

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

AND

SERMONS,

OF SOME OF THE

FIRST MINISTERS OF THE ASSOCIATE CHURCH IN AMERICA.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION,

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE ASSOCIATE CHURCH FOR THE FIRST HALF CENTURY OF HER EXISTENCE IN THIS COUNTRY.

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SERMON,

BY THE REV. THOMAS BEVERIDGE.

(Preached at Philadelphia, Oct. 31, 1788, at the
Ordination of the Rev. David Goodwillie.)

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.” (2 Cor. iv. 1.)

THE work in which they are engaged, who carry the Lord's message to his church, is great, and quite above mere human strength. They are ambassadors for Christ; and, being men compassed with infirmity, they seem very unfit for such an high office. They are employed to deal with enemies, as though God did beseech these by them; and as in Christ's stead to pray these, “Be ye reconciled to God.” This proposal of peace is often despised; yea, they who in the Lord's name make it, are for his sake exposed to reproach, to suffering, and to death. “Behold,” says Christ to his messengers, “I send you forth as shēep among wolves.” If we act with a single eye, and with an upright heart, “serving God with our spirit in the gospe! of his son,” we may lay our account with much ill-will, and many sore thrusts to make us fall, among this adulterous and sinful generation. But, we must “endure hardship, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.” We are in the service, and under the care of a gracious master, who knows our frame, and will not lay upon us more than is meet; he hath said, “as thy days so shall thy strength be.” “Lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.” “Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.”

The grace given to Paul, made him shine as a star of the first magnitude in the New Testament church. It may be said of the other apostles, that they did excellently; but he excelled them all. He was eminent in faith; eminent for his knowledge in the mystery of Christ; eminent in abilities for

the work of the gospel; eminent in zeal for the house of God; eminent for that holy fortitude, which made him so cheerfully hazard his life in the cause of Christ. "What mean ye," said he to his friends, on a certain occasion, "to weep, and to break mine heart, for I am ready, not to be bound only, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." He had, however, nothing save what he received, and nothing more than he needed. He was carried through his work as all the Lord's servants then were, and still are, by daily communications of strength from on high; and, therefore, he owns himself a debtor to mercy, as much, or more, than his brethren. "Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." Communications of grace are made to some saints more abundantly than to others; but those who have least shall not perish in the way; he who gathereth the lambs with his arm, and carrieth them in his bosom, will bring them safe to glory, "a bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench," and those who have most will find, on many occasions, that they have use for it all.

The Corinthians were, as many still are, disposed to make light of the ministry of reconciliation, on account of the suffering state and mean appearance of those employed in it. Therefore, the apostle in the preceding chapter shows them, that the glory which attended the proclamation of the law at Sinai, was in no wise so great as that of the New Testament Church. The former was the ministration of death; by the law was the knowledge of sin, and from the law issued wrath to devour the transgressors; but that in which he and his brethren were employed, was the ministry of reconciliation; by the gospel was the knowledge of Christ the Saviour, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

When the law was proclaimed, the thunders, the lightnings, the dark cloud, the voice of the trumpet waxing louder and louder, the burning mountain, and the earthquake were so terrible, that all the people trembled, and Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake. The sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of Mount Sinai, in the eyes of the children of Israel, an emblem of the wrath which will consume the breakers of that law. The gospel speaks better things. The sum of it is: "That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;" and that "he hath sent forth his son, made of a

woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

The law being weak through the flesh, the holy commandment stirring up the enmity of the corrupt heart against God, it revived sin; it could not take it away. Had not salvation, through the Messiah, been made known in the promise, and held forth in the types and shadows of the Old Testament dispensation, the law published at Sinai would have profited Israel nothing. Believers at that time fled from it (as they still do) to Christ; expecting salvation, not through their obedience to the precept, but through the grace manifested in the promise.

The law was wrote and engraved on stones, at Sinai; but in the more glorious ministration of the spirit, it is wrote and engraved on the hearts of men. The former writing perished; the latter endures for ever.

Terror and darkness attended the ministry of Moses; his face indeed shone, but the children of Israel could not look upon it. This light filled them with dread; and it had no sanctifying influence upon them. They continued to murmur, rebel, and go astray; but the light of the glory of God, shining in the person and mediation of Jesus Christ, is not a terror to us, it is our life, and our salvation. The Old Testament saints enjoyed the dawning of it. Abraham saw the day of Christ in the sure signs of the morning, "and was glad," and so likewise did all who in those early ages were partakers of like precious faith with him. Now the day is broke; the shadows are fled away: and the Son of righteousness is risen with healing in his wings. "We all" says the apostle, "with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord." Therefore, adds he, seeing we have this ministry, which is so glorious, committed to us, we find life to ourselves in the word which we preach to others, and are upheld by that mercy which in the name of the Lord we proclaim to all the wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. We are not only messengers to tell others of the Lord's goodness, but we are monuments of it ourselves; "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

This text leads us to speak, *first*, of the ministry of the gospel, *next*, of the peculiar trials which usually attend those who are employed in it, and *lastly*, of the mercy which preserves them from fainting.

I. Head, concerning this ministry, these things may be observed :

1. That none may enter into it unless they are called of God. "How shall they preach unless they be sent." We must avoid those who, through presumption, or through delusion, or through both, take upon themselves an office which was never given to them. It will be alleged by some, that many truths may be taught by such persons. It may be so. Satan, in the blackness of hell, would terrify men : transformed into an angel of light, he deceives them. The murderer never attempts to administer poison by itself ; he mixeth it with that which would otherwise be wholesome food. They who deal in false money, send it not abroad in their own name ; they counterfeit the true coin ; and the more nearly their base mettle resembles this, it answers their purpose so much the better. The persons of whom we speak would deceive none, if every thing about them was visibly bad. They come in sheep's clothing, but wolves they are, and in the spirit of wolves do they enter in among the flock. It is enough to us, that the Lord hath said, "I sent them not, neither commanded them, therefore they shall not profit this people at all." They who have this ministry, have it by a commission from the head of the church, from whom they also receive mercy to uphold them in it.

2. They have the Lord's call to this ministry, who, after due trial of their abilities, are set apart to it by the courts of his house, acting in his name. An immediate call from God is not now to be expected. After the New Testament church was formed, and directions given how it was to be supplied with pastors and teachers, this was no longer necessary. Those ordained by Timothy and Titus, had no other call to the ministry than we now have ; their fitness for the work was tried, and they were set apart to it, "by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery." Timothy was ordained in this manner himself. One person, for the sake of order, must preside in such ordinations, as Paul seems to have done in that of Timothy ; but there is no reason to suppose that this work was in those times performed by any person alone. Ordination by a Presbytery constitutes one a minister of the Catholic or Universal church. The call of the people is necessary to constitute him the minister of a particular congregation. It is the consolation of them who are faithful in God's house, that they are employed in the work to which he called them, and in the place to which he sent them.

3. The Lord endues those whom he calls to this ministry,

with talents necessary for it. It is required of them that are stewards in his house, that they be faithful, and wise, and tender towards his children, giving them their meat in due season. A divine skill is necessary in ministers of the gospel, that they may rightly divide the word of truth. They must be able by sound doctrine, both "to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle toward all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves;" he ought to be "an example of believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity; to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine," devoting himself wholly, his time, his talents, his heart to this work. According to the appointed order, the trial of men's endowments for the ministry of the gospel, is to be made by them who have the oversight of the flock; and the trial of the fitness of any one to labor in a particular congregation, is to be left to the members of it, so far as that no one is to be fixed among them, but in consequence of their calling him to that charge. The most able, and the most upright of those who have been employed in this ministry, have such affecting evidences of their own weakness before their eyes, and such an impression of the weight of the work, that they are often afraid to enter upon it; and sometimes doubtful whether they ought to continue in it. But it is wisely ordered, that none are left to judge for themselves in this matter. If it was not so, many who have been eminently useful in the church, would have been, as to any public service lost to it; and it would have been ruined by self-conceited persons, from very unworthy motives, thrusting themselves into the place of teachers. To such indeed a great door is opened in this land. The most part are either careless, and altogether despise the ordinances of Christ; or being led away by the spirit of error, they have itching ears, and after their own lusts heap up to themselves teachers: they will not endure sound doctrine; but are ever ready to hear the instruction which causeth to err. It is no uncommon thing among us to find persons pretending an extraordinary or immediate call to the ministry, while the reason of this pretence is nothing else than the want of ordinary qualifications for it. They are ignorant of the languages in which the holy scriptures were written, and unacquainted with the most common, and most useful parts of learning, and destitute of every endowment necessary to qualify them for the office of the ministry. They cannot teach that which they have not yet learned. They know they have no abilities which will abide a

proper trial, and therefore blasphemously affirm, that in their case none is necessary: Somewhat like that anti-christian synagogue to which they are allied; when it was no longer able to defend its abominations, it assumed new impudence, and endeavored to end all disputes by asserting its own infallibility. It is to be lamented, that the word of God should be so abused as it is among us by the daring presumption of these deceivers, of whom we now speak. They may amuse people by empty declamation; they cannot edify them by wholesome instruction. If a Greek or Roman author translated into our language, was thus abused and perverted by ignorant and false expositions, the world would cry out against it, as an insult to them, and to a work worthy of better treatment: but the abuse, and perversion of the sacred oracles is a light matter, or even a matter of scorn in this sinful generation.

4. The wisdom and glory of God is displayed in the committing of this ministry to men of like passions, with those to whom they are sent. We are not in this state fit for an immediate intercourse with the world of spirits. Therefore the Lord speaks to us by messengers, whose terror need not make us afraid, by messengers who themselves need that salvation they preach to others, and by messengers in whose weakness his strength is made perfect. By reason of our blindness, we sometimes give the praise to men which is due to God alone; if Angels had been employed in the ministry of the gospel, we would have been still less able to distinguish between the servant and his Lord, between the instrument and the Almighty hand working by it. God has taken some of our rebellious family, and sent them to tell the rest, that they have destroyed themselves, but in him is their help; that he hath set forth his eternal and well-beloved Son, to be a propitiation through faith in his blood; that he will not reject the vilest of the vile, who come to him through this only mediator between God and men; that though they are by nature all unwilling, yet he will draw his chosen with the cords of love; and that all they lost in the first Adam, shall be restored with advantage in the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. Thus by instruments which appear contemptible in the eyes of the world, and who are in themselves most unworthy of such honorable employment, he destroys the kingdom of Satan, raiseth up the building of mercy, and brings sinners out of the depths of wretchedness; from the sorrows of death to reign in life by Christ, and with Christ for ever and ever. We are weak indeed, but we serve him who is King of Kings. *and*

Lord of Lords. Most gladly therefore will we rather glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest on us.

5. The efficacy of this ministry depends not on grace in them to whom it is committed, but on the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, accompanying their administrations. Men whose hearts are not right with God, but whose wickedness lies hid from the church, may have a regular call to the ministry, and the truths of the gospel preached by them may be attended with the divine blessing, though they themselves have no part nor lot in it. It is God who giveth the increase. There was *ONE* Judas among the apostles, to show, that for holy and wise ends, the Lord may employ such as he, and but *ONE* to show, that he does not commonly employ such persons as his messengers to the church. Some after being for a time employed in this ministry, by falling into damnable heresies, or into habitual wickedness of life, have manifested themselves to have been always in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity; like Judas, who did not change as to his heart, but only as to his outward appearance; our Lord declaring concerning him at his best, that he then was what he afterwards proved himself to be. "Have I not chosen you twelve," said he to the apostles, "and one of you is a devil." Yet the word of God, preached by such is not rendered of none effect through their wickedness. It may still be the power of God unto salvation. None can have more need of the grace of God implanted in them, than those who preach it to others; and none ought to be employed in the ministry, unless they have what may in the judgment of charity be reckoned good evidences of it. A graceless ministry are the ruin of the church, they are cold, they are careless, they are time-servers, they are not steadfast in the profession of the faith; their heart is not engaged in the Lord's work; nor can they divide his word with that spiritual wisdom, or speak with that true zeal in his cause, as they would do if their fellowship was with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. But that the virtue of gospel ordinances proceeds from those who administer them, or depends upon their piety and good intentions, is a popish doctrine, designed to magnify the ministers of Antichrist, and make void the grace of God; it is contrary to the scripture, and condemned as such by the Protestant churches. Ministers of the gospel may as well as others be tossed with sad fears as to their own interest in Christ. It would be hard indeed if they might not preach him to others, till they were fully resolved in a question which may be often very difficult for them to determine.

People are often at a loss to know whether they are in Christ themselves; sad and endless would their perplexity be, if they were under the necessity of being certain as to the state of a minister, ere they could know whether he had the Lord's call to preach the gospel to them, and whether they might expect a blessing to attend the word spoken by him.

6. The Lord's flock can never be absolutely deprived of this ministry. Some of them may be scattered into places where the joyful sound of it is not heard, others of them may attend on it at the peril of their lives, but he who gave it will not take it away till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto what we have not yet attained, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The scaffolding, if we may so speak, will not be taken down till the building of mercy is finished. The servants and witnesses of Jesus Christ, may prophesy in sackcloth; they shall not be silent; they may be slain; but the spirit of life from God shall again enter into them. The candlestick may be removed, the light shall not be extinguished. The Lord in righteous judgment may take gospel ordinances away from a sinful nation, from a people laden with iniquity as we are, but these ordinances shall not cease. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, Christ's "seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven." The Lord has a tender regard to the congregation of his poor. He may rebuke them, and try them, and teach them the value of their privileges, by very afflicting dispensations, which threaten the loss of these altogether; but he will not forget them forever. "I will," saith he, "give you pastors according to mine own heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." The commission given to the apostles, extends to the end of time. They were not any more than the prophets to live forever; but the promise respects them as living in their successors. "Go," said our Lord, "and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."

II. Head, concerning the peculiar trials which attend this ministry.

This ministry sits very light on many who profess to be employed in it. They enter into it without fear, continue in it without care, and end their days in it without remembering that they ought to watch for souls as those who must give an account. Robbers come in, not by the door, and enrich

themselves by spoiling the flock. Hirelings care not for it, and flee when they see the wolf coming. But those who are faithful in the service of Christ, are often sore pressed under their burdens. It is through much tribulation, that all the saints enter into the kingdom of God, and such of them as are called to the public service of the gospel, have commonly a double portion. They have a conflict to maintain against corruption remaining in themselves, and they have much trouble from the corruptions of other men, among whom they exercise this ministry. Sometimes through reproaches and sufferings, they are set forth as it were appointed to death; and are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. As to the peculiar trials and temptations which usually attend them, these things may be observed.

1. It is often a grief of heart to them, that they deliver the Lord's message to his church so weakly and confusedly, and sometimes with such manifest defects, as they fear may bring discredit on the work in which they are engaged. The Lord, on many occasions, leaves them so far as that they may well see their own insufficiency. He will have this saying engraved on the hearts of such as he makes useful, "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." He will show all, that the excellency of the power attending the word is of him, not of them who preach it. He gives to his servants that they may give to the multitude; and sometimes he withholds from them, as a just punishment on those to whom they are sent, thus testifying that his spirit shall not always strive with them who despise his warnings. He may do to his messengers according to what he said to Ezekiel, when, like him, they are employed among a people joined to their idols. "I will," said he, "make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be a reprover unto them, for they are a rebellious house." Whatever the design be, the trial is severe, as it appears to the Lord's servants, an evidence of his displeasure at them, or at his flock, or at both. Ignorance and presumption may help some to speak confidently enough, while they neither know what they say, nor whereof they affirm; but the language which has a divine propriety, the message which bears the signature of God upon it, the liberty by which any are helped, in Christ's name, to speak a word in season to them that are weary, is the accomplishment of the promise, "I will cause the horn of Israel to bud, and I will give thee the opening of the mouth in the midst of them." It is from the spirit of the Lord resting on his servants. Paul found such need of

aid from above in preaching Christ, that after exhorting the Ephesians to make supplication for all saints, he adds, "and for me that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel."

2. They who are employed in the ministry of the gospel, may lay their account with this, that the Lord will not suffer those faults of theirs, which might be an evil example to his church, to pass without signal chastisement. He will forgive them, but for a warning to others, he commonly makes his displeasure as public as their trespass. Moses was very meek, above all the men who were on the face of the earth; yet the rebellious family of Israel did so provoke him, at the waters of Meribah, that he spake unadvisedly with his lips. His offence seemed small, according to the light thoughts men have of such matters; but the righteous judge was displeased with him, and that all might stand in awe and not sin, even Moses, admitted to such near and frequent intercourse with God, as no mere man on earth ever enjoyed, for his trespass, was excluded from the land of promise. When ministers of the gospel think on their former ways, they may often see some sad mismanagements chargeable upon them. Sometimes they speak what ought not to be spoken; the fire of corruption in others, kindling another such fire in them. Sometimes they are silent when they ought to speak, the fear of man bringing them into the snare. In a word, when they consider how much is required, and how little they do, and how many defects attend the little that is done, and what a pernicious and lasting influence their faults may have on the Lord's cause and flock, and how justly he might make them a profitable example to others in their sufferings, who have been an evil example to others in their sins—I say, when they consider these things, they are ready to adopt the Psalmist's language, "Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me." The faith of God's everlasting covenant prevents them from fainting, for he will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

3. They who are employed in this ministry, often labor in vain as to many, or even as to the most part of those to whom they are sent. In grief of heart they are constrained to cry, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" It is most discouraging to carry the Lord's message day by day, to them who hear it as if they heard it not; being, so to speak, preached deaf, blind and insensible.

“To whom,” says the prophet, “shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? behold their ear is uncircumcised, they cannot hearken; behold the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach, they have no delight in it.” Paul mentions two sorts for whom, and by whom, he was exceedingly grieved; and ministers of the gospel in the present time, will find them very numerous: the first were ungodly men, pretending to be christians. “Many walk,” says he to the Philippians, “of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” The second were avowed despisers of the Lord’s salvation; he tells the Romans, “that he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, on account of his unbelieving countrymen; other afflictions passed away, but this remained to the day of his death, he calls it “a continual sorrow.” Our Lord Jesus, in the days of his humiliation, tasted this affliction; he looked round him on an assembly of obstinate sinners with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts; and when he beheld Jerusalem, the city which killed the prophets, and stoned them who were sent to it, he wept over it, saying, “if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes.” All his servants are in some degree conformed to him, in having this affliction to bear: the more intent they are in the Lord’s work, it wounds their hearts so much the more to see the opposition made to it: the greater compassion they have for perishing souls, it is so much the more grievous to them, when they find, that in their ministry they are a savor of death unto death to them; their hearers stumbling at the word of life, and dashing themselves to pieces on the rock of salvation. It is well, however, if they can say, “Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded,” we have not shunned to declare unto them, to whom thou didst send us, all thy counsel. The servant who is faithful, though his labors should be found unsuccessful, shall enter into the everlasting joy of his Lord.

4. After much labor in the work of the gospel a storm often blows, which seems almost entirely to destroy the fair prospect the Lord’s servants once had of a harvest. By little and little are people brought to the knowledge and profession of sound doctrine; but error spreads among them like a raging pestilence. Order is established in the church, not without much time, much toil, and many conflicts, from opposing temptations; but the building, which was the labor of years, seems to be broken down by the enemy in a day. Quickly

do people go astray : " I marvel," said Paul to the Galatians, " that ye are so soon removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel ;" and again, " I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." Such lamentable instances of sudden ruin wrought by the enemy, beguiling unstable souls, filled him with a painful concern for the weak. " When I could no longer forbear," says he to the Thessalonians : when like an affectionate parent, I was in continual fears about my absent children exposed to danger, " I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain." Thus we may be humble, and ought to be watchful : when things look best, we know not how soon there may be a sad change ; we know our faithful High Priest, the great and the good Shepherd will keep his own : he paid too high a price for them to lose them ; he loves them too dearly to let any pluck them out of his hand ; but the wanderings of his sheep and the treachery of foes creeping disguised into his visible sheep-fold, are sore trials to them who have the oversight of his flock.

5. They who are employed in this ministry, may expect that some under their charge, or in their neighborhood, will readily be as scourges in their sides, and thorns in their eyes, and will glory in being so. The greater part only make light of the Lord's message, and go their way, one to his farm and another to his merchandize ; but according to the parable, there is a remnant of malignants who endeavor to take his servants and entreat them spitefully, and slay them. A faithful minister of the gospel usually finds Satan, in some evil agents, standing at his right hand to resist him : some Alexander doing him much evil : some Diotrophes prating against him with malicious words : some Amaziah telling the supreme powers, that he hath conspired against them in the midst of their subjects, and that the land is not able to bear his words : some Pashur ready to smite him and put him in the stocks. The malice of such persons may for a time be concealed. " Also, thou son of man," saith the Lord to Ezekiel, " the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls, and the doors of their houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, come I pray you, and hear what the word is that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them ; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." They begin to smite

with the tongue, and proceed from one injury to another, till they are found joining in a cry like that which the Jews made against Paul, "away with such a fellow from the earth, it is not fit that he should live."

6. In Christ's own flock there is so much weakness, and so many disorders, as are frequently very grievous to his servants. Some, through simplicity, are led astray. Some are so easily provoked, that it is hard to make them live in peace with other church members. Some are timid and stand back, when their service is most needed. Some take offence when none is given; and a brother thus offended, is harder to be gained than a strong city: parties will inevitably arise in particular congregations, and though the beginning of strife may appear little, yet it is as when one letteth out water; a small opening being made for it, it makes a greater for itself, and sweeps all away before it. Scandals also happen through the falls of those concerning whom better things were expected, and great occasion is given to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The reproof of sin is sometimes counted an injury rather than a kindness, and those against whom it is directed, would deal with the reprover as Asa did, if their power was as great as his. That prince is commended, as to the general tenor of his conduct, but when the prophet told him that he had done foolishly in relying on the Assyrians, not on God, who had delivered him from his most formidable enemies, in time past, he was wroth, and put the Lord's servant in a prison house, for, as the sacred historian adds, he was in a rage with him because of this thing. It is hard for ministers of the gospel, when they are assaulted from abroad, and vexed at home; enemies thrusting at them, and friends failing them. The persecution of Jews and Heathens never extorted such bitter complaints from Paul, as the disorders of the churches of Corinth and Galatia. The more he loved them, the greater was his grief at hearing ill news about them; but a succession of such afflictions may be expected by us. The tempest sometimes ceases, the sky is clear, and the prospect is desirable; but by and by the gathering clouds threaten a new storm; here we must watch, and labor, and fight, expecting rest with Christ in glory, not on the way to it.

7. Ministers of the gospel may expect that a faithful discharge of their duty, will render them very odious to the careless and profane world. Such will revile them, and speak all manner of evil against them, falsely, for the sake of the Lord Jesus. It has been so from the beginning. The captains of the host of Israel, seeing Jehu called aside by a prophet of

the Lord, they ask him, "wherefore came this mad fellow unto thee?" This was, it seems the style of the gay, the polite, and great in those times, and it hath never varied much. "I am," says Jeremiah, "in derision daily, every one mocketh me." "We are fools," says Paul, "for Christ's sake," so accounted of many, even of those who profess to be christians themselves. Many have been led astray, seeking to avoid this reproach of Christ. It is indeed painful to flesh and blood; yet the flattery of the world is more insnaring than its rage; its fair words undo more than its scornings; the love of its friendship rather than the dread of its displeasure, has been the prevailing evil in our times, and the more men employed in this ministry, have courted the favor of an ungodly world, they have in the righteous judgment of God, become so much the more contemptible in its eyes. "Them that honor me," says he, "I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." We serve him who was despised and rejected of men; they who sat in the gate, eminent in station, and famed for wisdom, spake against him; and he was the song of the drunkards; in their low and vile assemblies he was blasphemously derided; and if they thus entreated the Lord and Master, what will they not do unto his servants?

8. When any mischief is intended against the church, the first assault is usually made on those who bear office in it. The shepherd is smitten that the sheep may be scattered. We may learn from the account of the sufferings of the church under Ahab and other wicked princes, in Israel, that the first who were sought for destruction, were the prophets, the public teachers in those times. "They have," says Elijah, "slain thy prophets with the sword." Herod killed James, and designed to kill Peter. It was his policy to begin the destruction of the church, by the death of those whose life seemed most useful to it; and almost all who have succeeded him, in persecuting the Lord's heritage, have judged it prudent to begin where he began; of this, so many instances might be given, that the very enumeration of them would be reckoned tedious in a discourse of this kind. They who know any thing of the sufferings of the churches in Britain, in France, in Germany, in Bohemia and Hungary, since the reformation, need not be told that the fury of persecution, first lighted on the ministers of the gospel in these churches. They were commanded to be silent, they were imprisoned, were banished, condemned by some to a most cruel slavery in the gallies, and many of them put to death. In the latter

part of the preceding century, three hundred ministers of Christ were, by one law expelled from their flocks in Scotland: by another of the same kind near two thousand in England were forbidden to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus, except they would renounce the testimony they maintained against antichristian tyranny and superstition. The whole ministry of the reformed church of France, were driven out of that kingdom at once: and about the same time the protestant ministers in Hungary, were either exiled or sent to the galleys. The preaching of Christ awakes the rage of the Devil and his agents. They are ever devising evil against such as are diligent and faithful in this work. A time-serving ministry may enjoy the friendship of the world, but they who testify against it, because, its deeds are evil, will be counted enemies.

9. Those of whom we speak, are sometimes reduced to no small hardship, as to the means of subsistence in this world. The great Elijah seemed at a loss to obtain daily bread, and had only an ill dressed meal brought to him by the ravens, while the prophets of Baal, and of the groves, lived on royal bounty; eating at Jezebel's table: but the little which Elijah had was so mercifully and wonderfully given to him, that it was inexpressibly better than their abundance. The Lord's witnesses lived in poverty, and were constrained to seek an hiding place in the wilderness, while the ministers of Antichrist rioted in the spoil of the nations, and by their magnificent appearance, attracted the admiration of the multitude. Our suffering ancestors, particularly those in the ministry, were at a loss for a little bread to support themselves and their families, while haughty Prelates, who persecuted them, enjoyed large revenues, and lived in equal splendor with the higher ranks of men. Let it be remembered, that the Lord of glory while he tabernacled with men on earth, had not where to lay his head. The high priests and doctors of the law, who were enemies to him, lived in ease and abundance, but he, though he was rich, yet for our sakes, became poor, that we through his poverty, might be made rich in the possession of an heavenly and eternal kingdom. It well becomes us for his sake, and for the sake of his church, to suffer the loss of all things in this world. The preaching of some Enthusiasts has made them rich; and corrupt church-men have been liberally provided for by corrupt statesmen; but the prophets, the apostles, and the faithful ministers of Christ in every age, and in every nation, have more frequently lived in

poverty than in great affluence. They have not received their good things in this life.

10. The last trial of this kind we shall mention, is not the least, nor the most uncommon. It is disagreement arising among brethren engaged in the same work of the ministry. "Behold," says the Psalmist, "how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity;" but the more sweet this harmony and communion is, the more painful is any thing which mars, or even threatens to mar it. Paul and Barnabas, were for a long time intimately united as brethren and companions in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. They labored, they suffered, they hazarded their lives together, to make his name known to the Gentiles, as if they had been animated by one soul; but a difference arose, and the contention became so sharp between them, that they departed asunder the one from the other. Paul appears to have been on the right side. The Holy Spirit gives us the reason of his judgment, which was doubtless of weight: of the other, it is only said, he was determined in his purpose. Moreover, the church of Antioch seems to have judged in favor of Paul, of whom it is said, he departed, being recommended by the brethren to the grace of God. This disagreement must however have been very grievous to both these men of God. Wounds from friends are more deeply affecting, and more dangerous than those given by an enemy. Yet it is almost, if not altogether impossible, in this imperfect state, to avoid them: through weakness, through mistake, and through indwelling corruption, we at times hurt others, and are hurt by others. The Lord's work may be carried on with harmony, but usually there will be either such disagreement among those employed in it, or such threatening appearances of disagreement among them, as sufficiently shews that unity of heart and mind in the cause and service of Jesus Christ, is not the effect of any wisdom and goodness in men, but a blessing from him who saith to the church, "thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion."

III. Head, Which was to consider the mercy which preserves from fainting.

The trials which attend those who are employed in the ministry, are so connected with this mercy, that we could not well speak of the one without intermixing somewhat concerning the other. They never rightly applied themselves to the Lord's service who see not a peculiar need of mercy,

that they may be faithful in it. The idle servant neglects his master's work; in vain do you tell him of the aid he needs: he who encounters no danger, knows nothing of distress. The unfaithful servant provides as he thinks for himself. He relies on his own wisdom and foresight and takes the side he esteems most safe, or most honorable, or most agreeable to his own selfish designs. His resources are from within himself, or from worldly policy, or from the friendship of men, or from the hope of acquiring fame; but he who has any just apprehensions of the greatness of the Lord whom he serves, of the importance of the work to which he is called, and of his own insufficiency, would sink under the burden, if mercy did not uphold him.

As to this part of the subject, the following remarks may be added.

1. Faithful ministers of the gospel have often found it a comfortable truth, that the way of the Lord is strength to the upright. Going forward in it, wisdom, courage and readiness of mind to the service of Christ, have been increased to them: while the outward man has been wasted by labor and care, the inward man has been renewed day by day. The hand of the dilligent in this heavenly work maketh rich. It may often be seen, that talents are doubled to those who lay them out for God, while they are taken away from the slothful. They who run, wax stronger and stronger, and they who linger, faint in the way. They who in this warfare flee from the enemy, are troden under his feet, and they who relying on the Lord set their face against the artillery of hell, out of weakness are made strong, wax valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies which sought to destroy them: They are indeed, weak in themselves, but Christ is mighty in his weak members. When difficulties appear before them, apparently insurmountable, it is then that they learn by faith to say to this and to that mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and it is done.

2. Afflictions and temptations through the mercy of the Lord, are most profitable to his servants. Those do not waste their strength, but only shew them that it is in Christ, not in themselves. The assaults of Satan, the opposition they find among those to whom they are sent, and their own manifold infirmities, appearing in every new trial, constrain them to have more frequent recourse to the throne of grace, and whatever sends us to this throne, is our advantage in the end. The enemy meant evil to Paul by buffeting him, but the Lord designed this for good to his servant. The trial was

servere, a thorn in the flesh; but it was necessary lest he should be exalted above measure. The instrument employed in afflicting the apostle was terrible—a messenger of Satan; but the Lord can make the worst of beings, the bitterest of enemies do us more service on some occasions, than the kindest friend we have on earth. The medicine which is very unpalatable, may be in certain cases the most salutary. Paul lived as he directed others to live, trusting in the Lord, and daily calling on his name; yet, this new affliction made him pray more earnestly. “For this,” says he, “I besought the Lord thrice;” and the fruit of all was that he obtained more full assurance than ever, as to the Lord’s carrying him comfortably through his work. “He said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect, in weakness;” and he was more than ever reconciled to the work of Christ, and to the cross of Christ. Alas! how little of that self-denied and humble spirit is to be found among us in this generation? which moved him when he said, “therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak than am I strong.” He learned in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content; but he neither attained what he had at once, nor did he in this life reach to the measure he desired. It is well if we are learning: the grace which taught him, is sufficient for us also. They who learn of Christ, shall most assuredly grow in heavenly wisdom: under his care may be found many weak beginners, many who are slow to understand, but none who are not making some progress toward that perfection to which he will infallibly bring them, the weakest and slowest not excepted.

3. The attempts made to interrupt the Lord’s servants in their work, through his mercy, render them more useful. Paul was long in confinement; he seemed lost to the church. The malignant Jews might boast, that he was now restrained from that activity, for which he was formerly so remarkable, while he went from city to city, and from one nation to another, preaching Christ. But had they reason thus to boast? Verily no. “I would that ye should understand brethren,” says he to the Philippians, “that the things which have happened unto me, have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel, so that my bonds in Christ, are manifest in the palace, and in all other places, and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” His ministry was never so extensively useful as in his suffering at Rome. There

was a frequent intercourse between that city, and the remotest provinces of the empire: and people, from nations not subject to the Roman power, often resorted thither, some on one account, some on another. The cause of Christ was made known in a manner to all the world, when Paul was tried for his adherence to it in that celebrated city, and before the highest tribunal there: and his faith and constancy in suffering, encouraged other christians. John was banished to Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ: enemies intended that no church should enjoy the benefit of his labors, and in that retirement, the Lord made him useful to many churches. The wicked are snared in the work of their hands. The mischief they devise against the Lord's servants, is the destruction not of his kingdom, but of their own kingdom of darkness. They send Christ's messengers into exile, and know not that they are sending them to preach the gospel in other places, that the church may be enlarged. They imprison them and put them to death, and what is the consequence? The cause and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ have never more gloriously prevailed, than while his servants have resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

4. The Lord sets an invisible guard about his servants, when, according to human wisdom, there is no protection for them. It is remarkable, that such of them, as enemies were most intent to destroy, have ended their days in peace and honor. There was an uncommon diligence used to take away Elisha's life, yet the Lord so ordered it that he never died. The most eminent of those employed in the Reformation, whose destruction would have been more valued by Antichrist, than that of a thousand others, as Luther, Calvin, and Knox, men who feared no danger, and who made no excuse when their master called them to any perilous service, died in quiet; they hazarded their lives often, but through the Lord's goodness always escaped the hands of their enemies. Many in Corinth were set to hurt Paul, but the Lord assured him that no man should do so. And what was his defence? Not the number or power of his friends, but the favor of the Most High compassing him about as a shield. It seemed impossible for Elisha to escape, the army of the Syrians having invaded the land, of purpose to take him, and having beset the city where he was; his servant seeing this, said, "alas! my master, how shall we do?" But the prophet replied, "fear not, for they that are with us are more than they that are with them;" and the Lord in answer to his prayer, opened the eyes of the young man: he saw a more glorious host than

that of the Syrians—"the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Though we see not this guard with the eyes of our body, yet it is manifest to faith. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them;" we need not therefore be afraid to go to all, to whom he shall send us, and to speak whatever he commands us.

5. When the Lord's servants seem to be left to the fury of their enemies, and are spitefully entreated and killed for his sake, he vindicates their cause. It is very dangerous to meddle with them while they are employed in his work, and, according to the measure of grace given to them, acting for him. The injuries done to any of his saints, he will account done to himself: of this, he gives them the most comfortable assurance; "he that toucheth you," saith he, "toucheth the apple of mine eye." As this is true concerning all who belong to Christ, so especially concerning those who are appointed to act as ambassadors for him. They appear weak, insignificant, and such as may with impunity be trodden under foot; but he is strong who will plead their cause, and execute judgment for them. The mocking of Israel at the Lord's messengers, and their killing of his prophets, brought wrath upon that nation. The miserable end of those who have molested the ministers of Christ, for their uprightness and steadfastness in his service, is a strong testimony of his regard to his servants. They are not alone, the Lord is with them while they stand for him: and they who fight against them know not what they do.

6. The Lord writes an abiding memorial of his mercy on the hearts of his faithful messengers, that they may without fainting, in the day of adversity, preach it to others. Ministers of the gospel finding themselves deeply indebted to free grace, the love of Christ constraineth them to endure all things for the elect's sake, and most gladly to spend and be spent in the service of him who loved them, and gave himself for them. Our Lord Jesus stood in no debt to us; we were worthy of death, we were polluted exceedingly, we were enemies to him; yet he engaged in our desperate cause, labored for us, bore reproach for us, was made a curse for us, and was brought into the dust of death for us. What is all that we can do, or suffer in his glorious and honorable cause? only a small testimony of our love to him; we can never repay him for what he hath done for us; we must be eternally in debt to him—a debt great beyond what the heart is able to comprehend, or the tongue to express; but any thing we do in his

service, the very least (was it only the giving of a cup of cold water for his sake) shall not lose its reward.

7. The mercy of the Lord abounds toward his servants in the time of their greatest need, in fiery trials, and in grievous perplexities. Moses was sore vexed with the murmurings and hard-heartedness of Israel; but he enjoyed pleasant days of communion with God; and when his trouble abounded, he was then admitted to the most near and frequent intercourse with his gracious Lord. Jeremiah might with as much propriety as any man of whom we have heard, adopt the Psalmist's language; "I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up;" yet he was at times refreshed by manifestations of the Lord's goodness towards him, and towards the remnant of Israel; speaking of these he adds, "upon this I awaked and beheld, and my sleep was sweet unto me." Paul was called to appear at the tribunal of Nero, a very wicked and cruel judge, and as to man's aid he was left alone; no one had so much kindness for him, or zeal for the cause of Christ, as to stand with him, but all men forsook him; "notwithstanding," says he, "the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and all the Gentiles might hear, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." He was most remarkably helped when he had no help of men at all.

8. As the Lord has sent his servants to instruct others concerning his mercy, so he usually instructs them for this service, by communications of it to themselves. They are frequently brought into afflictions, of which they complain as pressing them out of measure, above strength, in so much, that they despair even of life. Moses was once so discouraged under his burdens, and so grieved in his spirit at the iniquity of Israel, that he said unto the Lord, "if thou deal thus with me, kill me I pray thee out of hand, if I have found favor in thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness." A new and unexpected trial made Elijah request for himself that he might die. The contempt and derision of the Lord's message by those to whom it was sent, made Jeremiah once forget the solemn charge given to him, to speak unto them all, that the Lord should command him, so far, that he said, "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name," a very sinful resolution, in which he was not left to continue. The Lord does not leave his servants to perish in these deep waters. He comforteth them in all their tribulations, that they may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith they themselves are comforted of God.

They labor among the poor, the afflicted and the tempted, and it is necessary, that they be qualified not by speculative knowledge only, but by experience for dealing with such. This caused Luther to say, that study, prayer, and temptation, were requisite to fit one for being a minister of the gospel, and his remark is agreeable to that made by an higher authority; "whether we are afflicted," said Paul, addressing the Corinthians, "it is for your consolation and salvation, or whether we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation."

The improvement which we ought to make of this subject, has been in some manner declared already, we shall not insist much longer upon it. From what has been said we may see:

1. That ministers of the gospel are often exposed to trials, the severity of which they cannot well understand, who were never called to public employment in the church. The Apostle Paul, notwithstanding all his gifts and graces, thus addressed christians in his time: "Brethren pray for us." We who are so weak, have surely not less need, especially in this time of affliction and temptation, when the Lord has sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death. Our trials are not indeed to be compared with those which many of the Lord's servants before us have endured, but they are heavy to us whose strength is so small.

2. We may see that those who live in ease, are not likely to be much useful in this ministry. If we should go through the whole catalogue of those who have been most eminent in the service of the gospel, we will find that they were taught in the school of affliction. Moses suffered a long exile in the land of Midian, and after this he had a great fight of affliction to endure in leading Israel through the wilderness. Paul was in deaths often. As the Lord's gracious designs in laying heavy burdens upon them, should reconcile all his people to the cross, so especially such of them as serve him in the ministry of the word: we can ill bear affliction, but we can less bear the want of it. It is fit that seeing we are called to instruct and comfort the afflicted, we ourselves should be taught to endure, as seeing him who is invisible.

3. We may from what has been said, see that ministers of the gospel ought not to bring up an evil report, upon their master's service, as if they were employed in a disagreeable and unprofitable task. The angels neither have, nor desire a more honorable employment than to do his commandments; they count it in no wise grievous, that they are all ministering

spirits sent forth to minister for them, who shall be heirs of salvation. What then are men taken from our ruined family and sent to tell their brethren the good news of salvation through Christ, that they should murmur? This work may be despicable in the eyes of a profane generation, but in God's account it is the highest we can possibly be called unto. It may frequently happen, that through the rage of enemies and the instability of friends, through weakness in ourselves, and fierce assaults from without, our flesh has no rest, and we are troubled on every side; but God who comforteth those that are cast down, will not suffer us to be always afflicted, and never comforted. He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.

4. We may see that such as enter into this ministry, ought to count the cost ere they begin. They are most fully and expressly warned. What our Lord Jesus on various occasions said to his apostles, concerning the evil things which an ungodly world would do unto them for his name's sake, is to be remembered by all those whom he at any time calls to serve him in the work of the gospel. Is it to be expected, that going forth under the banner of the captain of salvation, his enemies will not assault us? No man enlists under the banner of an earthly prince or leader, but he must lay his account with fighting, and with the hardships which usually attend men engaged in a warfare. If we expect reproaches and sufferings in our Master's cause, and are through grace resolved to bear these for his sake, the day of trial will be less grievous to us.

5. We may see that love to the cause and work of Christ, will make the afflictions attending this ministry light to his servants. Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it: the prospect of suffering and death, did not make him hesitate or linger in that great service he accomplished for us: the Evangelist Luke, observes that, "when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem;" he never went up with greater readiness to that city than he did the last time, when he knew that his hour was come, that he should be delivered into the hands of sinful men, who should scourge him and put him to death. Did he in love to the church thus yield himself to ignominy and sorrow? Did he for it become obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the cross? What then have we which is too valuable to be spent in its service? Paul did not count his life too much: "Yea," says he to the Philippians, "and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy

and rejoice with you all." "Hereby," says another apostle, "perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Let it be your prayer, that there may be a succession of faithful ministers of the gospel granted to us by the head of the church. The prophets, the apostles, the most eminent and useful servants of Christ do not continue by reason of death; but the Lord who sent them is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Ministers die, but the chief Shepherd lives, and by him this ministry is preserved. He takes the children instead of the fathers, and employs them in his service. He makes the spirit of those who are taken away, to rest on those who succeed them. He calls forth those who were most unlikely, and fits them for his work. Paul was once a blind Pharisee. Augustine was in his younger years an heretic of the worst kind, in his opinions, and a mere slave to the pleasures of sin in his life. Luther was for a long time, a devoted servant of Antichrist, ready as he owns to destroy any one who would have spoken but a word against that Man of Sin. Other eminent lights who labored in the great work of the reformation, were in like manner taken out of the dark kingdom of the beast. Our Lord Jesus will send, by whom he will send; from him we ought to ask the continuance of this ministry among us, and heavenly influence to accompany it.

It is most lamentable, that so many in this land live as heathens, utterly despising the ordinances of Christ; that so many are deluded by a false ministry—by teachers whom the Lord has not sent; that many are led astray by an unfaithful ministry—by men not upright and steadfast in their Master's cause; and that so many profit nothing by the word of God, though preached to them in some measure of plainness and purity. See that ye my brethren, do not provoke the Lord by sinning against the light, to take it away from you. Remember what he did unto Shiloh, for the wickedness of his people Israel. There is many a Shiloh to be seen without going so far as Palestine—places once favored of the Lord, but now in just indignation, forsaken by him. They are instructive monuments to us, calling us to take heed, lest we perish after the same example of apostacy from God.

The improvement which we all ought to make of this subject, is to rely on the mercy of the Lord as sufficient for us in all the service, and in all the sufferings to which we may be severally called, we do not glorify him while we think and

speak of him as an hard master, requiring much and giving little ; he is plenteous in mercy ; our afflictions may be severe, but they are of a passing nature ; whereas to them who fear him, God's mercy never ends ; let us therefore hope in the Lord, and when at any time we are brought into great depths, trust that he will bring us out of them, saying with the Psalmist, "thou Lord who hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth."