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Series 4  
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# SERMON

PREACHED AT WEST SPRINGFIELD, ON THE

## RESIGNATION

OF THE

AUTHOR'S PASTORAL CHARGE,

JULY 26, 1829.

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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE.

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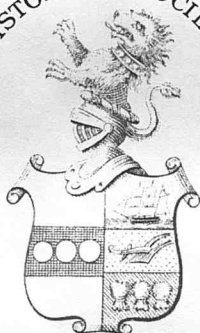
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## SERMON.

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2 CORINTHIANS, XIII. 11.

FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL.

THERE is something in this word farewell, which strikes one of the tenderest chords of the heart. It is hard for the child to say farewell, when he is about to leave the paternal mansion, and go abroad into the world, with the prospect of returning only as a visitor to the home of his early years. It is hard for the beloved and venerated head of a family to say farewell, when some perilous enterprize calls him away from the domestic circle, and the painful apprehension possesses his breast that he shall see the faces of those most dear to him, no more. And may I not say, it is hard for the pastor who regards with affectionate concern the interests of his flock, to say farewell, when he sees them before him possibly for the last time; when a thousand tender recollections throng upon him, and his thoughts are busy in connecting the past with the future, and he seems by anticipation to be standing amidst the

graves of his people, they having gone forward to the judgment to render their account of his ministry.

I am a living witness to-day, dear brethren, to the truth of what I have now said ; for it is part of my errand in meeting you this afternoon, to bid you farewell. It is the last time that I shall ever stand before you as your minister ; the last time that I shall ever be permitted to address you as my people. One inquiry, at this interesting moment, presses upon my heart—it is, how can I occupy this one hour that remains before the seal is put upon the record of my ministry, best to subserve your immortal interests ? I would fain crowd into these fleeting moments as much of counsel and warning as I can. I would make one more effort to waken up in you, my christian friends, a spirit of more ardent and active piety, and to turn the feet of the careless wanderer from God into the path of life. I would take counsel of the Spirit of wisdom and grace as to what I shall say ; and may that Spirit dictate such things, and give them such effect, that the solemnities of this afternoon may be kept, and deservedly kept by you, in grateful and everlasting remembrance.

I shall call your attention, in the first place, to some general counsels adapted to the congregation at large, and afterwards address myself particularly to several different classes.

To ALL of you I would say,

1. *Acknowledge and reverence the hand of God in our separation.*

One principal reason why the events of providence, and especially afflictive events, so rarely exert their legitimate influence, is, that the agency of God in bringing them to pass, is overlooked: the mind heedlessly reposes in the contemplation of second causes, and even while noticing the mysterious movements of the machine of providence, strangely forgets that these very movements imply the presence of an irresistible and wonder-working hand. So much of this spirit belongs to human nature, that none of us can ever be secure against being brought under its influence; and so effectually does it counteract the gracious designs of Providence in visiting us with affliction, that no degree of zeal for its extermination should be regarded excessive. Permit me to say, dear brethren, that there is great danger that this disposition to overlook the providence of God, will prevent you from profiting as you ought by that dispensation which leaves you, for the present, without a pastor. You are in danger of having your thoughts so much employed on the human agency by which this event has been brought about, as to forget that the hand of the Lord has been in it. Beware of the indulgence of this spirit, as you regard your best interests, whether as individuals, or as a congregation. Not only will it effectually prevent you from reaping that spiritual advantage which such a dispensation is

fitted to yield, but it will, in all probability, be the parent of jealousy, alienation and discord. If, on the other hand, you reverently bow before the providence of God, tracing his agency in that train of events which has resulted in our separation, it will not be long before you will be able to say, in view of it, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' However unpropitious the event may, in some respects, at this moment, seem, you will find that it is yielding you the peaceable fruits of righteousness. You will find that instead of complaint, there will be submission; instead of distrust, a firmer confidence in God; instead of some root of bitterness springing up to trouble you, an increased spirit of union and kindness—at once the evidence and the means of increasing religious prosperity.

May I be permitted here to suggest a caution against the indulgence of a morbid and desponding spirit, in view of the prospects which open before you. It is certainly the dictate of prudence to guard against threatening dangers; and this we can never do, if we shut our eyes against them, and refuse to credit their existence. Nevertheless, an unreasonable apprehension of danger—a disposition to regard every thing as dark as midnight, which is not as bright as noon, serves rather to cripple the faculties, and discourage exertion. That there is danger attending your present condition—the common danger incident to every congregation without a minister—admits of no question; and it is my earnest wish that you may all be properly awake to it.

But then you must not let your apprehensions of danger rise so high, as to render you incapable of doing any thing to avert it. I cannot conceive that you have, at this moment, any peculiar reason to forebode evil; but if the reason seemed to me much greater than it does, I would still exhort you not to yield to a spirit of despondency. Such a spirit is exceedingly contagious; and it would be an easy thing for a few individuals to propagate it, in no inconsiderable degree, through the whole congregation. It has nothing of religion in it, but the opposite; for one of its principal ingredients is a distrust of the providence of God. Endeavor, in the faithful discharge of your duty, to exercise a cheerful confidence in God, and the event will show you that it was safe, and wise, and happy, to trust in him.

2. *Be at peace among yourselves.*

On this subject, you may read lessons of counsel and warning in the history of many congregations, in which the interruption of a stated ministry has been a signal for the commencement of a long scene of strife and animosity. There are, however, some circumstances in your case, which I am willing to believe, give promise of a more favorable result. In the first place, this society, from its beginning, has generally been distinguished by a peaceable spirit, especially in the settlement of its ministers; and it may reasonably be supposed that those who now constitute it, would be desirous that its reputation, in this respect, should remain unimpaired. You have also, most of you—let it never be forgotten—

grown up under the ministry of one who was an angel of peace to all the churches ; at whose approach discord flew away ; and I know that, so long as his grave is here among you, you cannot be willing to see the demon Contention stalking over this ground, which has been consecrated by his labors. And I think I can discern too, in the harmony of the measures which you have lately adopted—a harmony so grateful to me, so honorable to yourselves—some token for future good ; a pledge that you will not suffer this ancient society, while its interests are in your hands, to lose one of its brightest honors—the honor of continuing united and happy.

Nevertheless, such is the weakness and depravity of man, that it would be preposterous to infer from any of these considerations, that jealousies and divisions are not liable to creep in among you. It is impossible to say how great a matter, in your circumstances, a little fire might kindle ; and I earnestly desire that you may never know, from having actually made the experiment. But if the thing which hath been is that which may be, then, by one rash act, or one incautious expression, you may light the torch of discord, to burn here with malignant brightness, after you are in your grave : You may dry up the fountains of social enjoyment, and palsy the hand of benevolent exertion, and pour mildew on the best hopes of generations to come. Where is the man, who would dare assume the responsibility of such desolation as this ; who would be willing to have his name go down to posterity associated with



the odium of having alienated this goodly heritage of peace, which our fathers have left us; or who would not shudder to behold, in the light of the judgment, the vast amount of good which he had thus been instrumental of preventing—the fearful amount of evil he had thus been instrumental of accomplishing? By this appalling consideration, then, I charge you to study the things that make for peace. Be kindly affectioned one towards another. Avoid all uncharitable constructions of each other's language and conduct. Above all, exercise a vigilant restraint over the tongue; for it setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell.

3. *Lose no time unnecessarily in re-establishing among you the christian ministry.*

It is always a critical period with any congregation, when its stated ministry is interrupted; and when such intervals occur, it is a dictate of prudence to render them as short as possible. In your case, there are some peculiar reasons for not hazarding any unnecessary delay on this subject; but even if such reasons did not exist, it would evidently be your wisdom to avail yourselves of the happy degree of union that now prevails among you, to enter upon the important and delicate business of settling another minister. Should it be delayed even a few months, some unexpected occurrence may have broken up the harmony which now exists, and you may know, when it is too late, that the golden season for accomplishing this object has been lost.

In this concern, in which your best interests are so deeply involved, let me counsel you, first of all, to seek direction from the God of all wisdom. The command "In all thy ways acknowledge him," is followed by the gracious assurance, "and he will direct thy paths." And again, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him." In full confidence of the truth of these promises, humbly seek the guidance of God's Spirit, that you may be enabled to choose such a minister, that not the present generation only, but your children and children's children shall have occasion to speak with gratitude of the wisdom that guided you.

In respect to the *qualifications* for which you are to look in a future pastor, it may seem a delicate matter for me to speak ; and yet, brethren, I think I know you too well to warrant a doubt that you will receive what I say, not as spoken in the spirit of a dictator, but of an affectionate friend, who longs after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

Let me caution you, then, in the first place, *not to expect a union of all ministerial gifts and graces, in a high degree, in one individual.* Men differ from each other in their original constitution ; and they are rendered still more unlike by diversity of education, and the various degrees in which they are the subjects of a divine influence. Hence we find that some men are distinguished for one ministerial qualification, others for another ; but it rarely happens

that the same individual is gifted, in a high degree, with all. If you should find a minister eminently distinguished in one respect, you will not think it strange, when you remember that he is only a man, if he should prove to be proportionably deficient in some other respect. The best ministerial character, however, is not that in which some one quality stands out with commanding prominence before all the rest, but that which unites the various qualities in their due proportion. Any flagrant defect of character, though it be associated with much positive excellence, you ought to regard as a serious objection: but you will do yourselves great injustice, if you think to find a minister who is, in all respects, what you could desire, and is without the common infirmities of a man.

I would say, in the next place, *Do not consider it essential that your minister should be of the highest order, either of intellect or cultivation.* In both these particulars, he ought certainly to be respectable: he should be a scribe well instructed; apt to teach; able rightly to divide the word of truth: but any thing far beyond this, I verily believe, ought not to be with you an object of pursuit, or even of desire. And I have two reasons for this opinion. The first is, that men of very high intellectual endowments are rarely to be met with; and if you should aspire to obtain such an one, it is more than probable that you would fail of your object; and even if you should suppose that you had succeeded, possibly a more thorough knowledge of him

might reveal to you the mortifying fact that you had been deceived. The other reason is, that you can feel no assurance that such a man will make you the most useful minister. It admits of no question, that, other things being equal, the man of distinguished intellectual powers can accomplish more, in any sphere of usefulness, than one of humbler endowments: but it happens, in very many cases, that great eccentricity is the companion of fine genius; and the counteracting influence of the former upon the latter, reduces the actual measure of usefulness below that of many less gifted minds. And I appeal to the history of the church for proof of the fact, that those ministers whose labors have been most richly blest, especially within their own immediate charge, have generally been men—respectable indeed—but not highly distinguished for their mental powers;—men, characterized rather by what is sober and solid, than by what is striking and brilliant. Far too much stress is often laid upon a preacher's manner. That it should be free from gross faults, ought perhaps to be considered indispensable; that it should possess a good degree of interest, is certainly desirable; but every thing above this, when you become familiar with it, ceases to be of any great importance. A fascinating manner may hide a multitude of faults for a time; but it will not be long before discerning people, at least, will see through the covering. Should a man highly gifted in this respect come among you, you ought to be satisfied that, along with this attractive talent,

he possesses those more solid and enduring qualities, on which his usefulness and your edification must chiefly depend.

The first and far the most important qualification for which you are to look in a minister, is *decided and elevated piety*. If his personal religion is of an equivocal character, he may be an attractive preacher—he may be an amiable man—he may throw an air of gladness over the intercourse of society,—but he is not qualified to be intrusted with the interests of immortal souls; and nothing else is to be expected, under his ministry, than a rapid decline of the spiritual prosperity of the church. On the other hand, let him be a man who loves his Master, and loves his work, and loves the souls who are committed to him; a man whose spirit is constantly growing more unearthly by communion with the Father of Spirits;—and you will find that, through the influence of his ministrations, a purifying process will be going forward through the whole moral atmosphere around you. The light of such an example cannot be hid: it will be a cheering light to the desponding, a directing light to the inquiring, a reproving light to the careless and ungodly. There is good hope that, under such a ministry, the interests of vital piety will flourish, and the church rise in beauty and strength.

Let your minister be a man *who will fearlessly, though affectionately, proclaim to you the whole counsel of God*. I know there are some truths in the gospel, which it were impossible should be

brought home to the feelings of a man conscious of being unrenewed, without giving pain ; and I am well aware that there is a strong temptation, on the part of ministers, growing out of this fact, to divest the truth of its edge, and thus handle the word of God deceitfully. But, believe me, brethren, you can scarcely be guilty of greater infatuation, than to place yourselves under the care of a minister, who, through fear of wounding your feelings, will run the hazard of destroying your souls. It is false, criminal, cruel tenderness, that can prompt a minister to adopt such a course ; and nothing less than madness can lead a people to desire it. Remember that the fact of the truth being withheld from you could never change its nature, or diminish the interest which you have in it. I do not wish you to have a minister who will needlessly shock the feelings of his hearers by harsh and offensive phraseology, or who will dwell upon the more awful truths of religion beyond the proportion in which they are found in the Bible ; but I pray God to deliver you from one, who, from any consideration, will fail honestly to tell you both your danger and your duty.

Let your minister be a man of *prudence*. Not that quality sometimes misnamed prudence, which shrinks from every important enterprize, lest there should be a lion in the way ; nor that which surrenders duty, when duty and worldly interest seem to clash : but that quality which leads one cautiously to weigh the probable consequences of measures

before they are adopted ; and which, in the intercourse of life, enables one to judge correctly, when to speak, and what to say, and when to remain silent. So essential is this virtue to a christian minister, that I hesitate not to say that no other gifts, or combination of gifts, which he can possess, can atone for the absence of it. In that great man, whose ministry you so long enjoyed, and whose memory you so gratefully cherish, you had one of the brightest models of ministerial prudence, which have ever blessed our American church. It were unreasonable to expect that you should ever be equally favored in this respect in another man ; but it would be strange indeed, if, while the light of his example has not yet ceased to shine among you, you should so far lose sight of your best interests as to fill his place with one of an opposite character.

I cannot forbear to add, as not the least important qualification in your minister, that he should be a man of *vigorous constitution and sound health*. The labors of a minister, including the public duties of the Sabbath and the proper preparation for them, together with the more private duties of a pastor, require an amount of strength and effort, which it is not easy for those to estimate, who have not actually addressed themselves to the work. With a moderate share of health it may be possible to discharge one class of these duties ; but to perform them all to his own satisfaction or that of his people, he must have a considerable degree of bodily vigor. You will not consider this point unimportant, when

you recollect, on the one hand, how painful it must be to a congregation to be obliged to dispense with many attentions and services which they had expected from their minister; and on the other, how painful it must be to him to behold the interests of religion languishing among his people, through the want of pastoral labor which he has the heart, but not the strength, to perform.

Having offered these few suggestions in respect to the character of the man who is hereafter to take the oversight of you in the Lord, you will suffer me, before I pass to another general topic, to say one word in respect to *your own duty*, as it will stand connected with his ministry.

Should your efforts to obtain a pastor, such as I have described, be successful, you will recollect that, after all, the question, whether he is to be a blessing to you or not, must be decided, in a great measure, by the spirit with which you attend upon his ministrations. It is a melancholy fact, that in this religious society, as in many others, there are a considerable number, who are either never, or only occasionally, present, at the preaching of the gospel. It is my earnest desire, brethren, for the sake of yourselves, and for the sake of your future minister, that a happy change in this respect may be speedily effected. No matter though he should speak with the tongue of an angel, it could do you no good, provided you should not place yourselves within the reach of his message. And you not only, by neglecting this institution of



God, wrong yourselves, but others also ; for you dishearten your minister (if indeed he can be called yours, while you rarely or never attend upon his ministrations) and thus prevent him from bringing all his powers into action for the benefit of those who are disposed to profit by his labors. It has been remarked, and I believe not without truth, that occasional and very rare attendants at the sanctuary, are generally the most censorious hearers. Let such persons remember that, if their minister is dull, it becomes them to be dumb ; for however it may be with others, they have contributed the full amount of *their* influence to deaden his energies, and break his heart.

Come, then, dear brethren, one and all of you, regularly to the sanctuary, and encourage your minister to labor faithfully, by showing him that you value his labors. And when you are here, be serious—be earnest—be devout.—Content yourselves to leave the world at home ; and let all the hours which you spend here be devoted exclusively to God. Come, not to criticise or cavil, to gaze or sleep ; but come to be absorbed in devotion ; to hear what God shall say to you, and to receive his message into a good and honest heart. And in private too, encourage your minister to address you seriously concerning the interests of your souls : be willing that he should enter your families to warn you or yours to escape from the wrath to come : in short, do every thing you can to give him access to your hearts on the most momentous of all subjects—

the subject of your soul's salvation. In this way, you will be fellow workers with him unto the kingdom of God ; and while you will have occasion to rejoice in his ministry, he may hope, with good reason, that you will be gems in his immortal crown.

4. *Hold fast the great truths of the gospel.*

There are two popular errors in relation to this subject, closely allied to each other, against which I wish you to be on your guard. The first is, that all differences of opinion among those who acknowledge the divine authority of the scriptures are unimportant ; in other words, that one system of doctrine may be held with as much safety as another.

Far be it from me, brethren, to wish to encroach on any man's right of thinking and judging for himself ; and I think you will bear me witness that, while I have endeavored to preach to you what I believed were the genuine doctrines of the Bible, I have often exhorted you to search the scriptures whether these things were so. It is not only your privilege, but your duty, not to take your faith on trust from any man or body of men, but to derive it uncorrupted from the living oracles. But while it is your right thus to do, remember that you are responsible for the proper use of it ; and that there is a wide difference between the right of private judgment, and the right of judging wrong.

The gospel proposes, as one of its leading objects, the salvation of men ; " for the Son of Man is come

to seek and to save that which was lost." It also prescribes the conditions on which salvation may be obtained. One of these conditions, and the leading one is faith; for, saith our Saviour, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." Here then is something to be believed in order to salvation—and what is it? Unquestionably the gospel. What then is the gospel? Is it merely the fact that God has given the world a written revelation, without any reference to what that revelation contains? To believe this, surely, is not believing the gospel, but only believing that there *is* a gospel. The gospel is essentially a system of truths; and whatever these truths are, they must be believed, else the gospel is not believed. I do not mean that there can be no saving faith, where there is an admixture of error; but I mean that those leading truths which enter radically into the constitution of the christian religion, and which render it essentially different from all other religions, must be received, else the gospel itself is, to all intents and purposes, rejected.

Moreover, let it be remembered that some of the systems of doctrine professedly derived from the Bible, are the exact opposite of others. For instance, it belongs to one, that man is a depraved being, and goes astray from God, as soon as he is born; another maintains that man has no corrupt dispositions, and that the doctrine of depravity is a libel upon human nature. One teaches that Jesus Christ died to make atonement for sin; another,

that his sufferings had nothing in them expiatory, and were only the sufferings of a martyr. One inculcates the necessity of a moral renovation by the Holy Spirit; another denies that any such change is necessary. Now it cannot be questioned, if there are any subjects in the gospel important, they are those to which these doctrines relate, because they are interwoven with the very texture of man's salvation; and to say that doctrines relating to these subjects, directly opposite to each other, may be held with equal safety, were virtually to say that no importance is to be attached to any of the truths of the Bible, and that there is no danger in rejecting the whole revelation of God; and that too, notwithstanding the fearful declaration of the Saviour, that the wrath of God abideth on him that believeth not. You perceive then that the notion that nothing is essential to christian faith but a belief of the divine authority of the scriptures, is scarcely removed at all in its practical tendency from absolute infidelity.

The other error to which I have adverted, not less popular nor less dangerous than the preceding, is, that, amidst all the conflicting opinions which exist, in relation to the doctrines of the Bible, it is impossible for any one to be certain what those doctrines are; and that it were arrogant presumption in any individual to be confident that he found the truth, when so many men of distinguished intellectual powers, and of apparently honest hearts, have arrived at different conclusions.

Now, my friends; let this reasoning have as much force as it will in respect to the minor parts of the christian system, there is one plain argument which proves that it is utterly nugatory when applied to any of its leading truths : for these truths, it is to be remembered, have been revealed by God himself ; and men are commanded to believe them on the peril of their soul's salvation. Say you that these truths cannot be ascertained ? Then you reflect either upon the wisdom of God, or upon his goodness. Is it possible that He who made the mind, and knew perfectly the extent of its powers, should have undertaken to reveal his will to man, and yet should have revealed it so obscurely that, in the faithful use of those powers, he should be unable to ascertain the meaning of the record ; thus defeating the purpose for which the revelation was given ? Or, is it possible that He whose name is Love, and who would not that any should perish, should have required men to believe certain truths as a condition of their being saved from eternal death, while yet it were impossible to know what these truths are ? Brethren, let us beware how we apologize for the unbelief of man, by thus casting blame on God. Let some men cavil concerning the doctrines of the gospel as much as they may, and let others surrender themselves to skepticism or indifference, on the ground of the endless diversity of opinion in respect to what the Bible teaches ; the truth of God, after all, remains unchangeable : it has a distinctive character ; it

may be known with certainty by any one who studies God's word with diligence, impartiality and prayer : otherwise you cannot escape the inference that its author is a hard master, and that in professedly giving a revelation to the world, he has been trifling with his creatures on the one hand, and defeating his own purposes on the other.

In respect to the great question, "What are the essential truths of the gospel?" I would say, let every man read and judge for himself; only let him remember that God has given him the power of judging right, and that he neglects to use it at his peril. The system of doctrine which I have preached to you is substantially the same which has always been preached here, since this society had an existence; that system whose prominent features are, the ruined and wretched state of man, and his recovery and salvation by the free grace of God, through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and the influence of the Holy Spirit. On the most careful review of this system, I am perfectly satisfied that it is the system which the Bible teaches; and with this confidence I urge you to hold it fast, as you value your own salvation. If it be not the true gospel, whence is it, I ask, that, while other systems, more flattering to the pride of man, have so often planted thorns in the dying pillow, this, wherever it has been practically embraced, has sustained the soul in peace and triumph; and no instance can be adduced, in which it has been abandoned for another in that most honest

hour when flesh and heart were failing. This single fact, brethren, comes to my mind almost with the weight of demonstration. If you are ever tempted to adopt substantially different views of religion from those you have been accustomed to hold, look forward, I entreat you, and take counsel of your own dying bed; and inquire how these views will probably appear to you, when you are closing your eyes upon the world to open them upon eternity.

5. *Cultivate a deep interest in the great objects of christian benevolence.*

The grand enterprize to which all these various objects are subservient, is nothing less than bringing the whole world under the influence of the gospel; nothing less than scattering all the darkness that broods over the nations, and curing all the disorders of society, and carrying the light of peace, and hope, and joy, to every country, and every hamlet, and every bosom, on the face of the globe. To say nothing of the fact that it is an enterprize in behalf of which the Redeemer shed his blood, and a noble army of martyrs have followed in his steps, and all the arrangements of Providence are manifestly subservient,—it is one which all the great and good spirits of this age are busy in helping forward, and the ultimate success of which is rendered certain by the promise of Him who cannot lie. Is there not enough in this enterprize, brethren, in the grandeur of its design, in the certainty of its success, in the high and honorable agency which it employs,

to attract towards it your benign and active regards ? And let me say too, if you value your own prosperity as individuals or as a congregation, you will do yourselves much wrong by declining an active part in this benevolent work. I know the common plea, that giving for objects of charity makes people poor : but I also know that there never was a plea more false ; and for proof of it, I appeal to the fact that those congregations in which the spirit of benevolence exists and operates most extensively, are generally the very congregations in which there is found the highest degree of temporal prosperity. And not only will you never be the poorer for what you give in this best of causes, but it will serve to exalt your character both as individuals and as a people ; for there is nothing more ennobling in its influence than true charity. And to crown all, need I add, that if you give with a right spirit, you are laying up for yourselves treasure in heaven ; you are converting that which must perish with the using into the true riches, which will exist imperishable, when all the wealth of the world shall have been melted down or burnt up in the last conflagration.

I rejoice in the conviction, dear brethren, that the pulse of active benevolence is beating higher and higher among you ; and I pray God to make you feel that you have not yet come up to the point which both duty and interest require. To most of you, God has been liberal in dispensing the bounties of his providence ; and as a congregation, you enjoy



the preaching of the gospel at a comparatively trifling expense. Remember the divine declaration, 'unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.' Let your gifts to the cause of God be according as he hath prospered you. Keep in advance, rather than fall behind, the spirit of the age. You live in a glorious day; and I can hardly ask for you a greater blessing than that actively benevolent spirit which the character of the age so imperatively demands.

I here close the remarks which I designed to address to the congregation at large: I shall now offer a few counsels to SEVERAL DIFFERENT CLASSES before me.

1. And first, to the *members of the church*. There are many things which I would gladly say to you, brethren, on this occasion, but the time requires that I should limit myself to a few. I will select those which seem to me most important.

And first of all, let me say, *Cultivate a deeper interest in each other's spiritual welfare, and a more intimate knowledge of each other's spiritual condition*. In becoming associated as the disciples of Christ, you mutually pledge yourselves that you will be fellow workers to the kingdom of God; but this pledge you can never redeem, if you suffer yourselves, in a spiritual sense, to live together as strangers. There is, if I mistake not, in most churches—there certainly is in our own—a criminal backwardness on this subject;—a sad contradiction between

profession and practice ;—an acknowledgment that we are brethren in our attendance at the communion table, and a virtual denial of it, in much of our private intercourse. Now, brethren, these things ought not to be so ; and until a change is effected in this important particular, you can never look for a high degree of spiritual prosperity. I counsel you to let your intercourse be more serious and spiritual. It is robbing God—it is robbing your own souls, to suffer all your conversation to be of a mere worldly character. Break down those barriers which an unhallowed custom has erected against an unre-served interchange of christian feeling. It is a sad comment upon any professed Christian's spiritual condition, that he should be shocked or embarrassed by an inquiry concerning the prosperity of his soul. Dare to ask such questions, my brethren, and be ready to answer them ; and you will find that the prevalence of such a spirit will at once increase and hallow your social enjoyments. It will assist you greatly to maintain a habit of devotion and spirituality ; and as not the least of its beneficial effects, it will cause you to love one another, with a pure heart, fervently.

I counsel you also *faithfully to maintain the discipline of the church*. There is perhaps no branch of duty which you are more in danger of neglecting than this. One reason is, that it is a matter of great delicacy ; and if ever so tenderly performed, it is almost sure to give pain. Another is, that the members are exceedingly apt to think too little of

individual responsibility in this matter; and each one to content himself with doing nothing, because the obligation rests upon him in common with many others. But surely neither of these considerations amounts to the shadow of an apology for neglecting to obey a plain command of Christ. It must needs be, even in the purest church, that offences will come; and the Head of the church himself hath prescribed the manner in which they are to be treated; and wo be to us, if we fail to give heed to his directions. All should be done that can be, by private reproof, and exhortation, and prayer, to prevent the necessity of the higher acts of church discipline; but where the offender shows himself irreclaimable, you are sacredly bound, by a regard to the best interests of the church, as well as to your own covenant vows, to separate him from your communion. Certainly every thing in relation to this subject ought to be done not only decently and in order, but with mildness and tenderness; still the duty should be performed with promptness and decision; and that church which tolerates gross offences, ought not to expect, cannot expect, the gracious visitations of the Spirit of God.

I exhort you then, dear brethren, to consider this subject as one of deep practical interest. Remember that it is a work which especially devolves upon *you*, and for the neglect of which your future pastor cannot be responsible. I would affectionately submit to you the inquiry, whether, if the Master should charge you with neglect on this subject, at this

moment, you would not be compelled to plead guilty. I would inquire again, whether, if there be such neglect, it may not be that to this it is owing that the Spirit of God has been, in so great a degree, and for so long time, withheld from us. I leave these questions with your consciences, and pray that they may come seasonably and profitably to your remembrance.

Let me further admonish you to *guard with great care the interests of the rising generation*. It is a fact which you cannot too constantly keep in mind, that from these dear children and youth among us are to be gathered the future materials of this church. In a few short years, all of you will be laid low in the dust; and instead of the fathers will be the children. Do you not desire that this church should live, and increase in strength and glory, after you are dead? Then let all your influence be exerted to guide the rising generation into the paths of virtue and piety. Counsel them to beware of the contagious influence of bad example, and false instruction, and to turn away from the haunts of the wicked, as they would fly from a pestilence. Endeavor to strengthen all their good resolutions, to cherish all their serious impressions, to encourage them in the study of God's word, and to bring them under the influence of its sacred truths; and these efforts may, by God's blessing, be followed by consequences of most grateful interest to you, and them, and this church, through all coming generations.

I cannot forbear, in this connexion, to commend to your special regard the interests of the *Sabbath school*. I say, in this connexion, because it evidently is to be regarded as an institution of the church; though it is an occasion for cordial gratulation, that many who have never enrolled themselves in the ranks of visible discipleship, are yet found actively devoting themselves to its interests. Happily, it is so to some extent among ourselves; and we bid God-speed to the benevolent labors of all such individuals, praying that the truths which they teach, may be savingly impressed by the great Teacher upon their own hearts. Brethren, let not this institution ever languish among you. It is emphatically—far more emphatically than any other institution beyond the christian parent's dwelling—a nursery for the church. Cherish these tender plants which are collected here, with the most watchful care, and you may hope that they will ere long adorn the garden of the Lord. Let the instruction which is communicated, always be serious, practical, scriptural. Let there not be a child within the limits of the congregation, who shall not enjoy the privileges of the school; or if there be any such, let not the guilt lie at your door. May the good Spirit of God, christian friends, accompany all your exertions in this benevolent cause; and may you know, from hearing in this temple the hosannas of children to the Son of David, that your labors have not been in vain in the Lord.

And finally, I would say to you, *Endeavor to*

*elevate the standard of christian character.* Our religion, brethren, has, I fear, been too full of worldly compliances; there has been too little thoughtful discrimination between what is right and what is wrong;—what a christian profession requires and what it forbids; and far too little decision in view of duty on the one hand, and temptation on the other. Let there be a settled purpose,—a purpose to go into effect from this hour, that your conversation shall be in all respects as becometh the gospel of Christ. Every thing demands it of you. Your own spiritual peace and comfort demand it. The vows of God, which are upon you, and which are registered in heaven, demand it. The interests of the church after you are dead, demand it. And the immortal interests of the world around you, of those who look on and triumph in your backsliding, demand it; for by this timid, compromising, miserable course, you are putting cavils into their mouths against religion, and apologies into their hearts for the neglect of it. Let not the inquiry be, how far you may conform to the world, and still maintain the semblance of christian character; but put this compromising spirit entirely away from you; and bring up the tone of your feelings, and the tone of your conduct, to gospel rules. In this way, and only in this way, your light will shine for the comfort of one another, for the salvation of sinners, and for the glory of God.

I cannot forget that there are in this church a considerable number, most of them young persons,

whom I am permitted to regard as being, by God's grace, the fruit of my ministry. There are not a few before me whom it devolved upon me to counsel when they were burdened with sin ; with whom it was my privilege to rejoice when the new song was first upon their lips ; and whose footsteps it has since been my endeavor both to guide and to quicken, in the path to heaven. There are some here whose thoughts, I doubt not, at this moment, recur to many a blest season in which we have knelt together at a throne of mercy, and they have permitted me to counsel them with the affectionate freedom of a father. It comes like a mountain upon my heart, that in these scenes of deep and delightful interest I am no more to mingle. I charge you, dear brethren, not to let these lambs of the flock, wander from the fold. I entreat thee, O merciful Saviour, Shepherd of Israel, to take them into thine own arms, and carry them in thy bosom, for they are thine !

And now, brethren, what remains, but that I should commend you to God, and the word of his grace, and bid you farewell !

2. I have a word to say to that class of my hearers, *who, during my ministry, have been once, or more than once, awakened to the importance of religion, and have sunk back to a habit of carelessness.*

Time has been, my beloved friends, when I regarded you as not far from the kingdom of God ; when the solemnity of your countenance betrayed

the deep feeling of your heart ; and when I ventured to anticipate the time as not far distant, in which you would be found among the faithful followers of Christ. But I watched, and waited, and expected in vain. I saw how the temptations of the world assailed you ; and how little resolution you brought to the work of resisting them ; and how your serious impressions gradually wore away ; and how, on the stream of business, or on the stream of pleasure, you were carried down into the vortex of absolute thoughtlessness. More than once, it may be, you have been the subjects of an awakening influence, and have felt this world to be nothing, and eternity to be every thing ; but as often, the world has charmed all your apprehensions about eternity to sleep. And where are you now ? I ask with deep concern, as the last hour of my ministry among you is drawing to a close, where are you now ? Oh, what has this ministry done for you ? It has indeed awakened your conscience ; it has filled you with fearful apprehension ; it has made you resolve and perhaps re-resolve that you would take care of your souls—But oh, I am speaking of things that are past ; for it is leaving you with your arms folded, and your hearts beating high with delirious joy, on the verge of everlasting burnings. Oh that I knew what to say, that would waken up in your breast, at this late hour, a resolution that could live amidst the temptations of the world—a resolution which should bring salvation in its train ! Dare you let this ministry close without such a resolution ? If so, then take



heed lest you should soon know what is meant by its being a savor of death unto death. In that day, when stifled convictions and broken resolutions will rise up before you as ministers of wrath, how, think you, will this ministry appear? Delaying hearer, once an anxious inquirer, now perhaps a careless trifler—farewell!

3. A word to the *aged*. The period through which you, my respected friends, are passing, is one of deep interest; for this reason, especially, that it is the last period of human life; and having reached it, you have an assurance that you are on the margin of another world. Suffer me once more to bring home to your consciences the question, What preparation have you made for this amazing change which lies but just before you? Be honest in deciding, for the decision is for eternity. If you are living under the influence of the gospel, and waiting in faith and hope till your change come, then happy are ye; and I have only to ask of God that he will shed increasing brightness upon your path, till it terminates amidst the glories of heaven. But if you feel conscious that to this hour you have never experienced the renewing of the Holy Ghost—if all is waste behind, and all is gloom before, then I would throw my whole soul into an expostulation with you, to begin your work for eternity without the delay of a moment. Ask you the question, ‘Is there mercy for a sinner at the eleventh hour of life?’ I read you an answer from the gospel—“The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin;” and

“ *Whosoever will*, let him take the water of life freely.” Come then, and bow that hoary head at the feet of Jesus, and learn of him. Come and bend those withered limbs in confession and penitence at his cross. Come and stretch out that trembling hand, and freely take the blessings of his redemption. Come and let that tongue, before it is stiffened in death, be loosed to celebrate his praise. I seem to hear a response from one, and another, and another of you, ‘ Even now, in the twilight of life, I will arise and go to Jesus.’ Execute this resolve, and immortal glory is yours. Fathers, mothers, farewell !

4. I address myself to the *middle aged*. I see among you some whom the cares of the world have not prevented caring for the soul ; but I fear the number is much greater, who make the concerns of the life that now is, an apology for neglecting the infinitely higher concerns of that which is to come. You have been, it may be, sober and regular in your lives, and have been ready to acknowledge the importance, and to profess a purpose, of making religion a matter of more practical concern ; but the necessity of providing for a family, and the consequent pressure of worldly avocations, have constituted a reason with which you have half satisfied conscience for putting off the interests of your souls to another day. Now let me entreat you, my friends, to review the last ten years, during which I have been among you, and tell me, or rather answer to your own consciences, whether you are not occu-

pying precisely the same ground now in relation to this subject, that you were when my ministry commenced. Have you made the advance even of a single step? Nay, I venture to ask, Has not your resolution to become religious grown more feeble? Do not the obstacles which lie in your way appear more formidable? Does not the prospect, even to your own view, seem more dark and uncertain? Another ten years will have swept many of you into eternity: but even if you should survive, tell me, I pray you, what there is in your own experience, what in the experience of others, to warrant the expectation that you will then have withdrawn your affections from this world, to which they are now so strongly enchained. Rely on it, my friends, this resolution for the future is a cheat; and this apology with which you have been quieting your consciences, is a cheat also; for there is nothing in the duty which you owe to your families to forbid, but every thing to require, that you should make religion a personal and an immediate concern. If you neglect it, take heed lest these very children for whose temporal interest you are so careful to provide, should rise up at the last, and heap reproaches upon you, for having, by your supreme devotion to the world, quieted their consciences in a course of sin, and thus contributed to carry them down to perdition. Be it that your worldly occupations are not in themselves sinful—you surely have not yet to learn that you may lose your souls in the pursuit of what the world regards an honest calling: any

thing puts your immortal interests in jeopardy that prevents you from giving the heart to God. And believe me, there is not one of all the paths which lead down to the chambers of death, in which you would be more likely to remain undisturbed than this in which you are walking. May the Spirit of God bring home to your conscience the question, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Men of business and care, wise for this world, but infatuated in respect to another, I counsel you once more not to sacrifice your souls, and bid you farewell!

5. I turn now to the *youth*. I take you to record this day, my young friends, that you have been warned—frequently, earnestly, affectionately warned, to enter without delay on a life of religion. If there be any one class of my hearers, whose spiritual interests have lain near my heart, and towards whose special benefit a larger share of my public ministrations has been directed than that of any other, you cannot doubt that yourselves constitute that class. And you cannot wonder that my eye affects my heart, when, in looking around upon you for the last time, as your pastor, I see so many upon whom I have reason to fear that my labors have been worse than lost. I see you, as I have long seen you, building all your hopes of happiness upon the world; turning away from that subject which involves your highest interests with indifference, perhaps with disgust; seeking, and apparently desiring, no other portion than

you can find in worldly amusements and vanities. I know that this course which you are pursuing can never render you happy, even in prosperity. But I look a little way forward, and see evil days coming upon you. I see you putting on the badges of bereavement, and walking mournfully to the grave. I see disease withering your strength, and blighting your hopes. And last of all in the train of earthly evils, I behold death, relentless, all-conquering death, holding you in his chill grasp, and bidding your spirit depart into eternity. I trace the spirit's flight, and the sound of wailing pierces my ear—the wailing of a dying but deathless soul. Oh what a price for the vanities of the world! Sell not your souls, dear young friends, for these miserable trifles. Venture not another step in the downward road. Regard as an enemy every one who would encourage you to neglect religion. Let this hour be rendered memorable in your whole existence, by being the hour in which you resolve to give, in which you actually give, your heart to the Lord. Could I be assured of this, beloved youth, it would cast a ray of gladness even over this scene of parting. I plead with God and with you that it may be so, and bid you farewell!

6. One word to the *little children*. My dear children, I am going to leave you. Many of you I have baptized—most of you I have counselled—all of you I have earnestly desired should be good and happy. Hear then what I have to say to you, perhaps for the last time. Remember that you have

within you a soul that can never die. Remember that God sees every thing that you do ; that if you forget and disobey him, he will punish you. Remember that, though young, you are sinners ; and pray to God to forgive you, for the sake of his dear Son, Jesus Christ. Read a portion of the Bible every day, and ask God to enable you to understand it, and improve it for the benefit of your souls. Listen attentively to the instruction of the Sabbath school ; and think of it not only while you are here, and on the Sabbath, but during the week. Never allow yourselves in any of your little sports on the Lord's day. God requires that you should be serious on that day, and devote it all to himself. Here in the sanctuary, never whisper, never trifle. Remember that God is here, and that he is offended with you, if you are light-minded in his presence. Give ear to the pious counsels of your parents ; and for their sakes as well as your own, fear and love the Lord. Jesus Christ, when he was on earth, took up little children into his arms and blessed them : though he has gone to heaven, he loves and blesses pious children still : he will love and bless you, if you trust and obey him. My dear children, I commend you to his gracious regards, and bid you farewell !

Were I to obey the dictates of feeling, dear brethren, I should protract these parting counsels beyond the setting of the sun. But it is time that I should draw to a close. In the review of my ministry, I find many defects, for which I desire to

humble myself before God—many expressions of kindness on your part, for which I here tender you my warmest gratitude. I thank you especially that we part in peace; and while I here pledge myself that, till my heart has ceased its pulsations, I will never cease to bear your interests as a people before the throne of mercy, will it be too much for me to ask, dear brethren, that you will suffer me still to live in your remembrance and prayers; that when other lips shall counsel you, and another shepherd shall lead you, you will sometimes send up a petition in behalf of your former pastor, that his labors, though in another part of the vineyard, may not be in vain in the Lord.

Brethren, my ministry among you is closed. I now give back my charge to the Chief Shepherd. I commend you to his care and love. I ask of him to encircle you with his protection, and cheer you with his smiles. I ask of him that he will cherish this flock of God, when this body of mine shall lie mouldering in the grave. Yes: my ministry is closed; but its results remain to be developed in the everlasting sufferings, or the everlasting joys of this beloved people! The thought is overwhelming—FAREWELL!