

## THE DUTIES OF A GOSPEL MINISTER

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*“Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it” (Colossians 4:17).*

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The 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup>

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.

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1. The following are instances of this usage: Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 20:24; Romans 11:13; 12:7. It is not necessary to produce more.

2. See Scott on the text [Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testament, According to the Authorized Version; with Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References*, Volume VI].

**THE DUTIES OF MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL WHICH ARISE FROM THEIR  
RELATION TO EACH OTHER AS SERVANTS OF CHRIST**

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 fervor 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 other's honor 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 DUTIES OF MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL WHICH ARISE FROM THEIR RELATION TO THE CHURCH IN GENERAL

### Preach the Word

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,<sup>3</sup> 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 dependence 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 dependence of man upon God, we ought to urge the necessity 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

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3. By the Rev. Matthew Lyle.

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 practicing 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 endeavor 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.

### **Enact Laws for the Government of Christ’s Church**

Another duty appertaining to the pastoral office, is the enacting of laws for the government of the Church of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Some may, perhaps, be startled at this assertion. Many indeed, receive it as a 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 everything expedient in the circumstances then existing. In the

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4. 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.