

10

DOCTOR SPRAGUE'S

SERMON

AT THE ORDINATION OF THE

REV. A. AUGUSTUS WOOD.

4480 c.2
10

A

SERMON

DELIVERED DECEMBER 19, 1838,

AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

REV. A. AUGUSTUS WOOD,

AS PASTOR OF THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, WEST-SPRINGFIELD.

By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ALBANY.

ALBANY:

PRINTED BY PACKARD, VAN BENTHUYSEN & CO.

.....

1839.



SERMON.

I COR. XI. 1.

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

IT is one of the distinctive glories of Christianity, that it furnishes in the character of its adorable Author a perfect specimen of human virtue. It was indeed one grand design of his advent into our world, to aid our conceptions of the divine majesty—to diminish the distance between finite and infinite, by exhibiting himself as “God manifest in the flesh;” but another was, to show to us the perfection of our own nature; to exhibit an example which might forever attract the children of men to higher and yet higher degrees of moral excellence. It was only occasionally, during his residence upon earth, that his divine glory broke out, like the sun from a cloud: to have made a constant exhibition of that, would have been inconsistent with the purposes of his humiliation. But there was no eclipse of the glory of the perfect man: no matter where or how he was situated, no matter whether the world were greeting him with their hosannas or pursuing him with their maledictions, he always exhibited the very virtues which the occasion required, and exhibited them in their perfection. During eighteen centuries and more, his character has been open to universal scrutiny; and many of the most brilliant intellects which the world has seen, have been employed in

endeavouring to fasten upon it some enduring stigma ; but the result is, that every effort to darken it has only caused it to shine the brighter ; has given the church a new ground for triumph in the human as well as the divine perfection of her glorious Head. Infidelity has more than once been constrained to render a tribute to the perfect character of Jesus as described by the evangelists ; and it would be well for her, if in some of her more thoughtful and honest moments, she would set herself to solve the problem how such a character, if it were real, could have consisted with base imposture ; or if it were not real, how it could have been produced by the fishermen of Gallilee, when there had not been even an approach to it in the best efforts of the greatest sages of Greece and Rome.

But while the character of Jesus furnishes a perfect model, and the only perfect model, of human virtue, it must be acknowledged that the very perfection of his humanity places him, in one sense, at an immeasurable distance from fallen beings ; to say nothing of the fact that there were some of the relations of life which he did not sustain, and some of its duties of course which he did not exemplify. It has pleased infinite wisdom therefore that, in the same volume which delineates the character and life of Jesus, should be recorded the history of some of the more conspicuous of his followers ; and especially of the man who laboured more, who suffered more, who accomplished more, and whose name is surrounded with a brighter glory, than any other. Paul was not a perfect man ; and hence, notwithstanding, in the consciousness of his own sincerity and devotedness, he could in our text call upon the Corinthians to be followers of him, yet it was only so far as he was a follower of Christ. He did not enjoin upon them an implicit imitation of his example ; for that would have been alike inconsistent with his imperfection and their liberty ; but he would have them judge for themselves how far he was conformed to the great model ; and in just that degree he would have them conform to himself. There was nothing

therefore in this injunction that was either dictatorial or ostentatious.

You perceive that the exhortation in the text was originally addressed to the church at Corinth as a body ; and it applies equally to Christians in every age and in every variety of circumstances. But if there be any one class of Christians to whom it is more specially applicable than to others, that class consists of ministers of the gospel ; for it was as a minister that Paul performed his most important services. It is in this view that I design to consider it on the present occasion ; and I shall have gained my purpose if I should succeed in awakening in my own mind, in the minds of my fathers and brethren before me, and especially in the mind of our younger brother whose consecration to the pastoral office is to be associated with these solemnities, a deeper desire to be more like the illustrious model we contemplate ; more like the yet brighter model which Paul delighted to imitate and to honour.

It is not, however, my design to attempt any thing like a complete delineation of the character of the great apostle ; for that would require a volume rather than a single discourse. Though I shall glance at several of his more prominent traits, it will be chiefly with a view to illustrate his eminent **CONSISTENCY** ; to show you how different and apparently opposite qualities were blended into an harmonious and well balanced character. Under each article, I shall be obliged to limit myself to a very brief illustration.

I. In the character of Paul we see *generosity* combined with *self denial*.

A more generous heart than his, we may safely say, never beat in any human bosom : there was nothing that he *could* do, that he was not ready to do, for the benefit of others ; and yet no man ever more entirely lost sight of his own personal convenience and gratification. While he would have the rights of others protected, he would cheerfully yield up his own. While he was willing to spend his own strength without any compensation for his services, he was an unflinching

advocate for the principle that the labourer is worthy of his hire. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, he reasons the point with great strength and conclusiveness, that ministers of the gospel have a right to a competent support : this he would do, that the church might have a standing admonition of her duty, and that his successors in every age might profit by it. But then is he pleading for himself in this argument? Is he making a general appeal, and leaving it to them to make the particular application in his own favour? So far from it, that he declares in the very same connexion, "Neither have I written these things that it should be so done unto me; for it were better for me to die than that any man should make my glorying void." *He* held the ministerial office under peculiar circumstances;—when the church was in its very infancy, and the few that composed it had to struggle continually against the arm of persecution; and in consideration of the embarrassments to which they were subjected, he cheerfully yielded his claim upon them for a support. But while he practised this self-denial, he generously guarded his example against perversion, and by a series of weighty considerations, proved that it is only a matter of common justice that the ministers of the gospel should be sustained by those who enjoy the benefit of their labours.

The Christian minister at this day is called to exercise his office in circumstances very different from those which marked the ministry of Paul; and of course we are not to look for the exhibition of these virtues now in precisely the same forms in which they appeared in him: but in *all* circumstances generosity and self denial are most important attributes of the Christian ministry. When I say that a minister is to be generous, I do not mean that he is, as a matter of course, to make large pecuniary donations either in public or private charity; for there are comparatively few instances in which this is practicable; but if he have a truly generous spirit, there are ways enough in which it may operate apart from pecuniary contributions. He will indeed be disposed to give according to

his ability ; but if he have nothing to give, his generous spirit is not inactive. If he cannot open his hand in alms giving, he can lift it up in prayer. If he cannot place his name at the head of a subscription list, he can show himself deeply interested for the object, and call forth the liberality of those with whom he has influence. If it is not in his power to do any *great* things in the department of charity, he may perhaps do many *small* ones ; and the world are wise enough to know that little things far more than great, indicate the character. He may show himself generous by hastening to the house of mourning with the balm of Gilead in his hand ; by seeking an opportunity to find out the wanderer and reclaim him to his duty ; by greeting with a forgiving and conciliatory smile the man who had wantonly insulted or injured him ; and by a thousand nameless offices of kindness for which the intercourse of every day may furnish opportunity. And while this is the very genius of Christianity, it does more than almost any thing else, apart from the influence of God's Spirit, to open a way into the heart for the message which he delivers. Let it be impressed upon the hearer that the minister who addresses him is really his friend, and that he desires in every possible way to become his benefactor, and that minister may reasonably hope not only for a listening ear, but an applying spirit.

But if generosity is an essential element in the character of a good minister, self denial is not less so ; and though the former respects our treatment of others, and the latter of ourselves, yet they both grow upon the same stock, and are really closely allied to each other ; for a minister must be self denied, in order that he may be suitably generous. Like every other Christian, he must deny all ungodliness and every worldly lust ; but there may be peculiar acts of self denial often required of him as a minister ; and these he is bound to exhibit especially as an example to the flock. Self indulgence, while it must paralyze to a great extent his own powers of usefulness, must, if he preaches the gospel, render him a standing con-

tradition to his message; for the only condition on which he has a right to ask any man to become a disciple of Christ is, that he should "deny himself and take up the cross."

It is possible indeed that a minister may practise generosity of a certain sort without being self denied; but surely that generosity is unworthy of a Christian minister which can never prompt him to self denial. To say that a man is generous, or in other words disposed to do good to his fellow men, just as far as may consist with his own convenience, is to impute to him, under a sad misnomer, the very essence of a selfish spirit. And on the other hand self denial without generosity degenerates into a contemptible meanness which is ordinarily fatal both to a minister's character and usefulness. Let him deny himself as much as he will for the sake of benefitting his fellow men, and instead of detracting aught from his influence it will greatly increase it. But let it appear that he is denying himself ordinary comforts for the sake of gratifying the love of gain, and let it become the prevailing impression that he is carrying the heart of a miser about with him, and he may preach to the winds with as good hope of success as to those who have such a view of his character. Let generosity and self denial be united, and become tributary to each other, and each will borrow from the other a value which neither of itself could have possessed. But let them be divorced from each other, and it is hardly too much to say that each loses that which constitutes it a virtue.

II. In the character of Paul there was also a singular union of *dignity* with *humility*.

In addition to that which, more than any thing else, constitutes the foundation of all true dignity, viz. high moral excellence, he was unrivalled in his intellectual powers and accomplishments; and for nothing was he more remarkable than a ready perception of what was fitting to the occasion on which he was called to act. Hence in whatever circumstances he was placed, we never find him losing sight of the high character which he sustained as an ambassador and an apostle

of Jesus. We see in him indeed no airs of artificial sanctity ; but we never find the apostle sinking into the buffoon or the trifler ; and where occasion requires we behold him rising with an almost unearthly majesty. In the celebrated speeches which he made in his own defence on different occasions, while he evinced all proper respect towards the civil authorities before whom he was arraigned, he displayed an heroic firmness, a conscious dignity, that well nigh confounded his accusers. Would he flatter a man because he knew that it was for him to decide the question whether he should wear a chain, or go without it ;—whether he should keep on proclaiming his Master's message, or bow his head to the block ? Behold him standing before Agrippa and before Felix ; and let his speeches on those occasions be the answer. Especially notice his conduct in the presence of the high priest ; who, in violation of all justice and all decency, broke in upon his defence by commanding those that stood by to smite him on the mouth. Before such an insult offered in such circumstances, the noble spirit of Paul would not cower : he turned to him, not in the spirit of revenge, though in the majesty of rebuke, and said " God shall smite thee, thou whited wall ; for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to law ?" But then, on the other hand, who ever evinced more genuine humility than he ? He never forgot that he had been a persecutor of the Son of God ; that it was literally by a miracle of mercy that he had been called into the kingdom, and called to the apostleship ; and in these reflections he seems to have found a standing antidote against the operation of a spirit of pride. And as the principle of humility was deeply inwrought in his soul, so its influence was always perceptible in his life. Not an instance in his history can be adduced in which he stands chargeable with the semblance of an ostentatious spirit. While he declared himself " less than the least of all saints," and " not worthy to be called an apostle," his whole deportment proved the sincerity of his declarations. Upon the favour of the great and the

mighty he put not the value of a rush, except as it might be rendered subservient to his usefulness or their salvation. It cost him no sacrifice to work at the trade of a tent maker, or even to wear about a chain, except as it might embarrass him in his work. In a word, it was the highest glory that he coveted to be a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus.

It must indeed be admitted that it is not in the power of every minister,—perhaps I should say of *any* minister—to exhibit the same degree of dignity that was manifested by Paul; for besides his splendid powers and acquisitions, and perhaps his unrivalled attainments in piety, he had the higher gift of inspiration: he was an apostle, as well as a minister, of Jesus. Nevertheless it is practicable for every minister to remember the dignity of his station, and to act in accordance with it; and it is incumbent on every one to rise as near to this illustrious model as he can. Let him take heed that, in all his intercourse, whether public or private, secular or sacred, with the church or with the world, he do nothing to degrade his character, or diminish his influence, as an ambassador of God. Shall he be lacking in dignity, who comes before men with a message from the king of heaven? Or he who is invested with the highest authority which the Head of the church ever confers upon mortals? Or he whose appropriate business it is to fit men for the noble employments of the upper world? There is dignity in the office which he bears: there is dignity in the message which he delivers: there is awful dignity in the end for which he professedly labours; and if there be not dignity in his character, his office will be dishonoured, his message probably rendered powerless, and of course the great end of his ministry miserably defeated.

But with all the dignity which appropriately belongs to him as a minister, he should still be deeply humble. I am not here inculcating a spirit of humility as one of the essential elements of Christian character, so much as the manifestation of this spirit as one of the indispensable requisites in ministerial conduct; though the manifestation of the principle of

course takes for granted its existence. I say then, that the Christian minister with a heart deeply humbled before God, should exhibit a corresponding deportment before men. Let him remember that it is never dishonourable to act in accordance with his circumstances, even though his circumstances should require him to resign every badge of external distinction. Especially let him know how to condescend to the ignorant and obscure; and let him never give even the humblest of his flock occasion to say that he was of too little importance to attract the attentions of his minister. I know that ministers may be charged with this, and sometimes are charged with it, when they are conscious that it is a slander; but for a minister to deserve the charge is to be undeserving of his office. Is there not every thing in our circumstances, Brethren, to demand of us the utmost humility and condescension? If we are ministers, we are worms of the dust. If we are ministers, we are heirs to a thousand infirmities and corruptions. If we are ministers, we are unworthy of the least of the blessings which God permits us to offer to our fellow creatures. Ah, and we are the ministers of Him who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor; who, though he was Lord of the creation, had not where to lay his head; who daily mingled with the obscure and the degraded; who washed his disciples feet, and served them at table, and finally, though he had life in himself, poured out his blood like water upon the cross. This is our King, Brethren. Need I ask whether it becomes the ambassadors of such a King to be humble?

You see then the importance both of dignity and humility in a Christian minister; and a moment's reflection will show you that neither can exist in its perfection, or even in its genuineness, independently of the other. Dignity without humility degenerates into pride and ostentation; and this in a minister is exceedingly offensive both to God and man. What! Shall the man who tells me from sabbath to sabbath that I must be humble before God as I value my soul; that I must put on the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and use this

world as not abusing it;—shall he, in the very act of telling me this, betray the humiliating fact that he is governed by an opposite spirit? If I meet him shall he treat me as a stranger because I am a man of low degree? And if I watch him, shall I see every thing to indicate, that his ruling passion is the love of personal display? Then surely he is not such as Paul; not such as I would desire the man to be, whose business it is to tell me about the littleness of the world and the majesty of religion. But on the other hand, humility without dignity degenerates into a servile and abject spirit, which, in its bearing upon a minister's character and usefulness, is scarcely less to be deprecated than a spirit of ostentation. Deliver me from that miserable servility in a minister, which, under the sacred name of humility or condescension, is ever ready to surrender up its own independence; which not only knows how to stoop but how to creep; which asks every body's advice from the fear of giving offence, and is never ready to act because all do not think alike. It is ignoble in a minister to be in such bondage as this to his people; and he cannot yield to it without sacrificing their respect and his influence. He may call it humility; but his experience will soon teach him that it is not that humility which involves exaltation, or is even consistent with comfort. I say again, humility must be qualified by dignity, and dignity by humility, or else the one becomes another name for pride, the other for a degrading servility.

III. Not less remarkable was the character of Paul for the union of *fidelity* and *prudence*.

When I speak of fidelity here, I refer not so much to that general devotedness to his work by which the apostle was distinguished, as to his uncompromising adherence to his convictions in all cases in which principle was involved; and especially to the bold and earnest manner in which he brought out the most offensive truths of Christianity. Is he called to speak before Felix; where there would seem to be the strongest temptation, if not to flatter him a little, yet to avoid coming

very closely in contact with his conscience? He most ingeniously incorporates with his own defence some of the great truths of religion; and for the benefit of his noble auditor selects as the topic of his remarks, the obligation to those very virtues to which the character of the Roman governour formed the most appalling contrast; and he reasoned upon these in connection with the doctrine of a future judgment with such overwhelming cogency as to make the wretch tremble upon his seat, and shut him up to the alternative of lying to his conscience or writhing under his convictions. And that was just a specimen of his preaching—bold, honest, uncompromising. Hence he could call upon those who had enjoyed the benefit of his ministry, to bear witness for him that he “had not shunned to declare unto” them “all the counsel of God,” and that he was “pure from the blood of all men.” But while he was thus fearless in exhibiting divine truth, he always “sought out acceptable words;” and never needlessly assailed the prejudices of those whom he addressed. In this very speech before Felix, he appears bland and courteous, and even gives him the epithet “most noble,” to which his office entitled him; and though his remarks were adapted and designed to come down with the weight of a mountain on the conscience of that wicked ruler, yet they were framed with such admirable skill and delicacy that Felix had not a word to say against him. And as it was in his preaching so it was in his conduct. To the Corinthians he administers the most pungent reproofs for the irregularities into which they had fallen, and yet he cheerfully gives them credit for whatever in their conduct was praiseworthy or of good report. In his treatment of his own countrymen, he recognizes their national prejudices, and yields to them in all things consistent with a good conscience; and in his treatment of Pagans he exercises a corresponding lenity modified by their different habits and usages. He caused Timothy to be circumcised because he was of Jewish extraction, and he would humour the prejudices of the Jews as far as he could; but this initiatory rite he for-

bade to Titus, because he was of Pagan extraction, and he feared lest it might lead the young convert away from the simplicity of the gospel. He urged the safe and conciliatory measure of refraining from meat that was sold in the shambles, lest it should be an occasion of stumbling to some weak brother. He declared that he was "made all things to all men, that" he "might by all means save some."

And in connexion with the apostle's prudence, I should speak also of his *tenderness*. Witness the memorable parting with his Ephesian brethren, when he was about to "go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that" should "befall" him "there." Witness the inimitable gentleness of his spirit as it often comes out in his epistles;—how he writes to the Corinthians "out of much affliction and anguish of heart, with many tears;" how he exhorts the Galatians to "restore" the wanderer "in the spirit of meekness, considering" themselves, "lest" they "also be tempted;" how he charges the Ephesians to be "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake" had "forgiven" them. "I beseech you by the mercies of God," said he to the Romans: and again, "I Paul by myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." And you see the same spirit coming out in his expressions of affectionate regard toward his friends. He advises Timothy in respect to the management of his health; and Epaphroditas he congratulates on his being restored from sickness, gratefully acknowledging at the same time that his joy was partly for his own sake, "lest he should have sorrow upon sorrow." It has been well said that "if ever there was a man who knew how to find the secret place of tears, that man was the apostle Paul."

Fidelity in a Christian minister now, is just what it was in the days of the apostle; it is acting on all occasions, even those which involve the greatest self denial, from a resolute regard to duty; and in respect to the preaching of the gospel, it consists in declaring the whole truth, and in declaring it with exemplary simplicity and boldness. There are some

truths in the gospel which, when properly understood, are exceedingly unwelcome to an unrenewed heart. I may desecrate upon the beauties of nature, or the beauty of external morality, or even the beauty of divine love; and in all that I say, may carry a whole congregation of unrenewed sinners along with me: but let me undertake to exhibit the beauty of holiness, the beauty of God's moral character in the incomparable blending of mercy with justice and truth; and it is more than probable that I shall hold up a picture that will have no beauty for the eyes of many that will gaze at it; and that they will turn away for relief upon objects better adapted to their distempered vision. The inculcation of the social virtues may perhaps give no offence to any body; but let the doctrine of man's utter ruin and helplessness, and his entire dependance on the sovereign grace of God and the atoning blood of Christ, be brought out, and it is quite likely that in some cases pride will wake up a fever in the heart, if it does not discharge its venom through the lips. But fidelity forbids the keeping back of any truth of God's word, no matter how unwelcome or offensive: it was Paul's greatest glory in respect to those to whom he had preached that he could take them to record that they had heard the *whole* truth from his lips; and wo to the dying moments of that minister who is not able to reflect at last that he has been, in this respect, in some humble degree at least, an imitator of Paul. But it must not be forgotten that fidelity has something to do with the manner as well as with the matter of preaching; for it is possible that all the truths of the gospel may be preached, and yet preached in a way that will effectually neutralize their influence. They may be preached with so little simplicity and perspicuity, and so enveloped in the mist of metaphysics, as to be but very imperfectly understood. Or they may be preached with such an air of indifference that, if the hearers fall asleep upon their seats, and the preacher shames them for their indecency, they may retort upon him, and with too much justice, "Thou didst it!" Or they may be preached with so little of application,

so little respect to the conscience, that those who listen, instead of being carried down into the depths, and carried round among the windings, of their own deceitful hearts, may be taken up in speculating upon beautiful abstractions, or in looking round for the beings to whom such truths may apply. Or, finally, they may be surrounded with such a glare of rhetorical beauty that, though they are really there, yet they are just as powerless as the sword that always sleeps in a splendid scabbard. The minister who is faithful will, under a deep sense of his responsibility, be careful to avoid these several errors; and while he takes heed that it is the truth and the whole truth that he preaches, will endeavour to cultivate that direct and honest manner of exhibiting it, which will give it its greatest power over the conscience and the heart.

Ministerial prudence operates, if I may be allowed the expression, within a somewhat different sphere from ministerial fidelity; for whereas the latter has its operation more immediately in the region of conscience and principle, and consists in holding stedfastly to one's own convictions; the former is chiefly conversant with considerations of Christian expediency, and consists in yielding up that which it would be lawful to retain;—in acting, especially in difficult cases, with calmness and consideration, and an impartial and enlarged view of circumstances; in so skilfully balancing different and opposite interests, that the greatest good shall ultimately be secured. The minister who is prudent in respect to his preaching, will, like Paul, never needlessly shock the prejudices of his hearers by offensive forms of phraseology, especially when they are not warranted by the word of God. And when he brings out those truths which are most adapted to alarm carelessness, or to revolt pride, while he will take care that he does not divest them of that which makes them arrows in the hearts of the King's enemies, he will also be careful that they gather nothing from his manner to render them still more unwelcome; and on such occasions especially, he will feel that all the ten-

derness of his heart is to be put in requisition. He will preach the truth with a discriminating reference to circumstances; giving milk to babes, and strong meat to such as can bear it, and to every one a portion in due season. He will be specially observant of the dispensations of Providence, whether of a more private or a more public nature; and when the voice of God is lifted up either in special mercies or special judgments, he will lift up *his* voice to urge them upon the attention of a slumbering world. And if he be prudent in respect to his ordinary intercourse, he will with David ask of God to "keep the door of" his "lips:" with Paul he will conclude that, though "all things are lawful for" him, "all things are not expedient." He will forbear expressing his opinion on subjects of inferior importance on which he has a perfect right to express it, if the consequence must be that he will thereby alienate from him a portion of his charge, or lessen his general influence as a minister of Christ. Instead of needlessly arraying prejudices against himself, and sowing the seeds of discord around him, by rash measures or ill timed speeches, he will protect himself in a great degree against reproach, and contribute to the harmony of the society in which he lives, by studying "the things which make for peace and things where-with one may edify another."

There are those who have attempted to effect a disunion between fidelity and prudence; but in doing so, they have put themselves out of possession of both. Fidelity without prudence degenerates into a headstrong rashness or a cold severity, that has no affinity to the benevolent spirit of the gospel. I can suppose it possible that a minister may take to himself great credit for fidelity, and seem to be displaying a martyr-like spirit before the world, when he is really giving a specimen of some of the most unamiable feelings of human nature: he is yielding perhaps to his own ruling passion in preaching or acting with undue severity, and by a sad perversion of language calls this denying himself and taking up the cross. And then on the other hand, prudence, where it is

not qualified by fidelity, becomes nothing better than a miserable, time serving policy. Oh, can you imagine any thing more degrading to a minister of Christ, than to soften down God's truth lest it should prove too pungent for delicate ears; or to ask, first of all, when any great case of duty or principle presents itself, how it will affect his reputation to act or not to act in the matter; to see spiritual wickedness triumphant in high places, and not open his lips to reprove it, lest he should thereby put at hazard his own popularity? And then to call such an humiliating exhibition by the venerable name of prudence! I repeat, it is only when prudence is tempered with fidelity, and fidelity softened by prudence and tenderness, that either the one or the other exerts its legitimate influence, or even rises into the dignity of a Christian virtue.

IV. In the character of our apostle there was also an admirable blending of *zeal* with *sobriety*.

There was that in his original constitution which rendered it certain that he would be zealous in whatever he might undertake; and hence we find that, previous to the miraculous interview which he had with his Lord on the plains of Damascus, he was as zealous in persecuting the church as he afterwards was in edifying and extending it. From the hour that he became a disciple, it was evidently the ruling passion of his heart to promote the honour of his persecuted Lord; and no difficulties, no dangers, not even the certain prospect of a martyr's death, could extinguish, or even abate for a moment, his burning zeal. Hear him saying in view of the bonds and afflictions which he foresaw awaited him at Jerusalem—"None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Hear him saying to the Romans, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved:" and again, in this remarkable language—"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart : for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." And in the second epistle to the Corinthians we have the following account of the sufferings to which he voluntarily subjected himself:—"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep : in journeyings often, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren : in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness : besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches : " and then he adds, " Who is weak and I am not weak ? Who is offended and I burn not ? " Could such sacrifices as these ever have been voluntarily made in a cause which was not incomparably dearer to the individual than life ? Or could such language as this have ever been dictated by a heart, whose every pulsation was not warmed and quickened by the love of Christ and the love of souls ? But with all his seraphic zeal, Paul was also a model of sobriety. His judgment operated with perfect calmness, even when his feelings were the deepest and the strongest. Not an instance appears, and we have no reason to believe that one ever occurred, in which, with all his native impetuosity, he yielded to any thing that was erratic or disorderly, or in which his zeal even seemed to mount up into phrenzy. When the Corinthian church had fallen into some irregularities in their public religious service, such as allowing women to speak in the church, or more than one individual to speak at a time, he met them with a prompt and decisive rebuke, reminding them that " God is not the author of confusion but of peace, and charging them to " let all things be done decently and in order." He testified concerning the Jews in Rome that they had " a zeal for God, but not

according to knowledge." and he exhorts the Philippians that they should "let" their "moderation be known unto all men." It was indeed one of the brightest glories of Paul's character that the warmth of his heart and the soundness of his head were admirably proportioned to each other; and that the same man who was ready to do any thing or suffer any thing for his Master's honour, was quick to discern and prompt to rectify, any departure from the simplicity or order of the gospel.

There is no view which we can take of the Christian ministry that does not conduct us to the conclusion that zeal is an essential requisite for a proper discharge of its duties. The interests with which the minister is charged are so great that the highest earthly interests, in comparison with them, dwindle into insignificance: they are nothing less than the salvation of these undying spirits, and the glory of our all wise Creator and all gracious Redeemer. I will say nothing here of the benign influence which the gospel is adapted to exert upon our *temporal* interests;—though there is enough, one would suppose, even in this consideration, to awaken a conscientious spirit into vigorous exercise: but when it is remembered that the gospel is the grand remedy for the moral diseases of human nature,—that it is that by means of which pollution is changed into purity and death into life, and the destiny of the condemned soul becomes gloriously reversed for eternity;—it would seem as if the want of zeal in a minister was evidence of an utter absence of the spirit of his work—I had almost said, of a principle of divine grace in his heart. And the Christian minister is not only professedly a child of God and an heir of the kingdom, but he is one of the higher servants of the Head of the church; and is it for him to deliver his message as if he did not more than half believe it, and to show himself equally satisfied whether a blessing attends his labours or not? And his own condition in eternity too is to be decided in no small degree by the amount of zeal which he shall have felt and manifested in relation to the great objects of his ministry; and shall he be contented, with

the retributions of the judgment in his eye, to resign himself up to a frigid indifference? Let the statesman who stands up before the chief council of a nation to speak to them on some great subject that involves the temporal welfare of millions, show himself indifferent to the issue, and even fall asleep in the midst of the discussion in which he is taking a part; let the physician who has received an urgent message from some distressed father to come down at once ere his child die, linger on some trifling concern till all that he can do becomes unavailing;—but let not the minister of Christ, charged as he is with the immortal interests of men—interests that shall not only continue but continue to grow, after the earth shall be dissolved and the old rolling skies shall have passed away,—let not *him* betray an indifference in respect to his trust: let the objects for which he labours always bear upon his heart, and let him strain every nerve for their accomplishment.

But if Paul's zeal is worthy of imitation, not less so is his sobriety. While it is important in all circumstances that a minister should cultivate and exhibit this latter virtue, it is especially so when the circumstances that surround him are of a peculiarly exciting character; and perhaps never more so than during a powerful revival of religion. There is always danger then, that light and heat will not be mixed in their due proportions; and that the purity of God's work will be marred by the undue influence of human passion. Let the minister then, as he would desire to witness the best result, take heed that, by his own discretion and sobriety he exhibits an example of all that is orderly and of good report; and that he sets his face like a flint against every thing of a contrary tendency. Especially let him keep a watchful eye upon the young, who in the ardour of their first love, may be liable to think that all the Christian graces are concentrated in zeal, and thus may erect a standard by which they will judge themselves too favourably, and others of more wisdom and experience than themselves, too severely. Moderation and sobriety, if not among the more active and imposing of the

virtues requisite in a minister, are yet so important that, without them, we must expect, to say the least, that the success of his labours will be greatly abridged.

I have seen zeal in a minister without sobriety; but it has been little better than a fierce and desolating fanaticism. It has indeed burnt furiously, but not with a pure and beneficial lustre. It has consumed the elements of Christian order, while it has thrown around here and there sparks of discord, which in their turn have kindled into a blaze which it has not been easy to quench. It is owing to this spirit in ministers that many a work of divine grace has been prematurely arrested, and many a church had occasion to put on sackcloth in view of her own desolations. But I have also seen what has been called sobriety and moderation without zeal; and it is just the coldest thing upon which I ever laid my hand. It is a miserable apology for doing nothing. It sees a lion in the street, whenever there is occasion to go out to do the work of the Lord. It has nothing of virtue in it, unless there be virtue in sitting still with folded arms, when God's command is to go forward and build up Zion. It is a twin sister to that misnamed prudence of which I have already spoken; and the whole ministry ought to unite in condemning both of them to everlasting exile. Paul was at once one of the most zealous and one of the most sober of men; and you and I, Brethren, ought to be like him.

V. I observe, once more, that in the character of the apostle there was a remarkable union of *activity* and *dependance*.

His activity indeed was the immediate consequence of his zeal; the one being the inward principle, the other the external manifestation. As his zeal for the salvation of men and the honour of his Master was unquenchable, it could never suffer him to be inactive; and hence we find that the history of his life is the history of an uninterrupted course of vigorous and self denied effort. No matter whether he was in chains or at liberty; no matter whether among the barbarians at Malta or the philosophers at Athens; no matter whether

labouring as a tent maker or defending himself before Agrippa or Felix ; he was always doing something that might turn to account in the promotion of his Master's cause. But with this unparalleled activity, no man ever felt more deeply, or exhibited more uniformly, a spirit of dependance ;—dependance on the prayers of his fellow Christians ; and especially and ultimately, on the power of divine grace. "Brethren, pray for us," said he in writing to the Thessalonians : and to the Philippians, "For I know that this," that is, the manner in which the gospel had been preached, "shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ." And again, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." And to the Corinthians,— "When I am weak then am I strong." And to the Galatians,— "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." While there was not an energy which he possessed that was not put in requisition for the great work to which he was devoted, in every effort that he made he came out of himself and placed his sole reliance on the power of almighty grace. In himself he felt that he was very weakness ; but, girded with Omnipotence, he could move the world.

And while there was this union of activity and dependance evinced in all the apostle's conduct, whether in regard to the cultivation of personal piety, or the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, the same thing constantly appeared in his preaching ;—the necessity of vigorous exertion on the one hand, and of humble reliance on God's grace on the other. No man ever urged repentance and faith as duties more strongly than Paul ; and yet no one ever inculcated more explicitly the necessity of a divine influence in order that these duties should be performed. "Work out your own salvation," said he to the Philippians, "with fear and trembling ; for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure."

As it is incumbent on every minister to be always, like Paul, about his Master's business, so every one is bound, like him, to urge upon others, whether saints or sinners, the great duty of devoting themselves entirely to the service of God. To the sinner he is to state explicitly the obligation to keep God's law; and inasmuch as he has broken that, to exercise repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and then he is to show him by an appeal to reason, and scripture, and his own conscience, that he is utterly inexcusable for neglecting these duties a single moment. He is to inculcate upon the Christian the obligation of living not to himself, but to him who died for him and rose again; to show him that a slothful Christian is a solecism; and that it is only in proportion as he glorifies God in body and spirit, that he has a right to reckon himself among the number of Christ's followers. Let the minister urge those whom he addresses to rise up to the highest pitch of effort and to consecrate every faculty to the service of a redeeming God, and he will do nothing more than Paul did; he will be only publishing that great law of discipleship which has been established by the Master himself.

But the doctrine of dependance—absolute dependance, must also be inculcated; and upon the church and the world alike. The sinner must be distinctly told that the new nature is the effect of an influence from on high; that there is no possibility of his being saved, except "by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost;" and he must be urged, with a full conviction of his helplessness, to cast himself at once upon the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. The saint must be charged to prosecute his internal conflict, and to reach after the things that are before, not in his own strength but in the strength of Christ; and in all that he does for the salvation of his fellow men, and the promotion of his Redeemer's cause, he must be taught not to expect success, no nor even to desire it, except as the Holy Ghost co-operates with him to give effect to his labours. Does God say to thee, "Stretch forth

that withered hand?" "But how shall I stretch it forth when it hangs paralyzed and motionless?" Make the effort; and in the act of doing so, thou shalt have strength from him who gave the command to enable thee to obey it.

There are those who attempt to divorce the doctrine of human activity and human dependance from each other; but in doing so, what wretched work do they make of our glorious gospel! The doctrine of activity apart from dependance leads to the grossest self righteousness: the doctrine of dependance apart from activity, becomes downright fatalism. The minister who tells me that my salvation depends entirely upon my own efforts, and that it is at any moment within my own power, leaves me with a good apology for putting off the whole concern till the last week or the last hour of my probation; and more than that, when I do begin to exert myself, I shall inevitably do it with the spirit of self confidence, and therefore shall do it to no purpose. The minister who tells me that my salvation depends on divine grace in such a sense as to preclude the necessity of my own efforts, puts me to sleep on a downy pillow, and feeds me in my slumbers with the fatalist's dream. God forbid, Brethren, that you or I should be left thus to defeat the design of the gospel! Let us urge obligation and urge dependance with all our powers; but as we value the great end of our ministry, let us take heed that we never urge the one at the expense of the other.

I may add also that the apostle, both in his experience and in his preaching, always recognized the necessity of personal holiness in connexion with an entire dependance on the blood and righteousness of Christ as the ground of justification before God. No man ever felt more strongly or preached more clearly than he, the great truth that the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the only ground of the sinner's acceptance. "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." But then, on the other hand, where was there ever a more stre-

nuous advocate, or a brighter example, of holiness of heart and life? He exhorts the Corinthians that they should be found "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The Ephesians he charges to "put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." To the Thessalonians he expresses a wish that God "may establish" their "hearts unblamable in holiness." Indeed a large portion of each of his epistles is taken up in urging those to whom he writes to higher attainments in holiness, and in giving them directions how such attainments may be made. And in his epistle to the Romans he not only states the consistency between personal holiness and justification by faith in Christ, but he goes into a laboured and most triumphant argument to *prove* this consistency; and comes to the conclusion that the doctrine of free grace, instead of superseding the necessity of holiness, is really the great spring of evangelical holiness; and the legitimate inference is that he who rejects the former is, as a matter of course, destitute of the latter. The very reason which he assigns to the Galatians for glorying in the cross is that, by it "the world" was "crucified unto" him "and" he "unto the world."

Let every minister, like Paul, urge upon his hearers the obligation and the necessity of holiness. Let him show them that to be holy is to be like God, the most glorious Being in the universe. Let him repeat, and repeat, and repeat in their hearing, till they can never forget it, that scripture which enjoins the practice of holiness as that "without which no man shall see the Lord;" proving to them that except they be holy, they are not only debarred from the kingdom of heaven by a law of that kingdom, but also by their utter incapacity to relish the enjoyments which it offers. Let him urge Christians to higher and yet higher degrees of holiness, till they shall finally reach the fulness of the stature of perfect persons in Christ. And let him account that the purpose of his ministry is fulfilled just in proportion as he is permitted to see the fruits of holiness cluster about him.

But then let him make Christ the all in all of the sinner's justification. Let him hold out no encouragement except through a Redeemer's merits. While he clings to the cross as the only refuge for his own soul, let him do his utmost to effect a gathering to this refuge of all the souls who are committed to him. Let him proclaim with all the earnestness and solemnity which such a message requires—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Suppose you undertake to separate *these* doctrines—here again, what utter shipwreck do you make of the faith that is committed to us! In the one case you make Christ the minister of sin; in the other you virtually declare yourself independent of his merits. In the one case you are a downright antinomian; in the other a haughty Pharisee. You have separated what God hath joined together; and in doing so, you have not only marred the beauty of the gospel, but have completely spoiled it as a system of salvation. Let me recognize that faith which justifies as being itself the germ of sanctification in my soul, and while I see a beautiful consistency in the gospel, I can well enough understand how it is that this gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

I have extended my remarks much beyond my intention, and I fear equally beyond your patience; and yet so copious is the subject, that I have but just entered upon it. I will only detain you with a few words addressed to the different classes who are more immediately interested in this solemnity.

Brethren and fathers in the ministry, is there not much in the subject we have been contemplating that is adapted to exalt our ministerial character, and of course to aid our ministerial influence? It teaches us that our highest efficiency as ministers does not lie in any one quality or even in several qualities, however great and excellent, but in such an harmonious combination of all those ministerial traits which God's word requires, as shall constitute an admirable consistency of cha-

racter. If I mistake not, it is one of the things most to be regretted in the ministry of the present day, that there are so many who cultivate some one quality at the expense of the rest ; and who, in the pursuit of a single object, entirely overlook many others which have even a greater claim upon their regard. I know of no better antidote to this evil than to contemplate habitually the character of Paul ; to see how, while he was ever swayed by a desire to glorify his Redeemer in the extension of his cause, he always accommodated himself to the condition in which he was placed ; always exhibited the very spirit which his circumstances seemed to require. Let us study his history ; let us ponder his example ; let us walk in his steps. And his death, let it be remembered, was in keeping with his life. There was a halo of glory around the fatal block that first caught his blood : he was strengthened by an angel—the angel of the covenant, to stand as firm as a rock, and contemplate the gathering horrors of the scene, and even hail with joy the lifting up of the instrument that was to sever his head from his body, and to separate the incorruptible from the corruptible. We, Brethren, are none of us likely to die a martyr's death ; but all that is essential in dying awaits us as truly as it did Paul ; and if we will live like him, we may, in the most important sense, die like him. God grant that our last moments may, like his, be cheered with grateful recollections ; that we may be able in his triumphant language to exclaim, “ I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course ; I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give me at that day.”

My dear brother now to be consecrated to the pastoral office, what better wish can I form for you, what better wish can I form for this beloved people, than that you may exemplify that consistency of character which has been the subject of this discourse ? What I have ventured to say then to our fathers and brethren, I would say with special emphasis to *you*,—hold to your mind the character of Paul, and get your soul tho-

roughly bathed with his spirit. It is your privilege, as it has been mine, to reckon in the list of your predecessors a man personally unknown to you, but well known and ever venerated by me, who I may safely say was one of the most admirable specimens of ministerial consistency with which any church has ever been favoured. By living among his people, you will of course learn much of his character; for though I doubt not the traditions of his greatness and his goodness will long be fresh here, the generation has not yet passed away who heard his instructions, and witnessed his example, and laid him in the grave. I would that his mantle might fall upon you from the skies; and that the people who have embalmed his memory may have reason to say that another hath arisen like him. My brother, I bless God that this is to be the sphere of your labours. I rejoice that in entering on your charge, you find them a happy and an harmonious people. I congratulate you on the ministerial relations you are forming; that you come into a circle of brethren in which discord has never gained a footing for an hour. I pray that every bright prospect may be realized; every promise of usefulness fulfilled. When your ministry is closed, may the benedictions of this and another generation perfume your memory!

My beloved brethren and friends composing this church and congregation,—though the subject of this discourse has had more immediate reference to those who sustain the sacred office, it may also very properly be applied to you; for if it be so important that ministers deliver their message aright, and that there be nothing in their example to prevent its legitimate effect, surely it is no less important that their message be heard, and heeded, and reduced to practice. In showing therefore that it is the duty of your minister to strive to be like Paul, I have proved your obligation to be fellow helpers with him in the great objects of his ministry; especially in securing your own salvation. I have proved your obligation to be always here, unless you are providentially prevented, when he

delivers his message ; to listen to it as a message from the King Eternal ; to supplicate God's grace to enable you to treasure it up in your memories, to impress it upon your hearts, and to give it an influence over your lives. Think not for a moment, dear brethren, to shift the burden of your duty upon him. It is for him to preach and you to hear ; for him to lead and you to follow ; for him to break the bread of life, and you to receive it at his hands. He might be a very Paul, and yet if you should trust to him to do *your* duty, you would inevitably perish under his ministry. But I have great confidence that you will act a wiser part ; that you will hear the word at his lips with attention and docility, and that you will co-operate with him in his efforts to bring you to heaven.

Brethren, I little thought when I last stood here on an occasion like the present, that events would occur in the providence of God, to bring any of us hither again so soon, to mingle with you in the solemnities of an ordination : but it is only the past and the present that we know—God alone reads the future. In respect to whatever may have been adverse in the past, I trust you have been enabled to exercise the spirit of submission : in all that is grateful and auspicious in the present, I cannot doubt that you thankfully recognize a fresh testimony of God's paternal goodness. And I know you will believe me when I say that from the heart I rejoice in your joy. I frankly confess to you that, when I was applied to, to address you on this occasion, I was strongly tempted to decline the request, from a conviction that this service devolved more appropriately upon another ; but I also own there was an attraction which it was not easy for me to resist, in the prospect of mingling in these scenes which interest you so deeply, and of yielding myself up again to some of the most tender and hallowed associations of my life. But I must not detain you with any considerations of a personal nature ; nor will I detain you at all, except to admonish you, in one word, to prepare to die. Need I say that this is suggested to me by seeing here to a great extent a different congregation from that

which was committed to my charge less than twenty years ago ; by having the question forced upon me, "The fathers, where are they?" by beholding gray hairs and wrinkles where I then saw nothing but marks of a vigorous manhood ; and finally, by having gathered around me as the youthful actors upon the stage of life, those whom I have seen rocked in the cradle, or whom I have sprinkled with the baptismal water. It seems to me that, during these twenty years, there has been a mighty current setting towards eternity ;—and another such period—oh the places it will vacate here ; and the graves it will open yonder ; and the immortal spirits it will gather into the presence of the eternal Judge ! Dearly beloved friends and brethren, you are all in the current, and you can never get out of it ; and he who comes after me here, in a service like this, will, in all probability, have occasion to say of many of you, "They were once here, but the grave has taken them into its keeping." God grant that those who have known and loved you on earth may be able to respond, "No, they are *not* here, but they are far more blessed, for they died in the Lord ; and heaven has gathered them into its bright abodes, and is entrancing them with its immortal glories."

24 JU 68

Rev. William Morse
with the authors respect

11

Mr. Dean's
DISCOURSE,
DELIVERED
ON TAKING LEAVE OF HIS SOCIETY,
May 24, 1840.

1875
11/1

THE
PUBLISHERS