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“THE PASTOR’S DUTY IN THE PRESENT TIMES.”

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND,

AT THE OPENING OF ITS ANNUAL MEETING,

IN BELFAST, JULY 4, 1848.

BY

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OF LONDONDERRY.

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DISCOURSE.

1 TIM. 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.”

NEXT to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul is the most remarkable name connected with the early progress of the truth. His heart and understanding had been enlightened by the Spirit. He had seen his lost and helpless state by nature, and had been led to that refuge which is opened in the Gospel to the truly penitent and believing. He had deeply felt the power of religion in his own experience, and he anxiously desired that all within the sphere of his influence should feel it too. The world lay before him in the darkness of heathenism ; a moral wilderness surrounded him on every side ; his spirit was moved as he surveyed the magnitude of the work, and the many obstacles that presented themselves ; but, trusting to the grace of Him whose commissioned messenger he was, he resolved to forget all earthly considerations, and to devote his unfettered energies in extending the boundaries of the Messiah's kingdom. Animated by these reflections, and, no doubt, by the glories of that heaven to which he is now ascended, he became an example to us all—to all ministers of the Gospel and to all the followers of Christ, whether serving at the altar or in the

world. His firmness and determination, his devotedness and zeal, put to shame our feeble efforts.

Timothy, to whom this epistle was addressed, had been brought up in the Jewish religion, and early instructed in the Old Testament Scriptures. The preaching of the apostle was the instrument of his conversion. From that period he advanced so rapidly in the knowledge of divine things, and was so distinguished for the amiableness of his dispositions, for the holiness of his life, and his zeal in the cause of truth, that he was greatly loved and esteemed among the brethren. Their testimony to the excellence of his character was so general and so strong, that when the apostle came from Antioch to Lystra the second time, "him would Paul have to go forth with him." The high opinion of the brethren was not, however, the only reason for the apostle's choice. It would appear, from the eighteenth verse of the first chapter of this epistle, that he was specially pointed out by divine revelation and authority as a person fitted to be ordained to the office of an evangelist. Accordingly, he was solemnly set apart by the "laying on of the hands of the presbytery," and afterwards the gift of the Holy Ghost was communicated by the laying on of the apostles' hands.

Timothy was long the friend and companion of the Apostle Paul, and is often mentioned by him with affectionate interest and regard. Animated by love to him, and, above all things, anxious for the success of the cause for which he laboured, he addressed him on the nature, qualifications, and duties of the ministerial office. His solemn counsels have been recorded in the book of inspiration to direct and animate the ministry in every age and in every land. Upon *their* character and conduct the welfare of the Church, and the cause of the Gospel, are mainly suspended. Let the pastors be careless, religion will languish, and corruption will creep in; but let the Holy Spirit, the promise of the ascended Saviour, descend upon those who fill the sacred office, and purity and love will reign—the Church will

arise in beauty and in strength. The great anxiety of the apostle for the faithfulness of ministers is proved by various parts of his conduct and writings. Witness his address to the elders of Ephesus, where he besought them with so much earnestness “to take heed unto themselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers.” Look again to the various admonitions to be met with in his epistles addressed to the bishops and deacons of the early Churches, and more especially to those directed to Timothy and Titus, which are almost exclusively devoted to topics connected with the sacred office. The admonition of the inspired apostle in the text is suited to every minister, as well as to the individual to whom it was originally addressed; and I trust it may be a useful and appropriate commencement of the proceedings of our General Assembly to consider the duties suggested by this passage of Scripture. For this purpose let us take up the different clauses of the text, and, in humble dependence upon divine grace, try to ascertain the lessons of instruction that they teach.

May the Great King and Head of the Church send down His Holy Spirit to direct our meditations, and sanctify every feeling of our hearts !

When addressing you for a short time, I trust, my reverend fathers and brethren, you will believe me that it is no *affectation* of humility when I say that I enter upon the task with diffidence. It would become me better to sit at the feet of those who are of greater experience and age than myself, and to listen to their instructions. And when speaking of the character and duties of a Christian minister, I have reason to fear that I may be only holding up a mirror to exhibit my own deficiencies. But in pressing upon you the admonition of the text, my diffidence is greatly relieved by the remembrance, that it is the admonition not only of an inspired apostle, but of one who laboured more abundantly than they all—of the first and most successful among Christian minis-

ters. From him, then, fathers and brethren, suffer the word of exhortation.

The words, "Take heed to thyself," imply, in the first place, the necessity of personal piety. While our profession has peculiar advantages, it has, at the same time, peculiar dangers. In the ordinary discharge of our duties, our thoughts are necessarily much engaged with Scriptural truths, and our conversation much occupied with sacred things. We are consequently in great danger of looking on the doctrines of the Gospel in a cold and indifferent manner—of regarding them merely as subjects of intellectual exercise, which our profession requires us to study and defend—of looking upon them in the same way as we do on the revelations of astronomy, or the discoveries of any other science. Religion may thus be studied only as a science to qualify for public duty, and its forms observed merely as a part of our worldly business. Let us guard against this danger. Let us be impressed, my brethren, with the necessity of pursuing the study of divine things in a proper spirit—a spirit of prayerful dependence upon the promised aid of the heavenly Comforter. The regenerated man alone is qualified to be a proper student of the Bible.

Learning and industry are, indeed, important, yet even these, though united with great natural powers, can effect but little without decided piety. If this be wanting, all other endowments are in vain. No matter what degree of talent God may have conferred upon us—though He may have bestowed such power of abstraction as may enable us to penetrate into the regions of abstruse thought and inquiry, and though he may have blessed us with a quick and solid judgment—with a memory susceptible, tenacious, and prompt—with a bold yet chastened imagination—with the power of language and ability of utterance; and though to all these He has added habits of patient industry and unwearied diligence, and yet if, alas! His grace has been withheld—if He has not poured into our hearts His spirit of love, and light, and

holiness—we are not prepared to understand or appreciate, much less to *interpret* the Book of Life. Oh, let it be our earnest effort and prayer that we may *feel* the power of religion upon our own hearts! Be not among those who admire the external grandeur and magnificence of the temple. Enter its gates, penetrate within the veil, and behold the glory of Jehovah's presence overshadowing the mercy-seat. Let it be deeply impressed upon our hearts that the best preparation for understanding the *words* of Christ is to have the *mind* of Christ—that the best qualification for bringing others to the knowledge of the Saviour is to know Him ourselves. We cannot give to those who hear us what we have not ourselves received—we cannot water others if we are not ourselves watered. The prosperity of our ministry mainly depends upon the prosperity of religion in our own souls. A man destitute of personal piety is, therefore, utterly unfit for the ministerial office. He may, indeed, be nominally clothed with it, but while he remains in such a state he is guilty not only of sin, but of flagrant and scandalous absurdity—an absurdity as great as if he had lost the powers of intellect or of speech. The Scriptures are accustomed to represent personal holiness as intimately connected with usefulness to others. The priests under the law were required to be holy unto their God.—(Lev. xxi. 6.) They were required to be “clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.”—(Isaiah lii. 11.) This language is quoted by the apostle in reference to Christian ministers in 2 Cor. iv. 7; and, independent of this, it is evident that the *cere- monial* purity required in the Jewish priesthood exhibits the indispensable necessity of *moral* purity in the Christian ministry.

The royal Psalmist of Israel offers this prayer, as recorded in the 51st Psalm—“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me! *Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” After His resurrection from the dead, the compassionate Redeemer addressed Peter three several times—“Simon, son

of Jonas, lovest thou me?" and it was not until after He had drawn from him an avowal of his affection—it was not until then that He commissioned Peter to feed both the old and young of his flock. See the close connexion between vital godliness and the discharge of the ministerial work, as exemplified in the case of the Apostle Paul, 2 Tim. i. 12, "For the which cause I suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed; for," and here mark the secret of his ardour, the cause of all his heroism and boldness, "for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." And again, "The love of Christ constraineth us"—"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you"—"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Now, in pursuing this train of thought, we may, perhaps, discover why it is that we are not more impressive. Coldness and feebleness in the pulpit cannot be attributed to the want of interesting topics. Oh, no! The word of God that we preach presents subjects of transcendent importance, and gives us motives to urge the most tender, and solemn, and affecting. God and angels, the creation, the ruin and the recovery of man, the incarnation, the death, the resurrection, and the glorious ascension of the Son of God, the day of judgment, a burning universe, a boundless eternity, a hell with all its terrors to alarm, a heaven with all its glories to allure—these are the topics of the Christian minister. What are the subjects drawn from the scenes and changes of this fleeting world to be compared with these? Why is it, then, that we are not more earnest and impressive? There is one solution of the difficulty, and, however deeply humbling, I fear it is the true one—that we have not experienced sufficiently the power of religion in our own hearts, and are not living under the felt influence of the world to come. Let us ever remember that personal religion is the ground-work of all usefulness, in the absence of which the most commanding gifts will be but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

"Take heed to thyself," may be viewed again as an ex-

hortation to improve the opportunities and talents which God has bestowed upon us. Some have been tempted to imagine that after a period of labour in the ministry they will become so familiar with the doctrines of the Gospel, and have acquired such a facility of expression concerning them, that they will have less to attend to in the nature of study, and that all henceforth will be comparatively easy. This is a fatal and injurious error ; for such is the nature of our office, rightly understood, that the longest practice, and the maturest wisdom, and the loftiest faculties, will never supersede, but rather the more insure a diligent, a careful, an anxious, and devout employment in the unceasing duties of the closet, not less than in our public labours. " Give thyself to reading," is the Scripture rule for ministerial study. It is obviously of a general character, nor is there any reason for restricting its application to the sacred volume. Mark the exhortation contained in the verse immediately preceding the text—" Meditate upon these things ; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all." Observe the peculiar force of this instruction. It was not given to a " novice," but to a convert of at least twelve or thirteen years standing, who had been blessed from his earliest years with an excellent Scriptural education—who was probably endowed with good natural talents, spiritual gifts, and pre-eminent religious advantages—under the apostle's personal instruction—and who, being raised to an exalted station in the Church, must have made satisfactory improvement of his privileges. Yet, notwithstanding all this, he is warned to instruct himself well before he attempted to instruct others ; to " give attendance " first " to reading," and then to " exhortation and to doctrine." We must acquire knowledge before we can impart it ; and we must bear in mind that light is as essential to the growth of piety in the spiritual world, as it is to the growth of vegetation in the natural one.

Comparisons are often instituted between personal piety

and human learning, as qualifications for ministers of the Gospel. Perhaps such comparisons are injudicious, even when the superior importance of personal piety is acknowledged, for they tend to lead us to regard these qualifications as differing in *degree* rather than in *kind*, and thus to lower in the estimation the peculiar and absolute necessity of personal piety as distinguished from every other qualification whatever. Human learning stands upon a different footing, and its importance may be enforced on different grounds. We are not warranted to assert that no man is fitted for the Gospel ministry who does not possess it, for doubtless the apostles ordained many who had it not; but we are fully entitled to say, that, in the age and country in which our lot is cast, ministers of the Gospel are bound to improve to the utmost the opportunities they enjoy of cultivating general as well as sacred literature.

It becomes each individual minister to regard with attention the errors by which he is surrounded, the points at which the faith may be assailed, and to be prepared not only to give a reason of the hope that is in him, but to repel with power and success every attack that may be made against the truth as it is in Jesus.

The necessity for this is every day more apparent. Facilities of communication are becoming greater, many are going to and fro, knowledge is increasing, and the minister who is ignorant will be regarded with contempt. We hear of changes and revolutions, happily at a distance. Churches are in the course of being remodelled, and the spirit of inquiry is everywhere abroad. The subjects of controversy that engage the attention of Continental Christians are, in many respects, different from those that prevail here. They are engaged, for instance, in the discussion of such topics as the canon of Scripture, and the truth of miracles. It is not at all unlikely but that such, to us new and unusual controversies, may ere long be imported into our country. We may yet be called upon to contend for "the

faith once delivered to the saints” on fields of controversy untravelled by those who have gone before us; and the battle may be far more fierce and deadly than we at all anticipate. We may be called upon to contend with new forms of degrading superstition and godless infidelity, and new enemies may arise and assail the truth. How necessary, then, that the watchmen on the walls of Zion be fully equipped for the coming conflict—that the weapons committed to our care be ever bright and burnished—that we be always ready to wield them against the enemies of righteousness and truth!

It has been observed by an eminent Scottish divine* as a remarkable fact, that almost all the men whom God raised up in the sixteenth century as His chief instruments in the revival of evangelical doctrine, and the restoration of Scripturally constituted Churches, were not only men of extensive learning, but who had been permitted, in the providence of God, to have leisure and opportunities for study before they were called to engage in the great public work of reformation. This was the case, too, with the greatest benefactor and the most successful reformer of modern times—with the illustrious Chalmers. And he himself was accustomed to inculcate the importance of every department of knowledge. True, indeed, he was ever ready to encourage Christian men, however lowly and illiterate, to labour for the spiritual good of others. He was deeply impressed with the conviction that the great and principal duty of ministers of the Gospel was to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and, in the sense the apostle uses it, to know nothing else. And yet, all this time no one felt more deeply, or enforced more earnestly, the necessity of ministers of the Gospel keeping up with the science and literature of the age, as well as being conversant in the knowledge of the truths and doctrines of religion.

Of course it must be borne in mind that the improvement

* Dr. Cunningham, of Edinburgh.

of opportunities and talents, and the pursuit of knowledge in any department, must all be made subservient to the great ends of the ministry. If they be not subordinated to these, they are worse than useless—in the minister of the Gospel they are decidedly sinful. Upon this point, let me quote the words of the amiable and pious Doddridge—"You must judge for yourselves; but permit me to say, for my own part, I would not for ten thousand worlds be that man who, when God shall ask him at last how he has employed most of his time while he continued a minister of His Church, and had the care of souls, shall be obliged to reply—'Lord, I have restored many corrupted passages in the classics, and illustrated many that were before obscure. I have cleared up many intricacies in chronology or geography. I have solved many perplexed cases in algebra. I have refined on astronomical calculations, and left behind me many sheets on these curious and difficult subjects, and these are the employments in which my life has been worn out, while preparations for the pulpit, and ministrations in it, did not demand my more immediate attendance.' O Sirs! as for the waters that are drawn from *these springs*, how sweetly soever they may taste to a *curious* mind that thirsts after them, or to an ambitious mind that thirsts for the applause they sometimes procure, I fear there is too often reason to pour them out before the Lord with rivers of penitential tears, as the blood of souls which have been forgotten whilst these trifles have been remembered and pursued." This is the language of a scholar, and a man of varied knowledge, but whose piety as a Christian, and devotedness as a minister, were equal to his other attainments.

There is obviously contained in the words, "Take heed unto thyself," a warning that the conduct of a minister be blameless. Though the standard of holiness set forth in God's word is the same to all believers, there are circumstances that demand peculiar circumspection and caution in those who are invested with the ministerial office. If a life

and conversation becoming the Gospel be required of every member of Christ's family, if even the appearance of evil is to be shunned by all, if an indifference to the world is to be cherished and exhibited by all, what circumspection is demanded in him who is God's ambassador? We are entrusted, brethren, to a degree beyond all other men, with the honour of truth and the glory of God, in a world where the most powerful influences are ever in operation to destroy them. Whatever our professions may be, our characters will still be made the standard by which both will be judged by mankind at large. A city set upon a hill cannot be hid; and hence our duty becomes so high and so imperative, that if our path were marked by light, and every step should drop with blessings, we could not exceed either in dignity or beneficence the distinction to which we are exalted. This is in a great degree the condition of all believers, but in a peculiar sense it is that of the ministers of Christ. The station of a minister of *our* Church, especially whose connexion with the people is more close than in any other denomination, gives a publicity to his conduct, and excites an interest in otherwise trifling affairs concerning him, so that what in others would be everlooked, in him is marked and censured; and faults which, in another case, would never have been heard of beyond his immediate neighbourhood, obtain a notoriety which, while it grieves the godly, furnish materials for the sneer of the scorner. Nor is it for our conduct only, or for the general tenor of our lives, but for everything we utter even in our most unguarded moments, for all that we do, or even seem to be, we are made extensively responsible. Our walk and conversation will certainly exert a mighty influence either for good or for evil in the Church and in the world. The faithful minister, like the star of Bethlehem, will not only light the path but lead the way to Jesus. On every part of his conduct will be inscribed "Holiness to the Lord." In the language of an ancient father of the Church, "His soul should be purer than the rays of the sun, and he

should walk among men as an angel of light ;” or, in the words of an inspired apostle, he should be “an ensample to the flock.” “What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness !”

Again, the caution, “Take heed to thyself,” may be viewed in reference to the spirit that we cherish and manifest towards others. The spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of love. How strikingly is this exemplified in the great Author and Finisher of our faith, and how deeply did the primitive disciples imbibe the spirit of their Divine Master. “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” There is scarcely any feature of Christian character to which greater importance is attached in God’s word than this. “The end of the commandment is charity, or love.” Charity is represented as greater than even the possession of miraculous gifts. “Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.” And how earnestly did the Redeemer, in his parting discourses, press upon His followers obedience to the new commandment of love one to another.

Where may we expect this spirit to be more especially manifested ? Surely among those who are fellow-workers in building up the walls of Zion—among those accustomed to plead with others the cause of charity and love. Where in this earth, withered and blighted with the curse of human selfishness and strife, where are we to look for tenderness and affection if not among the commissioned messengers of God—the God of love ? What regard may we not expect for each other’s honour, what tenderness for each other’s feelings, what readiness to defend a brother from the attacks or sneers of the ungodly, what kindness of look, what courtesy of demeanour, what care to avoid the slightest act or expression that may by possibility wound the feelings of a brother ! What a manifestation of that charity that covereth a multitude of sins. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily

provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."—1 Corinthians, xiii. 4—7.

And if ever there be a time when the lovely graces of the Christian character should be more especially manifested than another, surely it is when the rulers of the Church are met together in the name of their exalted Saviour, to consult for the interests of His kingdom, and the eternal welfare of those committed to their care. "How good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." The precious ointment that was poured upon the head of the high priest, diffusing its fragrance over all his robes—the dew of Hermon—the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, in all its countless gems of gold, presented not so grateful an image, produced not so pure, and refreshing, and delightful an impression, as the scene which the Church exhibits when "the multitude of them that believe are of one heart and of one soul." How forcibly should we feel the exhortation of the Word of God—"Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, 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." "Be ye all of one mind; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." Oh, let us ever remember that the eyes of an envious and a wicked world are intently fixed upon us. There are men who watch for every appearance of division, for every unkind act, every unguarded expression; and there is another class, with whom I deeply sympathise, who will mourn in secret, and shed bitter tears of sorrow over scenes of contention and strife. May the one class have no reason to exult; may the other—those who love the prosperity of Zion—have no cause for sorrow. May our meetings ever shed abroad a hallowed influence over the Church and the people of our care.

Let us take heed also to the spirit that we cherish towards those that are without. Though our views may be treated with contempt, and opprobrious names be applied to our persons, still let our demeanour prove that we have imbibed the spirit of our Divine Master—the spirit of kindness and love ; that we are under the blessed dominion of that “charity which is the bond of perfectness.” During the present excited state of feeling among various denominations of professing Christians, surely it becomes every one to whom the care of any part of the Church is intrusted to exert himself to the utmost in the promotion of vital godliness—in binding more closely the ties that unite in one spirit the pious and the good, and repressing, with a firm and steady hand the heats and eruptions of party spirit. While our time and talents are employed in enforcing the great truths of the Gospel, and endeavouring to “form Christ in our hearers” we should discountenance any who would blow the flames of contention, which has long been the pest of our country—the disgrace and calamity of the Christian name.

The next department of duty to which the apostle directs the attention of the evangelist Timothy is to the doctrine. “Take heed to the doctrine,” that is, to the kind of teaching you give, or your public instructions. The meaning is, that he should teach only the truth, and take heed to the whole business of public instruction—to every department of duty by which the people of his charge was to be edified. He was to preach a full Gospel—to make a full development of the whole plan of divine truth, as revealed in the word of God ; and, at the same time, to denounce with faithfulness the errors and sins that prevailed around him.

The Church is set up in the world as the defender of the faith—the pillar and the ground of truth—a living witness for God ; and, therefore, the ministers of the Church are bound to hold forth to an unbelieving world the profession of the truth in all its brightness and all its purity. This is

its first and paramount duty. If it effects not this, it fails in the one great object of its establishment. If darkness pervade the appointed source of light and life, how great will be that darkness? If the fountain opened for the refreshing of the nations sends forth the streams of bitterness and pollution, how ruinous and deadly must be the results? When a Church departs from the essential truths of the Gospel it becomes incapable of answering the end of its institution. It is no longer a useful light, but a delusive meteor; instead of guiding souls to heaven, it misleads and betrays them to destruction. The attainment of outward tranquillity and harmony among the professing followers of the Redeemer, is an object at the present day especially pursued; and truly it is an object worthy of all the talents and energy expended in its pursuit. But however valuable this kind of a peace may be, let it never be forgotten that truth is more important still. Not one jot or tittle of the truth can be safely sacrificed. It is a sacred trust—a treasure committed to the care of the Church—the smallest part of which she cannot, without the basest treachery, surrender. The wisdom that is from above is *first* pure—then peaceable. No doubt the love of peace and the love of truth are the two great principles that ought to be kept in view by individual Christians and by the Church at large. But if these principles come into collision, as they certainly may, and as they often do, the love of peace must yield to that of truth. The love of truth is of paramount authority. To give up, or even to compromise the leading doctrines of the Gospel for the sake of external quietude, is just as criminal and base as to sacrifice them for the sake of personal, or worldly advantage.

Ministers, when faithful, will ever be found holding forth those truths which the Bible teaches, and which the apostles and reformers confessed. Men change, but “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Human systems alter, but the truth of God is immutable and

eternal. Let a Church be alive to a sense of its deep and solemn responsibility—let it uphold, without shrinking, the glorious banner entrusted to its care, and the great King of Zion will bend from heaven's high throne with complacence, and make her a praise and a glory in the earth. He will fulfil to the united company of His people the promise made to each individual—"Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven."

The history of our own Church in this land illustrates, I conceive, the correctness of these observations. Error was permitted to creep in, though certainly not to the extent our enemies would represent. Still, it had a sad and blighting influence. Spiritual languor spread abroad, and efforts in the cause of godliness were paralyzed and frustrated. But, by a return to our standards, and—thanks to our fathers for their honest and uncompromising character—by a return to our standards, error was ejected. The result was beyond all expectation—the trumpet no longer gave an uncertain sound—new life was awakened—brethren long separated were publicly united, and, with increased and increasing energy, are now enabled to strive together for the faith of the Gospel.

If ever there was a time when the Gospel required to be more fully and faithfully preached than another, that time is the present; for the most remarkable and melancholy feature of the present age is an indifference to the truth. This indifference is manifested on all subjects, civil as well as religious. With regard to civil affairs, the two great parties who formerly opposed each other—who were accustomed to maintain certain distinctive principles, and pursue different lines in the government of the nation—these parties have abandoned their ground so completely, that they are now in a state of entire confusion. Their principles have been sacrificed upon the altar of expediency.

But look at their proceedings in reference to *religious* in-

terests, and you will easily see that their practice here is distinguished by the same want of any settled principle. A few instances will illustrate this. In the providence of God our brethren in Scotland were called upon to maintain the spiritual independence of the Church, and to uphold the great principle that Christ is its only Head and King. The civil courts interfered with this principle, ordered the admission of the immoral to the table of the Lord, commanded that certain persons should be ordained to the sacred office of the ministry, and that others, who had been degraded, should be immediately restored. An appeal was made to the legislature, that the Church might be secured from such unwarrantable interference. And what was the reply? The law must take its course. And the law *did* take its course, and nearly five hundred ministers were deprived of their churches, their incomes, and their homes.

Shortly afterwards, another case occurred with which all of us are familiar. Certain properties had been bequeathed for the promotion of orthodox principles in this kingdom. These endowments, in time, fell into the possession of persons who employed them to propagate doctrines at variance with these principles. In this case, the law decided that the known wishes of the pious donors should be respected, and that the funds should be applied to the purposes for which they were originally intended. An appeal was made to the same tribunal that had deprived the Church of Scotland of her temporalities. And what was the reply? Was it as in the previous case? The decision of the civil courts must be respected—the law must take its course. Oh, no! Here the arm of the law was suddenly arrested—its supposed majesty was insulted—the intentions of the pious dead were frustrated, and funds, left for the advancement of evangelical truth, were handed over to its avowed and inveterate enemies. Who does not perceive in all this, if not something worse, at least an utter indifference to the truth?

There is another case that I will only mention. If there

be anything fundamental in our constitution, as established at the time of the Revolution, it is that Romanism is a deep and dangerous error ; and our legislators, who profess to be Protestants, are required to appeal to God with the solemnity of an oath, and declare that they believe Popery to be "damnable and idolatrous." No man and no Government can hold Protestantism to be true, and hold Romanism to be true also. Yet, notwithstanding this, the Church of Rome is complimented and encouraged. Without any demand upon the part of her hierarchy, a magnificent grant has been forced upon them, amply sufficient to support their professors, and to board and educate the mass of those who are aspirants to the priesthood—and this is done in such a way that the system is now incorporated with the constitution of the country.

Look again to the different cases to which I have adverted, and mark the utter confusion of right and wrong by which they are pervaded. The Church of Scotland came into collision with the civil law on a point of *conscience*, and the law was sternly, and to the uttermost, enforced against them. The Arians and Socinians came into collision with the law upon a point of *covetousness*, and it was immediately altered to relieve them. The one party, who were exalting the Redeemer, were degraded—the other party, who were degrading the Redeemer, were exalted. The Free Church maintained the supreme jurisdiction of the civil law within its own province ; but because she was unjustly charged with a wish to invade the territory of the civil power, she was cast off and denuded of her property. The Romish Church, on the contrary, openly and plainly asserts that the temporal powers ought, in all things, to be subordinate to the spiritual. And yet she is regarded with complacency, carefully fostered, and the prospect is opened before her of additional emoluments and increasing honours. Now, what does all this mean ? It just means that the rulers of our country are guided, not by the light of truth,

but by a spirit of reckless expediency. And have we not reason to fear that they only reflect the opinions of the mass of the community, and that there is widely spread abroad a spurious liberality that confounds the distinctions of right and wrong, and, in opposition to the express declarations of Scripture, asserts that religious opinions are matters of no consequence whatever? What does all this prove, but that we live in a country and in an age the distinguishing characteristic of which is an indifference to the truth?

It is not difficult to see how the importance of the ministerial office is increased by the aspect of the present time. Those who are invested with it have an advantage over mere worldly politicians. They form their estimate of passing events not as they influence the temporary concerns of one party or another. They judge of them by a far higher standard. They view them in connexion with the great chain of Providence, and compare them with the unalterable rules of the divine word. And placed, as they are, on the high vantage ground of public instructors, their opinions affect not only those committed to their care, but they leaven the public mind to an extent far greater than might at first be supposed. How necessary, then, that the ministers of God at the present day should resemble the small tribe of Issacher, among the once favoured people of the Almighty—“Men that had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do.”

At no period, and under no circumstances, are we justified in holding back any part of the message with which we are charged. But in these days of indifference, superstition, and infidelity, we are called upon all the more loudly to proclaim to our country and the world the great principles of divine truth in their distinct and uncompromising character. It becomes each faithful minister of our Church to adopt the language of her great Reformer—“I am in the place where it is demanded of me to speak the truth, and, therefore, the truth I speak, impugn it whoso list.” Our

Church holds forth in her standards the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel with honesty and plainness, and she protests against error without any cautious and doubting reservations. There can be no disputes about *her* meaning. *Her* testimony is abundantly explicit. I know, indeed, that the fathers of our Church are regarded by many as having been too stern and uncompromising in their conduct. But is not the wisdom of the course they pursued remarkably manifested at the present day? The standards of the Church of England were drawn up in another spirit. Doctrines were there so stated, that persons of different views might each adopt their own interpretation of them; and ceremonies, thought innocent and harmless, were retained. No doubt these arrangements were well intended; they were originally made for the purpose of inducing as many as possible to join in the same external forms, forgetting that unity of form is of little moment without unity of spirit. But mark the consequence. The essential doctrines of the Gospel are now subjects of controversy among her own members, and the system and ceremonies to which all along she has clung so fondly are leading many of her sons back again to the darkness of superstition. While, in common with all the friends of evangelical truth, we mourn over these things, it becomes us to be grateful that upon *our* standards the truth is so plainly and distinctly inscribed. Worldly policy and temporising views had no part in their formation; the word of God was the only guide, the sovereign arbiter. And now when our venerated fathers are sleeping in the dust, and their spirits rejoicing with God their Saviour, *we* are called to uphold the standard which they have reared. The torch of truth is committed for a season to *our* care; let us see that we transmit it in all its purity and brightness to a coming generation. We are watchmen on the walls of Zion. Let the trumpet give no uncertain sound when the hosts are gathering to the battle.

“The doctrine” includes, also, a faithful exercise of dis-

cipline, and every other plan for imparting instruction to the flock. Upon these I can only for a moment dwell. It requires the faithful exercise of discipline for preserving the purity of the Church. And here the elders, who rule, have an equal responsibility with those who teach. There is a great temptation to unfaithfulness from various circumstances—from our proximity to a Church where discipline is unknown, and where all are welcomed. Ministers and elders, besides, may be reluctant to incur the displeasure of their neighbours—they may be eager to increase the numerical strength of congregations, and from fear of driving away or losing the aid of persons able and disposed to contribute, they may throw open too widely the doors of admission, or continue in the Church's privileges some who are unworthy of them. "The fear of man," says the inspired writer, "bringeth a snare," and increases the danger it was intended to avoid; "but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord," faithfully discharging his duty without fear of consequences, "shall be safe." It is ours to fear God, and have no other fear—to be faithful to Christ and to the souls of men. Let us ever remember that a small but devoted band will effect more for the cause of truth and godliness than a vast multitude who are careless and indifferent. Thirty-two thousand joined the standard of Gideon when going to the battle, but he proclaimed, by the command of God, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart." Three hundred only came down to the battle, and they completely triumphed.

"Take heed to the doctrine," exhorts that instruction be imparted to all the flock, according to their several stations and circumstances. There should be no respect of persons. The Church, like the grave, levels all distinctions. The rich are to be warned, the poor to be comforted, alike. In the eye of heaven the distinctions of this world are as nothing. It would almost seem as if to the poor in this world's good, a preference was given under the Gospel

dispensation, for, all along, "not many wise, not many rich, not many noble, have been called." From the hut of poverty and the bed of straw, the prayer of acceptance may ascend to heaven. Despise not the meanest of the flock. Look upon them all not according to the distinctions of this world, but as immortal beings, travelling rapidly onwards to eternity, and preparing to rise to happiness the most exalted, or to sink into ruin the most appalling. We have it on the authority of God's word, "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king." We would look with surprise upon the splendour of a monarch, and yet a tattered and neglected child may be of greater real value in the sight of heaven than the gorgeous inhabitant of a palace. In the soul of the humblest individual there is the germ of immortal blessedness—the meanest may be led to the cross and fitted for eternal glory—the heart that beats with affection to his fellow-man may be expanded with love to the divine Redeemer—the eye that has beheld beauty in the rugged scenery of nature can surely be delighted by the verdure and fertility of the plains of heaven—the ear that has heard music in the mountain-blast will be cheered by the zephyrs that sweep over the land of promise, and be charmed into rapture with the anthems of the blessed.

We now pass on to the next clause of the verse—"Continue in them." This contains an exhortation to perseverance and devotedness in the several departments of ministerial duty. Let every one who has thus commenced his ministry in "declaring the whole counsel of God"—let him continue his faithfulness, however despised and discouraged he may be—let him take heed lest the world, and the things of the world, withdraw his attention in any degree from the one paramount object—the fulfilment of his ministry. The apostle may here refer to the duties laid down in the previous verses—"Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands

of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them."

The author of the well-known and valuable "Essay on Decision of Character" refers to the singular fact in the life of the illustrious Howard, that "he turned not for a moment from his course when traversing those scenes, the most fitted to enkindle curiosity, and to awaken enthusiasm, by the associations of ancient glory with which they were connected, and even Rome itself. The importance of his object held his faculties in a state of excitement, which was too rigid to be affected by lighter interests, and on it, therefore, the beauties of nature and of art had no power, like the invisible spirits who fulfil their commission of philanthropy among mortals, and care not about pictures, statues and sumptuous buildings. It implied an inconceivable severity of conviction that he had one thing to do, and that he who would do some great thing in this short life—must apply himself to the work with such a concentration of his forces as to idle spectators, who live only to amuse themselves, looks like insanity. It was thus he made the trial, so seldom made, what is the utmost effect which may be granted to the last possible efforts of a human agent; and, therefore, what he did not accomplish he might conclude to be placed beyond the sphere of mortal activity, and calmly leave to the immediate disposal of Omnipotence."

If objects of earthly benevolence thus excited so much concentration of mind and perseverance of effort, what should be the earnestness and devotedness of those to whose guardianship the interests of immortal spirits are committed? Were the charge you have solemnly undertaken that only of a single soul—its training and discipline for eternity, so far as these can be intrusted to man—even then, how great would be the responsibility, and how numerous the difficulties of such a trust! The various temptations and obstacles that beset that solitary spirit would make the task of conducting it along life's pilgrimage to immortality too great for an

angel, unless aided and sustained by the Eternal Comforter. Its feebleness, its proneness to error and to sin, its immersion in a world of wickedness, its fallen greatness adding melancholy grandeur to its ruin, and its solemn destination of misery or bliss eternal—all would combine to invest that charge with an importance overpowering and alarming. But how is its pressure augmented by the number and varieties included under the care of every Christian pastor? When I think of these things I can only express my astonishment, mingled with the profoundest humiliation on my own part, that this very obvious view of the work appointed to us fails to so awful an extent in the production of its legitimate and natural effect—earnestness and devotedness of purpose.

The interests of the Church, the salvation of the faithful, and the honour of religion and of God, are committed specially to you. It is yours to “teach every man, and warn every man, that you may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” You receive from the Chief Shepherd not the injunction to perform a certain round of duty, but the guardianship of so many ransomed spirits, each more precious than the brightest luminary of heaven, and exposed to dangers the most imminent, and enemies the most formidable. Here is a garrison invested by the foe, ready to overwhelm it with slaughter. You are the watchmen to guard against surprise. It is a fortified but besieged city. You are appointed to stand upon its ramparts with your sword ready for the conflict, and your trumpet for alarm. Slumber in you is treachery, as cowardice would be defeat; and the life of the citizens shall be demanded at your hands. But why should I multiply images, when no comparison can represent, and no language can suitably express the tremendous, the sublime reality? I sum up all in words which alone will not degrade so great a subject—“You watch for souls as those that must give an account.”

Now, I can well conceive, brethren, there may be some dan-

ger in the overwhelming nature of these reflections. They may bring despondency where they should rouse to action. We may feel like persons required to empty the ocean, drop by drop, while a thousand rivers are pouring into its bosom. We may do nothing, and hope for nothing, because the task is too great for us. When thus bewildered and appalled, it may be well for us to remember that the tribute demanded of us is not success but diligence, not conquest but fidelity—to have the heart right with God, the eye fixed upon eternity, our whole mind devoted to the fulfilment of our ministry. And remember, brethren, your sufficiency is of God. Trusting in His strength you are endued with the force of omnipotence. As your day is, so will your strength be; and whatever be the aspect presented to yourselves of the results of your ministry, it will be seen when the light of eternity surrounds us, that you have been the instruments of greater good than your imaginations had ever anticipated. Who can tell but you may meet in the abodes of blessedness those to whom you have brought salvation—those over whose obduracy you may have mourned as hopeless—or those, perhaps, of whom you now know nothing, but with whom you will yet rejoice together in the kingdom that is above. “Be not weary in well doing; for in due season ye shall reap if you faint not.” “Continue in these things.”

The last clause of the verse contains a cheering promise, “For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” We have it here upon the authority of God’s word that the labour of the faithful and devoted minister shall not be in vain. He shall save himself and his people—save them from defection in the hour of trial—save them from misery eternal.

He shall save them from defection. This was what the apostle appears to have greatly dreaded. Times of trial were then fast approaching—times that were to test the steadfastness both of ministers and people. He foretells some of the coming events in the beginning of this chapter. “Now

the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils ; speaking lies in hypocrisy ; having their consciences seared with a hot iron." In "the latter times" there was to be a great departing from the faith, that is, during the last dispensation ; and the destruction of the world was not to happen until this should take place. There was to be a departure from the great doctrines which constitute the Christian faith. In 2 Timothy iv. 4, he foretells—"They shall turn away their ears from the truth." Believers were to be subjected to trial and persecution for the cause of Christ—they were to suffer loss of property, loss of friends, and, in some cases, loss of life itself, for their adherence to the truth. In these circumstances, there was great danger of apostacy. But the faithful minister, the apostle intimates, might, in some measure, save himself and his people from that sad calamity. "By doing this"—by taking heed to his life and doctrine—by devotedness to the duties of his sacred calling—he might be the instrument of saving himself and his people in times of prevailing danger and defection. And, brethren, do not the descriptions of the apostle apply, with wonderful exactness, to the present age? "Perilous times have come." "Some have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." "They have turned away their ears from the truth, and been turned unto fables." And is there not heresy in practice as well as heresy in doctrine? Are not the commandments of God in many cases openly disregarded? Is not the Sabbath profaned, and are not increasing arts bringing increasing profanation along with them? Is not the standard of morality becoming every day lower and lower, especially in the commercial world? Are uprightness and integrity respected as they ought? Are fraud and dishonesty visited with the just condemnation they deserve? Is not intemperance lamentably advancing? As a natural consequence of vice and immorality there are efforts being put forth for the pro-

motion of infidelity. In the reading furnished to the masses there is an unconcealed opposition to the truth, and we have reason to fear that with increasing knowledge the labouring and humbler classes of society will become more and more alienated from the Gospel.

And is there no reason to fear that there may ere long be open hostility to the profession of true religion—that persecution may be let loose, and that the Church, as in former days, may be assailed and wasted by the enemies of righteousness? Even now, on the Continent we hear of the worship of God being forbidden, and the reading and expounding of the Scriptures pronounced a crime against the State. And nearer home, even in these kingdoms of boasted light and liberty, there are sixteen thousand of our fellow-worshippers in Scotland refused a spot of ground on which to erect a house of prayer. And who can tell how soon such trials, and others far greater, may visit us, and the faith and steadfastness of ourselves and our people be severely tested? We may be brought into a condition where *we* too may be called to suffering. The Gospel is not changed. The enmity of the carnal heart is not changed. The rancour of religious bigotry and the pride of intolerance are not changed. The cruelty of an ignorant multitude is not changed. The indifference of civil rulers to all that is vital in religion, when it opposes their designs, is not changed. All that is changed is the outward condition of society, and by what convulsion this may be broken up is beyond all human foresight, and is known to God alone. It is not, however, so much our part to deal in conjectures with regard to the future, but to have a solemn conviction as to what is present duty, to continue in labouring more devotedly than ever, so that when the time of trial comes, we and our people may be saved from defection.

There is a source of danger, to which public attention has lately been called, arising from the masses who are sunk in ignorance and crime. The most appalling state-

ments have been made, and upon the most unquestionable authority, of the degradation of vast multitudes in the metropolis of these kingdoms. It has been ascertained that there are in London no less than 30,000 lawless and deserted children. Hundreds of these have never slept on a bed, and thousands live in lodging-houses that are sinks of wretchedness and profligacy, utterly regardless of all decency and comfort, and their spiritual welfare entirely neglected. In the year 1847, 62,181 persons were taken into custody by the police. Of these 15,698 were under twenty years of age. Of the whole, 22,075 could neither read nor write, and almost all the remainder could do so very imperfectly. 28,113 had no trade or occupation whatever, and must have gained their livelihood by preying upon the property of others. These returns embrace, you will remember, only those who were apprehended, while multitudes have been guilty of unseen and undetected crimes. What an awful and dangerous state of society does this exhibit, and we fear that this is but a picture of what exists in most of our towns with crowded populations.

These are the persons, formed and trained for crime, who are ready for every outbreak and excess. Such are the persons who, in France, are now the willing instruments of blood. Think how dreadful the miseries that civil discord there carries in its train—how it desolates the country over which it rolls—how all the rights of property, and all the provisions of justice, give way before it—how unprincipled licentiousness walks abroad, and all that is pure and holy is trampled upon in bitterest derision. Think how many thousands have been suddenly hurried into eternity. The stoutest heart among us would shudder to behold the destruction of a single individual by some deed of violence. Were the person now beside you in health and strength to be laid in a moment, by some deadly aim, a lifeless corpse at your feet, there is not one that would not recoil at a spectacle so dreadful. There are some would be haunted day

and night by the image of horror they had witnessed, and utterly unfitted for business and enjoyment. And how must this horror be aggravated and increased when we think of a vast multitude of victims—of the tears of many bereaved parents, and the shrieks of thousands of desolated families. Think of these things, and see the danger of a neglected, irreligious, and lawless population, especially in our larger towns. The duty of making inroads upon the territory of wickedness and crime is not the point at present before us, but rather the duty that we owe to ourselves and our people. Let us see that we save them from the sad indifference to religion that these things are calculated to produce. Our Saviour has foretold days of apostacy, and falsehood, and crime: and he adds—(Matt. xxiv. 12)—“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” Let us strive and pray that whatever clouds and tempests may sweep over the world—whatever changes may befall us—we and our people may rest securely upon the Rock of Ages, and be enabled to trust with confidence in Him whose love is everlasting, and whose power is infinite—of Him who can bring light out of darkness, and good out of evil—of Him who stilleth not only the waves of the sea, but also the tumults of the people.

But, doubtless, the apostle presents in the text an object far higher than any limited to this world. When he committed to writing the promise—“By doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee,” his thoughts were directed not merely to the sufferings of the present world, but to the glory that was to be revealed—a glory to which they were unworthy to be compared. The reward of faithfulness in a Christian minister he declared to be the salvation of himself and of those who hear him. Salvation! One word only, but containing millions of ideas. Salvation! Uttered in a moment, but requiring everlasting ages and all the amplitude of heaven for the unfolding of its meaning.

We know not, we cannot conceive aright the horror and misery of a state of alienation from God. We know not the wretchedness and despair awaiting the impenitent in an eternal world. We know not aright the privilege of friendship with God. We cannot conceive the unutterable joy awaiting the righteous in the mansions of our Father's house in heaven. Not until the veil that hides the eternal world be torn asunder, can we have any adequate conception of the wretchedness of the one or the glory of the other, and yet we are permitted to be fellow-workers with God, and instruments in saving souls from death. What an object does the apostle place before us—"Save thyself and them that hear thee." Here is an object that cannot fail—a hope that cannot be disappointed. In the pursuits of this world misfortune waits upon our path, and all our efforts may prove fruitless. But this design never can be frustrated while we seek it in conformity to the will of God, and rely upon His Almighty Spirit. Our object will be certainly obtained. And that object, how infinitely glorious ! It is that for which the covenant of peace was sealed from everlasting—that for which the heavens and the earth are preserved in being—that for which Christ is exalted to be head over all things to the Church—that which excites a deep interest in the breast of the once crucified but now exalted Saviour, that for which angels minister, and the spirits of the just made perfect look onward with solemn expectation, which, when it is finished, the desolations of sin shall be repaired, the power of Satan utterly destroyed, and the empire of death completely and for ever overthrown. It shall be yours to rejoice with the wise and holy of other generations, to meet in their assembly and partake of their fellowship. Beneath the same shadow of the tree of life you shall repose. Of the same stream that makes glad the city of our God you shall drink. It shall be yours to exchange the post of vigilance and warfare for scenes of eternal rest and triumph—a conspicuous place of labour for a con-

spicuous sphere of glory, and to shine forth effulgent in the kingdom of our Father, with many souls saved by your blessed instrumentality circling around you in happiness and glory.

Now, in conclusion, I trust the review of this subject will excite in each of us a feeling of deep humiliation, when we look back on our ministry. Let the exhortation of the apostle, which we have been considering, lead us to examine ourselves. What has been the state of religion in our own hearts? Remember, we must give an account of *ourselves* to God. This account we are to render as strictly and as fully as if we had never borne the ministerial character; and we must be judged equally with other Christians by the depth of our repentance, the simplicity of our faith, by the power the Gospel has had upon our hearts, not by our knowledge of its doctrines, by what we are not as teachers but as disciples, as humble partakers of the grace of Jesus, not as commissioned messengers to proclaim his love.

Again, have we given due and prayerful attention to prepare for the services of the sanctuary? Has it been our great aim to set before our people the Gospel in all its fullness? Can we in sincerity adopt the language of the apostle in reference to those who hear us—"God is my record; how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ"—"My little children, of whom I travail in birth, until Christ be formed in you"—"Now I live, if you stand fast in the Lord."

I fear, brethren, that we have many sins of coldness and indifference to acknowledge—that our time and our minds have been too much occupied in secular pursuits—that we have had very faint impressions of the character and great ends of our ministry—that we have been contented with merely delivering the message, and not looking for an answer in the conversion of sinners and in the advancement of believers in knowledge and holiness. Purity of communion is not sought after as it ought, and numbers of our people

neglect altogether the dying command of their Redeemer. How little are the ordinances of religion valued? How many forsake the assembling of themselves together on the Sabbath? Our Missions, too, how inadequately supported! There is assuredly sin somewhere, and it becomes us whom God has honoured to be put in trust with the ministry of His Son—it becomes us to inquire how far our neglect and sins may have been the cause of these things.

But humiliation *alone* is not enough. The great object of our meeting will fail if we are not sent home animated with new ardour and devotedness to the work. We have peculiar advantages. We have wide fields of usefulness open before us, and multitudes willing to hear. Our ecclesiastical system is the best fitted for the advancement of the truth. To us are bequeathed many dear-bought privileges. It is no light matter to be the appointed maintainers of our fathers' testimony in such a land, and at such a time as this. Lamenting, therefore, the many sins and shortcomings with which we are chargeable, acknowledging the divine goodness towards us, and praying for the aid and guidance of the Holy Spirit, let us resolve to devote ourselves anew to the cause of our Divine Master, to spend and be spent in His service. Do we really believe that we are either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death to them that hear us? Do we really believe that there are beyond the grave abodes of blessedness, and regions of despair—that in a few short years we and our people shall all be inhabitants either of the one or of the other? Or is this mere official language, never intended to be understood in its full and ordinary import? If these things be not true, then are we false witnesses for Christ—then are we gross deceivers; for these are the common topics, the first principles of our discourses. But if these things be indeed true and certain—if heaven and hell be awful realities—if a boundless eternity be yet before us, how can we be indifferent? Can we slumber over themes that wake the interest of angels' hearts in the

presence of their God, on which the anxious eye is fixed of those who once on earth have joined the general assembly of the Church of the first-born in heaven. Oh, is it presumption to believe that their spirits may even now be bending from their seats on high, looking down with sympathy upon us, and watching with all the anxiety of love, the course we now pursue! Let it be borne in mind that ministerial faithfulness, like Christian piety, is an individual concern. Each individual should resolve to preach the Word, and devote himself to the work with as much earnestness as if the cause of truth were suspended upon his single efforts.

From this subject let us learn the necessity of faithfulness. There is, from obvious causes, a temptation to accommodate the truths of the Gospel to the prevailing sentiments of the world, or to form a compromise between the doctrines of the cross and the feelings of the natural heart. Every minister, when about to preach the Gospel, is perfectly aware that he is about to deliver a message most ungrateful to the ears of unregenerate men. In truth, there never was a religion that the world hates so much as it hates the pure Gospel of Christ. When a minister is sensible of this fact, when he knows that the message he is about to deliver will encounter so much opposition from the world, he is strongly tempted to change, in some degree, the aspect of the message, and to substitute a little of his own wisdom for the wisdom of God. This he may do in a manner almost insensible to himself. It is not necessary that he should preach anything positively false. He may keep within the bounds of orthodoxy; and yet, by introducing those parts of the system only which are least unpalatable, he may keep back those truths which humble the pride of the human heart, and thus fail to declare the whole counsel of God. And shall he be hailed as the friend of man, and the faithful minister of Zion, who softly whispers "peace, peace," when

all is the cheerless peace of the sepulchre—who, by delusive prospects of security, beguiles thousands into the snares of the foul destroyer, or leaves them without a sigh, gaily to dance around the brink of the bottomless pit, and plunge beneath, the victims of perdition? He may be hailed by the thoughtless and giddy throng, the votaries of this world, the slaves of Satan. But hailed he shall not be by the sons of light and glory. By saints and by the King of Saints he shall be arraigned a traitor—to him shall be allotted a traitor's doom, and in everlasting burnings he shall wear the memorials of a traitor's crime.

The apostle, in another place, urges the solemn motive—"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." This is a warning that we are accustomed frequently to press upon our hearers in reference to their preparation for eternity. We tell them of a God ready to be reconciled, of a Saviour waiting to be gracious, of the Holy Spirit ready to renew and sanctify the heart. But we tell them, also, that it will not be always thus—that the careless and obdurate will not always be plied with the overtures of pardon—that the day of salvation will not last for ever—that the Saviour, who now bends from heaven's high throne to win them to Himself, will soon come in the more awful character of a judge, to take vengeance on those who neglect His great salvation. We have seen the sword come; we have blown the trumpet, and warned the people that the means of grace are passing away rapidly and for ever. Let this motive be felt by each of us in reference to our solemn duties. Now is to us the day of usefulness and activity, the night is coming when no man can work. The time is short. Eternity is approaching. We see the countenances of our people change from Sabbath to Sabbath, as we address them in our respective congregations. We cannot but remember that other feet have stood in our pulpits, and other voices have sounded within the walls that encircle our

worshipping assemblies. Soon death will seal our lips in the silence of the tomb. Soon new pastors and new people will occupy our places.

Think, brethren, of the solemn period when the last sands of the numbered hour are running ; when, in the darkened chamber, stretched on the bed from which you never will arise, looking round upon the circle of your weeping friends, and awfully conscious of your approaching end, what are the views you *then* will take of the worth of Sabbaths, the value of immortal souls. In what manner will you *then* estimate the weight of your ministerial charges. What will be your emotions, in the prospect of the last and dread account, if, through your unfaithfulness, the cause of truth has suffered, and souls been left to perish. How awful your reflections, if, even in relation to the poorest of the flock, you should become painfully alive to instances of neglect and failure before unthought of, if you have neglected to “reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.” With what feelings will then be remembered days and weeks wasted in worldliness and folly. With what feelings will you then think of abused talents, a perverted Gospel, a people lulled into the slumbers of indifference, and led on to ruin. Ah ! how will the remembrance of these seize upon the heart with a chillness colder than the icy hand of death itself. How darkly will their shadow fall upon the soul now ready to depart, solitary and unattended, into the world unknown. Oh, the remorse, the horror, the anguish unutterable and hopeless ! The cloud of darkness—but I forbear. I draw a veil over a scene so awful.

How different your emotions as death the last messenger draws nigh, if, amidst all your imperfection and infirmity, it has been your main object ever to be faithful—if for this you have struggled, for this you have prayed, being in season and out of season, always abounding in the work of the Lord, keeping back nothing of the truth, allured by no secular ambition, and chargeable with the

ruin of none. For yourselves, as helpless sinners, this plea will be all sufficient. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and in the review of your ministry, this shall inspire you with fortitude when advancing to give in your last account, that you have not been careless of your trust, that the people for whose salvation you laboured, and from whom for a season you are to be separated, are a company of pilgrims travelling on to Zion, and that you are going only a little time before them. How soothing the reflection, the meanest you have not despised, the feeblest you have not oppressed, the youngest you have not forgotten; your prayers have gone up for them in secret as a memorial before the Lord. It is your privilege to go before, and when arrived at the abodes of blessedness, your spirits will again and again be cheered by the opening of heaven's gates, and the admission of another and another of the flock that you have left behind, to the sanctuary above, till at length the whole family of the redeemed shall be assembled in the mansions of our Father's house, and be for ever with the Lord.

Who can tell the joy awaiting the faithful minister in the abodes of blessedness? Who can conceive the rapture that will fill and dilate his soul as the accents of the Judge fall upon his ear—"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Yes, his joy will be the joy of his Lord—inferior in degree, but of the same nature, and springing from the same sources. To have been himself the object of mercy—to have been the instrument in the salvation of others—will impart a pleasure that never can be adequately understood till the morning of the resurrection dawn, and "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." And is this, he will exclaim, the end of all my labours—is this the issue of the ministry under which I was so often ready to faint—is this the glory of which I heard so much, and of which I was accustomed to speak with so much coldness? Well might it be called "a glory to be

revealed." If to every disciple, faithful unto death, there is in reserve a crown of life, how great must be the reward of the faithful minister! Oh, for that surpassing crown, brightest among the bright coronets of glory! With what ecstasy shall we recognise among the countless multitude the seals of our ministry—the persons to whom we have brought salvation, and whom we have been the means of conducting to blessedness eternal. Well am I convinced that their companionship in the upper sanctuary will be the source of joy unspeakable, and their gratitude pouring forth during eternal ages will add—immeasurably add—to the bliss and the brightness even of heaven itself.

How forcibly do these reflections press home upon each of us the exhortation of the apostle—"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."









