive not only what is expressed, but what is *implied* by it; and thus the doctrine of the cross may *itself* be the means of convincing us of the evil of sin. An example of this lately occurred in the experience of a child of eleven years of age. Her minister, visiting her under a threatening affliction, and perceiving her to be unaffected with her sinful condition, suggested that “It was no small matter that brought down the Lord of glory into this world to suffer and die, there must be something very offensive in the nature of sin against a holy God.” This remark appears to have sunk into her heart, and to have issued in a saving change. Divine truths are like chain-shot; they go together, and we need not perplex ourselves which should enter first; if any one enter, it will draw the rest after it.

Remarks nearly similar may be made concerning *duties*. Though the Scriptures know nothing of duties to be performed without faith, or which do not *include* or *imply* it; yet they do

not wait for the sinner's being possessed of faith before they exhort him to other spiritual exercises; such as "seeking" the Lord, "loving" him, "serving him," &c., nor, need we lay any such restraints upon ourselves. Such is the *connexion* of the duties as well as the truths of religion, that if one be truly complied with, we need not fear that the others will be wanting. If God be sought, loved, or served, we may be sure that Jesus is embraced; and if Jesus be embraced, that sin is abhorred. Or should things first occur to the mind in another order, should sin be the immediate object of our thoughts, if this be abhorred, the God against whom it is committed must, at the same instant, be loved, and the Saviour who has made a sacrifice to deliver us from it embraced. Let any part of truth or holiness but find a place in the heart, and the rest will be with it. Those parts which, in the order of things, are required to precede it, will come in by way of *implication*, and those which follow it will be *produced* by it. Thus the primitive preachers seem to have had none of that scrupulosity which appears in the discourses and writings of some modern preachers. Sometimes they exhorted sinners to "believe" in Jesus; but it was such belief as *implied* repentance for sin: sometimes to "repent and be converted;" but it was such repentance and conversion as *included* believing: and sometimes to "labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life;" but it was such labouring as comprehended both repentance and faith.

Some have inferred from the doctrine of justification by faith in opposition to the works of the law, that sinners ought not to be exhorted to any thing which comprises obedience to the law, either in heart or life, except we should preach the law to them for the purpose of conviction; and this lest we should be found directing them to the works of their own hands as the grounds of acceptance with God. From the same principle, it has been concluded that faith itself cannot include any holy disposition of the heart, because all holy disposition contains obedience to the law. If this reasoning be just, all exhorting of sinners to things expressive of a holy exercise of heart is either improper, or requires to be understood as merely preaching the law for the purpose of conviction; as our Saviour directed the young ruler to “keep the commandments, if he would enter into life.” Yet the Scriptures abound with such exhortations. Sinners are exhorted to “seek” God, to “serve” him with fear and joy, to “forsake” their wicked way, and “return” to him, to “repent” and “be converted.” These are manifestly exercises of the heart, and addressed to the unconverted. Neither are they to be understood as the requirements of a covenant of works. That covenant neither requires repentance nor promises forgiveness. But sinners are directed to these things under a promise of “mercy” and “abundant pardon.” There is a wide difference between these addresses and the address of our Lord to the young ruler; that to which *he* was directed was the producing of a righteousness adequate to the demands of the law, which was naturally impossible; and our Lord’s design was to show its impossibility, and thereby to convince him of the need of gospel mercy; but that to which the above directions point is not to any natural impossibility, but to the very way of mercy. The manner in which the primitive preachers guarded against self-righteousness was very different from this. They were not afraid of exhorting either saints or sinners to holy exercises of heart, nor of connecting with them the promises of mercy. But though they exhibited the promises of eternal life to any and every spiritual exercise, yet they never taught that it was on account of it, but of mere grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. The ground on which they took their stand was, “Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” Hence they inferred the impossibility of a sinner being justified in any other way than for the sake of him who was “made a curse for us;” and hence it clearly follows, that whatever holiness any sinner may possess before, in, or after believing, it is of no account whatever as a ground of acceptance with God. If we inculcate *this* doctrine, we need not fear

exhorting sinners to holy exercises of heart, nor holding up the promises of mercy to all who thus return to God by Jesus Christ.

