

Causes of an Unsuccessful Ministry:

TWO

SERMONS,

ADDRESSED TO THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION IN THE

CITY OF ALBANY,

AUGUST 30, 1829;

THE SABBATH IMMEDIATELY SUCCEEDING THE AUTHOR'S
INDUCTION AS THEIR PASTOR.

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1829.

TO THE
Second Presbyterian Congregation in Albany,
THE
FOLLOWING DISCOURSES,
PREACHED FOR THEIR BENEFIT,
AND PUBLISHED BY THEIR REQUEST,
ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,
WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF GRATITUDE AND RESPECT,
AND EVERY WISH
FOR THEIR PRESENT AND ETERNAL HAPPINESS,
BY THEIR FRIEND AND PASTOR,
W. B. S.

SERMON.

HEBREWS IV. 2.

BUT THE WORD PREACHED, DID NOT PROFIT THEM.

THE preaching of the Gospel is an institution of God, designed to produce the most important results. It is the grand means which he has chosen to employ for carrying into accomplishment his purposes of mercy towards lost men ; and by which he designs ultimately to effect the complete renovation of the world. Nevertheless, it is certain that this great moral engine is wielded with various degrees of success ; and in some instances, it would seem, to human view, to operate almost in vain. In the passage just read, we have a fact stated in respect to the Jews who perished in the wilderness—the fact that “the word preached did not profit them ;” and who of us does not know, that though we have fallen upon days of brighter light, yet the days of unsuccessful preaching and unprofitable hearing have not passed away. There is many an individual, there is many a congregation, whose true history cannot be written, except the melancholy fact be detailed, that “the word preached did not profit them.”

If the fact be as now stated, it becomes a matter of deep interest to ascertain the causes of it. Whence that counteracting agency, by which divine truth loses its power over the consciences of men? Why is the field that seems blessed with the means of religious cultivation, so thinly overspread with spiritual verdure, or even given up to absolute barrenness? This might be an interesting inquiry at any time; but, if I mistake not, my friends, it is especially so to us, in the circumstances in which we are assembled this morning. I stand before you, for the first time, as your minister; and in the congregation before me, I recognize a company of immortal souls, for whom I am to watch as one that must give account. It is always prudent, in undertaking any important enterprise, to look forward, and see what obstacles lie in the way of its accomplishment; and the more important the enterprise, the more necessary the precaution. Is it not then eminently a matter of prudence, that you and I should pause here at the threshold of my ministry among you—a ministry which must tell deeply on the everlasting destinies both of you and me—and inquire what causes are in danger of operating to prevent its legitimate influence? I look forward to the judgment where every pastor must meet his flock, and I aspire to nothing less than the honor and the happiness of presenting every one of you perfect in Christ Jesus. I ask myself, I ask the God of counsel and wisdom, by what means can this high object be attained? What obstacles are to be removed or overcome, in order to its attainment?

The distinct object of the discourses of this day, then, is **TO ASSIGN SOME OF THE CAUSES OF THE IN-**

EFFICACY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY, AND ESPECIALLY OF A PREACHED GOSPEL; AND AS I PASS ALONG, TO SUGGEST SOME HINTS FOR THE PREVENTION OF THE EVIL CONTEMPLATED.

I wish here distinctly to premise that, in assigning the causes of an unsuccessful ministry, I do not overlook the sovereignty of God. Let it be remembered with reverence, that He has the hearts of all men in his hand, and turns them as the rivers of water are turned; and that whatever human causes may operate in the production of events, he directs and controls their operation. My object at this time, however, is to state those causes of the inefficacy of a preached gospel which lie within the range of human agency; and I shall consider them *as they are connected with the manner in which the duties of the ministry are performed, and the manner in which the privileges of the ministry are improved; in other words, as they have respect both to minister and people.*

In this morning's discourse, I shall confine myself to a consideration of those causes *which are connected with the character of the ministry—the preaching of the word, and the more private duties of the office.*

In respect to the former of these, viz. *the preaching of the word*, I observe,

1. That the gospel often fails of its efficacy, from the fact that *its leading truths are not exhibited with sufficient prominence.* I refer not here to that kind of preaching which altogether excludes the essential

doctrines of the gospel; which, instead of dealing with man as a sinner to be saved by the blood of atonement, amuses him with the reveries of a dreaming philosophy; because that would not come within the limits which my subject marks out: I am to give the reasons why the preaching of the *gospel* does not profit—not something which claims to be the gospel, but that which is really so; and hence I am limited to that kind of preaching which recognizes, at least, those truths which render Christianity a distinct religion. And the thought which I would here present is, that preaching often fails of its legitimate effect, because these truths, though occasionally exhibited, are kept too much in the back-ground. Let it be remembered that he who sanctifies the hearts of men, has chosen his own way of doing it; and that way is by the truth. ‘Sanctify them through thy truth,’ saith our Saviour in his intercessory prayer for his disciples; ‘thy word is truth.’ Just in proportion then to the distinctness with which the gospel, or the great truths which constitute the gospel, are preached, the christian minister has a right to expect that the purpose of his ministry will be answered in the sanctification of men. He who fails to give these truths their due prominence, uses, at best, but very inadequately, the means which God has put into his hands for accomplishing the design of the ministry: he is so far guilty of substituting his own devices for the appointment of Heaven; and surely it were rash to expect the divine blessing in even the partial disregard of divine authority.

Let that minister then who would be delivered from an unprofitable ministry, dwell much upon the

peculiar and most precious features of the gospel. Let the great doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ be in his preaching, as it is in the bible, the centre about which all other truths revolve. He must not be satisfied merely with alluding to this and other kindred truths, or with taking them for granted, but he must bring them out in all their fulness and glory, and he must hold them up in their various relations and bearings ; and if he fears the charge of repetition, let him ask himself whether Paul feared it, when he determined not to know any thing else in his ministry save Jesus Christ and him crucified. Let him do this, and he will find that he is indeed wielding the sword of the Spirit : there will be that in his preaching which will go home with a living energy to the conscience and heart ; and though it may be a stumbling-block to some, and foolishness with others, there will be a testimony in the edification of God's people, and the conversion of sinners, which all the wisdom of the world cannot gainsay, that it is the power of God.

2. A preached gospel often fails of its efficacy, from the fact that *its truths are not preached in their due proportion*. It sometimes happens to ministers as well as others, that they attach an undue relative importance to particular points in the christian system ; and they urge these, perhaps to the exclusion of others, equally or even more important. It certainly cannot be questioned that some truths in the gospel are far more essential than others : there are some, as we have already seen, which stand related to the rest, as a foundation to a superstructure ; but there is not one upon which a minister may dare to

place his finger and say, that it need have no place amongst the topics of public instruction. The rule which he should observe on this subject is, to preach every truth which the gospel contains, and to give to each one the same relative weight which God has given it in the inspired record. Suppose he adopt the principle that little good is to be expected from preaching the more alarming truths of the bible, on the ground that men must be gently attracted to a life of religion; or suppose, on the other hand, that he depend for success on the exhibition of these doctrines, to the exclusion, in a great degree, of all that is tender, and encouraging, and delightful, in the christian system; how obvious is it that, in either case, he arrays his own wisdom against the wisdom of the Highest. He practically decides, and that too in the face of divine authority, that a part, and an important part, of that scripture which is given by inspiration of God, is not profitable. Be it that some particular doctrine or doctrines may have had a greater influence than others in bringing *him* to repentance, or in advancing *his* sanctification, yet, inasmuch as the minds of men are differently constituted, he cannot be certain that some other truths may not be found of equal importance in the experience of others; and if he omit, either wholly or partially, so much as one, how does he know but that may be the very truth which might have been, with some one or more of his hearers, the incorruptible seed of the renewed nature. Let that minister, then, who would accomplish the greatest good by his ministry, see to it, not only that he preach the whole counsel of God, but that he attach to every part of it its proper re-

lative importance. Let him urge those things most frequently, and most strongly, which lie at the foundation of the gospel system; but let him not regard any thing as too unimportant for him to preach, which God has thought of sufficient importance for him to reveal.

3. A third reason why a preached gospel is often comparatively inefficacious, is, that *its truths are not exhibited in their proper connexion*. There are in the system of divine truth mutual relations and dependencies, which a minister cannot overlook, but at the expense of neutralizing, in a great degree, the influence of his instructions. Not one of all the doctrines of the gospel is to be considered as insulated, but each as making part of a perfect system; as deriving importance from the doctrines with which it is connected on the one hand, and as giving importance to the same doctrines on the other. Nay, there are some truths which are so essentially connected with others, that if you separate them, you not only prevent their legitimate influence, but you give them an influence the exact opposite of that which they were intended to exert. For instance, the doctrine of divine agency in our salvation, when viewed apart from the fact that man is a moral agent, degenerates into fatalism; and instead of constituting a motive to action, is fitted most effectually to discourage it. On the other hand, let the fact that man works out his own salvation, be separated from the fact that God works within him both to will and to do, and who does not see that the whole face of the gospel is changed, and the redemption of Christ becomes a

matter without meaning? It is a doctrine of the gospel that faith is the grand condition of salvation; but if you separate it from works, or consider it as a simple exercise apart from its practical influence, you make it only an apology for continuing in sin. It is also a doctrine of the gospel, that he that doeth the will of God shall inherit the kingdom; but if you regard this obedience as disconnected with a principle of faith, here again you subvert the foundation of the gospel, and build your hope of acceptance with God on what is merely external, while the heart is in a state of active rebellion. The gospel reveals the fact that man is dead in trespasses and sins, and exposed to God's everlasting displeasure; but if this fact be viewed apart from the glorious provision that has been made for him in the atonement of Christ, what other influence can it exert, than to induce him to fold his arms, and sit down in despair? Or suppose, on the other hand, that the doctrine of atonement should be disconnected with the exceeding sinfulness of sin, who does not perceive that it becomes, at once, the most idle, as well as the most absurd, of all speculations? And the same mutual dependence runs through the whole system of gospel truth. If we disregard this connexion, and separate things which God hath joined together, we deform this beautiful system, and invite the cavils of a wild and ungodly scepticism. But if this connexion be regarded, and these truths exhibited in their proper relations, the gospel cannot fail to commend itself to every man's conscience, and there is good reason to hope that it will be the power of God unto salvation.

4. Another reason why the gospel is often preached with so little effect, is, that *its truths are not exhibited in their practical application*. The gospel, as a system, is, in the highest degree, practical; and each particular truth is important, according to the influence which it is fitted to exert. Just in proportion then as the practical bearing of any doctrine is kept out of view, the legitimate influence of that doctrine becomes neutralized. It is possible that the doctrines of the gospel may all be stated and defended, in the form of abstract propositions, and that too with great ingenuity and acuteness of intellect; and yet the preaching of them shall produce scarcely more effect than would be produced by repeating lessons from Socrates or Seneca. A few cultivated minds may be edified, or, I should rather say, amused by it; but with men of ordinary intelligence, such as constitute the mass of nearly every congregation, nothing better can be expected than that it should be an apology for absolute inattention, if not for going to sleep. The truths of the gospel, in order to exert their legitimate influence, or even to awaken any considerable interest, must be exhibited as they stand connected with the condition, the duties, and the destinies of man: they must be urged as motives to earnest and persevering action; as bearing with tremendous weight on the interests of the life that now is, and much more of that which is to come. And even this is not all. The preacher must not be contented merely with showing that the truths which he inculcates have a practical bearing, but he must try to make them bear upon the hearts and consciences of his hearers. When he describes the natural con-

dition of man as dead in trespasses and sins, he must endeavor to make the solemn truth tell upon the conscience of every sinner before him ; to make him realize that he is the very man to whom this fearful description applies. When he exhibits the doctrine of the wrath to come, he must seek to fasten on the mind of every unrenewed hearer the impression that his own soul is in jeopardy, and that except he repent, he must likewise perish. When he dwells upon that precious theme, redemption by the blood of Christ, he must bring it home to the careless sinner, as a ground of alarm ; to the repenting sinner, as a foundation of hope ; to the faltering christian, as an argument for warmer zeal and more earnest devotion. And so of every other truth of the gospel—the minister should feel that nothing has been done to purpose, till he has succeeded in giving his message an individual application ; till it is recognized by the consciences of his hearers as the sword of the Spirit.

5. The limited success which attends the preaching of the gospel, is sometimes to be attributed to the fact that *its truths are not exhibited in their right adaptation* ; in other words, that the topics of discourse are selected without sufficient reference to the circumstances of the hearers, and the indications of providence. True it is, indeed, that all scripture is given by inspiration of God ; and whatever truth that contains, a minister has not only a right, but is bound, to preach. But he is not only to preach the whole counsel of God, but rightly to divide the word of truth. The same truth exhibited at one time, and under given circumstances, may produce far more effect than at another time, and under different cir-

circumstances ; and one great secret of a preacher's usefulness is to notice the leadings of providence on this subject, and to adapt his preaching accordingly. God designs all his dispensations either for instruction or admonition ; and in many of them, he sends messages to the children of men, of most solemn and fearful import. In enforcing these events especially, a minister acts as a co-worker with God in the salvation of men ; and he has a mighty advantage over the conscience, when he can bring both the providence of God, and the word of God, to bear upon it at the same time. Even circumstances of comparatively trivial interest often convey most important lessons ; and the preacher, by availing himself of them, may sometimes open for divine truth a passage to the heart, which it would otherwise never have found. By this means, the truth is not only presented as an object of contemplation to the mind, but I may almost say that it becomes palpable to the senses : it comes up in the form of living reality—the form in which it is most difficult to gainsay or resist it. Let that minister then who desires the success of his ministry, study with diligence and prayer the volume of God's providence, that he may the more impressively illustrate and enforce his word. Let him see to it, if I may be allowed the expression, that his public ministrations run parallel with the divine dispensations. Let the subjects of his discourses, so far as possible, be selected with reference to the actual condition and wants of his people. If he adopts a different course, and satisfies himself with merely preaching the truth, without thinking of its particular adaptation, I do not say that he will preach to no

purpose, but I do say that the good effect of his preaching must be greatly diminished.

6. I mention as another reason why the preaching of the gospel often produces so little effect, that *its truths are rendered repulsive by a needlessly offensive manner of exhibiting them.* That some of these truths are in themselves deeply humbling, and fitted to cut the conscience to the quick, no one who understands them can doubt; and no minister can be responsible for the effect which a simple and honest exhibition of them may produce. If the effect should be to array against him the most violent opposition, and cause his name to be cast out and evil spoken of, he must be contented to bear it, remembering that it is enough for the servant that he be as his master. But while he is fearless and faithful in preaching the most severe and humbling doctrines of the gospel, let him do it with meekness and affection; not seeking to invest them with any artificial terrors, but holding them forth in all their simplicity, as they are found in the word of life. He should make it manifest to his hearers that he preaches them, not because he delights to render them unhappy, but because he desires their salvation; and when he is dealing the heaviest blows upon their consciences, the spirit of christian kindness should still breathe in his manner; and he should remember that he has himself as deep a personal interest in these truths, as have any of those whom he addresses. If the preaching of the gospel excites opposition, a minister must not conclude too hastily that it is evidence of extraordinary fidelity on his part: it may be so, or it may be the effect of gross imprudence, and at the bottom of it all may lurk a spirit of

haughty arrogance or wordly ambition. It matters little whether any particular doctrine is entirely omitted, or whether its influence is entirely counteracted by a repulsive manner : the result in both cases will be substantially the same. Let every preacher of the gospel remember this ; and let the effect of it be to induce him to speak the truth in love.

7. The last reason which I shall mention for the inefficacy of a preached gospel, under this division of the discourse, and the exact opposite of the one which I have just noticed, is, that *its really humbling features are covered up, or softened down, by a brilliant and fascinating manner*. There is a tendency in human nature to extremes ; and while some men are in danger of wielding the sword of the Spirit in an incautious and terrifying manner, as if it were a carnal weapon, thus perhaps preventing many from coming within its reach, others there are who brandish it with such graceful adroitness, that every other sentiment gives place to that of admiration. The gospel ought certainly to be preached with dignity and interest—in such a way that the attention of the hearers shall be attracted to its truths ; but the moment the manner attracts the attention *from* the truth, it becomes a serious evil. There is not a doctrine of the bible, however serious or appalling, whose influence may not be completely counteracted, nay, the preaching of which may not awaken delightful emotions even in the breast of a wicked man, through that mysterious, transforming power, which often exists in mere manner. It must be a pitiful consolation to any minister to reflect, even that he has preached the whole counsel of God, if, at the same time, he is

conscious of having disguised it by the fascination of his style or address ; or to reflect that he has excited no opposition, if it has been at the expense of blunting the edge of the sword of the Spirit. Oh let me trifle with any thing else, but let me not trifle with that message, which has in it the elements of eternal life, or eternal death, to the souls of men !

Such are some of the causes of an unprofitable ministry, as they stand connected with the manner in which the gospel is preached. We will now consider some other of these causes, *as they are connected with ministerial character, and with the more private duties of the ministerial office.*

1. And the first which I shall mention, is, *the want of sufficiently distinct knowledge, on the part of the pastor, of the circumstances of his flock.* It is possible, no doubt, for a minister to live in the bosom of his congregation, and be in the habit of daily intercourse with them, and yet have comparatively little of that kind of knowledge of their circumstances, which is essential to ensure the success of his ministry. He may be familiarly acquainted with every individual in his pastoral care, and may even be regarded as an inmate in every dwelling ; and yet if he knows nothing of their spiritual condition, there is no reason to expect that his intercourse with them will materially subserve their spiritual interests. The knowledge to which I refer, is to be gained only by intercourse of a strictly pastoral kind ; and it is alike important to the success both of his private and public labors. If he have a mere worldly acquaintance with his people, how will he be able to find out who are

the tempted, or who the desponding, or who the inquiring among them ; and without such knowledge, how can he give to every one a portion in due season ? No doubt many an anxious sinner has cast off the burden of his conviction, and rushed back to the world ; no doubt many a trembling christian has wandered long in thick darkness ; no doubt many a tempted one has actually yielded up his scruples, and brought guilt upon his own soul, and reproach upon the cause of Christ ; when a faithful pastor, who should have been acquainted with each case, might have led the conscience-burdened sinner to Jesus, and caused the desponding believer to rejoice in the light of God's countenance, and the tempted one to hold a successful conflict with his spiritual enemies.

But, notwithstanding the great importance of this kind of knowledge of which I am speaking to a minister's success, I am well aware that his means of attaining it are often far more limited than his wishes would make them. This knowledge, it is to be remembered, is especially important, in enabling him rightly to adapt his public instructions ; and if he should occupy so much time in attaining it, that is, in mingling with his people in private, as to render his public services hurried and unimpressive, the very purpose for which it is attained would thereby be defeated. It requires no small degree of wisdom in a minister, to judge correctly how to distribute his time between his public and private duties : they have a most important reciprocal influence on each other ; and one important means of a minister's usefulness, is to regulate this influence with skill and success.

2. Another reason of the limited success that often attends the labors of a minister, and closely connected with the preceding, is *the almost exclusive worldliness of his private intercourse*. I am no advocate, brethren, for a studied reserve in ministerial character ; much less for that department which would seem to say, 'Stand by, I am holier than thou :' nevertheless, I am constrained to acknowledge my conviction that many of us greatly hinder the influence of gospel truth on the hearts of others, by exhibiting too little of its influence on our own hearts. A minister is bound to be courteous ; but he must never be so at the expense of principle : he may be cheerful ; but he must take care that his cheerfulness does not degenerate into levity : he may mingle in the social circle ; but he must never be found in any place whither he cannot carry his ministerial character, or where his presence would cause his character deservedly to suffer. Moreover, in his ordinary intercourse with his people, he must bear about with him the impression that he is the guardian of their spiritual interests ; that he is a minister of Christ out of the pulpit, as well as in it ; that it is required by his office that much of his conversation should be serious and spiritual, and no part of it unedifying and frivolous. Oh, if we to whom this sacred office is entrusted, remembered this as we ought, I doubt not that there would be far less of unprofitable preaching than there now is. Let a minister mingle with his people with a right spirit, and the private duties of the week will be found to be a most happy preparation for the public duties of the sabbath ; while the labors of the sabbath will, in turn, facilitate and give effect to those of the week. Let him, on the other hand, mingle with them as a

mere worldly companion, and a sharer in their levities, and though he may preach the truth, and preach it eloquently and powerfully, he is not to be surprised if his preaching should be regarded as a mere dead letter. And here, brethren, I doubt not—however humbling the confession—here lies the secret, why many a man of powerful intellect, and commanding eloquence, has been cursed with an almost absolutely barren ministry; while, on the other hand, many a man of moderate powers, and limited attainments, who has yet maintained a spiritual intercourse with his people, has been instrumental of clothing the whole moral region around him with beauty and verdure.

3. A third reason for the limited success of a minister's labors, drawn from the character of his pastoral duties, is found in the fact that *he neglects to enforce the dispensations of providence*. I have already spoken of the importance of his doing this in public; but it is not less essential as a part of private pastoral duty: indeed he may ordinarily do it in the latter case, with better hope of success than in the former; because he may render his remarks more particular and discriminating. In seasons of affliction especially, there is, for the most part, an unusual susceptibility of religious impression; the heart seems to loosen its hold of earthly objects and interests, and to feel the need of some more enduring and satisfying portion. Let a minister then, as he desires the salvation of his people, be a frequent visitor at the bed of sickness, endeavoring to impart such counsels and warnings as the circumstances of the case may warrant or require; and if health is restored, let him endeavor still to follow up the dis-

pensations of providence, and use the goodness of God as an argument for repentance. Let him mingle too in scenes of bereavement, not merely to perform an official duty in conducting the funeral solemnities, but as an affectionate counsellor and guide, to endeavor to enforce the dispensation as an admonition from heaven, and to cause it to yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. And when worldly disappointments weigh down the spirits; when riches take to themselves wings and fly away, and long-cherished hopes are found to have had within them the elements of perplexity, and mortification, and distress; let the minister of Christ endeavor then to direct the thoughts upward to more enduring treasures, and bring the soul to rest upon God: or if he who is the subject of these trials has already, by a gracious adoption, become an heir of heaven, let them be urged as an argument for greater deadness to the world, and more entire devotedness to Christ. The amount of good which a minister may effect by such a course, cannot be estimated. It would not be strange if he should accomplish more, in a given case, by a single conversation at such a moment, than by the labors of years in other circumstances. No doubt many an afflictive visitation is lost, and worse than lost, upon the individual for whose benefit it was designed, merely because his minister has neglected this important part of pastoral duty. Happy, if all of us who sustain the pastoral office, realized the danger of neglect on this important subject!

4. Another defect in the private labors of a minister, which often constitutes a reason for his limited success, is, that *he bestows too little attention upon the*

moral and religious interests of the young. This interesting portion of a minister's charge, because they are not the acting members of society, are sometimes, in a great degree, overlooked ; but it is manifest that many years cannot pass away, before such neglect, on the part of a minister, must be visited with an exemplary retribution. These children and youth, at the susceptible period through which they are passing, may, probably, by suitable care, and God's blessing, be moulded to virtue and religion : they may come forward into life imbued with good principles, and formed to correct habits, and many of them prepared to be pillars in the church of God. But if this forming period be suffered to pass without improvement, a minister will find that he has much to undo, which it would have been far more easy for him to have prevented ; that he has gained nothing, but lost much, in delaying an attack upon the vicious propensity, till it has had time to grow with the growth, and strengthen with the strength. And he may be convinced, when it is too late, that the same degree of effort, on his part, for the renovation of the heart, applied in the season of childhood, might accomplish many fold more, than if it should be delayed to mature life. Let every minister, then, as he desires the prosperity of the church, in coming years, keep a watchful eye upon the interests of the young. Though he should seem to some to bestow upon them an undue proportion of his labor, no doubt the event will prove that his course, in this respect, was marked by wisdom. From the seed sown in this mellow soil, he may look with good hope for a harvest ; while other seed which has fallen upon hearts hardened by familiarity with the world, and vicious indulgencies,

will never germinate, even amidst the sunshine of gospel privileges, and the dews of heavenly grace.

5. I only observe, fifthly, that the want of success in a minister's labors, is often to be traced to *a neglect, on his part, of personal religion*. Ministers, like other men, are in danger of neglecting their own hearts; and perhaps the more so, as they have so much to do with the hearts of other people. There is danger that they will substitute official duty for personal piety; and practically yield to the delusion that it is impossible to be so conversant as they are with religious things, without increasing in the christian spirit. But it cannot be too deeply impressed upon a minister's mind, that if he will make large attainments in piety, he must do it in precisely the same way with the most obscure christian—by holding a steady course in the thorny path of conflict and self-denial. And that he should do this—that he should not only be a man of piety, but of eminent piety, and should be continually aiming at higher and higher christian attainments, his holy and responsible vocation imperatively demands. Let him be indeed a man of God—a man whose affections sit lightly upon the world, and are fixed strongly on heaven—a man who cares for nothing in comparison with the immortal soul, and the glory of his master; and his influence will be like that of the sun, diffusing light, and life, and joy, all around him. It will impart fervor to his prayers, energy to his preaching, consistency to his example, a charm to his whole life. On the contrary, let him be a man who sinks the character of the minister in that of the worldling; who neglects his bible, and neglects his closet, and

neglects his heart ; and it will be strange if his people do not sleep the sleep of death under his ministry. It will be strange if the influences of heavenly grace are not withheld, and the region around him is not given up, in a great degree, to spiritual barrenness, and even the few plants of righteousness that remain, do not droop under such a chilling influence. Rely on it, such a character in a minister of the gospel, however accomplished in other respects he may be, will always be a worm at the root of the church's prosperity.

I have now, brethren, as I proposed, endeavored to exhibit before you some of the causes of an unsuccessful ministry, which grow out of the character of the ministry itself ; and, at the same time, by giving a brief outline of a minister's duty, to show how the evil contemplated may be avoided. I acknowledge that I have not been able to do this without trembling ; for I could not forget that I was spreading out before you my own duty, and giving you a standard by which you will have a right to test my own ministrations. Nevertheless, though I am well aware that my ministry among you will be marked with many infirmities and defects, I would not shrink from an acknowledgment of the full extent of my obligations. Rather, while I would desire to have these obligations written with the point of a diamond upon my memory, I would hold them up to you, my brethren, as an argument for your faithful co-operation, and especially for your fervent prayers. When I reflect how momentous must be the results of my ministry, and in how many ways its design may be defeated ; when I glance over this congregation, and then glance onward to the judgment, and

think how my ministry must then be the subject of review, and you must stand there either in despair or in triumph, to testify how I have fulfilled it; you cannot wonder that this with me should be a moment of overwhelming interest. I acknowledge that I feel oppressed by the weight of responsibility which the solemnities of the last week have thrown upon me. I own there are reflections crowding upon my mind at this hour, which prompt to the almost involuntary exclamation, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Already, dear brethren, you have received me into the arms of your kindness: I cast myself now on the support to be derived from your prayers. I ask you, when you are nearest the throne of mercy, to plead that the Master's grace may be sufficient for me. I ask you, as you value your own spiritual prosperity, and the immortal interests of this beloved flock, to pray that I may be a faithful laborer here; that my ministry may be honored with large measures of success; and that, in the day of retribution, we may stand together on the right hand, witnesses to each other's fidelity, while we join in the common acclamation to God, for the love, and grace, and glory, of redemption.

I cannot forget, brethren, on this occasion, that I am standing in the place of one, whose memory is embalmed in your hearts, and whose name all the wise and good delight to honor. Of the ability with which he fulfilled his ministry, of the zeal with which he sought out objects of charity, of the instinctive tenderness with which his heart responded to every note of sorrow, of the facility with which he accomplished arduous enterprises, of the splendor of his

virtues and the extent of his influence, I need not, and perhaps ought not to speak; and yet I cannot forbear just to advert to what he was, to deepen your impression both of responsibility and of gratitude. In the tomb where his ashes repose, and around which your thoughts love to linger, there reigns the stillness of death; but from the third heaven whither we doubt not his spirit has fled, there comes a voice to you—the voice of your beloved, now glorified pastor—charging you, in a strain of unearthly tenderness, to be faithful in the improvement of the ministry which is now begun among you. Ye who have so long enjoyed the benefit of his labors and of his prayers; ye lambs of the flock, whom he has watched, and counselled, and pointed into the path to heaven; you cannot disregard the admonition! Oh, he forgets you not even in glory; and if there be joy in heaven over the repentance of sinners, surely he will rejoice in the spiritual prosperity of those who once constituted his beloved charge.

Brethren, I have not made these remarks in the spirit of eulogy—for that would not become the occasion—but I could not withhold a passing tribute to the memory of your departed pastor. And surely, here in the place in which he stood, in the presence of the congregation which he served, in the atmosphere which has been hallowed by his prayers, I need not offer an apology. I enter with joy, yet with trembling, into his labors. May his Lord and mine still be honored here in a faithful ministry!

SERMON II.

HEBREWS IV. 2.

BUT THE WORD PREACHED, DID NOT PROFIT THEM.

It was proposed, in the morning, from this passage, to assign some of the causes of the inefficacy of a preached gospel; causes connected with the manner in which the duties of the ministry are performed, and the manner in which the privileges of the ministry are improved; in other words, as they have respect both to minister and people.

To the former class of these causes, viz. those which respect the minister, your attention has already been directed: the latter class, or those which respect the people, remain to be considered in the present discourse. As in the former case, the causes which I adduced had respect to the preaching of the word, and the more private duties of the office; so those which I shall notice this afternoon, will be drawn from *a defective attendance on the services of God's house, and from false views, or neglect of duty, on the part of a people, in respect to a minister's pastoral labors.* And having endeavored, as I passed along in the morning, to give an honest exposition of

the duties of a minister, you will allow me now, with equal plainness, to connect with a further consideration of the causes of an unsuccessful ministry, a view of the reciprocal duties of a people.

In speaking of the failure of ministerial success from a *defective* attendance on the services of the sanctuary, you perceive I take for granted that there is an *actual* attendance. I know there are those—and would to God the number were small—who deliberately turn their backs on a preached gospel; who voluntarily exile themselves from the means of grace, while the sun of righteousness is pouring his brightest beams all around them. But as I have no reason to believe that I am speaking *to* any such persons, so I cannot hope to gain any good purpose by speaking *of* them; and instead of stopping to expose their infatuation in thus setting at naught an institution of God, I shall proceed directly to show *you*, my friends, who are accustomed to a regular attendance at the sanctuary, some of the ways in which there is danger that the design of such attendance will be defeated.

1. *Neglect of the study of the bible, as a preparation for hearing the word*, contributes to render it ineffectual. There is a notion quite too prevalent, that religious knowledge may be gained without much effort; and that it follows nearly as a matter of course, that a person who has been accustomed to breathe a religious atmosphere, and attend stately on the preaching of the gospel, should have some intelligent and definite views of the christian system. But experience proves that this is a sad mistake. I do not say that such a person will not of course know some-

thing of religious phraseology—he must necessarily have caught many terms and expressions which belong to theological science ; but I do say that, so far as real knowledge of christianity is concerned, he may be removed but a single step from a heathen. I acknowledge, indeed, that such a result presupposes something more than a neglect of the private study of the scriptures ; it takes for granted, also, that there is a wandering and careless mind during the actual preaching of the gospel : but simple inattention to God's word goes far towards accounting for it. Religious knowledge is to be acquired, like every other kind of knowledge, by the proper application of the faculties. The person who would make the most rapid progress in natural science, would not be satisfied with merely hearing occasional lectures from a professor, however ingenious or accomplished he might be : he would wish to make the principles of the science the subject of private investigation, and to read attentively those authors by whom its principles had been most ably expounded ; and he would do this the rather, that he might be the better prepared to profit by oral instruction. Just so it ought to be with every hearer of the gospel. He should not be contented with hearing the truths of the bible exhibited and defended from the pulpit : he should search the inspired record for himself, and see whether there is a harmony between the preached word and the written word ; and he should do this especially, that he may be able to listen to the instructions of the sanctuary more intelligently, and, of course, more profitably. The man who goes to hear the gospel preached with his mind already stored with its truths, goes prepared both to estimate and to profit

by it : he who neglects his bible at home, will probably bring with him to the sanctuary little of the ability, and still less of the disposition, either to value or to profit by what he hears.

Suffer me then, dear brethren, to urge upon you, especially with reference to your improvement of a preached gospel, the diligent, constant, devout study of God's word. Think it not enough occasionally to read a chapter without much reflection upon its contents, and without any reference to its connexion ; but let it be a part of the employment of every day to read a portion of holy scripture in regular course ; to endeavor to understand its meaning, and to make a practical application of it to your own heart. Remember that it is from the bible that we who preach, profess to derive all our principles and precepts ; and that if we speak not according to that, there is no light in us. As you desire then to be able to judge intelligently of the doctrines which you hear, and to render the preaching of the gospel subservient to your spiritual interests, I say again, study the bible.

2. Another reason why the preaching of the gospel often produces so little effect, is, that *it is not heard with due attention*. I speak not here of those who are sometimes found in our worshipping assemblies, engaged in absolute trifling, or deliberately arranging their posture to go to sleep, or who in any way openly violate the decorum that is due to public worship ; but I refer rather to that large class who are strangers to the business of keeping the heart ; who come hither with minds undisciplined to the worship of God ; who think it unnecessary to impose any check

upon a wandering imagination ; and who suffer their thoughts to labor about the cares, or to riot amidst the pleasures, of the world, while the sounds of judgment, and eternity, and salvation, die away upon the ear. Suppose the merchant comes hither with his mind brooding over some commercial speculation, or the mechanic with his thoughts busy in devising means for the more successful prosecution of his trade, so far as any spiritual advantage is concerned, the one might as well remain in his counting-room, and the other in his workshop. Or suppose the lawyer sits here with his mind occupied in preparing to defend his client ; or the man devoted to science, in thinking over the variety and extent of his acquisitions ; to the eye of man, indeed, that takes no cognizance of the world within, each may appear to be a hearer of the word ; but in the eye of God, what better is he than a trifler with it ? Or suppose that any one comes hither without any intention to profit by the preaching of the gospel ; suppose his attendance is merely a tribute to custom or curiosity, or else that he comes only to relieve himself from the weariness attendant on perpetual inaction at home, and when he seems to be awake, his faculties are still buried in sluggish repose ; here again, I tell you, my friends, in each of these cases, what seems to be an attendance on the word, is nothing better than an act of mockery. He who would hear the gospel to purpose, must come with a determination thus to hear it : he must be contented to put the world away from him ; to stand aloof from its cares and from its pleasures ; and to keep his faculties awake, and in vigorous exercise, while the truth of God is dispensed. Otherwise, let the gospel be preached in his hearing

as plainly and pungently as it may, not a ray of light will penetrate his understanding, the sword of the Spirit will never reach his heart.

3. The effect of a preached gospel is often prevented, *by being heard with a spirit of fastidiousness*. It is always to be expected that, in a congregation consisting of a large number of individuals, there should be some diversity of taste ; and it were scarcely possible that the same preacher should be, in every respect, alike acceptable to all. One individual, for instance, prefers a cool and didactic manner of preaching ; another thinks more of strong and earnest appeals to the heart. One attaches great importance to elegant diction and a graceful manner ; another can scarcely tolerate any departure from the most studied plainness. One is delighted with argument ; another wants nothing but illustration. And this diversity of taste extends to almost every thing that relates either to a preacher's manner or matter. But how manifest is it that it cannot be indulged, to any considerable extent, without a great sacrifice of edification ; for if the principle be adopted, that the preaching of the gospel shall be disregarded, if it be not in all respects exactly suited to the taste of the hearer, where is the man on earth whose preaching must not be, to a considerable proportion of every congregation, utterly useless ; and just in proportion as this spirit prevails, is it not obvious that the usefulness of a minister's public labors is prevented ? The grand question with the man who would profit by the preaching of the word, should be, whether the true gospel is preached, and preached in its naked simplicity ; and this question once settled in the

affirmative, the ear, and the understanding, and the heart, ought all to be open. What though there may be defects in a preacher's manner, yet how easily will they be borne with by one, who remembers that his message is a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death. Would the criminal on the scaffold, think you, be likely to amuse himself with any personal defects in the man who should be commissioned to announce to him that his sentence was reversed, and his life to be lengthened out; or would he treat the intelligence with contempt, and challenge the executioner to do his office, merely because the declaration of his acquittal had been read to him in an ungraceful manner? Far greater infatuation is that man guilty of, who treats with indifference the preaching of the gospel, because it does not come to him in precisely the manner which his own taste would dictate; for in doing so, he rejects the only remedy that has ever been devised for the malady of his soul; the only salvation that ever has been, or ever will be, offered to him. Surely, brethren, these words of eternal life are too important to be heard merely as a matter of amusement. Be the manner in which they are presented what it may, rely on it, the only wisdom is to receive them into a good and honest heart.

4. And this leads me to say, fourthly, that the success of a preached gospel is often hindered *by its not being heard with proper docility*. There is a natural reluctance in the human heart to yielding an implicit belief even to the testimony of God. There belongs to man's depraved nature a spirit of pride, which finds no aliment in the humble employment of

a learner ; which would rather decide for itself what is true, and what is important, than sit down at the feet of Jesus, and yield to the teachings of his Spirit. It is owing to this that many men, especially men of philosophical minds, frame for themselves systems of religion independently of the word of God ; thus assuming the prerogative of deciding what the bible ought to contain, rather than the more humble province of inquiring what it actually does contain. To these preconceived theories, they endeavor to make every thing bend ; and every sermon which they hear, just so far as it is at variance with these theories, passes for nothing. Not that I would have any hearer forget that his minister is a fallible man ; or receive any thing from the pulpit as true, which is not conformed to the lively oracles : but I insist that, when this agreement is once ascertained, the mind should surrender itself to implicit faith ; and this is the only rational course that can be adopted, unless the claims of the bible to be a divine revelation have been previously set aside ; for it is a perfectly obvious truth, that if God has spoken, it is the duty and the wisdom of men to listen and obey. Let every hearer then see to it, that he does not prevent the influence of God's word by a spirit of philosophical speculation. Let him give all the theories which his own imagination or ingenuity may have created, or which may have been the product of any other human mind, to the winds. Let him bring to the sanctuary a heart disciplined by prayer and self-communion, to receive the impressions of God's truth. Though he have a mind which can grasp subjects of great extent, and fathom those of great depth ; yet let him remember that it is no dishonor to the most lofty or the most

penetrating intellect, to receive lessons of wisdom from the Being who created it. Rather let him account it his highest honor to be a disciple of the blessed Jesus.

I have spoken of the want of a teachable spirit more especially in men of philosophical or cultivated minds: I may notice in this connexion a spirit of undefined and unacknowledged skepticism, equally fatal to the influence of gospel truth, which is to be found, in a greater or less degree, among men of all classes. The unbelief of which I now speak, is not the result of reflection, but of the want of it; it subsists not upon a spirit of bold speculation, but, in a great measure, upon voluntary ignorance. The persons to whom I refer, know enough of the bible to know that, if it be the word of God, its truths have a fearful bearing upon their own condition: they believe it enough to keep conscience from accusing them of being infidels; and they disbelieve it enough to prevent its truths from exerting their proper influence. If this be not so, tell me, I pray you, how it is, that, in almost every religious assembly, there are so many who hear truths, the legitimate effect of which is to make the sinner tremble, and profess to believe them, and yet manifest no more concern, and far less interest, than if they were listening to a romance. Rely on it, brethren, the secret of all this is a lurking spirit of skepticism. And let me tell you that this spirit may exist and even operate powerfully in the heart, while the individual himself has hardly suspected its existence. My friends, I entreat you to deal honestly with yourselves on this subject. Settle the point whether the bible be, as it

professes to be, a revelation from God : settle the point, what are the doctrines which the bible contains ; and let your conviction, in both respects, be intelligent and influential. Presume not upon the possibility that the gospel which we preach may turn out to be an imposture. Satisfy yourselves, to the driving away of the last doubt, whether it be so or not ; and if the result be a firm and enlightened belief of its authority and doctrines, the faithful preaching of it can scarcely fail to reach your conscience, and probe your heart.

5. Another obvious hindrance to the effect of a preached gospel, is *the want of a spirit of self application*. With most persons it is a more grateful employment to scan the characters, and even to dive into the hearts, of other people, than to look very narrowly into their own. And in hearing the gospel, it often happens that it is a much easier matter for one hearer to find something that will exactly meet the case of his neighbor, especially if it be in the way of reproof, than to find a portion that seems equally well adapted to himself. Now, brethren, you instantly perceive that this spirit most effectually defeats the design of preaching. Nothing is gained to purpose, unless each individual hears for himself. It is the duty of a minister, indeed, to do all in his power to give the truth a distinct and personal application : but he may do his utmost, and it will all be in vain, unless a corresponding attention be rendered to this subject on the part of his hearers. Every individual should remember, when he comes to the sanctuary, that he has to do here with one heart, and only one : he is to forget, so far as he can, any application which

the preaching may have to those around him, in his earnest endeavors to bring it home to his own condition and his own conscience. Enquire then, dear brethren, when the truth is exhibited before you, what there is in your own character or circumstances to which it applies ; what corruption it may help you to subdue ; what infirmity to eradicate ; what temptation to overcome. When the law of God is exhibited in its infinite extent and tremendous bearings, let it be a mirror in which to contemplate your own guilt, and a schoolmaster to bring you to Christ. When the work of redemption is set forth in all its grace and glory, endeavour to ascertain your own character, by watching your emotions in view of it ; and to your own conscience bring home the question, ‘how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’ When the obligations of a holy life are urged, ask conscience to what extent you have hitherto regarded them ; and recollect that without holiness, it is impossible that *you* should see the Lord. And so of every other part of God’s message. You are to hear it with the same personal application as if it were addressed to you only ; and whether it be for warning, or reproof, or instruction, you are to consider it as a word spoken to benefit your soul.

6. The last obstacle which I shall notice, under this division of the subject, to the efficacy of a preached gospel, lies *in the want of devout recollection*. It is a common fault of hearers, that they imagine that when the sermon is done, they have done with it ; and that they may very conscientiously dismiss it from their thoughts, and with it every thing that relates to preaching, till they are admonished, by the

announcement of another text, of another similar demand upon their attention. They may indeed call to mind the sermon in one way : if it were an eloquent one, they may admire it ; if it were an ordinary one, they may criticise it ; but as for making it a subject of serious recollection with reference to their spiritual benefit, the thought does not even occur to them. If you would profit by the preaching of the gospel, brethren, instead of adopting such a course as this, take the sermon with you to your closet, and there let it be the subject of earnest and devout contemplation. And with your recollection of the truths which you have heard, join humble and fervent prayer to the author of all spiritual illumination, that you may not only understand the truth, but feel its purifying and quickening power. In this way only, the preaching of the gospel becomes nourishment to the soul. In the strength of a single sermon the christian can go many days : it assists him in his spiritual conflicts, and strengthens him for his various duties, as it recurs to his thoughts amidst the cares and business of life ; whereas, by being instantly dismissed from the mind, it leaves it as open to temptation, and as barren of pious affections, as if it had been spoken to the tempest.

I cannot forbear here to advert to an error not very uncommon among hearers of the gospel, and even among christians—that of attaching an undue importance to the multiplication of public religious exercises. I would have these services multiplied to that extent, and that only, which is consistent with a profitable improvement of them ; but I feel well assured that it is possible for a person to be so con-

stantly occupied with hearing, and so little occupied with recollecting and applying, that the object for which he hears shall be, in a great measure, defeated. It is possible, moreover, and I doubt not the case often occurs, that a person may be exceedingly zealous in his attendance on social religious services, where his zeal is nothing better than the workings of a spirit of self-righteousness ; not the operation of genuine religious feeling, but a substitute for it. Let every one regard it both as a privilege and a duty to be present on these occasions, as opportunity may offer ; but let him take heed that he does not overlook the fact that these exercises are designed, not merely to awaken the feelings for the moment, but to supply materials for future reflection, and to produce permanently good impressions. Whenever social religious services are multiplied to such an extent as to interfere with the duties of the closet, or the duties of the family, they become an evil, and retard rather than assist the progress of genuine religion. While I would exhort you, in reference to these services, not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, I would also exhort you to let every thing be done decently and in order.

I have now stated some of the causes of an unsuccessful ministry, as they are connected with a defective attendance on the preaching of the word. In what remains of the discourse, I shall direct your attention to some other causes, which grow out of false views, or neglect of duty, on the part of a people, in respect to a minister's pastoral labors.

1. I mention under this article, as one cause of an unsuccessful ministry, *an impression which too commonly prevails, that the official duty of a minister belongs only to the pulpit; and that, in the common intercourse of life, the character of the minister ought to be merged in that of the man.* That a highly important part of a minister's duty is to be performed here, admits of no question; and it is equally certain that, in his ordinary intercourse, he ought to bear in mind that he sustains many relations in common with those around him; but he should never forget, and his people should never forget, that he sustains one which they do not; that he is set to watch for their souls, as one that must give account. They may expect—they have a right to expect that he will be courteous and condescending, and will pay a due regard to the various claims of society; but they ought also to expect that, like his great master and model, he will always be, more or less directly, about his Father's business: they should recollect that his time is, in some way or other, to be devoted chiefly to their immortal interests; and if he feels obliged sometimes to decline their solicitations to mingle with them in the *innocent* enjoyments of social life, they should be ready to admit the weight of his charge as a sufficient apology. Rely on it, my hearers, your minister could hardly do you an act of greater injustice, than to occupy a considerable portion of his time in any employment whatever foreign to the object of the ministry; nor could you more entirely lose sight of your own interests, than in wishing him to do it. You may always conclude that you have the most reason to be satisfied with his labors, when

they are most exclusively employed to advance your spiritual interests, and secure your salvation.

2. Closely connected with the preceding is another cause of an unsuccessful ministry: I refer to the fact that *due facilities are not given, on the part of the people, for pastoral intercourse.* Every minister is, or ought to be, a spiritual guide to his flock; to counsel them in difficulty; to direct them to the proper source of comfort in trouble; to endeavor to arouse them from lethargy; and, if possible, to save them from everlasting death. Hence it is exceedingly desirable that they should consider him, and confide in him, as a counsellor; that they should make him acquainted with their trials and difficulties, and every circumstance of their condition which he may be likely to turn to their spiritual benefit; especially that the heavy-laden sinner should lose no time in obtaining his counsel on the great subject of his soul's salvation. But so far from this, it often happens that the pastor is embarrassed in his attempts to learn the spiritual condition of his flock. On every other subject but that which interests them most, he finds a cordial welcome to their houses, and a ready access to their hearts: but here there is a barrier which he often seeks in vain to remove. Even on the part of christians, it must be acknowledged that there is sometimes a degree of reserve on this subject, which has a most disheartening effect upon a minister. As you desire, brethren, that *your* minister may do you all the good in his power, endeavor to multiply his opportunities of doing good, by suffering him to live in your confidence as a spiritual friend and counsellor.

3. The success of the ministry is often prevented *by a low standard of piety in the church.* It is a remark from which few, if any, exceptions can be made, that wherever you find a slumbering church, there you will also find a slumbering congregation. The latter follows from the former, as an effect from its cause; and one way in which the cause operates to produce the effect, is, by counteracting the influence of a preached gospel. Suppose a minister preach ever so pungently and faithfully; suppose he exhibit and urge all the truths of the gospel in their various practical bearings; how little effect will it be likely to produce upon an ungodly world, so long as the church—the very community who profess not only to believe, but to feel the power of these truths—exhibit scarcely more of their practical influence than those who profess to have no part nor lot in the matter. When he describes the purifying and quickening influence of christian truth, and shows how it teaches men the difficult art of self-denial, and causes them to become crucified to the world and the world crucified to them; oh how much must it detract from the influence of his preaching, if, at the same time, the world can point to the church, and inquire, and with good reason too, ‘What do ye more than others?’ But suppose, on the other hand, there be a high tone of christian feeling and action in the church, and every member be concerned to let his light shine before men; suppose the graces of the Spirit are all displayed in bright and happy combination, and the church as a body thus renders her unceasing testimony to the purifying influence of evangelical truth; and rely on it, brethren, the minister

will address his people under a greatly increased advantage. Oh, it were every thing to his success, that he should be able to say, 'Behold how these christians love one another; how these christians live above the world; how these christians exemplify, in their daily walk, the power of religious principle; how this faith which they profess, is proved by their own experience, and their own conduct, to purify the heart, and work by love, and overcome the world?' Brethren, if you will witness the full effect of a preached gospel among you, be you the very persons to whom your minister may point for an exhibition of the influence of that gospel upon the heart and life. In this way, your example will be a powerful auxiliary to the influence of his preaching; while his preaching will, in turn, serve to recommend and enforce your example.

4. *In the failure of the direct co-operation of the church with the pastor*, there is another cause of the limited success which often attends the ministry. A minister is dependent, in no small degree, for the good which he accomplishes, upon the direct aid which he receives from the church; and if they stand aloof, and suffer him to labor single-handed, the result cannot fail to be, that his usefulness will be greatly abridged. He may devise schemes of doing good; but in most instances they will never go into successful accomplishment, unless the church put forth a hand to second them. Let the church then, as a body, remember that she is responsible, in no small degree, for the usefulness of her pastor. Let her recollect that, if she refuse to co-operate with him for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ,

whether at home or abroad, she thereby weakens his hands, and, in a great measure, obstructs his influence. Let each individual member realize his personal responsibility on this subject: let him not dare, and let him not desire, to hold back from being a fellow-worker with his minister unto the kingdom of God: rather let him count it a joy, and an honor, to contribute the extent of his influence to advance the great purposes of the ministry. It were not easy to estimate the good or the evil which an individual professor of religion may do, by strengthening the hands, or diminishing the influence, of his minister. Let each one consider this well, and he will need no other argument to induce him to be faithful.

5. I observe, once more, that the success of the ministry is often hindered *by the neglect of prayer on the part of the church—prayer with special reference to the minister's labors.* Said the apostle to the converts of Thessalonica, 'Brethren, pray for us;' and if he needed the prayers of his fellow-christians—he who was gifted for his work, as no other mere man ever was—surely the ordinary ministers of Christ have much more reason to urge the same request. To the prayers of the church, more perhaps than any thing else, so far as human means are concerned, has a minister a right to look for assistance and support; and if he is disappointed here, wonder not if his spirits should fail, and his heart break. Let the church then—the whole church, and each individual member, pray for their minister; that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, through his instrumentality. Let them ask for him, divine direction in all his difficulties; divine support in all

his trials; divine strength, that he may be enabled to hold on his course with constancy and fidelity, keeping steadily in his eye the one grand object of his ministry, the glory of his master in the salvation of souls. Let him be the object of remembrance in the devotions of the closet, of the family, of the social meeting, not for his own sake only, but for the sake of those to whom he ministers; and the effect of it can scarcely fail to be, that he will labor with increased strength, alacrity and success. Oh, if a minister can feel that his church encircle him daily with the arms of prayer; that many a domestic altar, and many a place of retirement, constantly bear witness to their intercessions on his behalf; there is no duty which will appear formidable to him, no trial under which he will be likely to sink. But if this support be withheld, I repeat, you have no right to wonder if he becomes discouraged in his work, and a death-like languor pervades his ministrations.

I have now, brethren, endeavored to lay before you some of the causes of an unsuccessful ministry, as they are connected with the manner in which its privileges are improved; and, at the same time, to present an outline of the course which a people must adopt, who would secure its legitimate benefits. And in doing this, my sole object has been to put you on your guard against the danger you may be in from the operation of these causes, in reference to the ministry now established among you; and to lead you here, at its very commencement, to adopt a course, which will render it to all of you a savor of life unto life. If I have spoken without reserve, it has been because I am deeply concerned for your

spiritual interests, and because it is my heart's desire and prayer to God that he may deliver me from an unsuccessful ministry. Let me entreat you, then, dear brethren, to take the directions which have been given in this discourse, along with you to your closets; and there resolve, in humble dependence on divine grace, that your future conduct shall be strictly conformed to them. Remember, you who have delighted to testify, in so many ways, your respect for the christian ministry, that the greatest act of kindness, after all, which you can render to your minister, is to yield a serious and devout attendance on his ministrations, and thus to co-operate with him in his labors for your salvation. It must be a most distressing result both to him and to you, if, after having shared liberally in your affectionate attentions, it should be found at last that he has labored among you in vain; if, to the very persons who had always been most alive to the promotion of his temporal comfort, his ministry should prove a savor of death unto death.

Brethren, I will not dissemble the emotions with which I stand before you this day. Though a large proportion of you are yet strangers to me, the relation which I now sustain to you, brings your immortal interests peculiarly near my heart; and I anticipate, with unutterable interest, the scenes in which we are probably destined to mingle. It may be that at the threshold of my ministry, a period to my labors may arrive; the voice of condolence may quickly succeed the voice of gratulation, and these altars again be overhung by the dark cloud of death. But if I should be permitted to labor for years among you,

some of you I shall meet under the pressure of bereavement, some of you I shall visit in the chamber of sickness, and some perhaps it will be my sad office to attend in the last hour of your probation. I may hear some of you, as the vital current is ebbing away, tell of joys unspeakable and full of glory; and from the lips of others, I may hear lamentations over a wasted life, and forebodings of a wretched eternity. With many of you I may be permitted to take sweet counsel: many, I would fain hope, it may be my privilege to direct into the path to heaven. But whatever the events of my ministry may be, one event is certain: At no distant period, the voice that now speaks to you will be hushed in an unbroken silence; and every ear that hears me will be deaf in an iron slumber. You will all be inhabitants of the world of desolation, and I too shall be there, perhaps among you. And shall you and I have nothing more to do with each other in reference to this ministry, after the grave has once gathered us into its bosom? Oh yes; we shall have a meeting beyond the grave; and this ministry will come up for review at the last tribunal; and it will enter, oh how deeply, into the everlasting destinies of each of us. In the prospect of that day, I charge my heart to forget every earthly interest, in comparison with the interests of your souls. In the prospect of that day, I affectionately charge you, dear brethren and friends, so to improve my ministry, that the recollection of it then shall fill you with peace and triumph. I covet no higher joy, than that of beholding your salvation secure; and no higher honor, than that of being your guide to heaven.

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