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# SERMON

ON THE

**DUTIES OF A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL:**

PREACHED AT THE OPENING

OF THE

*PRESBYTERY OF HANOVER,*

**AT DEE ESS CHURCH;**

OCTOBER 11, 1809.

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**BY JOHN H. RICE, A. M.**

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PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE PRESBYTERY.

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————— The Pulpit (in the sober use  
Of its legitimate, peculiar powers)  
Must stand acknowledg'd, while the world shall stand,  
The most important and effectual guard,  
Support and ornament of Virtue's cause.

COWPER.

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1810.

TO THE

**REV. CONRAD SPEECE,**

**THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE**

IS INSCRIBED BY THE

**AUTHOR,**

*AS A MEMORIAL OF A FRIENDSHIP,*

COMMENCING IN CHILDHOOD,

**MATURED IN MANHOOD,**

CONTINUING THROUGH ALL THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE,

AND TO BE RENEWED, IT IS HOPED, AND PERPETUATED

*IN ETERNITY.*

A

# SERMON

ON THE

DUTIES OF A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.



COLOSSIANS IV. 17.

*Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*

**T**HE probability is, that the person here mentioned, was a minister of the Gospel. This appears from the charge here directed to be given to him : from his being called, in the Epistle to Philemon, Paul's fellow-soldier ; and from the most common usage of the Greek word, rendered ministry. The word is indeed, sometimes used to designate the office of deacon, but more frequently, that of \* minister of the Gospel. Such, then, we believe was Archippus. And this, it appears, was the import of the message to him : " Take heed that thou perform, with diligence, fidelity, and zeal, all the duties of the sacred office ; remembering that thou art accountable to the Lord for thy conduct in it ; that thou art encouraged to look for his assistance ; and bound, as much as in you lieth, to promote his glory." [See Scott on the text.]

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\* The following are instances of this usage. Acts i. 17. 25. vi. 4. xx. 24. Rom. xi. 13. xii. 7. It is not necessary to produce more.

The object of the discourse now about to be delivered, is to state the duties of a minister of the Gospel; and to present to the minds of my reverend brethren, motives to fidelity in that office which we have received of the Lord. As the subject, however, is very copious, many things must be touched very lightly; and many, perhaps, altogether omitted.

The duties of ministers of the Gospel may be arranged under two general heads. 1. Those which arise from their relation to each other as servants of Christ. 2. Those which arise from their relation to the Church in general.

A very few remarks will be made on the duties of the first class.

1. United by many endearing ties, and having many common interests, and trials, and dangers, we are bound to pray with peculiar fervour and importunity, one for another.

2. Having many perplexities and difficulties, of which they alone can have just views, who know them by experience, we are bound to give to each other, counsel and advice: taking care at the same time to avoid all arrogant pretensions to superiority in wisdom or intelligence.

3. As we are men of like passions with others, and of course liable to imperfection and error, it is our duty, on proper occasions, to give and to receive with fraternal affection, admonitions and reproofs: And,

4. It is our duty to rejoice in each others honour and success in the ministry; carefully avoiding all unholy emulation, all jealousy and envy; provoking one another only to love and to good works.

This would be the proper place to treat of the duties of ministers of the Gospel, as members of the judicatories of the Church. These are of a mixed nature, arising both from our relations to each other, and to the Church in general. This is a very interesting topic; but lest this discourse should be

drawn out to an unreasonable length, this point shall be left to some one more able than I am to do justice to it: and we shall proceed to the second class of duties incumbent on ministers of the Gospel, namely, those which result from their relations to the Church in general.

The duty which shall be first mentioned here is that of *preaching the word*. But because this has been the subject of a discourse, heretofore delivered at the opening of this Presbytery, \* I shall make only a few remarks upon it.

The Scriptures, although not written in systematic order, contain a harmonious system of divine truth, in which due weight is allowed to every doctrine, and the proper place assigned to every duty. Now, our teaching ought to be conformed to the Scriptures, both in doctrine and manner. Nothing is to be judged unimportant, which the wisdom of God has revealed. We ought, therefore, to attempt to give *whole*, and *connected* views of divine truth for the edification of our hearers. Otherwise, very imperfect notions of evangelical doctrines may be formed by those who attend on our ministrations. To illustrate what has been said, by an example. The necessity of the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the absolute dependance of man upon the grace of God, in the whole work of salvation, are very clearly taught in Scripture. But should a preacher exclusively insist upon these doctrines, incessantly repeating, "You can do nothing, absolutely nothing," is there not reason to apprehend, that they would be seized upon as excuses for the negligence and carelessness of the unbeliever, and the lukewarmness of the Christian? When Paul teaches that "It is God who worketh in us both to will and to do;" he also enjoins it on us, to "Work out our salvation with fear and trembling." So also, when we teach the dependance of man upon God, we ought to urge the ne-

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\* By the Rev. Matthew Lyle.

cessity of diligence and activity in the use of the means appointed by God for the attainment of his blessing. Again, nothing is more certain than that external performances, without the heart, are mere mockery in the sight of God. But should we, deeply impressed with this truth, insist only upon what has been termed *inward* religion, as distinguished from *practical*, might not our hearers learn to substitute *feelings* and *frames*, in place of all the duties of religion? And, instead of cultivating the active benevolence, and practising the sublime virtues of Christianity, would they not use every effort to excite those feelings which they had been taught to consider essential to salvation. These instances may exemplify the remarks which have been made, and show the necessity of exhibiting to our hearers the whole system of truth contained in the Gospel. The partial, and exclusive method of preaching here censured, may not only give perverted views of religion, and thus injure the Church; but by inducing a suspicion of poverty of intellect, and scantiness of information in us, may lessen our dignity, and thus hinder our usefulness among *those that are without*. “Let no man despise thee,” said the Apostle Paul to a young preacher ordained by himself. But while we endeavour to avoid that contempt which intellectual poverty produces; let us not, (a common error with men of more genius than piety) affect the characters of fine, philosophical preachers: they are often little better than baptized deists—but let us, “not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but “in demonstration of the Spirit, and with power,” preach the whole truths of the word of God.

2. Another duty appertaining to the pastoral office, is the enacting of laws for the government of the Church of Christ \*. Some may, perhaps, be startled at this assertion. Many indeed, receive it as a

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\* It is not meant that this power is committed exclusively to pastors. In our Confession of Faith, the people, by their representatives, are associated with the ministers, in this important business

maxim that Christ has, either by himself, or his apostles, established every rule necessary for the government of the Church; and of course, that it is the height of presumption, to think of legislating for this purpose. The great Head of the church certainly did every thing expedient in the circumstances then existing. In the government of such a society as the Christian Church, spread over half the globe, and placed in an undefinable variety of circumstances, it would be impossible, in such a volume as the New Testament, to comprise rules to suit every case which might occur. All, therefore, that could be done, was to prescribe a sufficient number of general rules, the application of which to particular cases, must be directed by other rules less general; arising out of the circumstances, the habits, and manners of the people; or at least, modified by them. And whatever objections have been raised against Confessions of Faith, and Constitutions or forms of Church Government, there has never been a church without them, either written, or established by usage, and handed down by tradition from one age to another. Now the power of enacting these laws, is, in part at least, entrusted to the bishops of the Church. But the utmost caution is necessary, lest we transcend the powers committed to us. The claim to the vicegerency of Christ upon earth, is one of those assumptions, from which it is hoped that the world is now freed for ever. But power, whether ecclesiastical or civil, is always assuming. We ought then, carefully to study the general maxims given by the Lord Jesus, for the regulation and controul of the officers of his church.

One of the most important of these maxims is contained in the declaration of our Lord when he stood before Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world." What incalculable mischief would have been prevented, had the import of this single declaration been always duly regarded! The religion of the meek and benevolent Saviour, was not designed

to be an engine of state ; an instrument of erecting a despotism to controul the consciences of men ; to crush every manly independent feeling of the soul, and extinguish every spark of liberty. I know, brethren, that I speak the sentiments, both of you who are present, and of our Church in general. We want no blending of Church and State ; no establishments ; no grand dignitaries of the hierarchy, clothed in the pomp and splendour of the world.

Another maxim in ecclesiastical jurisprudence, though not expressly mentioned, yet clearly resulting from the one just considered is, that the censures of the Church shall create no temporal disabilities. In many countries, *called Christian*, excommunication has deprived the citizen of his most valuable rights. But this is not a doctrine of our Church. We are not a society of Jesuits : we have no secret articles of faith, to be executed, when some deep, subtil contrivance shall have enabled us to procure an establishment of presbyterianism. These are the dreams of the weak, or the malicious suggestions of the designing. We claim no power but that which is claimed, and exercised by every society in existence ; namely, the power of admonishing and reproving disorderly members ; and, in cases of obstinacy, of declaring that we will no longer hold communion with the offender. In other words, we claim the power of declaring on what terms we will consider any man a member of our voluntary association. It is one of our fundamental maxims, that authority is not given for destruction, but for edification. Discipline is, therefore, to be exercised with caution and tenderness. An excommunicated person is not to be deemed an outlaw, or treated as an enemy ; but to be admonished as a brother.

Permit me here to remark, that in addition to these limitations, our constitution has placed a guard against the encroachments of ecclesiastical power, by associating laymen with the clergy, in the government of the church. It would be very inconve-

nient, and in many cases quite unsuitable for the whole Church to take cognizance of a case of discipline. Lay-elders are, therefore, chosen to represent the people, and manage their affairs. Now, according to our Constitution, in all the higher judicatures of the Church, there may be as many lay-elders as clergymen; and in the church session, where most processes are instituted, and finally decided, laymen always constitute the majority. It will not be improper to remark that this form of ecclesiastical polity, very happily corresponds with the form of civil government under which we live; and is well calculated to inspire men with a predilection for republican institutions. \*—The motive for introducing these remarks, it is hoped, will be duly appreciated.

3. A third part of ministerial duty may be expressed in the charge of Paul to one of his disciples. “That which thou hast received, commit unto faithful men, able also to teach others.” This is a matter of the utmost importance. The good of the state, and the prosperity of the Church, require us to be faithful in the discharge of this duty.—But what idea are we to form of a faithful and able preacher of the Gospel? Let us in few words attempt to delineate the character: A faithful minister of Christ, then, is one who, with a full belief of the word of God, and deeply impressed with its important truths; with a heart glowing with love to God and benevolence to man, and animated by the very Spirit of Jesus, declares the whole counsel of God; a man who “fearing God, and knowing no other fear,” reproveth and rebukes, with all authority, the rich as well as the poor sinner; the high as well as the low; but whose chief delight is to administer to the humble and contrite, the consolations of the Gospel, and “in terms as sweet as angels use,” to whisper peace to the despairing sinner. A faithful minister will,

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\* Hume, in one of his Essays, makes a remark to this effect, that a prince would never choose Presbyterianism to be the established religion of his country.

like the good shepherd, feed the flock ; deal gently with the weak, encourage the timid, and reclaim the wanderer ; he will comfort the afflicted, instruct the ignorant, and assist the poor and needy. He will, like an angel of peace, enter the abodes of want and sorrow, pouring the “oil and wine” of consolation into the wounded heart of the widow, and drying up the tears of the orphan : in a word, he is ready to make any sacrifice, to forego any worldly pleasure, to endure any labour, and to expose himself to any danger, for the good of man, and the glory of his Saviour\*.—But he must be able to teach others, as well as be faithful. An able teacher of religion has such acquaintance with ancient languages, history, laws and customs, that he can justly interpret the volume from which he draws his instructions ; he has a comprehensive view of the doctrines of the Bible, and has experienced their efficacy ; he is acquainted with the enemies of the Church, their forms of attack, and the most successful method of repelling their assaults. In a word, he is a man of extensive knowledge, yet not vain : a man of taste, yet not fastidious : a man of study, yet not a recluse : a man of deep thought, yet plain and simple in his mode of teaching. Thus, furnished for every good work, with zeal tempered by knowledge ; and knowledge, sanctified to the noblest purposes, the faithful and able teacher of the New Testament, exhibits to his hearers the perfections of God, the nature of his government, the sanctions of his law, the promises of his mercy, and all the awful, and all the affecting truths of the Gospel. Time and its vanities ; eternity and its important reality ; the joys of heaven and the horrors of hell ; the astonishing love of God to man, and the duty of man to his God, are the themes on which he dwells with peculiar earnestness, and with affectionate vehemence, presses on the atten-

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\* Here again the author refers his readers to a sermon on ministerial fidelity, preached at the opening of the Presbytery, by the Rev. Conrad Speece.

tion of his hearers.—But let us proceed to the consideration of the position a little while ago laid down—that the *good of the state, and the prosperity of the church* require us to “commit that which we have received, to faithful men, able also to teach others.”

In every state there will be, and there must be religion. Without it, human society cannot exist. The wise men among the heathen maintained this doctrine \*. Indeed, man by the very constitution of his nature, is a religious creature. His weakness, and his wants make religion absolutely necessary, and no efforts have been able to expel from the human heart all regard to the Deity. The experiments upon human nature, which have been made in our own age, are sufficient to convince us that religion is the great bond of human society ; the law of attraction in the moral world. And, as in the material universe, should an act of almighty power annihilate that law of attraction which alike binds together atoms and worlds, all would be

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A dark  
Illimitable ocean, without bound,  
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height  
And time and place are lost ;

an “ eternal anarchy ; a universal hubbub wild ;” so, should religion be destroyed, all would be desolation, and misery, and ruin in the moral world. Even hope, “ the last comfort of the wretched” would forsake the earth ; the gloom of everlasting despair would envelope the human race, and the deepest colouring of eternal darkness would overspread the face of nature. Religion is necessary : and the only question is, Shall we have the true religion or a false one ?—the religion which teaches man all that he ought to perform in all the relations of life ; or that, which takes away in a great degree, the sanctions of virtue ; and satisfies the conscience by the performance

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\* Let one speak for all. “ Pietate adversus Deas sublata, fides etiam, et societas humani generis, et excellentissima virtus justitia tollitur.

of some eternal ceremony, or the endurance of some useless penance? These questions admit of no discussion: nor does it now require any proof, that unadulterated christianity is the religion that is suited to the nature, and adapted to the wants of man. But we know that even Christianity has been perverted to the most wretched purposes. We know too, that the character of, at least a majority of professors, is determined very much by that of their teachers; that the very feelings and sentiments of the people are moulded and directed by their spiritual guides. Clearly then, it is important that ministers of the Gospel should be faithful men, able also to teach others. Examples, which the recollection of this audience renders it unnecessary for me to produce, are not wanting in the history of the Church and the world, to prove the truth of these remarks. But let us, from this general view of the subject, descend to one or two particulars, to show the usefulness of faithful and able preachers to society.

1. They are useful in promoting a sound and sober morality. They neither detail a system, patched up of worn out scraps of heathen ethics, and shreds of Gospel precepts, nor do they make all religion to consist in high flights of feeling; but while they teach the faith of Christ, they show its inseparable connexion with good works, and urge their hearers to "let their conversation be as becometh the Gospel." The effect of this kind of preaching, (it has been ascertained by experience) is to make the people just, sober, temperate, charitable, public spirited, and obedient to the laws of the land.

2. They are useful in enlightening the minds of the people. The discussions into which they enter, on the foundation of morals, the distinction between right and wrong, the various duties incumbent on men, and other topics of this kind, serve as so many lectures on the most important philosophy in the world. And it is not possible that the people should attend to these lectures without gaining improve-

ment much more valuable than any to be acquired in the schools of Philosophy. The cheapest and the easiest way in the world to make men good citizens of a state, like ours, where the best interests of the people depend upon their knowledge, is to furnish them with pastors of enlarged minds, of extensive views of religious truth, and of understandings imbued with the spirit of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

3. They are useful in refining the taste, and purifying the feelings of man. The Scriptures are full of grandeur and sublimity ; of lively imagery, of impressive narrative, of affecting sentiment. Let me here introduce the testimony of the justly celebrated Sir William Jones, on this subject. “ I have carefully and regularly perused these holy Scriptures ; and am of opinion that the volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence than can be collected from all other books, in whatever language they may have been written \* !” The truths of Scripture exhibited in their native simplicity and dignity, are wonderfully calculated to seize upon the affections, to elevate the soul, to soften the rugged temper of man, to give a fine cast to his feelings, to raise us above the meanness of sensual indulgences, and prepare us for an intercourse of benevolence and pleasure with our fellow men. Thus the religion of Jesus Christ, the best gift of God to man, while it prepares us for heaven, of all things best fits us for the present state of existence. How important to society is it, that we commit the precious trust that we have received to able and faithful men ! But let it be understood that these remarks are made solely for the regulation of ministers of the Gospel in the discharge of a very important duty. We want no legislative prescription of ministerial qualifications. Let not the civil powers interfere with the rights of conscience. Only let the people duly appreciate the value of faithful and able

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\* Vide his Life, by Lord Teignmouth, page 374. See also page 375.

preachers, and let them disrelish every thing in religion that is destitute of sound reasoning, and sober sense.

But it was said that, not only the good of the state, but the prosperity of the Church required of us diligence and care in the discharge of the duty under consideration. Let us consider this matter a little.

The Church is prosperous, when its members live worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called; when numbers are added to it of such as shall be saved; and when it is guarded against error, and protected from enemies. It is acknowledged that the prosperity, and even the existence, of the Church, depends upon the grace of God. But the use of means is according to the appointment of Heaven; and surely the means should be adapted to the end which is to be attained. With this remark, we proceed to the consideration of the particulars in which the prosperity of the Church has been said to consist.

1. The Church is prosperous, when its members live worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. Now, that they may do this, it is necessary that they understand the doctrine of Christ. We know that we are sanctified by the knowledge of the truth. But men, occupied for the most part in the busy concerns of life, and having but little time for reading and reflection, cannot, by their own exertions, acquire that knowledge of the truth which is necessary: hence the reason of the establishment of a Gospel ministry; and hence, very clearly, the necessity of faithful, and able preachers of the Gospel.

We may arrive at the same conclusion in another way. The apostle, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, carefully prescribed the qualifications of \* bishops of the Church. They must be “apt to teach, †” “not novices ‡;” they must give attendance to reading, and to meditation; they must be able to con-

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\* Every Minister of the Gospel is a bishop.

† 1 Tim. iii. 4.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 6.

vince gainsayers, and stop the mouths of vain talkers ; and other qualifications, which may be seen in the epistles to Timothy and Titus. Now does it require proof, that these qualifications are, in part at least, intended for the edification of Christians, and their growth in grace and divine knowledge ? surely not. The good of the Church then demands of us faithful and able men, to instruct the people in righteousness.

2. The Church is prosperous when numbers are added to it of such as shall be saved. The mere addition of numbers is, indeed, a very fallacious principle upon which to calculate. At least it is no certain evidence that the Church flourishes. If the doctrines taught are suited to the corrupt taste of man ; if the door of admittance is made wide, then indeed, converts may flock in on all sides, and there may be a great appearance of prosperity, when in fact, there is a sad decline ; as there is, sometimes, on the human countenance, a glow like that of health, when the vital organs are consuming by some incurable disease. I am afraid that the Church has no reason to boast of converts such as these. But when men, impressed with solemn views of divine truth, enlightened to understand the glorious scheme of redemption, feeling their obligations to God, and their neighbour, and determined by the grace of God to “ add to their  
“ faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to know-  
“ ledge temperance, and to temperance brotherly  
“ kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity :” when men such as these are added to the Church, the friends of Zion have abundant reason to rejoice. The necessity of faithful and able teachers to win converts such as these is too obvious to be insisted on. I shall only remark, that as the religion of Christ is a reasonable service, it seems strange indeed, that men should ever have supposed, that methods utterly repugnant to all reason, are, of all others, best calculated to persuade men to enter this service !

3. But again, the Church is prosperous when it is guarded against error. A part of our discipline, while in this state of probation is, *the search of truth*, and the Scriptures are wisely so contrived, as to put to trial, to exercise, and strengthen our love of truth, as temptations from the world are intended to call into exercise our temperance, fortitude, and other christian virtues. Now as man is surrounded by objects which strike strongly on the senses, and solicit the passions, it is easy to see that he is liable to error. A glance at the different sects which have existed, and the heresies which have prevailed in the Church will abundantly confirm' this remark. Who does not see then that the good of the Church requires teachers of minds disciplined to the love of truth, ardent in its pursuit, accustomed to compare, and accurately to distinguish, able to separate truth from falsehood ; and to combat error ?

4. But the Church is, in the last place, prosperous, when it is protected against enemies.—The Church has, and always had enemies. It has been thus far preserved, in the midst of every danger by the blessing of God on human exertions. We all can remember, when the spirit of infidelity came raging from the regions of darkness, armed in all his terrors, and surrounded by all his aids, by sarcasm, and buffoonery and impudence, and false philosophy, and a host beside. The onset was fierce ; the combat continued long. Hell seemed to have poured forth all its legions for the destruction of Christianity. What then would have been the fate of the ark of God, had there not stood ready, men well trained for the combat, from whose armour of heavenly proof, the weapons of the enemy fell pointless to the ground ? What could an illiterate novice have done, against the lively satire of Voltaire, the sly insinuations of Gibbon, and the virulent malignity of Paine ? But, God be thanked ! the doctrines of the cross have triumphed : the enemy has been defeated. But the danger is not yet over. The foe is subtle. And when you suppose

him to be driven from the field, he varies the form of attack, and a new assault, as formidable as any before it, is made in a new direction. The Adversary sometimes appears as an open foe, sometimes as a pretended friend: often he is found in the very Church, dressed in the garb of God's people, attempting that, by treachery and poison, which he could not accomplish by open violence. The minister of the Gospel ought to be furnished with the sword of Michael, and the spear of Ithuriel to combat such a foe.

The reign of infidelity is just past. The Arian and Socinian heresies are now gaining ground; and the champions of the Church will have to guard against them. But these pestilent errors will, probably, creep in chiefly among those who make some pretensions to learning, and who, finding the fortresses of Atheism and Deism battered down, will fly to these refuges of pride and false philosophy. But on the opposite side, we shall have to guard against the deadly influence of a frigid and heathenish morality, the licentiousness of Antinomianism, the pride of self-righteousness, and the wild enthusiasm, and extravagance of ignorance. How numerous, and how various are the foes of the Church! Ministers of the Gospel, while they feel all the benevolence of their Master, ought also to be like the double flaming sword which turned every way, and guarded every avenue to the tree of life. Great Head of the Church! make thy servants zealous and courageous, vigilant and prudent; and add to their numbers many faithful and able champions of the truth.

From the view which has been taken of this subject it is concluded that the good of the state, and the prosperity of the Church require us to be cautious upon whom we lay our hands. We are most solemnly bound to commit that which we have received to faithful men, able also to teach others. Our duty extends farther. We ought, by every lawful exertion, to attempt to encrease the number of able and

faithful preachers. This is indeed a work of difficulty. The Church has no worldly honours or emoluments to bestow. They who enter the ministry must forego their hopes of wealth, of ease, and of fame; and calculate upon privations, and difficulties. This situation of affairs gives a considerable assurance of purity of motive, in those who do devote themselves to the ministry: but it has a powerful effect in preventing men of genius and learning engaging in the work. How shall the wants of the Church be supplied? Only one plan promises success. It is that of educating poor and pious youth for the ministry. There are in this country young men, who, although poor in this world's goods, are endowed with higher gifts than those of fortune; young men, who have received from their Creator, minds full of vigour and ardour, and whose hearts have been enriched by divine grace. These, if left without assistance, will languish in obscurity, like the wild flower, wasting its sweetness in the desert; but if duly cultivated, they will flourish in the garden of the Lord. Let us then with the utmost care and attention, foster the infant institution \*, established by us for the education of young men of piety and genius for the ministry. Let the wants of the Church, and the cry of perishing souls, stimulate us to the most rigorous exertions in this holy work. Let us make repeated and importunate calls on the pious and benevolent, for their assistance, and heaven may prosper us even beyond our hopes.

4. It is the duty of ministers of the Gospel to be well acquainted with the state of the Church; particularly that part of it, in which they are called to labour. Each minister ought if possible, to know the wants of every individual in his congregation, that from the treasures of the Gospel he may draw supplies suited to the exigencies of every case.

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\* A small sum of money, the beginning of a Theological School, has been vested in the board of Trustees of Hampden-Sidney College; and the Rev. Moses Hoge, President of the College, has been elected Professor of Theology.—I wish that I were at liberty to speak of this gentleman as he deserves—but his modesty is as great as his merit.

We ought also to understand the controversies of the day, to be acquainted with the errors, and heresies which prevail, that we may guard our flocks against the dangers to which they are exposed.

But not to dwell on these particulars, it will be remarked, that the Church, can never perhaps, be so much separated from the world, but that the current of events, the prevailing maxims and customs, the complexion of civil affairs, and a great variety of circumstances, will influence the conduct of Christians, and affect the prosperity of the Church. Without any intention of dwelling a moment upon them, three causes which have powerful influence will be mentioned, the state of literature, of politics, and of wealth. In every age of the Church, the operation of these causes has been favourable or adverse to vital piety. But farther; it is well known to those acquainted with ecclesiastical history, that every age has *its particular cast*; its propensity to some evil course of action. The characteristic of one age is credulity; of another scepticism: of one, a contentious wrangling bigotry, and intolerance; of another, indiscriminating liberality of sentiment: of one, precision and austerity; of another, conformity to worldly customs and maxims. Sometimes the fashion is to build churches, and to found colleges, and in general to make sure of heaven by the pious use of money. And at other times, the only duty zealously performed by Christians, is the making provision for their households. Now it is our duty, to mark the character of the age in which we live, and to the utmost of our abilities, to oppose those vices which grow out of it. This is indeed a discouraging business. But nothing is to be despaired of, under the auspices of Christ.

What, let me ask, is the *character of the age* in which we live? Providence has crowned this nation with his favour. For many years a tide of wealth, with hardly an ebb, has flowed in upon us. Poverty and beggary are scarcely known in this happy land.

Now, has our inclination to do good kept pace with our ability? Have the interests of religion and literature, (more nearly allied than many suppose,) been zealously promoted; or while plenty flowed around us, have they been permitted to languish under the chilling influence of poverty? In a word, are liberality and public spirit our national characteristics; or does avarice, or avarice and luxury combined, swallow up every noble and generous sentiment? These are questions thrown out for examination. Let every man decide for himself.

If it be true, as some have asserted, that the love of gain is the ruling passion in this country, it is easy to see that religion, in all human probability, will not make any very great progress. Hardly any passion so effectually stops the ears against the voice of mercy, and hardens the heart against the influences of divine truth. How little is it to be expected, that he, who, intent only on the accumulation of wealth, every year extends his fields, and enlarges his barns, will regard that Gospel which requires him to deny himself, to take up his cross, and follow his Saviour. Alas, that men should renounce heaven for earth! that they should barter their souls for riches! Can we not by some means persuade them, that “should they gain the whole world and lose their own souls,” the loss would be unspeakable? Are the present dispensations of providence to our nation, designed to point out our duty, and assist us in the holy work? While we teach the Christian duty of making provision for dependants, by honest industry, are we not obliged to urge men to industry, and frugality, that they may have somewhat to give to him that needeth; and that they may have “substance” of which they may “impart to the Lord?” I know indeed that this is a very delicate subject; and that when we speak thus we are often suspected of selfish motives. But it ought to be understood that when we ask support of the people, it is not our wish to live inactive and luxurious lives; to riot in wealth,

and glitter in splendour ; BUT THAT WE MAY GIVE OUR UNDIVIDED TIME AND ATTENTION, OUR DAYS AND OUR NIGHTS, TO THE STUDIES AND ACTIVE DUTIES OF OUR PROFESSION \*.

4. Let us now proceed to the consideration of another ministerial duty, which loudly calls for our attention. It is that of superintending the moral and religious education of youth. The Christian religion, wherever it has had its due influence, has been the patron of learning. It is well known that those establishments in Europe, where learning has been preserved from age to age, owe their foundation to Christianity. Every seminary of any note in our own country has the same origin ; and I may add with equal truth and pleasure, that many of them are indebted for their establishment to our own Church. But the slander that the religion of Jesus asks or needs any support from ignorance, has been long ago refuted. Every body knows that the greatest names in philosophy are also to be found among the disciples of the cross. Our religion does not indeed require its professors to be men of literature, because it is intended for all ranks and classes of men, for the learned and ignorant, for the rude and the refined. But its influence both direct and indirect is to promote true learning. It was not, however, my intention to say even thus much, on this point. The *religious* and *moral* instruction of youth is the subject to which your attention is now called.

That this is a matter of the utmost importance, is clear from the numerous precepts in relation to it contained in Scripture. Heaven would not take pains to repeat in various forms a command which men might regard or neglect, as pleasure or caprice might prompt them.

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\* The author of this discourse wishes it to be understood as his opinion, that the support *promised* to preachers of our Church in this country is enough for the services usually rendered ; but that it would be greatly to the interest of Religion, if a full support could be given, and full ministerial service rendered.

The duty before us, claims our attention the more, because, all important as it is, and involving the best interests of the Church, it is, in this country, very greatly neglected. Some openly oppose the religious education of youth; others in a very direct manner discourage it; and even those who admit its necessity, seem very willing to remove the burden from themselves, and, as far as possible, lay it upon others.

Men who affect to be philosophers, openly oppose the religious education of youth. Their declamation about superstition and bigotry, and prejudice, and I know not what, will be past over with this single remark, that the readiest way in the world to make enthusiasts of their children, should they ever come under religious impressions, is to suffer them to grow up without religious instruction.

It surely will be admitted that the youthful mind ought to be stored with truth. *That* truth which is best calculated to restrain the passions and to regulate the moral conduct, is most valuable to the young as well as the old. The fundamental doctrines of Scripture are supported by the strongest evidence that the nature of the case admits. What proposition, for instance, can be more clearly proved than this? "*There is a God.*" What point in philosophy can be more clearly established, than the moral government of God? Can even the great doctrine of gravitation itself, be proved by the induction of more particulars, than the doctrine of human depravity? How many things do philosophers believe upon slighter evidence than Christians have for the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retribution? What doctrines are better calculated than these to restrain the evil passions, and regulate the conduct of youth? Why then should it be unphilosophical to imbue the youthful mind with religious truth? or, rather, why should they who call themselves philosophers, oppose it. Are they afraid that the truth should be known?

It may also be observed, that on the subject of religion the youthful mind cannot be kept in a state of indifference. It will either entertain reverence for God, and love of religious truth, or be filled with bitter prejudices against Christianity. Every day the character will be more decided for or against religion. Do the philosophists know this; and under the pretence of keeping the mind free from prejudice and bigotry, do they hope to make sure of their victims; to bind unsuspecting youth with the shackles of false philosophy, and drag them to the gloomy altars of Deism, or plunge them into the profound abyss of Atheism. It seems then, that hypocrisy is not exclusively confined to Christians!

But others, who do not openly oppose, in a very direct manner discourage the religious education of youth. It is said to be dangerous to bring up young persons in a religious way, because they are so apt to depend upon their morality for salvation: and it has been asserted, that it seems harder to produce conviction in the mind of a sober, decent, moral man, than in that of an outrageous profligate. As if the worse a man is the higher the probability of his becoming better. Again it is said that it seems expedient that a man should have gone *great lengths* in sin, because his conversion will be more remarkable, and he will have better evidence of its having taken place; as if a holy life were not the only satisfactory evidence of a genuine conversion.

But this is not all: even parents who admit the necessity of a religious education, in many cases seem to wish to ease themselves of the burdensome duty, and impose it upon others. The learning of the catechism with the schoolmaster, and repeating it to the minister, seems, in their opinion, to comprehend the whole course of religious instruction. If any thing more is to be done, "for their part they cannot see what it is; and wish the minister would come and do it."

The condition of youth is such as might be expected from the prevalence of these sentiments, and from this course of conduct. They are, to a great degree, giddy and light minded, profane and licentious, ignorant of religious doctrine, and unimpressed by divine truth. Indeed the prospect before us is gloomy. In some parts of the country, the old supporters of the church are, one after another, dropping into the grave, and very few, take their places.

Is the picture drawn in too dark colours, when the Church is likened to some stately building, which under the all-consuming influence of time, loses now one, and then another of its pillars, and trembles at every blast, and nods to its fall? We hope that it is. But yet we cannot conceal it from ourselves, that vice abounds; that a wide wasting, desolating torrent of iniquity is sweeping over our land; and that only here and there a solitary individual is to be seen throwing himself in the way, and with unequal strength, struggling against the deluge. We know too that while the Spirit of God visits other parts of the Church, we are left to barrenness and desolation. We see no roses budding and blossoming in this wilderness, no pools of water in these thirsty lands. Can nothing be done, my brethren, for the myriads of young persons among us, who are thronging the broad way that leadeth to destruction?

First of all, let us try what prayer can do. Let us cry mightily unto God for the effusion of his Spirit. Who knows what the Lord may do for his Church, if his people unite in fervent supplications to him. But we are not to depend entirely upon prayer. It is true that, situated as we are, we cannot do much in the way of superintending the religious education of youth. Confined at home by laborious occupations, we cannot visit the widely dispersed families of our respective charges, and communicate the necessary instructions to the young. We ought, however, to improve every opportunity of making family visits, and be careful to improve them to the best advantage.

In administering the ordinance of baptism, we have frequent opportunities of urging parents to be faithful to the souls of their children, to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In the administration of this holy sacrament, would it not be better, instead of spending so much time in vindicating our practice, to dwell upon the improvement that ought to be made of the ordinance? Baptismal seasons ought to be times of earnest prayer, of diligent self-examination, of solemn reflection even to those parents who are not immediately interested. Every thing connected with the religious education of youth is of importance. Religion never will prevail to great extent, until families become nurseries for the Church. The young must be trained up in the way in which they should go; they must be instructed in the doctrines, and taught to reverence the institutions of religion, before we can expect to see happy seasons in the Church. What it may please the benevolent God to do, we know not. We know, indeed, that mercy rejoiceth against judgment. *But when we are not using the means appointed by Heaven, for the attainment of any good, it is presumption to hope for it.*

5. Let me entreat the patience of this audience a few moments longer, while their attention is called to the state of public opinion and practice, in regard to the Sabbath. Were this holy institution abolished, in a very few ages hardly a vestige of religion would remain in the world; hardly a congregation would assemble to hear the word of life. It is an observation of a great master of wisdom, that what may be done at any time, is always left undone. Surrounded as we are by objects of sense, which continually press upon us, and solicit our attention, we should, perhaps, forget invisible things, if there were not stated times for us to withdraw from the world, and fix our thoughts on heaven. It is absolutely necessary that there be a Sabbath. In the best days of the Church, it has always been kept most holy. Ought not mi-

ministers of the Gospel, boldly to animadvert upon the notorious breaches of this holy day, so common in our country? Ought it not also to be enquired, whether Christians, living in a corrupt age, have not partaken of the corruption, and accommodated their practice, rather to the sentiments of the world than to the precepts of the Gospel. If this be the case, ought we not to set a better example, and raise our voices too against this crying sin?

A few words as to the motives to a diligent and faithful discharge of the duties of our station, and this long discourse will be closed.

The late awful dispensation of Providence \* obliges me to mention in the first place, the shortness of our time, and the uncertain duration of our ministry. While I speak, and you hear, the hour approaches, when we shall have to give an account of our stewardship. How precious ought time to be to a minister of Jesus! Not only his personal interests, but the interests of the Church, the welfare of souls, are connected with the manner in which he spends his time. For our own sake then, and for the sake of the Church, let us improve every moment as it passes, in the faithful discharge of the duties incumbent upon us.

The motive to diligence in the ministry which I shall next mention, arises from a consideration of the greatness of the work. If the truth has been stated in the preceding remarks, the most important interests of this world and of eternity, are promoted by the ministers of Jesus Christ. Important indeed is that office, upon the faithful discharge of which, depend good morals, good order in society, and every thing valuable to men upon earth, and the interests of eternity. How utterly inexcusable he who neglects concerns such as these! Should a man to whom the best

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\* Presbytery had appointed to meet for the purpose of ordaining Mr. Thomas W. Lumpkin, a young man of piety and genius, to the work of the Gospel-ministry. But it pleased God to remove him by death, before the meeting took place.

interests of his country are committed, ruin the nation by sloth and negligence, what execrations would load his memory ! But what endless curses will be heaped upon the head of the man whose infidelity and sloth ruin souls !

3. I shall suggest, as a motive to diligence, the greatness of the reward promised to the faithful minister. He shall receive the plaudit of the Judge ; “ Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into “ the joy of thy Lord ! ” Think you not, brethren, that his happiness will be great indeed, who partakes of the joy which the Saviour will feel, when he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied : when the ransomed of the Lord shall return to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy shall be on their heads ? O ! how delightful will it be, to join with those very souls, who, by our instrumentality, were rescued from the power of Satan, in singing the song of redeeming love ; to unite in the worship of heaven, with those whose worship we have directed upon earth ! To see those with whom we have sympathized in sorrow, and whose tears we have endeavoured to wipe away, filled with eternal joys, and exulting in raptures which never shall end ; to see the poor wanderers, whose steps we had endeavoured to guide through this world, admitted into the heavenly mansions, their foes vanquished, their fears dispelled, their faith changed into sight, and their hopes into full fruition ; and to shine among them, as the stars in the firmament of heaven for ever and ever ! This is the reward of the faithful minister of Jesus Christ.

In a word, all that is valuable in time, and all that is awful in eternity ; the ineffable horrors of hell, and the unspeakable joys of heaven combine to urge us to do the work of ministers with all diligence and fidelity. May God give us all needed grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.