

John Cowan

The duties of the
gospel minister

A Sermon

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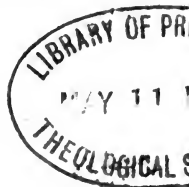


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THE DUTIES OF THE GOSPEL MINISTER.

A

SERMON,



PREACHED AT

THE ORDINATION

OF THE

REV. ANDREW SYMINGTON,

*To the pastoral charge of the Reformed Presbyterian Congregation,
Paisley. April 26, 1809.*

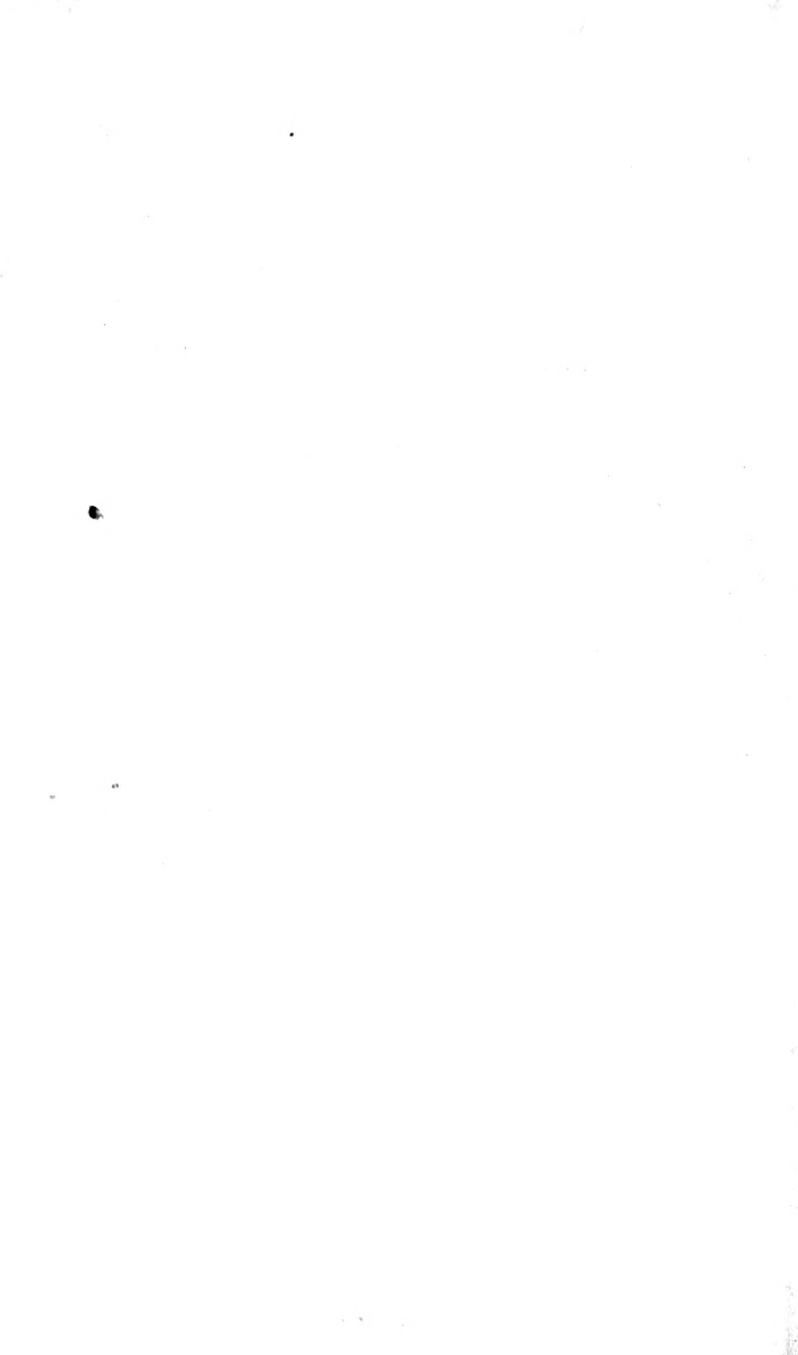
BY JOHN COWAN,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, STRANRAER.

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1809.



A SERMON, &c.



1 TIMOTHY IV. 16. *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.*

THE Lord Jehovah is King of Zion. This kingdom he has formed for himself, and all dominion and power shall serve and obey him. This is the place where he desires to dwell, and out of which he shines gloriously. From his mercy seat, and from between the two cherubims he communes with his people. But, the better to suit himself to the capacity of his subjects, he generally conducts his administrations by the instrumentality of chosen men,—men of like passions with others. He puts the treasure in the earthen vessel, that it may be the more accessible to his children, and that the excellency of the power may be of him. During the old testament age, we find Moses, Joshua, and a long succession of high-priests and priests taken from among their brethren, and ordained by God to manage the important services of that ancient hierarchy. And even when Jesus the servant and elect of his Father appears, he is beheld in all things made like unto his brethren; being a partaker of flesh and blood,

that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining to God. He, indeed, possessed of all power, appoints new forms, orders and regulations in his church; but, still he retains the official services of chosen men; “ *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*”*

The apostles, after the ascension of Jesus, by the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of pentecost, were endowed with power and authorised to go and preach the gospel to every creature. By this unction they were also qualified as wise master-builders, for the work assigned them: and enabled to persevere in opposition to all the difficulties and obstructions, that were thrown in their way by the enemies of christianity, with a design to suppress it in its tender years. This Spirit is an abiding Spirit, though not in the apostolic form; and this office of preaching the gospel is by it rendered permanent. This office is not, however, accessible to all those, who may pretend to more eminent abilities and greater piety than the rest of mankind. It must be subjected to form and order. It must be conveyed in the name and by the authority of Zion’s Lord. Such solemnity is necessary to guard against intrusion; to secure the sacred nature of the office; and to give importance and authority to those by whom it is duly executed. In the instances of Timothy and Titus, we see the forms of

* Eph. iv. 11, 12.

the church reduced to practice; these men of gifts were solemnly ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, and they were commanded; “*to commit*” this trust “*to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also*”* In the epistles which Paul writes to these two evangelists, he gives us a view of the solemnity and difficulties of this office, and the qualifications and duties of those who officiate. From the 6th verse of this chapter we have some very appropriate directions to Timothy respecting his conduct and public administrations. These are concluded with the text in which Paul addresses this young minister with a seriousness and concern, that must make a deep impression on the mind of every one who can for a moment put himself in young Timothy’s place; “*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 shall endeavour to illustrate this text, by considering,

I. The objects respecting *himself* to which the gospel minister should attend. II. A few things respecting his *doctrine* to which he should attend. III. The blessed end which the gospel minister serves by *taking heed to himself* and his *doctrine*. And then conclude with a short improvement of the subject.

Upon the first of these things, I remark,

1. The gospel minister must take heed to his own personal religion.

* 2 Tim. ii. 2,

True religion is a radical qualification for the want of which nothing can compensate; though one were to preach with the tongues of men or of angels, and have not charity, he becomes as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. These important inquiries into the state of the soul, which should be made by christians in general, ought to be carried on with peculiar care and interest by the minister of Jesus: lest when he has preached Christ to others, himself should be a cast-away. He must take heed to the existence of religion in his soul, and endeavour to ascertain whether Christ be in him, or he be a reprobate. He should frequently institute a trial, and candidly examine himself; "*whether he be in the faith.*" He should explore the secrets of his own mind; lest he be like the whited sepulchre, full of rottenness within. He must take heed to the different powers and faculties of the soul. The little leaven should leaven the whole lump. True religion diffuses its virtues through the whole heart: it affects every power of the mind: the understanding is made spiritual; the affections heavenly, the will obedient, and the conscience faithful. The whole heart is renewed and becomes like the chariots of Amminadib. The vigour and progress of grace should be closely observed: faith, love, repentance and the various graces of the Spirit admit of different degrees, they do not come to perfection at once: like the seed sown on the good ground, they spring, they grow and they bring forth fruit; "*but grow in grace.*" This growth should be realized and its progress should be carefully ascertained. There is another idea respecting the

growth of grace which merits similar attention, and it is, the influence that this grace has in mortifying corruption. A minister is not to preach himself, but Jesus Christ; pride and boasting must therefore be excluded. His doctrines should be pure and he is to enforce purity of heart and life. He must not, then, yield his own members the instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. He should study to purify his own heart from all pollution of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. The opposition maintained between the law in the members, and the law in the mind, requires particular attention. From this quarter the minister of Jesus collects much of his experimental knowledge. Here he sees the deceitfulness of his own heart, the cunning of Satan, and the insinuating nature of sin and temptation. This knowledge prepares him to fight with skill against principalities, and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. It fits him, too, for trying the experiences, and directing himself with judgment and truth to the hearts and consciences of his hearers. Personal religion might lead our attention to many of the duties in the life and conversation of the minister; but these I dismiss at present, and shall conclude what I have said on this particular by adding, that personal religion well understood, and judiciously improved must inspire a minister with confidence in the discharge of his duty, it must render his services pleasant to himself, and it must diffuse through all his discourses, a seriousness and heavenly spirit, calculated to secure the attention and arouse the devotion of his auditory.

2. The gospel minister must take heed to his own improvement in knowledge, and in fitness for his official work.

He has an important trust committed to his care; he is therefore to labour in word and in doctrine. A disposition for study is a necessary gift in the minister of Christ: he must be contemplative, given to reflection, and bent on inquiry and improvement. His stock of knowledge should be daily increasing; he should go along with the growing knowledge and real improvements of the age in which he lives. To search the scriptures should be his first work; they are the text-book of all theological study, the criterion of all genuine improvement. He should look into the sacred page with the eye of faith, that he may in the first place believe for himself its gracious report. He must study it as the sacred repository of the fulness of the gospel, that he may be able to break the bread of life for others, and give every one his portion in due season. It must be examined, likewise, with critical acumen, that truth may be sufficiently confirmed, and false doctrine fully exposed. The most particular attention is necessary in preparing discourses for the public. Here the minister appears as a city set upon a hill, that cannot be hid. His preparations should be extensive; by these he should fit himself to go through his work in a masterly manner, to do credit to his office, and to secure the respect of all to the gospel which he preaches. For this part of his work, prayer, meditation, reading and reflection must surely be recommended. The importance of the subject and the real situation of those

to whom it shall be addressed should impress the mind in all this preparatory exercise.

General knowledge, too, should be regarded as a happy acquisition; “*Give attendance to reading.*”* The knowledge of arts and sciences, the knowledge of history, natural, civil and ecclesiastical is highly ornamental; it gives a beautiful polish to these shafts in the hand of God; a portion of it is expected in every public character. This general knowledge greatly improves the mind; it gives an extension of thought and accuracy of judgment; it gives great assistance in illustrating many passages of scripture, and fits for acting with propriety both in the church and in the world.

The knowledge of human nature and of the world merits, likewise, some attention; like Paul, a minister should become all things to all men; that he may by all means save some. Human nature has its peculiar feelings, partialities, dispositions and prejudices; the ambitious in the world know how to take advantage of these, so as to procure for their devices very general approbation. These may likewise be made subservient to the interest of the gospel, and men, as it were, caught by guile. Surely such as are ignorant of these cannot fail of irritating the mind sometimes when they design to sooth, and of provoking greater prejudice when they intend to conciliate favour. A knowledge of the world, in its prevailing corruptions and temptations, in the popular taste and manners of the age, in the circumstances

* 1 Tim. iv. 13.

in which men are placed, and the influence that these circumstances have both on their religious sentiments and conduct, is no mean acquisition: this enables a minister to weigh the characters of men with candour, and to censure where it is due, with accuracy and judgment. In public administration, suffice it at present to say, a minister should be grave in his appearance, interesting in his discourse, prepossessing in his manner, and impressive in his address.

3. The gospel minister should take heed to his general conduct.

The eyes of the world are upon the minister of Christ, and although it should often forget that he is a minister, yet it is never at the time when he forgets it himself. It is ever disposed to contrast any impropriety in his conduct with the most sacred idea in the ministerial office. He should therefore study great circumspection, he should resemble the four living creatures in the vision of John* which were "*full of eyes behind and before.*" A minister's life should exemplify his doctrine, on him it is reasonably expected to operate first; he should make his light so shine before men that they seeing his good deeds may glorify his heavenly Father. This will display the usefulness of his doctrines, and naturally induce to a more ready compliance with his instructions. His conduct is the test of his sincerity, it is a model to others, and if he should fail in one point he is generally considered to be guilty of all; his failure is apt to destroy all his usefulness, and will often be mentioned by the

* Rev. iv. 6.

wicked, with an impious and extatic triumph, as a sanction to their grosser immoralities. He should therefore study much uniformity, and not be chargeable, like the ministers of old, with straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. He should be like the ruby which reflects the light from its many polished surfaces; from whatever direction he is viewed, the light of truth and the beauty of holiness should be seen. As an individual, he must be “*blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine: A pattern of good works, of good report of them that are without; a lover of good men, just, holy, temperate, exercised unto godliness.*” In his family, he must study to exercise his talents for government, for instruction and for discipline; he is “*to rule well having his children in subjection with all gravity.*” In the church in general he is not to assume the pre-eminence, like Diotrefes, or, like the haughty dignitary, lord over the heritage of God. In the congregation over which he is placed, he must take heed to his authority and suffer no man to despise him. He must support the character, maintain the dignity of a public teacher, and endeavour to secure the respect, obedience and attention of those among whom he labours. To his people, and indeed to all with whom he is conversant, he should study to endear himself by prudently blending together his dignity and familiarity, his authority and condescension, his religious reserve and innocent freedom; attending still to the particular time appointed for every work under the sun. In all his exercises he

should display the affection of a father, the friendship of a brother, and the earnestness of one who beseeches in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God.

4. The gospel minister should take heed to cultivate in himself those gifts and dispositions, which fit for the ministerial function and adorn the ministerial character.

These indeed are numerous, and some of them have been occasionally introduced in what has already been said; but there are others of such importance to the right discharge of the ministerial office, as to merit a distinct treatment. I shall only mention a few of them, and shall give the first place to prudence. Prudence is that faculty by which a man is directed to do, on all occasions, what is most fit to be done. By it a minister adopts the most proper season, and gives the most acceptable and effectual tone to all his administrations: "*The prudent man foreseeth evil.*" Christ Jesus recommends a prudent conduct to his disciples in the following maxim; "*Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*"* Solomon, likewise, with his usual beauty of sentiment and simplicity of expression, gives it a high character in the following passages; "*When wisdom entereth into thy heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.*"† "*The words of the wise are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.*"‡ Imprudence is very dangerous in every situation, but particularly so in the church of God; it never fails

* Mat. x. 16.

† Prov. ii. 10, 11.

‡ Eccl. ix. 17.

to raise stumbling-blocks, to aggravate offences, and produce confusion; it should, therefore, be studiously restrained, and a contrary conduct attentively cultivated.

Meekness and patience do likewise merit our attention. The exercise of these in the peculiar circumstances in which Christ was placed forms a striking trait in his character: in this should the servant resemble his Lord. A bishop should not be self-willed, he should not be soon angry, he should be no striker, no brawler, not a novice lifted up with pride; but he should be patient and should endure with all long suffering.

To be denied to the world is a disposition recommended to the study of the minister of Christ: he is not to be greedy of filthy lucre, he is not to be covetous, he is to take the oversight of his flock "*not for filthy lucre's sake.*" It is necessary, however, here to add, that ministers are not called, by these scriptural directions, to dismiss all concern about temporal objects. An inordinate love of the world, which is blamable in every person, is all that is rebuked in them. A minister, if he is a husband, parent or master, is under sacred obligations to provide for them of his own house. A comfortable support is therefore expected from those among whom he labours; and his right to this is equally moral and independent, with the right of the labourer to his hire. Nor is family subsistence all that he is to expect: he has surely a right to a return bearing an equitable proportion to his large expenditure in fitting himself for the duties of his office. Pecuniary mat-

ters, however, should be cautiously treated, and the usefulness of a minister and peace of a congregation should not be sacrificed for filthy lucre's sake.

Steadiness is another commendable qualification. A minister must not be soon shaken, he must continue and abide by the truth, "*rooted and established in the faith.*"—The last thing I shall mention here is perseverance; this must include in it vigour, resolution and activity, and, in this view of it, it is a gift of no small importance. By it the minister is fitted to abound always in the work of the Lord knowing that his labour shall not be in vain, supported in fighting the fight of faith, and made instant in season and out of season: by this faculty he is preserved from that supineness and lukewarmness which betray the mind into the guilt and danger of hiding its Lord's talent in the earth.

II. I shall now consider a few things *respecting his doctrine* to which a gospel minister should attend.

1. He must take heed that his doctrine be true and scriptural. "*Thus saith the Lord,*" is the sacred authority of the scriptures. "*It seemeth good to the Holy Ghost speaking in the word,*" or "*thus it is written,*" is the powerful argument used by the minister of Jesus. This confirms his doctrine and interpretation, and commands the assent of his hearers. The scriptures are the balance of the sanctuary adjusted by the veracity and righteousness of God. This is to be used in Zion which is "*the city of truth.*" "*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*" Scripture truth is ever

to be mentioned as sacred; to pervert it is to intermeddle presumptuously with the sacred authority of heaven. It is the rule of faith and of practice.

In searching after truth, however, it is necessary to examine the spirit as well as the letter of scripture: "*The letter killeth, the spirit maketh alive.*" It is possible to pervert the letter of scripture, so as to make it support the most gross sentiments and warrant the worst of practices. It may be compelled to blaspheme, to contradict itself, and to suppress that very spirit which it is designed to breathe. But let the scriptures be studied in their uniformity, in their analogy and in the system they contain; let their first principles and evangelical spirit be examined; surely they bring glad tidings of great joy, and the words that they speak are spirit and life. It is not meant by this that the letter of scripture is to be disregarded; for surely scripture language is best for expressing scripture ideas, and we can have no rational prospect of attaining the knowledge of divine truth, without attending to the language in which it is conveyed. To think that the gospel is a system of sublime mysticism, taught by the Spirit without the word, or discovered in the word by a lively and enthusiastic imagination, is an absurdity exploded by the common sense of mankind. It seems, upon the whole, to be the most scriptural and successful plan to join word and spirit together, to search the scriptures daily and to implore the Spirit to lead and guide into all truth. To refer divine truth to the decisions of reason is absurd. To reduce it by a false philosophy to a system of morality which at best only points at

the external virtues of life and propriety of conduct, is to overlook its most sublime part, and to dismiss the love of God from it which is its first principle and first command. The blaze of superstition, and the varying play of human invention are equally hostile to the simple doctrines of the gospel. In opposition to all these balances of deceit, the minister must still apply to the balance of the sanctuary: all his doctrines and instructions must be warranted by this standard. The faith of believers can receive nothing else; the soul can be fed by no other provision; the glory of God can shine through no other medium. So the preacher of Jesus must ever “*speak the words that become sound doctrine. In doctrine*” he must “*show uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.*”

2. The gospel minister should take heed, that his doctrine be important, useful, and enriched with all the fulness of grace.

A sermon may be composed strictly according to the line of abstract truth, and yet be of very little advantage to the cause of religion. Like mathematical demonstration, principles may be confirmed, and still their application may lie concealed. This is undoubtedly the characteristic of scholastic divinity, so much studied in former ages. In some instances it is difficult to say whether their abstruse propositions are true or false; and equally difficult to see any good end that they serve. By too much abstraction the gospel is reduced to a skeleton of truths. It may resemble Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones,* bone

comes to his bone but there is no flesh on them; so truth may be joined to its kindred truth, and yet be clothed with little of the fulness of the grace of God. The doctrines of the gospel should ever be set forth in their relation to God; in this relation they maintain their true importance. They give a discovery of his glory, perfections, purposes and grace. In their own nature they are spiritual, sacred, heavenly and divine. In their relation to man, they must exhibit the one thing needful, they are designed to convey life into his soul and offer him the great salvation; they must present him with the weapons of his warfare. The doctrine that possesses these ideas, and is preached in these connexions, must recommend itself to the attention of every considerate hearer. A minister should study to render his doctrine extensively useful. Scarcely have we one truth recorded in scripture, but its usefulness is set down along with it; it always bears on some one part of conduct or another. Doctrine should therefore be practical, and well applied to heart and life. It is profitable for reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness. The precious fulness of Christ must receive a due attention from the minister of the gospel. This is the river which makes glad the city of God. The gospel is a feast, a feast of love for the friends of Jesus. *“Wisdom hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her wine,”* and she sends forth the ministers of the gospel to invite in her name. *“Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine that I have mingled.”** This is *“a feast of fat*

* Pro. ix. 2—5.

things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things, full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."* It is "water and milk without money and without price."† Christ in the gospel gives his flesh for meat and his blood for drink; he is set forth crucified and slain; this is the bread and water of life, this is the word by which men live, and to which a minister should take heed in preaching the doctrines of the cross of Christ.

3. The gospel minister should take heed that his doctrines comprehend the whole of divine truth. Paul shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God. "The words of the Lord are pure words; as tried silver." The truths of God are all sacred; none of them are superfluous; and none of them should be treated by the minister with indifference. The summit of divine knowledge indeed is not attainable in this life; but from strength to strength he should proceed unweariedly in the laudable search of truth. It is supposed that he has made more considerable progress in the discovery of it than others. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth."‡ And if he may still remain ignorant of many things, as none can by searching find out God to perfection; yet, surely, for wilful ignorance, for prejudice at the truth, for policy in concealing it, or for negligence in the study of it, no excuse can be found. These are base in themselves and exceedingly hurtful to the cause of religion. Truths may be considered, in-

* Isa. xxv. 6.

† Isa. lv. 1.

‡ Mal. ii. 7.

deed, of greater or of lesser importance, when compared among themselves; but this distinction cannot warrant the extrusion of any of them from the creed of the church; as on these that are considered the branches of this tree of divine knowledge, as well as on those that are more radical, fruit may be found, and even on the tops of their uppermost boughs.

There is a great variety of doctrines in the word of God, and they all claim the attention of the preacher of truth and righteousness. There are doctrines that respect the glory, will, and works of God—doctrines that respect the creation, fall, and redemption of man—doctrines that respect the constitution, worship, ordinances and government of the church—doctrines that respect the organization and administrations of civil society—and doctrines that bear on every relation in which man is placed, teaching him to live soberly, righteously and godly in the world. All these deserve to be carefully considered and faithfully applied. The gospel is a complete system; all its parts in their different dependencies must be regularly fitted together; to lop off any of them must considerably mar the whole; for one truth cannot say to another, “*I have no need of thee.*” Those truths in the gospel that are considered least essential, and farthest removed from the radical principles of christianity, may resemble the active limbs and arms, hands and feet, that hold a similar position in the human body. They may be rendered very serviceable in the cause of christianity and religion.

4. The gospel minister must take heed that his doctrine be seasonable and well applied.

“*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*”* “*To every thing there is a season.*” There are, indeed, certain doctrines of the gospel that are never unseasonable; the staff of bread and stay of water must be always administered. There are others that are to be more sparingly used. As the frequency of medicine defeats its own end, and the continual use of over-nice delicacies may be sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the belly; so, by dwelling too much upon party peculiarities, or critical disquisitions, a minister may spend his money for that which is not bread and his labour for that which satisfieth not. Although truth is not circumstantial, yet circumstances must regulate in a great measure, the application of it. It must be varied to answer the situation of the old men, the young men and children to whom it is preached: new born babes must be fed with the sincere milk of the word; and strong meat must be given to those of full age. Sometimes a minister must assume the appearance of (Boanerges) a son of thunder; at other times he must use a still small voice. He must be simple and explicit to meet the understandings of the unlearned; he must be dexterous and learned to meet the prejudices and sophistry of deceivers; and he must be direct and powerful to suit the situation of the hard hearted and unthinking. Considering this variety in the dispositions of mankind, it cannot

be expected that the same discourse can have the like effect on all who hear it; to some it may be precious and suitable, to others barren and unfruitful. There are peculiar seasons in the dispensations of providence which may properly enough give a peculiar direction to a minister's public administrations. He should know the times and what Israel ought to do. The cry to him is, "*Watchman what of the night, Watchman what of the night?*" There are times for piping and for dancing, there are other times for hanging the harps on the willow trees by the streams of Babylon. There are seasons when immoralities greatly prevail; against these the minister must give a scriptural testimony and solemn warning. There are seasons when lukewarmness characterizes many in the church of Christ, these call for the sound of alarm to awake those that sleep. There are times of strong temptation to draw away many from the truth. There are also seasons when infidelity and heresies prevail; against these the minister must lift up a standard and give a distinct sound. At one time judgments may be threatened; then the minister is called to examine the cause of these, and to show how the danger is to be avoided. At another time blessings may be liberally bestowed; then the minister must call to sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving. A minister must direct his doctrine to bear on the living controversies of the age and the place in which he lives. There are, indeed, some obsolete controversies which ought not to be revived; and there are some that deserve no better name than that of profane and vain babblings

which will die of course, but are such obstinate things as just to live the longer for being the more frequently condemned. There are others of considerable importance; in these the minister of Christ must interest himself, and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. In some of these he may be involved in opposition to the avowed enemies of Christ and of the gospel; in others he may be obliged to withstand the friends of Jesus to the face because they are to be blamed. Between these he must make a difference, against the one he may declaim with the greater severity, against the other with the greater charity: but still he is to adhere to the form of sound words and overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony.

5. The gospel minister must take heed to his doctrine in its operation on the hearts of his hearers. This remark may be considered by some as rather extraneous; but it presents itself so naturally, it contains so necessary a part of the minister's duty and is so closely connected with his attention to his doctrine, that I conceive it ought not to be omitted. In preaching the word a minister prepares the field and sows his seed, but here his cares are not at an end; with a watchful eye and anxious concern he must attend its progress. The choking briars and thorns he must study to remove, the stony ground he must endeavour to clear and enrich, the way-side he must hedge in, and when the fowls come down on his seed he must drive them away. He must watch over the souls of his flock, knowing that he is to give an account to God. The word of God is

designed to do great execution, it is sharp and powerful like a two edged sword, it is a hammer to break the hard heart, it is a fire to melt, and a furnace to purify the soul. To assist the word in these operations and to ascertain its progress are difficult but important duties. The gospel is a valuable talent bestowed on all those who hear it; a minister should aid his people in putting this talent to usury, and prevent them, if possible, from hiding it in the earth. He should exhort them from house to house, pray with them and urge them, by all means in his power, to the active performance of religious duties, and the serious improvement of their religious privileges. He should study to promote the work of the Spirit, to stimulate the religious convictions of his people, and to strengthen their resolutions and endeavours. He should be accessible to those who are smitten in their hearts, he should tell them what they must do to be saved, and in their perplexities be ready to say, "*This is the way walk ye in it.*" He should confirm the doubting, strengthen the weak, and encourage the fearful. And in all respects he should study to forward the operation of the little leaven of grace till it leaven the whole lump.

III. I proceed to consider the blessed ends which a minister serves by *taking heed to himself and his doctrine*:—"thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."

In doing this I shall take notice of some blessings in which a minister and his people are common sharers; and of others which are obtained by them respectively.

1. As resulting from his administrations, the gospel minister and his hearers may be common sharers in the blessings of spiritual and eternal life. There is a close connexion instituted by God between the use of his word and the enjoyment of these great blessings; life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel. Man is naturally ignorant, the god of this world has blinded his mind, he cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them. The strongest intellect and the most assiduous application without the use of the gospel, search in vain for this pearl of great price; every acquisition made by them must declare, "*it is not in me;*" but these appointed means by the blessing of God produce the most happy effects. They make wise unto salvation. "*For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*"* Paul after his conversion ventures to boast of the glory and usefulness of this dispensation, which he once considered degrading to his nation, and justly incurring the severest punishment; "*I am,*" says he, "*not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*" Regeneration and conversion are important changes in the nature and life of man; they bring from darkness to light, they make heirs

* 2 Cor. iv. 6, 7.

of God and joint heirs with Christ. The preaching of the gospel has an honourable place among those means by which they are produced: “*In Christ Jesus,*” says Paul, “*I have begotten you through the gospel.*” The words of James are similar;* “*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.*” Peter affirms the same doctrine;† “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*” In this way believers become branches in the true vine.—In this way they are grafted in, and partake of the root and fatness of the true olive tree. In considering the character of the believer, and the various gradations in his spiritual improvement, we are naturally led to attach a considerable value and importance to the means of grace; for whom God predestinated, them he also calls; and whom he calls them he justifies, sanctifies and glorifies. The just shall live by faith; but faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; “*Hear and your soul shall live. How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*” So that man is not to live by bread alone, but on the words that proceed from the mouth of God.

The minister is not to be excluded from a share of these great blessings which the gospel from his lips imparts to others. It is surely desirable and proper could he, for his own comfort, ascertain his regeneration and interest in Christ previously to the

* Chap. i. 18.

† 1 Epis. i. 23.

commencement of his public services; as without these he neither can act from proper motives, nor expect much success in his work. Yet, supposing him for a time to be a stranger to the life of religion, it is not absurd to conceive that his own words may prove the savour of life unto life to his own soul, and be blessed to call him effectually to the hope of the gospel, and bring him out of darkness into God's marvellous light. But whatever may be the effect of his administrations on his own state, it is surely his duty, as well as the duty of his hearers, to improve these as the means of promoting the best interest of their souls, and of bringing them to the enjoyment of the blessings of spiritual and eternal life.

2. The gospel minister, in duly discharging the duties of his office, saves himself and those that hear him, from that lukewarmness about religious matters which too often characterizes the bulk of mankind.

The disposition of the Laodicean church is one which extensively prevails. Mankind, pleased with fanciful attainments, are ready to put the evil day far from them, and it often happens that a minister's greatest zeal, and most faithful expostulations cannot convince them of this error, nor arouse them from this security. The infatuating evil of procrastination, expressing itself in the words of the wise man, "*A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep,*" may sometimes baffle his utmost exertions and set at nought his most serious reproofs. Sometimes, too, the most painful preaching of the word, may be a blessing cursed by God; it may make the heart of the people fat, their eyes blind

and their ears heavy. Most frequently, however, it happens otherwise: the lively and conscientious discharge of ministerial duties tends to promote the religious exercises both of minister and people. The scripture maxim will generally hold, "*Like people, like priest.*" A minister as the head of his congregation, may be thought to diffuse generally something of his own spirit through the different members of it; and when that is the spirit of truth and piety, the spirit of zeal and perseverance, it will produce the most happy effects. When a minister is impressed with a sense of his responsibility, alive to the importance of his office, interested in the good and happiness of souls, and actuated by the noble principle of love to God, his words must be quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. On the other hand, nothing perhaps has a greater tendency to sear the consciences of the people, and produce lukewarmness in religion, than a careless and corrupt ministry; when the blind lead the blind both fall into the ditch. If a minister be a stranger to his study and a sloven in his work; if his services be wholly formal, and the spirit of the gospel scarcely found in his trite performances; how can he save himself or his hearers from that insensibility which sets at nought the counsels of the gospel, and will have none of its reproofs? The danger is great. The observation is too frequently realized, and it seriously urges upon the ministers of Jesus the duties of taking heed to themselves and their doctrine, that

they may both save themselves and those who hear them.

3. The gospel minister, in the faithful discharge of his duty, saves himself and those that hear him from falling by the numerous temptations that beset them,

Temptations are often very trying and painful to the saints of God. To avoid them is their study, but to stand in the evil day is their duty. Temptations are of various kinds; some of them have their origin in the corrupt heart; every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Others proceed from the love of the world which draws away many after it, and from the fear of the world which is a snare to many: and others from satan the tempter, who is master of this seducing art. To these temptations the minister of Jesus must pay attention. He is a watchman, on his watch tower, and should be continually on his guard. He should observe the various operations of these enemies, he must study their different powers and the fascinating arts which they use to deceive, that he may be able to discover the snare, and warn the unwary of their danger; for this end he must "*take heed to himself and his doctrine.*" When, from his own experience, he is taught the manner in which temptations work, and the way of successfully withstanding them, he is then well qualified to save himself and his hearers from their dangerous snares. By taking heed to his doctrine the minister likewise prevents temptations; before it satan falls as lightning from heaven; by it his secrets are brought to the light and made

manifest. By the gospel that grace is made known which is sufficient to foil all the malicious designs of the evil one; by it is discovered that rock against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. The faithful preaching of the gospel brings forth the whole armour of God, which enables to stand against the wiles of the devil, and to wrestle against all his wicked assaults. It roots the word deeply in the heart, and prevents from falling away, like the stony ground hearers, in the hour of temptation. It builds up in Christ; it establishes in the faith in opposition to all the temptations of false philosophy, vain deceit, the traditions of men, and the rudiments of the world. The administrations of the gospel, we see, are truly useful; they put into our hands the spiritual weapons of our warfare; and, if blessed by God, will make us conquerors, and more than conquerors, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

4. As a blessing peculiar to the people. A holy minister in the faithful discharge of his office, may sometimes save those who hear him from the judgments of God that may threaten them.

If the Lord would have spared the whole city of Sodom for the sake of ten righteous persons, may it not be supposed that a righteous minister in a congregation, and a holy ministry in a church may prevent for a time the execution of judgments threatened against a guilty people? In the history of the kings of Israel we find heavy judgments were threatened against that nation, and recorded in a book; but the execution of them is suspended for a season, on account of the tenderness, humility, and

tears of good Josiah. Similar blessings may yet be obtained from the piety, humility and tears of the ministers of Jesus. In the discharge of their duty they are to weep and say, "*Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is there God? Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people.*" The intercessions of God's servants have frequently been successful in turning away the fierceness of his anger. When the children of Israel committed idolatry at Horeb, the Lord was displeased, his wrath waxed hot, and he said he would destroy them; but his chosen Moses stood in the breach before him, and turned away his fierce wrath. The fervent prayers of the servants of God, their unfeigned piety and their earnest intercessions avail much. It must then be the duty and interest of people in general to seek the good of Jerusalem, to pray for a holy ministry, and to hold them in reputation for their work's sake; for they shall prosper that love Zion.

5. As a blessing peculiar to the minister. By complying with the duty in the text, he saves himself from those woes and curses that are denounced against indolent and ungodly servants.

To illustrate this position I can produce nothing more appropriate than the words of the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel.* The servants of the Lord are strikingly represented in their office, in their duties,

* Chap. xxxiii. 1-9.

and in their responsibility, by the character of a watchman: if when the sword comes, the watchman blow the trumpet and give faithful warning, then he is free from blame, whatever are the consequences. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned, then their blood will be required at his hand. So, if the Lord shall say to the wicked man thou shalt surely die, and if the minister of the gospel do not warn him of his danger, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will the Lord require at the minister's hand. On the contrary if the minister warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and the wicked do not turn, he shall die in his iniquity; but the minister has delivered his own soul. The Lord has frequently expressed his displeasure with the conduct of wicked and unfaithful ministers in the most explicit terms; "*Surely because my flock became a prey, and the shepherds fed themselves and fed not the flock; thus saith the Lord I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand. Woe to the pastors that destroy the sheep! Woe to the shepherds that feed themselves and not the flock! Woe to the scribes and pharisees, blind leaders of the blind!*" To avoid these denunciations should be the care of the ministers of Jesus: and these they can avoid, only in the way of taking heed to themselves and their doctrine. By applying to the ministers of the gospel, our Lord's parable of the three servants, each of whom received, for particular use and improvement, a portion of his master's property, we shall have a striking illustration of this

particular. The two first recorded, industriously improve on their Lord's generosity; they pay attention to themselves and their talents; and upon giving in their account, they receive his approbation; "*Well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*" The third is negligent, he hides his Lord's talent in the earth; his Lord is much displeased and orders the unprofitable servant to be cast into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The responsibility of the ministers of Jesus is very weighty: the danger, to which the undutiful expose themselves, is very great; but those who have fought the good fight, who have kept the faith, and are ensamples to the flock, shall receive from the chief Shepherd a crown of glory that fadeth not away. "*Who then is that faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*"*

I shall now bring the discourse to a conclusion by addressing you, in a few things, in connexion with what has been already delivered.

1. In the institution and work of the gospel ministry, and in the end which it serves, we may see the great goodness and condescension of God to the sons of men.

The circumstances in which the generality of human kind are placed in this world, will not indulge them with leisure, and opportunity to pursue

* Matt. xxiv. 45, 46.

the paths of knowledge. Their various employments occupy much of their time and attention. Are they then to remain in ignorance and darkness? No, my brethren, for their instruction, the Lord has given them pastors and teachers, who are to devote themselves exclusively to the study of useful and divine knowledge. On the first day of the week, a day appropriated to religious exercises, labour ceases, the jubilee trumpet sounds, and the people are to convene in the house of God, to seek the law at the mouth of their teacher, and to receive the fruit of his talents and his application. Blessed by God, such administrations are the means of saving their souls: they increase their knowledge, they regulate their lives, they cherish their devotion, and they cause them to grow to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ Jesus. The goodness of our God farther appears in allowing us the frequent use of these means; he gives “*precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little;*” because he knows that we are slow of heart to believe. In this service he employs men of like passions with others, that they may enter into their feelings, consider their circumstances and reason with them on their own principles. Had God in preaching the gospel to men, retained the exclusive use of angelic missions, had he continued to speak in majesty, as from mount Sinai; or did he refer all entirely to the use of the sacred page, the inconveniency would have been great; but the system of religious and spiritual instruction now adopted, although divine in its origin, is rational in its

principle and well suited to the genius of mankind. We are still more struck with the condescending countenance which God gives to the gospel; it is his gracious exhibition of himself to sinners. He in very deed dwells with men on the earth, he has pitched his tent with them, and will glorify the house of his glory.

2. A faithful and intelligent gospel ministry are an invaluable blessing to the church and the nation of which they are a part. “*There is gold,*” says Solomon, “*and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.*” The various important duties which the minister should discharge require him to be intelligent. To teach men the knowledge of God, to explain what they are to believe and what they are to do according to the scriptures, to exhibit the great salvation and the way of obtaining it must demand both skill and understanding. He has likewise to direct mankind in their devotion to God, and in their social duties, he has to expose sin and rebuke the guilty sinner, he has to study the dispensations of Providence and give warning of danger; he has to deal with the high and the low, the rich and the poor. How beautiful then to be faithful and impartial! Surely, my brethren, it is easy to see that such a discharge of ministerial duty is useful: the mind is enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, the mask of superstition is torn off, the state of society is meliorated, peace and liberty are proclaimed, and righteousness, truth and holiness are followed, without which no man shall see the Lord. On the other hand, when ignorance and

unfaithfulness prevail, the sublime doctrines of the gospel are concealed, the souls of men deceived, truth perverted and the paths of holiness unfrequented. This, brethren, is exceedingly dangerous, and would to God! that there were less reason to complain of this evil in the present age. Are there not many persons, untutored and unprepared who intrude on this sacred office? Are there not too many of the learned and intelligent who take but little heed to themselves and their doctrine? and how can they save those that hear them?

3. A congregation have much to expect from the administrations of a faithful pastor, sent and blessed by God, and should esteem him highly for his work's sake. He saves them that hear him. Under his public services they sit with confidence, they hear with joy and are edified with sound doctrine. To the government in which he presides, they readily submit, knowing that he watches for their souls as one that must give account. In their worship they are led on by him according to the simple forms of the scripture. His discipline they should readily receive, convinced that it is for the destruction of the flesh; that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. In waiting on his ministry, the saints of God will be made to rejoice in the acceptable year of the Lord; their darkness will be dispelled, their doubtings rebuked, their troubled minds comforted, and their wounded spirits healed. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth*

salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth?" My brethren, "*Hold such in reputation. Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation; Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*"

4. The text sets before us the exalted motives by which the ministers of Jesus should be actuated in performing their work. The salvation of the soul is precious. It is the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It is worthy of our undivided attention. With all diligence we should make our calling and election sure, and take heed to ourselves and our doctrine, that we may both save our own souls and those that hear us. But, to conclude, let me assume the confidence, My Rev. and Dear Fathers and Brethren in the service of Christ, to address you and to say, that this text applies to you and to me. The duties which I have mentioned, I trust, are the duties of our office; they are incumbent on us, we should study their performance. The end which our labour serves is worthy, it is grand! and when considered as a motive it is truly forcible. What can tend more to warm our hearts and interest our feelings? What can tend more to arouse our minds and stimulate our greatest exertions than the idea of serving our God, and saving the souls of men? This is the joy that is set before us,—this is the reward of our labour. "*Therefore,*" my beloved brethren, "*be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*" Amen.

After prayer and praise, The Rev. John M^cMillan, as appointed by the Presbytery, having observed the usual preparatives, proceeded to put the questions of the Formula. These were answered. The candidate was then, by prayer and the "laying on of the hands of the presbytery," solemnly ordained to the Christian Ministry, and the pastoral charge of the Congregation. The following addresses were delivered immediately afterward, and they are now published at the request of the people.

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CHARGE TO THE MINISTER.

DEAR SIR,

FROM the opportunities which, in providence, I have had to observe your natural abilities, your literature, your theological knowledge and your christian character; I did the more readily accept the place assigned to me, in the recent and solemn act of your ordination, an act, by which a mighty change is effected in your situation. It hath elevated you from being a probationer before the church, to become a pastor and an overseer therein; it hath installed you in the office of an ambassador for Christ; it hath made you a steward of the mysteries of God. Now the ministry of reconciliation is committed unto you; the keys of the kingdom of heaven are put in your hands; and your name is enrolled among the public servants of our common Lord Jesus Christ. I do, therefore, with heart and good will salute you as a Dear Brother and fellow-labourer in the vineyard; sincerely wishing you in your new station, abundant supplies of grace, peace and joy from God the Father, and Christ Jesus the Son of the Father, and the Holy Ghost, the seven Spirits before the throne. May

you ever have cause, from this day to your dying moments, to bless God for making you faithful, and putting you into the ministry.

Permit me, Rev. and Dear Brother, to suggest a few particulars, in relation to your present character, your future conduct and work. As you have solemnly dedicated yourself to God in the office of the holy ministry; you are no longer your own. You are the Lord's, officially; you are his, wholly. Your person, your talents, your graces, your services, your time, and all your influence are the Lord's. By a regular call, according to the order of his house, he hath separated you from civil employment to sacred service in his sanctuary. He who gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body, hath given you to be a pastor in his church. With your own consent, you have been taken to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and, there, you have been consecrated, after the form of the new testament church, to minister in holy things; you have been conducted to the door of the house of Christ, your master, and your ear hath been bored to it, to serve him all the days of your life. Then, his solemn voice to you was, "*Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people, all the words of this life.*" Bear, therefore, upon your mind the constant impression of all this, as a strong obligation lying upon you, and an animating motive to excite you, to bring all your tithes into the house of the Lord, for the benefit of his church,

The work of the ministry includes labours sufficient to employ the strongest body, and the most active mind. The audible voice from the excellent glory to you, as a devoted servant of the Lord, now is, *“ Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine, meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.”* Under the influence of this sentiment, the wisest and the best of Christ’s servants have acted in past times. Paul a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ; Simon Peter, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ; James a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, was the language of these first and eminent ministers of religion. Let us walk in their steps—To copulate ministry and magistracy in the same person, as is practised in papal and episcopalian churches, is sinfully to limit the operations of ministry—To prosecute a civil profession, and make it the principal business of life, as is often done, allowing to the ministry only what its interests can permit, is sacrilegiously to rob a holy ordinance, in order to increase the gain of filthy lucre—To consume time in idleness, in amusements, in lengthened company-keeping, and in frequent protracted convivial entertainments, cannot fail to restrain the exercise of ministerial duties, and must necessarily injure a spiritual frame—To speculate extensively upon arts and sciences, unconnected with the great objects of the ministry, is highly improper in one, whose duty imperiously calls him to search the scriptures, that, as a scribe instructed in the mysteries of Messiah’s kingdom, he may bring forth things new

and old to the edification of immortal souls. You will therefore consider the work of the ministry to be the grand leading object of your pursuit; and see the propriety of making all other things subordinate to the promotion of its interests. In so doing, you are neither commanded to be unsocial, nor are you prohibited from improving to their highest advantage your temporal concerns.

You will likewise perceive the necessity of still prosecuting, with increasing diligence, theological studies. It is commonly said, a scholar has finished his academical studies, on obtaining a competent knowledge of the various branches of literature, necessary, as auxiliaries towards the study of divinity. It is also said, a student of divinity has completed his studies when he acquires that measure of sacred knowledge which may qualify him to enter into the ministerial function, and commence its duties. But with no propriety can it be affirmed, that a minister of the gospel has finished his studies. With the best preparation for the office, and in the possession of the most brilliant endowments, there will still be found large room for future improvement; for here "*we know in part, and prophesy in part,*" and here "*we see through a glass darkly.*" The first and permanent duty of the gospel minister is study; it brightens his talents, and bestows excellence and perfection on his ministrations, which appear no where else. The practice of carrying forward ministerial services, in the neglect or discontinuance of study, is no less absurd, than the attempt would be to walk without feet, and fly without

wings. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee.” The very extensive subject about which ministerial studies ought to be employed, is the whole word of God, with all its diversified contents; for “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.” What a large field opens here to our view! History and prophecy, law and gospel, duty and sin, promises and threatenings, privileges and privations, heaven and hell, in a word, the wisdom of God in a hidden mystery, sufficient to occupy the most contemplative mind. Thus exercised, the gospel minister will find occasion for the practical application of all his literature—his Greek and Hebrew—his logic and philosophy—his history, geography and chronology:—of his languages, in ascertaining the genuine meaning of the words—of his logic, in arranging the subject—of his philosophy, in illustrating the philosophical passages of scripture, which are not few—of his history, geography and chronology, in explaining the numerous allusions to customs, places and times, wherewith the word of God abounds. With all this diversified matter, and as adapted to the vast variety of characters and cases, is the gospel minister to enrich his sermons; for

the conviction, instruction and consolation of his hearers. Whatever others may do, we trust, Dear Brother, your hearers shall never have it in their power, to report how often you have literally gone over the same things before them, and what may be the number, real or supposed, of your sermons, on preparation being abandoned. We indulge hope, the character drawn in scripture shall be realized in you. *“ Because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.”* In the investigation of scripture, it ought not to be forgotten, that neither the sole nor the principal dependence, for arriving at truth, is to be placed upon talents, literature and human aid, but upon the supernatural and spiritual assistance of the Holy Ghost, who is promised by the Master of assemblies to all his ministers. *“ The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father shall send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance. When the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.”* Humble prayer for this heavenly guide must accompany all our investigations, all our preparations and all our administrations.

Further, you are called, Dear Sir, to fulfil the ministry, which you have received of the Lord Jesus, by the conscientious discharge of the numerous duties annexed thereto, with regard to all the objects about which it is conversant—As a minister of

Christ you exist in various relations—to the catholic church—to the congregation which hath elected you for their pastor—to the ministers of Christ—and, I have to add, to the world at large. The unlimited extent of the ministerial commission, as to its objects, bears me out in this last sentiment. “*Go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature.*” None of the human race is excepted out of this commission, but all of them are comprehended. Directing your ministry, as in duty bound by this express injunction, towards the common salvation of all men, you will readily improve every occurring opportunity, nay, you will diligently seek it out, to the accomplishment of this generous call of heaven. It is, perhaps, the fault of all of us, that we too frequently overlook this general part of our commission, limiting its extent within the boundaries of an ecclesiastical connexion already formed. But remember you are a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise, so much as in you is, to preach the gospel to them also—From the ministers of Christ you have received the right hand of fellowship. With them you are to unite your talents; with them you are to co-operate in the work of the Lord; with them you are to sit in the courts of his house on ecclesiastical judgment; here, no competition for personal excellence, no rivalship for superior fame is permitted; but all, with lowliness of mind, kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another, are, as the servants of one Lord, to strive together for the faith of the gospel—

Their ministerial powers and work being equal, no official superiority can have place among them—The ministry being a gift of Christ to the catholic visible church, your office gives you a general relation to the whole church, extending through all its congregations. “*God hath set some in the church, first Apostles, secondarily Prophets, thirdly Teachers;*” for the edifying of the body at large—The hands of the representatives of the church have been laid upon you. On this account, the congregation calling, has no exclusive right to monopolize the whole service of the minister. On proper occasions, to supply the parts of the church destitute of a fixed ministry, his services are due to them, as their right, in virtue of the common relation between him and them. Nor will a sister congregation provided with the blessing of the gospel, judging properly, grudge to impart a little of their spiritual enjoyment to another congregation in want of it. It is upon this principle that a minister, called, but by one congregation to be its particular pastor, possesses the power of sitting in courts of review on the causes of all congregations. To deny this, leads us directly into the error of the disorganizing independent scheme. You will therefore be pleased to remember that the care of all the churches, in some sense, devolves upon you—Between you and the congregation calling you a particular relation is formed; it being the constitutional order of the presbyterian church, as established by her glorious Head, that she should be divided into distinct congregations, for the more commodious administration of ordinances, and each

to be planted with a particular minister. So long as his divine Master is pleased to continue him in the congregation, he is with great propriety denominat- ed the minister, or the angel thereof. To him the immediate charge of it is committed; and to him, as such, the divine address is made, "*Take heed to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you an overseer, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*" To the spiritual interests thereof he is continually to attend, performing the various ministerial duties of preach- ing, administering the seals of the covenant, pray- ing, catechizing, visiting families and the sick, reli- gious conversation, dispensing acts of discipline, as the case requires, and exhibiting, in his own person, a living example of piety and morality, for the imita- tion of others. Like the high-priest of old, with the names of the twelve tribes engraven in precious stones upon his breast plate, he is to carry all the members of the congregation before the Lord. Your public duty obliges you to manifest the same religi- ous care for all the members of the congregation, without respect of persons, whether they be high or low. But though an equal religious attention be re- quired from you to them all; I am not permitted to restrict your private friendships, nor to enter into your domestic arrangements; neither have your con- gregation a right to dictate unto you in matters of this kind; and if they know their place, they will never attempt it.

Moreover, my Dear Sir, you are not only to preach the gospel, but you are set also for the defence of it.

It is wonderful indeed that the gospel of Jesus, so fully authenticated as a divine revelation, so admirably adapted to the helpless condition of fallen men, and so salutary in its effects, should meet with opposition from the world; but it has had enemies in all past periods, and it is not without them in our own times. As a public watchman placed upon one of the high walls of Zion, you are required boldly to appear in its defence; under a banner displayed because of the truth, against all, by whom it may be opposed, whether the opposition be directed against the gospel in general as a divine revelation, or be made in particular against any of its doctrines, ordinances and institutions. To you it belongs “*earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.*” This day you have been ordained a minister of the reformed presbyterian, covenanted church of Scotland, embracing that system of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, which we believe to be agreeable to, and founded upon the holy oracles of God, and is contained in the Westminster confession of faith, and the other subordinate standards of these three nations, adopted by them in the purest times of reformation, as holding the same uniformity of religion, to which we consider ourselves inviolably bound to adhere; on account both of its divine original, and being the eminent attainment of the church in former times, from which it would be highly sinful to recede. “*Nevertheless, whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things. Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy*

crowd." You have at once and before many witnesses pledged your faith, to preach and defend the same cause, though now abandoned by the public establishments of the nations as their uniformity of religion, and not fully adopted by any of the numerous denominations, which have risen up in succession for upwards of a century. This circumstance lays us under the unpleasant necessity of appearing, as we do this day, in a state of separation from the various churches around us, with none of which we can unite in ecclesiastical communion, in consistency with truth and principle.* Notwithstanding, it is the joy of our hearts to hear that many precious truths are taught in other churches, and to know, by testimony and personal acquaintance, of the piety and worth of many of their members, in both official and private stations; because of which we warmly embrace them in the bowels of the Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours; and long for the arrival of the happy time, when separation, on a testimony, shall be superseded by our mutual union in the truth as it is in Jesus. Ordained to the ministry in a state of separation from the different churches existing within this populous city, where your pastoral charge lies, let your uniform conduct bear conviction on the minds of all

* This observation is not meant to preclude the members of our church, from holding communion with evangelical christians belonging to other denominations, in those exercises of religion and acts of worship competent to christians in their private capacity, occasionally meeting in families, at table, or otherwise. We certainly do consider this species of communion, proceeding upon a general principle, to be different from ecclesiastical communion, where doctrine, worship, privilege, and government are inseparably connected.

that this is not the effect of disappointment, chagrin, affected singularity, prejudice, or the mere example and persuasion of others; but the mature result of conscience and voluntary choice, in behalf of our ancient religious reformation, once the common profession and glory of the three nations. As a minister of Christ, guarding against the influence of party spirit, you will esteem and honour truth and piety in all persons where they appear, still accounting the saints to be the excellent of the earth, in whatever denomination such characters are to be found. At the same time, zeal for the honour of your divine Redeemer will constrain you, to maintain an explicit testimony against immorality, error and all deviations from the truth of the gospel, as an appointed mean to protect your own flock against the danger of these evils, and to lead others into the path of duty. *“I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night.”*

Personal religion, you know, Sir, is not only requisite on the score of our own salvation, but it forms a prominent part in the composition of the gospel minister, enabling him to enter into the spirit of the exalted duties of his office. All the objects of the ministry being spiritual, how is it possible that a carnal mind, under the dominion of sin, can enter into the spirit of the work? It is confessed a preacher of this description may speculate upon the external things of religion, and deliver orthodox sermons, but to himself they are wrapt up in unintelligible mystery. *“The natural man receiveth not the things of*

the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned, but he that is spiritual judgeth all things." Such an one must be deficient in all the advantage which results from the experimental knowledge of conviction, regeneration, pardon, peace, consolation and communion with God; besides, not having been truly affected with his own salvation, it is morally impossible he can travail as in birth until Christ be formed in the souls of sinners, or speak a word in season to distressed consciences. You will then see the two-fold necessity, the minister lies under, of cultivating the vital principle of real religion—for himself and for others. O live by the faith of the Son of God; improve him daily for all the purposes of salvation, that you may grow up into him in all things, which is the head; for the higher the degrees of your personal religion are, with so much the greater ardour will you be carried out, in all ministrations, after their very important ends—the glory of God and the spiritual profit of the souls committed to your charge, that you and they may sing for ever in the heavenly sanctuary, "*Salvation to God and to the Lamb.*" O study to excel in all the ornamental parts of the character of the gospel bishop, as this is described at large by Paul.* "*A bishop then must be blameless,*" &c.

With all these, and many other weighty things in view, you have not been disobedient to the heavenly vision, in accepting the ministry; though, perhaps,

* 1 Tim. iii. 2.

under the deep impression of personal unworthiness and weakness, you may have approached with a timorous heart and trembling hand to lay hold of it. But be not dismayed, ample assistance is provided for you; it is ready to be communicated at your very outset in the work, and to be continued throughout the whole course of it to the end. Your divine Master never sent any a warfare on his own charges; he hath pledged his veracity in many precious promises of succour to your faith. It would be unseasonable to recite them all. I shall only call your attention to two of them, full to the purpose. The first is the promise annexed to the ministerial commission. "*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*" The matter of this promise is, the gracious promise of Christ to attend his ministers at all times, and in every part of their work, including direction in what the work is, assistance to the execution of it, comfort under all discouragements, success to render their labours effectual, protection against opposition, and the hope also of a gratuitous reward, on the conclusion of the service. What more is wanting? The promise of his gracious presence carried Moses through his work in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness; for the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had said to him out of the flaming bush, "*Certainly I will be with thee.*" The same promise carried Joshua through Jordan, and his wars in Canaan; for the Lord had said to him, "*As I was with Moses so will I be with thee.*" The promise of our text carried the twelve apostles of the Lamb honourably through all

the parts of their arduous work. Methinks, my Dear Brother, I hear the same promise, as with an audible voice, spoken from heaven unto you on the commencement of your ministerial service, Lo, I am with you always even to the conclusion of it. Apprehend it by faith; rely firmly upon it; and make use of it, at all times, and in the all of your ministry. It applies alike to the closet for your studies, to the pulpit for your administrations, and to the seat of judgment for your decision. Improved by an unsuspecting faith, it will carry you also honourably through all the work, to which you have engaged yourself, on this solemn day of vowing to Jacob's mighty God—The second is the special and periodical promise made to the ministers of Christ, as witnesses, prophesying in sackcloth, during the papal antichristian reign—“*I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days clothed in sackcloth—These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.*” This period is long, difficult, and forbidding, signified by the witnesses prophesying in sackcloth. Already, the greater part of the dreary period is over; but it is not finally concluded. The sound hath not reached our ears, “*Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and shall be found no more at all.*” The papal interest is indeed brought low abroad, but, as may be seen in the neighbourhood of this place, it is making bold attempts to rise again amongst us, by whom, as a nation, it was more solemnly abjured than in most other places of reformed christendom. The matter of

this promise is power, comprehending spiritual ability, in all respects, equal to the duty, and exigences of the time; particularly, a clear discernment to know the truth beclouded by the deceptions of the Man of sin, fortitude to brave every danger in the cause of truth, patience to endure the grievous hardships of persecuting foes, contentment under all privations, for the sake of the gospel, and perseverance to continue until the happy change, when the kingdom shall be given to the saints of the Most High, and all dominion shall serve and obey Zion's King. This promise, in past time, carried witnesses, martyrs, and reformers, who loved not their lives unto the death, honourably through their work and sufferings. It carried your predecessors in office, who served the church in succession in this place, honourably through their work, under a public testimony for the covenanted attainments of these lands. Their praises are in the churches; the effects of their labours are apparent among us to this day; and you are entering into their labours. Keep them in your recollection, as so many pledges of the truth of the promise, and as examples for your imitation. You, Sir, are come to the kingdom—to the ministry, for the latter time of the promise. There is still enough in it to support you also in all your work and trials, and to enable you to witness and prophesy, though it should be wearing sackcloth of the harshest kind, put on by the faithful in past time. Having these high assurances of succour, enter with confidence upon your work, well knowing where your great strength lies.

Finally, let me charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and before the elect angels, witnesses of the transactions of this day, that you observe all things appertaining to your office. *“Hold fast the form of sound words in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.—Speak the things which become sound doctrine. Continue in the things which thou hast learned, and been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. Study to be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed of his work, rightly dividing the word of truth. Be thou faithful unto the death. Let no man despise thy youth. O Timothy,”* O Symington, *“keep that which is committed to thy trust.”* Let the consideration of the authority of the Lord Jesus commanding constrain you to all duty; let the consideration of your own engagements bind you; let the comfort resulting from the conscientious discharge of your office influence you; be afraid of the reproach your misconduct will bring upon religion before the profane; seriously reflect upon the awful issue of the wicked and slothful servant; with pleasure remember the joyful account of the good and faithful servant; think of it that you are encompassed with a great cloud of holy prophets, apostles and ministers of Christ; anticipate the account you have to deliver to the Judge of the whole earth, as you value the glory of God and the worth of immortal souls; O be diligent in your work. Under the united impulse of all these motives, and as you would afford joy of this day to the ministers of Christ conveyed to introduce you into office, up, and

be doing; and may the God of love and grace be with you now and ever. Amen.

CHARGE TO THE PEOPLE.

I AM now to address myself to the members of the congregation. My Dear Friends, you have this day received a most valuable gift, a minister of Christ. No violence hath been offered to your spiritual rights in the deed of the day. Neither diocesan supremacy, nor the law of patronage in the hand of king or heritor; neither military force, nor ecclesiastical usurpation hath been practised upon you. You sought a free moderation, you got it. The minister now ordained amongst you, was your own voluntary choice, repeatedly expressed and warmly urged. Left unto himself by the court, without any undue influence, that I know, being employed to bias his mind, you were his choice, as he has publicly declared this day. The whole administration of the presbytery upon the business of the call and ordination having been conducted according to scriptural laws; I am warranted in pronouncing the following sentiment—The Lord hath chosen him for you, and you for him; and now the Lord hath given you a pastor, I hope, according to his own heart, to feed you with knowledge and understanding. This appears the more striking, that, amidst a multiplicity of other calls presented to your object, the lot hath come forth for you. The pastoral relation is now formed between him and you. I am not prepared to say, a marriage relation is formed; Christ

alone being the husband, and the church of believers his spouse. It is enough that ministers, the friends of the glorious bridegroom, are employed to espouse sinners unto him, the one husband. In all relations the respective duties of parties ought to be accurately understood. To the knowledge and performance of these we are to look for all the utility and comfort of the relation, whilst on the other hand, we see, ignorance of and a departure from them effectually mar every good of the relation—You have heard something said concerning the duty of the minister. You will bear with me, in stating some of the duties that lie on your side of the relation. I might say, the sum of all your duty towards your minister, is, That you receive him in the Lord. This is obvious from the words of our Saviour, spoken to his apostles, at sending them forth to preach the everlasting gospel,* “*He that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.*” The great duty of the people is here marked out in *their act* of receiving the apostles—this act does not terminate upon the minister, it is also a receiving of the Lord Jesus by whom he is sent; and it ascends still higher, it is a receiving of God the Father, who hath clothed the Saviour with his office—In receiving him, you are to recognize the authority of his official character, as a minister of Christ, come, in his name, to minister unto you. The acknowledgment of him in the divine authority of his office, is your primary duty, and

* Matt. x. 40.

lays the foundation of all the other duties you owe unto him. All are not teachers. The times abound with usurpations of the ministerial function. Christians therefore are called first to ascertain the divine warrant of the person to minister in holy things, before they can lawfully submit unto his administrations. But truly your minister appears among you with all the credentials of a lawful ordinary minister of the new testament. Receive him then as an ambassador for Christ, and never forget to view him in this exalted light, in all the varied parts, and acts, of his ministerial office. This will add weight to his ministrations, and awe you into holy reverence when assembled for the ordinances of religion—Receiving him you will carefully attend upon his ministrations. In vain does the minister watch unto the duties of his office, if the people interested therein, and who are the objects of the ministrations, do not give a conscientious attendance on them. Your presence is always expected in the house of God, when the minister appears in the pulpit, and to fill up all the hours of religious meeting, unless some insuperable impediment lie in the way. Too many, alas! are culpably negligent in this respect. “*Blessed,*” saith the Redeemer, “*is the man that heareth me,*” (speaking by his ambassadors) “*watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors*”—Receiving him, you mix faith in the hearing of the word, and thereby receive from his lips all the messages he brings you in the name of his divine Master. If this be not performed, nothing is done, all is left undone. Your personal presence in the ordinances will be of

no avail. It will only rank you among the hypocrites in Zion, whom fearfulness shall surprise. Your hearts must open to embrace both the Saviour and his salvation, as brought near unto you in the offer of the everlasting gospel. Faithful preaching by the minister is an arduous task; no less difficult is the work of the hearer, in making a believing application of the word unto himself—his, is the work of faith, not completed by a bare assent of the mind to general propositions, an operation competent to the natural intellect, but distinguished by a particular and cordial embracing of gospel truth, and good, for his own personal benefit. Your duty in this respect is exemplified, in the parable of the sower, by those who received the seed into good ground—*“They hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”* Let me call upon you to imitate them, saying, on every returning opportunity, we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Receiving your minister imports the salutary, but to flesh and blood unpleasant exercise of cheerfully submitting to acts of discipline under his administration, if delinquency in your conduct should at any time render it necessary. The ordinance of discipline, mercifully instituted for the beneficent purpose of reclaiming offenders, is acknowledged by us all; but, in how many instances, as our mournful experience teaches, do we find the deserving object spurning the precious remedy of his sin, instead of meekly submitting, and to avoid the application of it, flying off full of wrath,

to take shelter in the communion of some other church? Against adding sin to sin, by a conduct of this kind, and thereby despising the merciful remedy of heaven, let me warn all of you. Rather say, such smiting shall not break my head; it shall be an excellent oil; having been appointed for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. If the case of any individual require it, and we pray God of his goodness to prevent it, let him receive the ordinance of discipline, with the same readiness, from the hand of the minister, as he would do the communion-cup.

Again, my Dear Friends, you are requested to pray much for your minister—Did you pray earnestly to God, when you were in want of a fixed pastor, and, in some sense, as sheep without a shepherd, that the Lord of the harvest would send a labourer into his harvest among you? I ask you again, what think ye? Is the minister now ordained over you the answer of your prayers? If he be, and your motives for seeking him were good, you may certainly expect a blessing, to accompany him, from the glorious giver, without which he can be of no real spiritual advantage unto you. For, believe it, Paul may plant and Appollos water, but God alone can give the increase. Viewing the matter in this light, O praise the Lord; give unto him the glory due unto his name, for this new display of his goodness; raise aloud your voices in celebrating his praises, in magnifying the blessing. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tid-*

ings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion thy God reigneth!" Having obtained this answer of your prayers; remember the work of prayer is not concluded. Prayer remains your constant duty. Pray unto God for promised assistance to be bestowed upon your pastor in all his work, that the arms of his hands may be made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob, that he may open his mouth boldly, and preach, as he ought to do, the mystery of God and of Christ—If you expect him to appear, in the midst of you, with an open mouth, do not think that your lips are to be shut before the throne of grace. Pray also that remarkable success may attend all his labours, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified amongst you and all his hearers. Cause that these prayers may unceasingly ascend from your closets, your families, and your religious fellowships. Alas! How often are people negligent in this duty! How many rise up as critics, to censure, who never bend their knee in prayer, that the preacher may be directed from above in word and deed, and that a word may be spoken in season to their own souls!

Further, my Dear Friends, the temporal support of the minister depends upon you. Sequestered from secular employment, to be wholly occupied in a business relating to your best interests, the salvation of your immortal souls, can any thing be more reasonable than that a proper provision be made for him and his family? That faithful ministers, in times past, have been reduced to prophesy in sackcloth, through the power and oppression of the beast with seven heads

and ten horns, is no reason why a congregation, having it in their power, should not clothe their minister with softer raiment. But I need not enlarge on this subject before a people of your description. I give you the fullest credit, that nothing shall be wanting on your part to render your beloved minister comfortable. Notwithstanding, it is incumbent on me, from the situation I now fill, to declare in the most explicit manner, that ministerial support by the people is an ordinance of Christ, the head of the church; and where this is neglected, it may provoke the Lord to withhold the blessing from the administrations of his servant, and thereby blast his ministry to the people.

I would say also unto you, cultivate brotherly love and harmony among yourselves, in your congregational capacity. You are one congregation; one, in a joint profession of the same faith, to which the minister hath solemnly declared his attachment, and I trust, one, in the important work of this day—a day to be remembered in all the following days of your life. Love to God, producing love to the brethren, is the noblest principle of the human heart; it is the fulfilment of the law; it sweetly constrains to all relative duties; it renders every service easy; it forgets past offences, and generously projects future peace. O study to be one in this divine principle, keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, as the best evidence of the God of love and peace being with you. Imitate the laudable example of primitive christians, who were of one heart and one mind, walking together in the ordinances and

commandments of the Lord. Than personal discord and party contentions prevailing in a congregation, nothing can be more dangerous to its prosperity. At all events, avoid these vices, mournfully frequent in many congregations, as you would wish to shun the worst of evils. “*Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*”

In matters of positive truth and duty you can make no concessions; but in all personal concerns you have power to do much, and much must be yielded, for the sake of peace, both here, and in all prudentials, relative to public congregational management, where the voice of the majority ought to decide—Any person who delights in discord, is the firebrand of society; and a single sinner of this kind may destroy much good. Shall we hope, that you will dwell together in unity, as brethren?—The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder. It hath pleased God to raise you unto official station in his house, that, in the line of your office, you may co-operate with the minister, for the spiritual good of its members. The trust of souls committed to you is great. Remember that for the management of it you are responsible to the Lord of his house. One day he will call all his servants to account, whether their talents be five or two. By an exemplary conversation in all godliness and honesty, tenderly visiting the sick with your prayers and best advice, diligently,

but not critically, inspecting the morals of the people, wisely and impartially judging their causes, study to approve yourselves worthy of the honourable office. Let the people blessed with such overseers, esteem them worthy of all honour, for their work and office sake, and conduct themselves accordingly in due subordination to their authority, as placed over them in the Lord.

Moreover, my Dear Friends, you are called steadfastly to adhere to the profession of your faith to the end, without wavering. We trust you made the profession from judgment, from conscience, and from choice. The matter thereof being nothing other but the faith once delivered to the saints; it will be at your peril, if, in any future period, you shall renounce it, either in whole or in part. Various occurrences may meet you during the course of life, to put your stability to the test. Temptations to allure. Difficulties to alarm. But none of these things ought to move you. There are sufficient stores of grace with the Redeemer, to enable all his followers to be faithful unto the death, when they shall receive from him a crown of eternal life, that fadeth not away. Defection from the faith, and versatility in a profession are reigning evils in the visible church. Apostates have appeared in her, in all ages, not considering the awful words of the Saviour, that they who have put their hand to the plough, and look back, are not fit for the kingdom of heaven. *“Be ye steadfast and immoveable always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”* With stability in the faith

study to connect universal sanctity of conversation, as the best ornament of your profession. For this purpose, depend upon the influences of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in all believers, that he may sanctify you wholly, in spirit, and soul, and body. Nothing is more abhorrent to the genius of the christian religion than sin—in its every shape, and nothing so much tends to expose this holy religion before the world, as the immoral lives of nominal christians. The enemies of the gospel often find too good reason to put the question to its professing, but false friends, What do ye more than others? Alas! for the prevalence of iniquity amongst us, and in our churches in these evil days! But, Brethren, “*let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven.*” By a life of faith, holiness, and prayer, endeavour to secure the gracious presence of the Master of assemblies in your congregation, that it may truly be the house of God, and gate of heaven—What heart-cheering comfort will it afford to sister congregations, to hear good tidings of you, from this new æra in your church state—that the gospel is successful—that pure and undefiled religion is prospering—and that there are glorious spiritual appearances of the Son of man, walking in your congregation, as one of the golden candlesticks, and holding in his right hand a bright star.

Might I now accost my dear brethren in the ministry convened in presbytery at this time, saying, Let us all remember that, like our young brother, we have formerly, on similar occasions, opened our

mouth to the Lord, by coming under solemn engagements at the reception of our office. Let us also reflect how we have implemented these our engagements; and, conscious, as we must be, of great deficiency, let us, humbling ourselves in his sight, earnestly pray that the time of introducing our young friend into office may be remarkably blessed as a happy season of spiritual reviving, and of filling our horn with fresh oil, for what future service shall be required of us. Sincerely wishing the numerous audience may return under a blessing from the sanctuary; we conclude by pronouncing upon all present the benediction, wherewith the priests of old blessed the people. “ *The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*” Amen.



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