

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT BETHEL, ON THE ORDAINATION OF

THE REV. WILLIAM M'PHETERS.

TIMOTHY, III 1,

*This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop,
he desireth a good work.*

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A SERMON.



1 Timothy, iii. 1.—This is a true saying, if any man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

WHEN our Saviour instituted his church in the world he intended to form it into a regular government. He never gave any countenance to those plans of insubordination, which some have attempted to introduce into ecclesiastical matters. Intending to erect his church into an orderly kingdom, he appointed all the offices necessary for the management of its affairs, and the exercise of its authority. The principal of these offices, is that of a gospel minister, which the present occasion, as well as the words of our text leads us to consider. *He that desires the office of a bishop, desires a good work.—* In treating the subject arising from these words, we shall pursue the following order:

I. We shall make some explanatory observations on the office of a gospel minister—

II. Consider the qualifications it requires—

III. The duties it imposes—and,

IV. The treatment to which it is entitled.

I. According to this order, we shall proceed in the first place to make some explanatory observations on the office of a gospel minister. My first observation is, that the scriptures do not appear to give any ground for the distinction of a superior and inferior order of the clergy. Some of the protestant churches, however, hold a different opinion on this subject. They suppose

that the word bishop designates a superior order of the clergy, and that of presbyter or elder an inferior class. I might produce several passages of scripture to refute this opinion, but shall content myself with the following. 'For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shoudest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot, or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre.* It requires no comment, to shew, that the Apostle here uses the words elder and bishop as synonymous. He sets out with specifying the qualifications which ought to be regarded in the choice of an elder, and, at the very same time, applies all his directions to the choice of a bishop.

My next observation is, that a minister holds an authority delegated to him by the great head of the church: this is evident, because our Saviour has entrusted them with the exercise of discipline and government, enjoining it upon them to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all authority; and to discharge the episcopal office of his church, so as to promote the edification and good of his people. It is also evident, from the terms by which ministers are sometimes designated in scripture, particularly from their being called ambassadors of Christ. 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God.† But to guard this doctrine from the abuse to which it is liable, and has sometimes been exposed, it ought to be remembered, that their authority goes no farther than what the scripture authorises. They are not to lord it over the consciences of men; or to consider themselves as lords of God's heritage. Their business is to carry into effect that system of government which Christ has laid down in the holy scriptures. When they confine them-

* Titus i. 5...6...7.

† 2 Cor. v. 20.

live within the limits, and act according to the directions of the word of God, then it is that they are supported by this solemn sanction—'he that despiseth you despiseth me.' With these restrictions, we can certainly to understand what our Saviour says to his disciples, and through them to the officers of his church in every future age, 'verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.'* This part of the subject suggests a very useful caution, both to the officers and the people of the church of Christ. The officers should take heed not to abuse a commission which is so sacred, and the limits of which have been fixed by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and the people should beware of trifling with church discipline, and of inconsiderately opposing it, lest whilst they apprehend themselves as dealing only with their fellow-creatures, they should be found opposing an ordinance of God.

Another observation, is, that the ministerial authority is conferred by regular ordination. I know, indeed, that they are not wanting in the present day, who consider ordination as unimportant or unnecessary. They suppose themselves to be called of heaven to the sacred office, and to have received their commission immediately from God. When the matter is rightly understood, I am far from denying the propriety of a divine call, but a divine call can never be intended to supersede the institutions of heaven. Ordination is certainly an appointment of scripture, and sanctioned by the example of the primitive church. If, therefore, we are to pay any regard to the scriptures in matters of church government, we must not lay this ordinance aside. Besides the reasonableness and necessity of the institution, have a strong claim on our attention. The great head of the church, seems to have appointed ordination as the only sure rule by which the people could know who were ministers and who were not. Such a rule appears to be indispensibly necessary.

* *Matth. xviii. 18.*

It is the duty of a christian to receive the sacraments, and he can receive them only from the hands of regular ministers; if then there be no rule for ascertaining who are regular ministers, the people can never know that they live in the performance of their duties. But there is no way of ascertaining this, in the present state of the church, but by ordination. In the primitive church indeed, they had officers commissioned immediately by Christ himself. This, in a great degree, constitutes the difference between an apostolic office, and that of the common ministry, the apostle receives his commission immediately from heaven, and the minister receives a similar, from inferior authority, by ordination. But then Apostles, and all extraordinary officers whose commissions were immediately from God, performed miracles, or carried with them some supernatural evidence of their authority. And if any person pretends to an immediate commission from heaven, to preach the gospel now, and does not confirm his pretensions in the same way, he ought to be treated as an impostor. We cannot infer the ministerial authority of a man, from his preaching the truth in an acceptable manner; for then every man of piety and talents might begin to preach, and administer the sacraments without any ceremony, and in contradiction to the rules laid down in the sacred volume. It would not even do to say God blesses his preaching; for we are incompetent to search the heart, and a man's converts may appear promising for a time and not prove real converts at last. In fact nothing but miracles can be considered as sufficient to prove an immediate commission: and as the age of miracles has ceased, all pretensions to such a commission, or to any other commission than what is conferred by regular ordination, ought to be treated as enthusiastic presumption.

My last observation is that election; as well as ordination, is necessary, before a clergyman obtains the right of exercising his ministerial authority in any particular church. The

truth of this observation arises from the nature and privileges of churches considered as voluntary associations: these privileges are countenanced in scripture, and constitute a part of that spiritual liberty, which we have a right to enjoy, but should be careful not to abuse—a liberty, some degree of which, is absolutely necessary to the sincerity, if not to the purity, of religious worship. There are many denominations of clergy, whom we admit to be regularly invested with the ministerial functions, and yet from diversity of opinion, we cannot in conscience submit to their instructions, or government. That clashing of opinion, which attends all human affairs and which could not be wholly excluded from religion, even in the days of inspiration, makes it necessary that the people should have the right of choosing their pastor. This election may be either general or particular—general, when a minister is brought into the fellowship and communion of a certain denomination, by those appointed to exercise its government, and particular, when he is called by a congregation to discharge among them the episcopal office. We shall now proceed,

II. In the second place, to *consider the qualifications which the ministerial office requires.* The first qualification which I shall mention, is real vital piety. There are a great many reasons why this qualification should be necessary, and the majority of them so obvious, that it will be sufficient barely to mention them. It seems, indeed, to be one of the greatest absurdities in the world, for an unregenerate man to obtrude himself into the sacred desk. Shall an enemy to God undertake to advance his honor, or promote his interest in the world! Shall any one make it the business of his life, to explain and enforce the doctrine of scripture, which the scriptures contain the sentence of his everlasting condemnation? With great propriety it was once said by an eloquent preacher, “when an unregenerate man comes into the pulpit, he carries his own death warrant in his hand.” It is related of a distinguished preacher, in the earlier days of the church,

that on a certain occasion he was induced by the fear of persecution to comply with some idolatrous ceremonies, which afterwards appeared to amount to something like a denial of our Saviour. The next time he went into the pulpit, the first thing that met his eye, was the sixteenth verse of the fiftieth Psalm, 'But unto the wicked, God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth.' The conviction of this passage, struck him dumb at the time, and for several days afterwards kept him in a state bordering on distraction. And I am persuaded that no unregenerate man, were not his conscience totally asleep, would ever attempt to preach the word of God. One consideration which makes religion necessary in a minister, is, that it is the best preparative for receiving and understanding the truths of the scriptures. The depravity of the human heart, is the original source of all error, and whatever an early education or orthodox instruction may have done for us, we are never secure even against essential errors, until we possess a sanctified heart. But supposing our doctrinal sentiments should be correct, practical religion is to be learned only from experience: and how shall that man lead others in the road to heaven who has never travelled it himself—the blind would lead the blind, and our Saviour has told us what would be the consequence. Besides an irreligious minister could not delight in his office and of course, could not be diligent in performing the duties of it: and what is still more important, nothing can be done in the ministerial office without the divine blessing, and an irreligious man has but little reason to expect that.

But I think it not only necessary that a minister should possess religion, and that in an eminent degree, he ought to be a man of the most upright, exemplary, and prudent conduct, patient, and forbearing, and able, on all occasions, to command his own temper. I mention this, because there are some professors of religion, of whom charity would teach us to hope well, who are, notwithstanding, subject to a fickleness and in-

consistency of conduct, which would be very incompatible with the office of the gospel ministry. Together with the qualifications already mentioned, I think it very desirable, and not absolutely necessary, that a minister of Christ, should possess, in a good degree, the assurance of faith, and a warm zeal for glorifying God in the gospel of his Son.

It is undoubtedly of great importance, that the work of the ministry should not be committed to weak or ignorant men, who might be unable to teach others; competent gifts, as well as graces are indispensibly requisite. I do not mean, that candidates ought to be rejected for the want of preeminent talents, but a gospel minister ought to possess a mind naturally sound, and well cultivated. A liberal education may not in all cases be indispensibly necessary—uncommon natural talents combined with certain circumstances, may compensate in some degree for the want of improvement; but generally speaking, I think what is commonly called a liberal education ought to be required. A minister of Christ should certainly attend to all those branches of human learning, which might enable him to deliver his message with propriety; and in order to understand his message he ought to be acquainted with the sacred scriptures, in the original languages. There may be some dispute as to the course of study most proper to effect the first of these purposes, or to qualify a man for speaking, but it is certain that to accomplish both the purposes just mentioned, a considerable course of human learning, is absolutely requisite.

But there are some denominations in the world, who declare absolutely against the necessity of a learned ministry, and in support of their sentiments, alledge the example of our Saviour, who chose fishermen and mechanics to be the first ministers of the new testament. Their error however, as happens in almost every case of bad reasoning, consists in comparing things which do not resemble. It is true that our Saviour in the first instance, chose mechanic's and fishermen,

to publish the gospel: but to say nothing of the advantages which these men derived from his personal instructions and example, for upwards of three years; when he sent them into the world, he endowed them with miraculous qualifications; he enabled them to perform miracles, to speak all languages that were necessary, and by a supernatural inspiration, instructed them what they ought to speak. ‘But when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in the same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.’* Here now, were men, endowed with every qualification, that can be conceived of, or supposed necessary for the purpose. The gift of miracles which arrested the attention and carried conviction to the consciences of the world—the gift of tongues which contributed to the same end, and also furnished them with an opportunity of communicating the treasures of the gospel to all nations—and the spirit of inspiration, which enabled them to give the most appropriate and salutary instructions, on every occasion. I should think, if any thing can be inferred from our Saviour’s example in this case, taking the whole of it together, it would be that a minister of Christ, ought to possess all qualifications necessary for convincing and instructing the world.

But those with whom we contend, will suppose that by possessing real religion, and being taught in the school of Christ, they obtain all the knowledge and qualifications which are necessary. In reply to this, I will readily admit that religion is the best preparative, for understanding the word of God, and I have no doubt the divine Spirit, conspiring with the use of means, greatly assists a pious minister in his studies. But distinct from the qualifications which grace may confer, there are others absolutely necessary, and which may be acquired

* *Matth. x. 19...20.*

by a course of human means. It will, no doubt be admitted, as of the first importance, that a gospel minister should have a correct knowledge of the holy scriptures, for without this he is no better than the blind leading the blind. But to understand the holy scriptures, we should be acquainted with them, in the original languages, we should be acquainted with the history of those customs, and events, in the midst of which the inspired penman wrote, and to which they frequently allude; we should be versed in literary science, so as to understand the different modes of writing—the different phrases and figures with which all compositions abound, and the rules of interpretation, to which all writings human or divine, must be subjected, without some knowledge of this kind we shall not be qualified even to follow a good Commentator or the scriptures, or to form any opinion for ourselves. But how is this knowledge to be obtained? It may as already said be obtained by human means, or it might be conferred by the extraordinary inspiration of the divine Spirit. But those who neglect the natural means, and pretend that divine teaching gives them all necessary knowledge, are pretending to an inspiration which supercedes the use of means, and is therefore very distinct from the common operations of grace; for common grace does not supercede means, but encourages and assists in the use of them. But when any one makes pretensions of this kind, he ought to support them by miracles, or some supernatara evidences. The teaching of which he speaks is a secret miracle, and amounts to something like that inspiration which the apostles possessed, and if it be of this kind it needs a publick miracle to make it credible. All pretending therefore that we are taught by the divine Spirit what things we ought to learn, as others learn them, should be rejected in the present day, as self-righteous presumptious: and if any people give credit to such pretensions, they are manifestly in the high road of error and delusion: and what is worse, they put themselves under the influence of a delusion, which cannot be corrected or reasoned down because they do not profess to be led by reason, or

evidence, or scripture, but by the unsupported assertions of a fellow creature. It perhaps would be well to recollect, that the plain line of distinction between impostures, and the real messengers of heaven, has been pretty much the same in every age. An impostor never proves his assertions. Mahomet had his secret miracles and inspirations, but he did not pretend to confirm them by any publick miracles; and modern imposters, have their illumination and teachings for which they can give no evidence but their own assertion. On the other hand the real messengers of grace always deal with mankind as with reasonable creatures; when they introduced a divine revelation into the world at first they confirmed it by sufficient and undeniable miracles, and since the age of miracles has ceased they require the belief of nothing but what can be proved from a revelation sufficiently authenticated. These observations will, I trust, be sufficient to shew that the improvement or knowledge necessary for the ministerial office are not to be expected in a supernatural way, and therefore that a course of scientific education is absolutely necessary. But let it be remembered, that although all knowledge may be useful to a clergyman, his principal attention should be turned to the subject of divinity. His business is to understand and teach the doctrines of the word of God, and every man ought to be better acquainted with what belongs immediately to his own profession, than with any thing else. I have now taken a brief view of the principal things necessary to qualify a man for preaching the gospel. What I have mentioned are real and cordial religion, a prudent and upright moral deportment, a good degree of the assurance of faith, a fervent zeal for glorifying God in the gospel of his Son, and a mind sufficiently improved with useful knowledge. These things taken together and connected with a favorable train of providences, constitute what may be termed a divine call to the ministerial office. They are very much mistaken, who suppose a ministerial call to consist in blind impulses

or impressions, of which a person can give no rational account, and which have no relation to his fitness for the work. A ministerial call comprehends all the necessary qualifications for the office, both human and divine. And a ministerial call without ministerial qualifications, is the greatest absurdity in the world.

III. In the third place we were to consider, *the duties which the ministerial office imposes.* On this part of the subject, as well as upon every other part of it, I think it necessary to consult brevity. The subject itself is very extensive, and if every thing were to be said which might be said, it would make a volume rather than a sermon. I shall make a few remarks on the part of the subject now before us as it respects example, instruction, and discipline.

1. It is incumbent on a minister to exhibit a good example, this is in fact the duty of all christians, the eyes of the world are upon them; they are a city set on a hill; and indeed the opinions mankind in general form of religion, is more influenced by the example of the church than by any thing else. But a good example on the part of a minister is more particularly requisite, as his station in the church is more conspicuous, and their conduct more closely watched. There is a strong disposition in the people of the world to justify their behaviour, and even their vices, by the mistakes of clergy. If they can find any thing in the conduct of a minister, which bears even a distant resemblance to their own faults, they sometimes lay hold of it with avidity, and circulate it with exaggeration. Hence the necessity of avoiding even the appearance of evil, that if possible, no ground may be given for injuring the christian cause. A minister in his deportment, should avoid every thing light or foppish; in his intercourse with the world, whatever favors of duplicity or over-reaching, and in what relates to religion he should always be solemn and sincere. His whole conversation should be seasoned with piety, and the gravity of his character always supported. There is a wonderful delicacy in the character of a clergyman; I

have known men celebrated through life and after death, for their virtuous behaviour, who were addicted to a number of vices, any one of which, would have ruined the influence of a clergyman, and covered him with disgrace for years, perhaps for life. This fact it is true, is for the honor of religion, as it shews the superior purity, expected of those who make a distinguished profession of it, but it shews at the same time, with how much caution a minister ought to act. Perhaps the exhibiting of a proper example is the most difficult, and at the same time the most important of a minister's duties; it gives weight to every thing he does, and without it all his labors will loose their efficacy. I shall give two general directions to assist in the accomplishment of this all important purpose. The first is, to reflect much on the great object of our mission. A minister stands between the living and the dead; his labors are directed to the salvation of sinners, and he must soon give an account of his stewardship to the Judge of all the earth. Let him familiarize these considerations to his mind, and they will form the best guard on his conduct. In the second place, he ought to beware of what some would term little faults. A great many little things, have a strong influence on the character; and it is oftener by these than by gross misdemeanors, that his respectability and usefulness is impaired.

2 I shall next speak of the duty of instruction. This is comprehended in a great measure, though not entirely, in preaching the word of God. The danger of unfaithful preaching is perhaps no where more strongly painted than in the language of Ezekiel; 'So thou O Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me... When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand... Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked

of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.*

One of the great ends of preaching is to convince the careless. This requires plain, honest, and sincere dealing.—Plain, honest, and affectionate statements should be given them of the guilt and danger of sin, and perhaps generally conveyed in the language of scripture. Nothing should be kept back through the fear of man or the desire of popularity, and yet rash or coarse expressions, calculated to give unnecessary offence, should be carefully avoided. There may be an honest policy in preaching the gospel of Christ—the wisdom of the serpent, and the harmlessness of the dove. There are certain avenues which more surely reach the heart; and the man who understands human nature, may lay hold of these with propriety, or rather it is his duty to do it. The best rule on this subject, is to feel a strong desire for the salvation of those to whom we speak; this will convert all our knowledge into the proper channel, and frequently communicates an instinctive something to our address, which is most likely to be accompanied with the divine blessing. A minister may sometimes feel a temptation to expose the vices of his enemies, for his own gratification, and that under the appearance of declaring the truth with faithfulness: but such conduct would be very wicked, and perhaps the motives of it would often be detected—Sincerity has a stamp peculiar to itself, which can hardly ever be counterfeited successfully.

Another great end of preaching, is to direct the awakened sinner. When a sinner is once awakened, the moments are precious and critical, and none of them should be lost. The conscience labouring under a sense of guilt, will seek for rest, and often finds it where it should not. Every effort should now be employed to guard the sinner from falling back into unbelief—from resting on a false hope, or from settling on any thing short of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some seem to act upon

* *Ezek. xxxiii. 7...8...9.*

the belief that when convictions is once begun, we may safely trust the work to God himself. It is certainly true, that all our preaching on this, and every other subject, will be unavailing, without the superintending agency of the divine Spirit. But the divine Spirit co-operates with means, and although skilful instruction may be frequently baffled, it is no doubt frequently the essential means of salvation.

The edification of Christians, is also an important end of preaching. It is true, persons may be very ignorant when they become Christians, but is far from desirable that they should continue so. It was indeed once thought that ignorance was the mother of devotion; but the fact is, knowledge is necessary to give piety its true direction, and unfold the christian character to advantage. Religion without knowledge, either degenerates into thoughtlessness, or blind zeal. I hope, indeed, the truly pious will always have light enough to keep them back from the worst excesses of fanaticism; but they may do much injury to the christian cause. On the other hand, if all the churches of Christ were properly instructed in the doctrines of grace, and all the various branches of duty, it would wipe off much imperfection from the christian character; and there would be less of that stumbling which hardens the wicked, grieves the judicious christian, and mars the beauty of the church. For this great purpose, sermons ought to be instructive; they ought clearly to unfold these doctrines of the gospel, more immediately connected with repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; these doctrines promote humility, tenderness of conscience, and lead to the genuine and extensive reformation of the human heart. On certain occasions too, it will be the duty of a minister to defend the christian system in general, or to defend particular doctrines, and refute particular errors, and he should always be ready to improve unusual dispensations of divine providence. But as already said, preaching does not comprehend all the instruction a minister should com-

municate. He should make his conduct and conversation instructive, he should visit the sick, and take every opportunity of making his people wiser and better.

The next ministerial duty of which we shall speak, is discipline. Our Saviour when he instituted his Church, formed it into a regular kingdom, appointed laws for its government; and officers for carrying those laws into effect. When, therefore, the discipline of the Church is properly administered, it carries with it, the force of a divine Government. The rules of discipline, and church government, are in the first place to be looked for in the holy scriptures, and whatever they establish on the subject, should be conscientiously observed.— But it is not to be expected that the scriptures should direct all minute cases, or furnish rules, which would literally apply to all occurrences. Whenever, therefore, the scriptures do not direct us, the government of the church must be conducted by those principles and rules, which are essential to the good order of all societies, or voluntary associations. Moral writers do not scruple to say, that those rules which are essential to order, carry with them a divine sanction; inasmuch, as God is the God of order. One of these rules, as it applies to the church, is, that in all matters, which fairly come before the members of the church, at large, a majority must govern. Another is, that all regulations not anti-scriptural, which are sanctioned by a majority of the church, should be religiously observed. These rules are not literally enjoined in scripture, and yet, as there could be no orderly society without them, I apprehend they carry with them, a divine authority. But according to these rules, it would seem that those of our communion, ought, in consistency, to acknowledge, that church government is rightly administered, when it is agreeable to our Standard or Constitution, which is our interpretation of the sacred scriptures, as they relate to this point. If these views of the subject were fairly attended to, it might prevent a great deal of trouble, with respect to ecclesiastical matters. It is a matter of regret and astonishment to see how church dif-

discipline is sometimes treated. There are people who enter the church as though all right belonged to them alone, they wish to trample on its regulations at pleasure, and complain loudly of the bigotry of those who would prevent their doing so. But if such people would consider it, all the bigotry lies at their own door. If a church be a voluntary association, what right have they to change the rules (for to violate with impunity is to change them) which the will of a majority have sanctioned. The principles of such conduct are tyranny, they have little reason, and less scripture, on their side, and those who inconsiderately act upon them, are acting a dangerous part. They are trifling with the rules of that church which our Saviour calls the kingdom of heaven, in a manner in which they would not trifle with the regulations of any petty society whatever. This leads me to observe, that many of those, who make the greatest out-cry, about what *they* call religious liberty, are in reality, among the greatest religious bigots in the world. The first object of their clamor, no doubt is, to free themselves from the power of others; but another as ardently desired, is, to get all power into their own hands. This observation, if I am not greatly mistaken, applies to all men who do not live quietly under the rules of that church, to which they have attached themselves, unless their consciences oblige them, either to attempt a reformation, or to withdraw: and when a good man attempts reformation, he will proceed in an orderly constitutional manner, or if he withdraws, he will withdraw quietly.

IV. In the fourth place, we shall consider *the treatment to which the ministerial office is entitled*. This part of the subject brings into view the reciprocal duties of the people to their clergy. My first observation here is, that some of the duties of the people are correlative with those of ministers, and supposed by them. Of this kind, particularly, is an attentive hearing of the gospel, and a submission to discipline. For

why is so much apparatus provided for publishing the gospel? why is the blood of him that dies unwarned required at the watchman's hand, if those who receive the warning are not bound to improve it? And we have already shewn the nature of discipline, and the reasonableness and necessity of submitting to it, so far as it is an ordinance of God.

I shall next observe, that a certain degree of respect is due to the ministerial office. If they be the ambassadors of Christ, this will confirm my observation, for the representatives of a prince, especially if they behave with propriety, are always treated with respect in proportion as their master is respected, The respect and friendship due to the office, will lead real christians to bear with the imperfections and failings of the men, for ministers are but men, and will always have their imperfections. The same principle, will teach them to be cautious in believing, or circulating unfavourable reports, respecting the clergy, on slight evidence, or of judging them harshly, where their motives are not known. Indeed this kind of forbearance, is due to all persons, but it is required more particularly for the clergy, as much may depend on their maintaining an upright character, and as they are at least, as liable to misrepresentation, as any other description of men. But we are not to infer from what I have said, that the clergy should be spared, when guilty of gross offences. In that case, the interest of religion requires, that they should be impartially dealt with. I do not hesitate to say, that gross offences in a clergyman, are more criminal than in others: they are bound to abstain from vice, by the same obligations, which bind others, and the sanctity of their office, should form an additional motive.

The respect due to their office, should procure for ministers a candid and patient hearing of what they deliver, as the counsel of God. It is not, indeed, the duty of the people to follow their instructions in a blind implicit manner; the word of God, is the test by which every opinion should be tried.

But on doubtful points, it seems not too much for the people to suppose, that their minister might be better qualified than they, to form an opinion, and this would produce a deference, which would make them cautious in rejecting what he might advance.

Another duty of the people, which it may seem delicate to mention, but which I find pointedly inculcated in the word of God, is that of giving their minister a worldly maintenance. I know some denominations make a great out-cry against the doctrine of supporting the clergy, and abuse, in the most illiberal terms, those who professedly receive any thing like a compensation for their ministerial labors. There is no person more opposed than I am to unfriendly bickerings between different denominations; but as the charge just mentioned, has been repeatedly made, and urged against us in the most acrimonious language, I think it neither indecent nor improper to shew its futility. My first enquiry shall be whether those who make this charge, are consistent with themselves, for the doctrine they advance on this subject, is I confess, not wholly inapplicable to their other principles. They require no expensive education to qualify their ministers, nor do they enjoin laborious study, and preparation to form their discourses for the public: if then their sermons cost them nothing, it seems not improper that they should give them to the people for nothing. But do they act thus? We do not find them laboring with their hands for subsistence. They derive their living from the altar. And, perhaps if all calculations were made, the sum necessary to support the appearance they make, would not fall so far below what is received by those against whom they so loudly exclaim. But the charge of mercenary principles must be tried by the sacrifices made to the interests of religion. And what have those secularians to boast of here? They frequently tell us they were "called from labor to labor in the vineyard of their Master." And probably a young man without funds, or any other resources than his own labor, would not find it easy to support himself more comfortably

than these persons do, by the emoluments of their office. But on the other hand, suppose a young man had acquired an education, sufficient to introduce him into any of the learned professions, I will not ask this congregation, whether such a man, would not make considerable sacrifices, by devoting himself to the gospel ministry. I have now taken, what I believe to be a candid view of this subject, and the result appears to be, that the persons whom I oppose, have charged mercenary motives on men, who sacrifice much more largely than they do, for the interests of christianity.

But I apprehend the honest inquirer, will find but few duties so fully and strongly inculcated, as that of supporting the gospel. The texts of scripture on this subject are pointed and numerous, both in the old and new testament. It is true, the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian church, that he had laboured, working with his hands rather than be burdensome to them; yet, as he acted only as a missionary among them—as the church at that time was not organized—and as he inculcates the duty of supporting the gospel, at the same time when he reminds them that they had not supported him, I am certain that nothing can be inferred from his example in that case, to invalidate the many precepts, which he himself as well as the other inspired writers, have given on this point.

As this duty is strongly and plainly inculcated in the word of God, so it is very reasonable in itself. If a man spends his youth and his patrimony in acquiring the qualifications of an office, and must afterwards employ a life of study, in discharging the duties of it; is it not reasonable when you call him to discharge this office for you, that you should compensate him for his labors? and more especially if you promise him a stated salary, and, what you yourselves, will pronounce a low and inadequate one, does not justice and duty require that you should fulfil your promise?

But it should also be recollected, that the interests of religion are deeply concerned in this matter. Place a man in penurious or embarrassed circumstances, overwhelm his mind

with the cares of providing for a rising family, and it is impossible that he should make that proficiency in knowledge, necessary for the respectable discharge of his ministerial duties. And, indeed, few things militate more against the propriety and respectability of congregations themselves, than repeated delinquencies, and accumulated arrearages. When I speak of respectability, I do not use the word merely with reference to the opinions of the world. That respectability, which arises from the conscientious performance of scriptural duty, is no doubt acceptable to God. And I will further remark, that the merit or demerit of ministers, will and must be reflected on the society of which they are members; for it belongs to the nature of all societies, and is a condition inseparable from their very existence, that if their principal officers become contemptible the society itself must appear so.

I shall now conclude this part of the subject with two observations. The first is, that what is engaged or stipulated for religious uses, is not more to be considered as a debt due to individual ministers, or persons, than as a debt due to God for the maintenance of his worship. He who gives us all, reclaims a part for his own glory. In this light the subject has been viewed in the Jewish church, and among the primitive christians; and on this ground it is, that God challenges the non-performance of it as a robbery committed against himself—*ye are cursed with a curse for ye have robbed me even this whole nation.* My next observation is, that no man will ever be the poorer for any prudent liberality in supporting the church of Christ. The scriptures abound with promises on this subject, and those promises can easily be fulfilled without a miracle. Every man has so much of his property, and so many of his affairs in a fluctuating state, that the providence which governs the whole world can easily compensate or punish us by insensible methods. But the rewards of this duty are not always insensible; the performance of it may lead to piety or morality in our families or neighborhoods, which will save us in a great

measure from the extravagancies of vice. And it is much easier to support the gospel, than to bear the tenth part of the expences which vice brings in her train.

I have now gone through the principal duties arising from the contract which is this day to be ratified. I feel it incumbent on me, to declare, that I have not been thus particular on account of any peculiar suspicion with respect to the minister and people immediately interested; but still when a contract is very important it is also important that the duties of it should be fully understood. The present contract is of the most interesting nature, and has for its object, the most important consequences in the world—nothing less than your present and everlasting felicity. ‘Behold’ says the Psalmist, ‘how good and pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity;’ with how much propriety may this be applied to a church, preserving its purity and peace at the same time—submitting to discipline—discharging its duties—and walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord. If there be any thing in this world which bears even a distant resemblance of heaven, it is such a church. And where we see a general and conscientious regard to all the precepts and institutions of Heaven, we have every reason to conclude, that a great measure of divine grace rests upon that people, and that multitudes are preparing for the fellowship of the saints in light. And shall we my brethren, entertain the hope that the solemnities of this day, will conduce to these important ends. Happy indeed will it be for this people, if they are faithfully instructed in the counsel of God, and if they receive the truth in the love of it—if they teach these things diligently to their children, and ‘bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.’ Then shall piety spread from heart to heart, and from family to family, and in the morning of the resurrection it shall be said, that this man and that man were born here. But the reverse of this picture would be gloomy and melancholy indeed. A people trampling on the word of

God—converting its ordinances into instruments of strife and contention, and whilst the light of divine truth shines around them, sinking into formality and forgetfulness of their Maker—to such a people, the gospel will become a favor of death unto death. My brethren, whether you are disposed to improve the dispensations of grace or not, it is our duty to declare that the kingdom of heaven has come nigh unto you. The banner of the gospel is now erected in this place—and the servant of the Lord, whom you will soon see consecrated to the sacred office, is like his divine master, set for the fall or rise of many among you.

ERRATA.

- Page 6, line 12, from top, for 'from' read *though*.
 7, 6 from bottom, for 'which' read *when*.
 8, 3, top, after 'appeared' insert *to him*.
 —, 5, bottom, after 'ought' insert *also*.
 10, 13, top, for *the* purpose, read *their* purpose.
 —, 1, bottom, for 'absolutely' read *absolutely*.
 11, 10, do. for 'sometheng' read *something*.
 12, 3, top, for impostures read *impostors*.
 —, 1, bottom, for ministrial read *ministerial*.
 13, 13, do. insert *the* before 'clergy.'
 —, 15, do. for 'their' read *his*.
 16, 10, top, after 'but' insert *it*.