



THE PASTOR'S FAREWELL TO HIS FLOCK.

A

22

VALEDICTORY SERMON,

TO THE

First Baptist Church and Congregation,

DELIVERED AT BEVERLY, APRIL 19, 1840,

BY THEIR PASTOR,

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S E R M O N .

2D CORINTHIANS, xiii. 11.—*Finally, brethren, farewell.*

The language of my text is Paul's valedictory to the Church at Corinth. The same would I adopt as *my* valedictory to you as a Christian Church, and to all who pertain to this congregation. The time has arrived, when it is proper to take my leave of you, never expecting to address you more, as I have done, for a few years past. May God help me to speak and you to hear, so that when we meet before the throne of impartial justice, it may appear that I have *spoken*, and you have *heard*, aright.

In elucidating the text, it will be proper, to

I. Consider the appellation, which the Apostle uses. By nature, *all* men are *brethren*, the children of one common Father.

But it is in a *higher* and more *spiritual* sense, that the Apostle here calls them, "brethren." It is a spiritual relation, a connexion, into which they are brought by grace, being regenerated by the Spirit of God, and made "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." This relation is common and universal among all who are "born of God." All the children of God have a common relationship, and each is acknowledged a brother before God.

Brotherhood is an *endearing* relation in *this* life, but among the *saints* it holds a superior character, and its endearments are in exact proportion to the degree of holiness, which each one possesses. This is *always* true in experience, and every brother finds his

heart knit to his brethren the *more*, as his soul becomes lifted above the world and worldly things;—and in the same degree too, he feels the enjoyment which intercourse with the pious is adapted to give. What believer has not known the sacred pleasure of associating and conversing with his “brethren in Christ”—what christian has not felt his heart “burn within him,” when engaged in holy discourse upon the things of “the kingdom!” Let us now

II. Enquire, *when* it may be said that christian brethren fare well.

Farewell, as used in the text, seems to be a parting expression, as at taking leave of a friend or people.—But as compounded of two words, fare and well, it imports a *desire*, that those to whom it is addressed, may be happy and prosperous. In this sense it is my design to employ it in this discourse.

The question then returns, *when* may it be said that christians fare well?

Is it only when they increase in *number, wealth, and power*—do they fare well, only when the tide of *prosperity* and *popular applause* sets strong in their favor, and when worldly influence proffers its aid in their support? No, my brethren, all these things may be received and enjoyed, and yet as a *body* and as *individuals*, they may be far from faring well.

I remark then, that christians fare well,

1. When they are “*spiritually minded*,” and anxious to become more and more *holy*.

Every christian is a *spiritual* man and a *holy* man—but christians do not, in every instance, possess so *high* a degree of spirituality, as they ought to possess, nor are they as *holy* as they ought to be. For the more part, even those who are pious, live *far, very* far below their privileges, and below the standard of personal piety to which they ought to attain. Many there are who rest contented with the most meagre attainments in grace. Such are persons of little prayer and self denial, of little knowledge of divine things, and possess so little piety of heart, as scarcely

to do any thing which is adapted to promote the power of religion. This, my brethren, accounts for the little success which, for a large part of the time, attends the preaching of the Gospel—the church hangs like an incubus upon those who preach the word, and the impenitent seeing the deadness of professed christians, go on in their sins, and pride themselves in being as good as many in the church.

When such is the state of christians, can it be said that they are faring *well*? Far from it. Christians fare well *only* when their minds are interested in *spiritual* things—when *truth* is dear to them—when pious exercises, duties and conversation are more pleasant and engaging to their minds, than other things—and when their desires are continually rising before God, that they may become more pure, and more like God. When such is the religious state of brethren of Christ, the church is like the “vineyards of Engedi”—the “garden of the Lord.” *Grace* being in exercise, peace and joy abound,—each desires to feel the enjoyment of things sacred, and can say, “Then shall I be satisfied, when I awake in thy likeness.”

2. Christians may be said to fare *well*, when they are advancing in *piety* and *religious knowledge*.

There is such a thing as christians being excited to a lively frame and apparently *much* engaged and zealous in religion; but at the same time, they may be far from advancing in holiness and the knowledge of Christ. And they may be very loquacious and busy in religion, without any true rising to God and aspirations after sacred knowledge.

The christian who values religion, not for the *excitement* which it brings, but for its tending to promote practical godliness, is the man who fares well. To illustrate this, we may suppose a man hears a report, that a relation in a distant place, has bequeathed him a large fortune. This may excite him and engage his attention. But the question arises, whether he really comes into *possession* of the property, and in what respects he is *benefitted*. If he really be-

come richer and happier, and more useful, it is well, but if it is only in report, what is he the better?

Just so it is in religion. A mere ebullition of feeling, is of little worth. There must be that in the mind, which ensures the actual *advance* in piety of *heart*, and religious *knowledge*. In the *first* experience, or in a few *years* of experience, no christian can learn and obtain *all* that is to be learned and obtained of religion. The spiritual man is expected to *advance* and *grow* in knowledge and holiness, from his first spiritual breath, until the last he draws. Without this, of what avail will it be for him to remain here below—what good will his example do to others?

3. Christians may be said to fare *well*, when they are diligent and earnest in *prayer*.

Prayer is a very common topic among christians, and on this account, it may possess but little interest to such persons, as, like the Athenians, are “always seeking some new thing.” But prayer is a very common subject in the *Bible*, nay, it is the *most* common, because it is the most *important* subject in all that relates to christian duty. Without prayer, no one can be a christian—with it, every sinner may obtain the blessing of God, in peace, enjoyment and safety to his soul.

Without prayer, no christian ever made large attainments in the life and power of godliness. Without *frequent*, *fervent*, and *untiring* prayer to Almighty God, the religion of a christian will become dwarfish,—his heart shrivelled—his affections cold and cheerless, and his whole action in religion, like the locomotion of one, whose powers are checked by a paralysis.

But let this death-like state give place to the power of *prayer*, and let the soul “wrestle with God” as did Jacob; then shall he “prevail like Israel,” while in answer to his importunity, he feels the power of truth in his heart, and fares *well* through the grace of his Redeemer. In such a state, he will “follow on to know” and “be able to comprehend with all saints what is the height, and depth, and length, and breadth

of the love of God," to his exceeding abundant joy in the Lord.

4. Christians fare *well*, when they are *established in the truth*.

The Bible is the standard of all religious truth.— It reveals every doctrine necessary to our faith and knowledge, and every rule of duty important for us to obey. Herein is taught but *one* system of truth, and but one code of *laws* for our faith and duty.— Hence, if the Bible were adopted as the only standard of faith and practice, there could be no diversity of opinion upon doctrine or duty.

But when christians become worldly-wise, and think they may decide what is right and may square their convictions of duty by their own *wishes*, without an appeal to the Bible, they are in great danger of wandering from the truth and their duty. Examples of this kind are seen in persons who have lost their balance, and by indulging erroneous opinions and embracing false doctrines, are induced to violate their covenant engagements, and associate with the heterodox and corrupt.

If christians would fare *well*, they must stand *firm* in the truth of the gospel, and like the deep rooted oak, or the sea-girt rock, defy every inducement to swerve from the truth. Temptation to compromise with error, will never be wanting, while sin reigns in the world, and often is so fascinatly presented, as almost to "deceive even the elect of God." But there is one general characteristic in all the great leading errors and corruptions of the truth, by which they may be known. It is, that in every instance, error connives at sin under specious names, and seeks to quiet the conscience, while forsaking the truth. Let the christian who would fare *well*, be aware of every doctrine, which is not supported by the Bible, and whose tendency is to unsettle the mind, and lead the heart astray from the great principles of gospel truth and duty.

5. Christians fare *well*, when they are *united in*

love. Christian love is the grand constituent of christian *character*. Without *love*, how much soever of faith, of benevolence and zeal any man may possess, he is but as “sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.”

Love is the *essence* of religion—“love is of God,” for “God is love.” When Christ would put Peter to the closest test, by a comprehensive enquiry, he thrice enquired of him, if *love* had a place in his heart. “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?”

If *this* grace be wanting, *all* is wanting—if *this* be in exercise, *all* the graces of the spiritual man will perform their respective functions. Then it is, the christian fares *well*—he feels, while love possesses his heart, that *all* is well—he can trust in God, even in the darkest times—he can rejoice and hope in his mercy, and by love, “his cheerful feet in swift obedience move.” In the exercise of love, each believer feels a sacred nearness to all who love God—their hearts become like the hearts of David and Jonathan—with each other they wish to live, with each other they wish to die, and with each other, hope to spend eternity. Love to the christian mind, is like steam to the engine. It sets all the graces of the spiritual man in *motion*.

What was it that gave the Ephesian Church so high a character? Was it the soundness of their faith? No, it was *love*—love to *Christ* and love to *each other*—it was love which made them happy and honorable to God, and induced their ready obedience to Christ. But when they “*forsook* their first love” —the Lord was angry with them, and “removed the candlestick out of his place.”

But let it not be thought that love consists in a “whining cant” and words of “empty air.” A man may utter words as *soft* as oil, while gall and wormwood are in his heart. *True* love is generous and kind, and binds all true hearted disciples in one common bond, like a “three-fold cord which is not easily broken.” Under the influence of *genuine* love, each brother will desire and rejoice in another’s good, and

“do to each other, as he would that others should do to him”—prayer will be prevalent, and the church move forward in peace and power.

Without love, the best creed will be an empty form, and all the acts of the church be wanting, in what is chiefly essential to make them effective and useful.

Under the influence of love, the minds of christians will *commonly* be agreed, in all essential points of truth and duty. Or, if they should see some things with different eyes, love will incline them to bear with each other's imperfections and to “agree to disagree,” where the Bible gives no definite rule.

The same principle will incline them to be *faithful* to each other.

Some persons suppose that when Solomon says, “love covereth all sins,” that every fault should be borne with, without complaint. But this cannot be his meaning, else the explicit directions of Christ and his Apostles, must be wholly disregarded. Christ and his Apostles, command christians to *exhort*, to *reprove* and *rebuke* one another, and the church to labor with those who offend by their sins, and continued neglect of duty, and even to *exclude* them from their fellowship, if they cannot be reclaimed. David understands *this* to be the exercise of love, when he says, “Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness, and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil.”

Love will induce christian faithfulness, upon the same principle, that one man would warn another, when he sees him going into imminent danger—for example. Suppose you were very anxious to visit a city in which the yellow fever or plague is making fearful ravages, but you are wholly ignorant of it. Would it be the part of love for your friends to withhold information of the fact, and not try to dissuade you from going, lest you should be disappointed of your visit? No, you instantly reply. Just so it is in regard to christian *faithfulness*. The more you

love your brethren, the more ready you will be to counsel and admonish them for their faults. Nothing can be more fatal to christian union, than to cover up sin. If christians would be united in love, let them be affectionately faithful—then they will fare *well*.

6. Christians may be said to fare well, when they are agreed in *efforts* to advance the cause of genuine religion.

The object of any man's conversion, is not merely to secure his personal enjoyment, nor his personal safety. God has higher designs to answer, than any man's happiness or safety. His own *glory* is concerned, in all that he *does*, and all he *intends* to do. It is for God's glory, that his children should continue in the world for a season. *Here* is the appropriate theatre of their action. *Here* are materials upon which their energies may be profitably expended, and *men* are the proper instruments of good to men. Hence Jesus Christ, instead of making preachers of *Angels*, invested *men* with his high commission. And not only are *preachers* to be employed, but *every* christian has an appropriate part to act, and by the united efforts of the *whole* church, is the work of the world's conversion to be carried forward unto completion. Let christians then be agreed to labor in promoting the great cause of religion in the world, but let them labor in their proper places, and they will fare *well*, for God rewardeth the pious efforts of all his saints.

In each of these respects, I can respond to the language of the Apostle, and say, "Finally, brethren, *farewell*." It is my desire, that tho' *some* of you have profited so little by my labors, you may, by some other instrumentality, profit *much* more, and that you may fare *well* in each and all the particulars that I have mentioned.

From this subject, we may infer that the declension of religion and the loss of spiritual enjoyments, is owing to the deficiencies of christians in their duty.

God has instituted means for the *improvement, growth* and *happiness* of his children, no less than he has decreed the *salvation* of them that believe. And every christian who would enjoy the consolation of the gospel, must be "spiritually minded."

Strive to be more holy, and daily cultivate all the graces of the spiritual man, and *do*, as well as *get* good.

Upon a similar principle, all men conduct the affairs of life—the principle of labor and profit. Look where you will, you see men carrying out this principle. They labor, not because they love to expend their *physical* strength, but, for the sake of the *reward* which they hope to receive. So must the christian labor, to become more *holy* and more *wise* in heavenly things, and to "enter into that rest which remains for the people of God."

If christians would see the church *prosper*, they must be faithful to their covenant engagements. For *how* can a church prosper, in which *prayer* is wanting—or *how* can a church prosper, whose members are *unsound* in the truth—who are wanting in *affection* for each other, and in *judgment* upon the duties which are incumbent upon them? To embrace a large number of members, is far less important than to be *prayerful* and *united* in sentiment and practice.

Without *union*, the *government* of a church cannot be maintained. Offenders will find friends to advocate them in doing wrong, and what may be done in *one* instance, will be claimed in another, till, by partiality to one, favor to a second, and the neglect of a third, the church becomes corrupt, discipline is destroyed, and members may *go* when they choose, and *do* what they please with impunity. I am aware that *my* views of discipline have, by some, been thought to be severe. But unfortunately, if they are so, I have not been able to carry them into effect. And I give it as my best advice, to the church, that they should copy the example of the Ephesians, who "could not bear them that were evil," whether corrupt in senti-

ment, or covenant breakers, or unholy in their walk and conversation in the world.

In what remains to be said, I deem it proper to refer to the circumstances of our connexion, which have had *few*, if any parallels—I mean, the facts connected with my being called to your service a *second* time.

Here it is proper for me to refer to my first settlement with you.

In the year 1816, I was ordained your pastor, and including the time of previous and constant supply, I served the congregation about nine years and a half. The church *had* been much divided for several years, and consisted, at my settlement, of only one hundred and six members. But it pleased the Lord to shed down the showers of his grace—to unite your hearts, and revive his work, so that about sixty were baptised while I remained.

Near the close of the year 1824, I was under the necessity of removing, for the want of adequate support. After an absence of eleven years, in which it pleased God that I should see much of his power and grace, I received the unanimous invitation of this church and society to return. Accordingly I came back in September 1836, leaving a united people and a pleasant situation, much to *their* grief, and, as it afterward appeared, to their *injury* and my own. This, however, I can say, that I acted from a conviction of my *duty*—that no selfish motive moved me to it, nor can I, to this hour, perceive any thing which induced my compliance with your call, but the strong attachment, which I early formed to this place and people.

The *Society*, it is true, was increased during my absence, by the rise of children to manhood, and the church, by the revival of religion under the labors of its worthy pastors. But as a congregation, they were, *essentially*, the same at my *return*, as when I removed from them.

I entered upon my labors, with the expectation of being at home for the residue of my life, a sentiment, which many of this congregation, and many other cit-

izens of the town, have often expressed to me. Not that I would be a burden to any people, if God should spare me beyond the time of useful labor. I believe and hold, that every minister who lives *beyond* his ability to be useful, ought to lay down his commission, and if poor, as most ministers are, be provided for by the christian public, till God shall call him home.

In returning to you, if I ever had any faith, I came in the full confidence of seeing the fruits of my labors, and God has *not* disappointed my faith. Forty one members have been added to the church—thirty six families to the congregation, and by the blessing of God on your exertions, you have within the same period been able to build this commodious house.

I speak not of these things, my friends, as though I, or you, have any thing to boast of, God forbid. If I *seem* to boast, I must say with Paul, “ye have compelled me.” I speak of them as facts to HIS praise, to whom alone the glory belongs. And I speak of them to show, that if I have even been the *humble* instrument of a *little* good to this people, the *last* year has been more blessed, than either of the preceding. And it gives courage to my heart, and raises my unfeigned gratitude to God, that I can *now* look upon *many* before me, of former and latter years, and say, to the honor of *God's free grace*, Ye are my epistle, and the seals of my ministry in the Lord, whom I hope to meet, and with whom I hope to dwell, in a purer and happier world than this.

Is it now enquired, why it is proposed to dissolve this connection? I reply, the reduction of salary is the *ostensible* reason. But the *real* occasion is the *opinion* of a few individuals, unfavorable to my ministry, although written and verbal testimony, proves the church and society to have been *unanimous* in my call, but three and a half years ago, and that, after having known my standing, talents and character as a minister for twenty years. Nor has a single complaint been made to me, down to this time. How much in accordance with the “golden rule,” the

course pursued toward me has been, I leave the public mind to decide.

For myself, I have only to say, that according to my *ability*, I have not shunned to declare unto you, all the counsel of God, and have ever been ready to serve you in health and in sickness, in prosperity and adversity, by night and by day, and if it has been thought that any family or individual has been neglected, it has been far from my intention so to do. I have been very conscious of *many* imperfections, in all my labors, and have great occasion to be humbled before God. But this I can claim, that in my *return* to you, and in my *labors* among you, I have kept in view the single purpose of doing you good, and not *evil*—and with full sincerity, may add, that I have been willing to spend and be spent for *you* and your *children*.

Finally, my brethren and friends, you will, of course, be looking, speedily, for a successor. In one word, then, let me advise, that if you are so fortunate as to procure a pastor with all the *mental furniture*, which highly cultivated minds could desire, to give him your confidence and your prayers, and more than all, to remember that he is a *man*, and as a *man*, he cannot be perfect, and as a man and a *minister*, he has rights in common with others.

Brethren, if you would prosper, settle your trials among yourselves, and prepare yourselves to receive God's blessing; not by conniving at what is wrong, nor by half quenching the coals of strife; but fully investigate every subject—dig up the very *roots* of dissension, and wholly extinguish the fire of jealousy, by plain and faithful dealing.

To the many, whose hearts now bleed, let me say, Trust in God—be much in prayer—stand fast in the truth—firmly maintain what is right—be prudent and pious.

My dear hearers, who have heard the truth from my lips for years, but still remain in your sins, let me say, Yours is a *serious case*. You are not ignorant of your duty, nor of God's commands. The threaten-

ings of Jehovah's broken law, and the melting strains of Jesus' dying love, have sounded forth, to awaken your slumbering consciences and win your hearts to God. Every expedient has been tried—*expostulation, entreaty* and *persuasion*—but your rocky hearts have refused to break. Shall it yet be in vain—and must it still be said to you, “O wicked man, thou shalt surely die.” Can you, my brother sinner, expect to fare *well*, while you neglect the great salvation, and the Saviour who bled on Calvary? No man can fare *well*, who is out of Christ.

“This solemn truth does still remain,
 “The sinner must be born again,
 “Or down to ruin go.”

Say, sinner, will you reproach *me* at the judgment day—will you say, I have not invited you to the gospel feast? If it be so, *I* shall not fare *well*; but, if I have done *my* duty to you, my garments will be clean, and your blood will be upon your *own* heads. My time of preaching to *you* is over; our next meeting, probably, will be before the throne of God, where it will be known *how* and *what* I have *preached*, and with what feelings and desires you have *heard*. May God have mercy upon you, and may you love and serve *him*, as the obedient children of his grace: *fare-well*.

Beloved Children and Youth—Let me say to you, “Remember *now* your Creator in the days of your youth.” You too, like many others, may find an early grave. God gives no lease of life—disease and death are fast conquering the millions of our race, and the far greater part of those that die, go down to the tomb in the morning of life. Now, while you are young, is the *best* time to seek your Saviour's love, before the cares and disappointments and woes of life come upon you. And you may remember for your encouragement to seek the Lord, that

“The flower when offered in the bud,
 “Is no vain sacrifice.”

Precious youth, my heart has been interested for your good—for you I have labored—for you I have prayed—and all that I can more say, is, “farewell,” dear youth.

As I cast my eye around, I see here and there, an aged traveller, near to eternity. My friends, you are *few* in number—the sands of your glass are almost run. Yours is a great account, for a *long* life, and many blessings, and soon you must give it up before your Judge. Let me then, my dear aged friends, ask, how stands it with your immortal souls? Is *your* peace made with God—are your lamps trimmed and burning—have you the spirit of adoption—do you feel an evidence to your own souls, that you love God, and are prepared for the abodes of the holy and the happy? If this is your case, happy are you—soon you will leave a vexing world—soon you will exchange the sorrows of the world, for the joys of heaven—soon, your deathless spirits will enter upon indescribable joys, and amid the countless throng, adore and praise the Lamb, who died for you, and washed you in his blood.

But, my beloved friends, if any of you have lived till this hour in your sins, how fearful is your condition! Your *youth*, your *middle life*, and your *old age*, all consecrated to the world! Your day of grace is almost passed—heaven or hell, will soon be yours.—Fly, then, *fly*, I beseech you, to the arms of Jesus—make salvation the *great*, the *only* object of your attention for the few short days which remain to you—whatever you come short of, see that you fall not short of the pardoning mercy of the Lord.

Finally, my *christian brethren*—my *fellow-sinners*—*precious youth*, and *aged friends*, farewell.



