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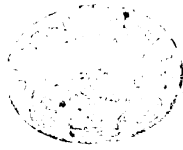
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AN ORDINATION SERMON.

LUKE III. 7—15.

Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptised of him, O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance; and begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our Father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth, and saith unto them, he that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptised, and said unto him, Master what shall we do? and he said unto them, exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, and what shall we do? and he said unto them, do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

PREVIOUS to the advent of Christ, and the establishment of his spiritual kingdom, it had been predicted, by an angel, that John should go before him, in the spirit and power of Elias, to prepare the way of the Lord. This prediction was accomplished. And our text is a concise history of his first interview with the people to whom he was sent.

In this history we shall naturally be led to notice,

- I. The *manner* in which he executed his commission:
- II. The *matter* he delivered.
- III. The *object* he had in view.
- IV. The *effects* produced.

I. We notice the *manner* in which he executed his commission.

1. His manner was such as corresponded to the dignity of his character as the harbinger of Christ, and to the importance of the message he was sent to convey. It was plain, distinguishing, affectionate, solemn and commanding.

It was plain. He came a "messenger of truth;" "his language plain; and plain his manner." In addressing his hearers he did not labor for elegance and ornament. His style was not embellished with that beauty of expression, and studied phraseology, denominated by the Apostle, "the enticing words of man's wisdom." He affected no parade of learning, no display of science falsely so called, lest he should involve his message in obscurity, conceal it under the charms of eloquence, and leave his audience to admire the speaker rather than the subject, to be amused with the sound, rather than instructed with the sense. Had he courted popularity, or been solicitous to gain the applause of worldly men, he would have labored to adorn his subject with all the beauties of language, and elegancies of fine writing. For these are the things which chiefly attract the attention of the men of *this world*; and that preacher is most applauded who most attends to the choice and brilliancy of his figures, the sound and collocation of his words, and the harmony of his sentences. With such affectations of eloquence, a speaker may entertain and delight the "wise, the scribe, and the disputer of this world," but to the simple and unlearned, he is "a barbarian" and needs one to interpret.

But not so the preaching of John. He was sent to proclaim the advent of Christ, and to prepare the way for his kind reception. In delivering such a message, plainness was indispensable. Because of the people's hypocrisy, their boasting that Abraham was their father, their confidence in their alms, prayers, ceremonial observances, and long enjoyed privileges, he calls them a generation of vipers. Here is no flattery to inflate their pride. Next he warns them of a "wrath to come," and urges them to escape. He endeavors to persuade them to repent, by the delightfully encouraging motive that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

When he had thus roused and fixed their attention, he proceeded with great fidelity and plainness to point out their duty according to their respective characters—to the rich he prescribed charity; to the publicans, lenity and justice; to the soldiers, gentleness and contentment. Here is no disguise, no reservation,

no concealment of truth or duty. What was required of them in their several relations he plainly disclosed, and as plainly admonished them of the tremendous consequences of a refusal to comply.

His plainness of address powerfully reminds us of the manner of our Savior. His ordinary style, was "Woe unto you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites." "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." It would now be considered highly indecorous, and perhaps it is unnecessary for the servants of Christ, to employ the same epithets in addressing men as either John or our Savior used; but the same plainness is requisitè in opening to their view, the native depravity of their hearts, the criminality of their conduct, and the certainty of their final destruction, except they repent and reform.

2. His manner was *distinguishing* and *particular*. He did not deal in general observations, and spread out the truths he uttered, over so large a surface, that they resembled water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered. Nor did he throw them into a confused, indistinct mass, from which nothing could be extracted that was necessary, or certain, or practical. He did not leave his hearers to *conjecture* what his message was, or to doubt respecting a hereafter, that possibly there might be a future state, and a wrath to come. Nor did he describe their moral characters, or shew them their duty in so involved and indefinite a manner, that they could not apply the instruction, or understand their duty. But he was distinguishing and clear. He referred them to eternity. He distinctly taught them, that there was indeed a wrath to come, and that they were exposed to endure it; that God had laid the axe at the root of the trees, and that every tree not bearing good fruit would be cut down and burned; that it would be of no avail in the great day of wrath, to say we have Abraham for our father; that repentance was essential to salvation, and that in all respects, each one, according to his past character and conduct, must reform. So particular was he in his address that it was impossible for them, to misapprehend the truth, or to avoid ascertaining both their character and their duty. Though they might forget, yet they could

not live ignorant of what manner of persons they were. How different this from what the natural man desires, and from what many teachers practice ! Men, in general, are unwilling to have their religion tried, or their characters and conduct exposed lest their deeds should be reproved, by the voice of a self-accusing conscience. They dread and abhor the particularity of faithful instructors, and esteem them enemies because they tell them the truth. And there are many professing to stand as guides to souls, who exhibit the gospel in such general terms, that their hearers never know what they are to believe, practice, or experience, in order to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. Under such teachers men are ever learning, but never come to the knowledge of the truth.

3. His manner was *affectionate*. Aiming at their immortal welfare, and desirous to have them secure it, he addressed them with great tenderness and concern. He was "affectionate in look ; and tender in address ; as well becomes a messenger of grace to guilty men." He beheld their condition, saw them trusting in those privileges and works, which could not profit in the last great day, and exposed to suffer the just indignation of God, and he affectionately warned them. Deeply impressed with a sense of their danger, with tenderness he enquires, if any one had performed the benevolent office of warning them to flee ? Without waiting for a reply, he hastens to give the friendly admonition. Behold the axe is laid at the root of the trees, every tree not bearing good fruit is to be hewn down and cast into the fire, Remember therefore, it will be of no use to plead your descent from Abraham ; it will not avail you to boast of your advantages, or to trust in yourselves that you are righteous ; but you must repent of every sin, and vary the whole course of your conduct, or be finally rejected. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, the Savior is approaching, behold now therefore is an accepted time. What errand could be more benevolent—what admonition more seasonable and affectionate ? Their future happiness seems to be the great object of his concern, and with heart-felt anxiety would he persuade them to seek and secure it.

Such was the course our Savior pursued a few years after in addressing his hearers ; on his approach to Jerusalem he exclaimed, Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem ! how often would I have gathered you. He even wept over it, Oh that thou hadst known the things of thy peace, but now they are hidden from thine eyes. The apostles imitated the example of their Lord in this respect. A similar method of treating with sinners, the ministers of the cross ought now to adopt. The tenderest solicitude for their souls ought to be felt, and the most affectionate expostulations to be employed, in persuading them to turn from the highway to ruin, to the narrow way of life.

4. His manner was solemn. The message he was commissioned to deliver, was the most important of any ever communicated to mankind. It was nothing less than the joyful tidings that the coming and kingdom of the long-expected Messiah were at hand. It was his charge to prepare the way of the Lord, by forewarning the people of his advent, and by admonishing them to repent and believe the gospel. On such a subject, it would be impossible to trifle. "No ! he was serious in a serious cause ; and understood too well the weighty terms he had taken in charge." The honor of his Lord, and the eternal welfare of immortal souls were concerned. Gravity and solemnity, became him in all his deportment, but especially in discharging his high commission. He was negotiating with beings, who were rebels against the Sovereign of the universe, but yet spared as prisoners of hope. Soon were they to enter upon the retribution of eternity. Soon would they be beyond the benefit of offered mercy. Soon the Savior would appear. His hearers must prepare ; repentance must be exercised ; a total change in their principles and practice must be wrought, or their end would be to endure the wrath of God. Every thing relating to his ministry was weighty and momentous. Could he avoid solemnity and earnestness on such an occasion, and in such a work ? Could he trifle when so much was depending ; when such awful consequences were to follow, if his hearers rejected his message ? How solemn then, may we imagine, would be his address to them on these most interesting subjects ? Any thing bordering upon frivolity or unseriousness,

would be totally incompatible with the dignity of his character, and the sacredness of his office. In the language of one, whom we have quoted more than once, "He, that negotiates between God and man, as God's ambassador, the great concerns of judgment and of mercy, should beware of lightness in his speech."

Finally, in his manner, he was *commanding*.

He spake not with that timidity and self-distrust, which possess those who are conscious to themselves that they act without commission; but with the energy and boldness of one whose office was sacred, and whose "credentials clear." He knew he held his commission under the King of heaven, that he acted under authority, and that of the highest kind; this freed him from all diffidence and embarrassment, and greatly emboldened him in the management of his cause, and execution of his charge. When he addressed the multitude, who crowded to him, he could appeal to his authority, and refer them to his powers for proof, that his mission was divine, and his work, of God. While this inspired *him* with confidence and courage, it awed his hearers with silence, and drew forth their profound and fixt attention. With what authority could he deliver his message, and address them on their everlasting concerns? With what force and effect could he warn them to flee from the wrath to come; to renounce their confidence in privilege and birth; to repent of their sins, and to perform their respective duties. How authoritative his direction to them, to vary their whole conduct and to substitute liberality for covetousness, equity for injustice, and meekness and contentment, for violence and slander? So commanding and irresistible was his manner, that his audience were alarmed at their past misconduct, and future prospects, and in numbers came to him earnestly enquiring what shall we do.

II. Next we are to consider the *matter* he delivered. However plain, distinguishing, affectionate, solemn and commanding in the *manner* of a public speaker may be, yet if his *matter* be unimportant, unnecessary, and not calculated to effect any real or permanent good, he hardly deserves a hearing. He is but little better than sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal. It is the subject that claims our attention, not the *person*, the *voice*, the *at-*

titude, the *gesture*, or the *mere language* of the speaker. It is the *mind* which is to be enlightened, and the *moral state* of the *heart* which is to be improved by public preaching, not the *amusement* of the fancy, or the *gratification* of a vain curiosity.

By this test, let us examine the subjects, which John the Baptist exhibited.

The great leading truth he advanced, was the necessity of repentance. This essential duty he perpetually urged. For this he was commissioned. How explicit his language! "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." How faithful in his ministry! "The word of the Lord came unto him, so that he went into all the country about Jordan preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Sinners have no duty so immediately, and indispensably necessary, as repentance. It is a duty with which is connected forgiveness, but without which forgiveness cannot be obtained. This duty if left unperformed, will leave us with our guilt unpardoned, and our souls unsaved. He therefore inculcated it, upon his hearers, with great clearness and force. He was careful also to explain its nature and its fruits, lest some should mistake, and trust in a worldly sorrow, which worketh *only* death. He taught, that genuine repentance could not be exercised without producing good effects. It would alter the state of the heart, and influence the course of the life. The opulent must be charitable. Let him who professes to be penitent, and hath two coats, impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat must do likewise. The unjust and extortionous, must be upright in his dealings, let one of this character who styles himself a penitent, prove his sincerity by exacting no more than was appointed him. The violent, and envious, must be peaceable and contented. A penitent individual of this class, must do violence to no man, accuse no one falsely and be content with his wages. Thus he unfolded to them the nature and correspondent effects of true repentance. He also urged its necessity by the most solemn and weighty motives. The kingdom of heaven was at hand. The time was near when Christ should come, and introduce his spiritual kingdom; when a society should be formed of men possessing such characters as he

had described, and who at last should be admitted to a purer society in the kingdom of eternal love and peace. A motive of this sort could not fail of influencing them, in their future conduct.

On the contrary he assured them that there was a wrath to come upon the impenitent. To this they were already doomed, and could not possibly escape except they repented. By these solemn considerations he endeavored to persuade them to comply with their duty.

Another subject which he urged was, the insufficiency of any privileges, or of any works, for justification in the sight of God. His hearers were Jews, a people long favored of the Lord. Many of them were scribes and Pharisees, who were accustomed to boast of their religious privileges, and of their superiority over others in goodness, in zeal, and observance of the law. The pride and hope of such he labors to destroy. He meets them at the threshold, and cautions them against depending on ground so false. "Think not to say to yourselves we have Abraham to our father." This will by no means avail you. "For now the axe is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." The tree must be made good. There must be a radical change in the temper of the heart. Except this should be effected, their possessing the oracles of God, their being the posterity of the father of the faithful, their being in covenant with the people of Israel, their being more righteous than others, would profit them nothing. They were as far from the kingdom of heaven, as if they had never heard of Abraham, or inherited those privileges.

While he thus destroyed their carnal hope, he pointed them to the Lamb of God, who was to be slain to take away the sin of the world. He was soon to appear in the character of the Bridegroom of the Church, as the Son of God, and Saviour of men. To him therefore they must look for a righteousness to justify, for mercy to pardon, and for merit to redeem. Doubtless he described to them, his character, his mediation and his work, in order to induce them to confide in him, and to satisfy them

that such confidence would not be misplaced. Christ and him to be crucified, would unquestionably be the theme of his preaching, and the object of faith and hope which he would recommend.

He also referred them to the tremendous doom that awaits the ungodly beyond the grave. He taught them, in the plainest manner, that everlasting punishment was in reserve for the guilty. Looking forward to this end of the ungodly, he anxiously enquires, who had performed the benevolent office of warning them to flee? Many who hear the gospel, would have this subject left untouched, that the minds of men may not be disturbed through fear of what is to come in another world. But fidelity in those who watch for souls, requires, that like the prophets and apostles, like John the Baptist, and our Lord himself, they warn the wicked of his evil way, lest his iniquities be his eternal ruin. Moreover it is the part of compassion and kindness, as well as of ministerial fidelity.

Another truth he dispensed was the necessity of a good life. It is sometimes objected against the ministers of the Gospel, that they place too much reliance on faith, to the exclusion of works. That they do not sufficiently inculcate christian morals. But this charge could not be brought against John. He taught morality, in its purest principles, and most perfect forms. His hearers were first of all to repent. Their Christian character was to commence with sorrow for the past. And in order to complete it, they must bring forth fruit, meet for repentance. Every part of their conduct must be varied. Old things of transgression must be done away. In all their intercourse with the world, the word of God must be their rule. This they must appeal to, as the only standard of true morality. In no other way could their religion be genuine, or their Christian character complete.

Such was the substance of what he delivered to his audience with a view to their everlasting happiness, and their reception of a Savior. It is said also, that "many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people."

III. We are to consider the *object* he had in view.

The general design of his mission was to declare to the people the approaching termination of the Mosaic dispensation, and the speedy introduction of the Christian; and to prepare them to receive the Savior, and to become his followers.

His object then, was twofold; to open the way for the coming of Christ, and the establishment of the Gospel kingdom; and to prepare men for the kingdom of glory.

One part of his object was to open the way for the coming and kingdom of Christ. Such a procedure in the course of Divine Providence, seemed necessary, not only on account of the various predictions on this subject, which claimed a correspondent fulfilment; but on account of the strong attachment of the Jews to their long-established religious rites and sacrifices; and on account of their inveterate prejudices against other nations, which rendered them unwilling that they should derive any privilege or blessing from their expected Messiah. Their national pride, and religious partialities were deep rooted, and of long standing. Other nations were regarded only with contempt. Hence they looked for the Messiah to be the temporal king and savior of the Jews; but the enemy and destroyer of the gentiles. Misapprehending the character of Christ, and the nature of his kingdom, they thought his kingdom would be of this world, and that he would be the great captain of their national salvation, and conduct them triumphantly from one conquest to another, till his kingdom should be the only kingdom, and their nation the only nation on the earth. Such being their expectation, it became the harbinger of the Messiah, to prepare their minds for the reception of *one* whose kingdom should be spiritual and who should gather into one spiritual fold both Jew and gentile. To this end, he informed them, that it would not avail them to say, we have Abraham to our father, for if they were not the spiritual heirs of Abraham, heirs both of his faith and obedience, rather than they should be denominated his seed, God, by a miracle, would convert the stones before them into spiritual children. Now also, continued he, "the axe is laid at the root of the trees." From henceforth, "every tree not bearing good

fruit, whether it grow on Jewish or gentile ground, shall be cut down and burned. These truths were well calculated to shake their confidence in their privileges, to remove from their minds their national bigotry and prejudice, and thus prepare them for the reception of a Savior, in whom neither circumcision nor uncircumcision would avail any thing, but a new creature. Such a communication from a messenger of God, would powerfully tend to weaken their attachment to their ancient forms, and dispose them to abandon their numerous and expensive rites, to embrace with cordiality, and to adhere with constancy to the new and milder dispensation of the Gospel.

The other part of his object was, to secure the salvation of their souls. This is very evident from the nature and tenor of his address. He reminded them of the insufficiency of all their sacred privileges, of all their religious rites, and of all their legal observances. He showed them that these things would be of no avail in the day when God should judge the world in righteousness. He inculcated repentance as the only condition of obtaining remission of sin. He urged upon them a holy obedience, as the fruit of a right and sincere repentance, and enforced all by the solemn consideration that it was the only method of escape from deserved wrath.

Instruction of this sort is manifestly designed not merely to make men moral, but religious, not barely to make them better members of the community, but to fit them for the society of the just made perfect in heaven. It is directly calculated to rescue them from the gulph of perdition, and to elevate them to seats at the right hand of God. If their salvation had not been his object, why warn them to flee from the wrath to come? Why attempt to persuade them to renounce their confidence in their descent, their privileges, and divinely instituted rites? Why admonish them that the kingdom of heaven was at hand? Why command them to repent and believe the Gospel? Is it possible to account for this, except upon the principle, that he was laboring to secure their everlasting blessedness?

His object then undoubtedly was, to promote their moral welfare to procure for them present and future peace; to make

them willing subjects of the spiritual kingdom, about to be established, and thus prepare them to welcome the Savior with acclamations of heart-felt joy. His labors prepared the people, at the advent of Christ to say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," and his instructions opened before them the safe and certain road to a happy immortality. Such an object, originating with God, and receiving his blessing, claimed the admiration of angels, and demanded the attention and praise of mortals. It has been undeviatingly pursued by a God of mercy; it has perpetually rested on the heart of the Lord of life and glory; and it has constantly employed the prayers and efforts of the apostles and ministers of the cross. The object designed in the short, but important mission of John, forms no exception. He also labored for the salvation of sinners.

Lastly. We are to notice the effects produced by his ministry. When such was his manner, such his matter, and such his object, it would be impossible for his audience to remain unaffected. The fidelity with which he discharged his duty, the plainness and pungency of his address, must either rouse their indignation, or create an alarm for their souls. Both of these effects were, in fact, produced. For we find in a subsequent part of the Gospel history, that "all the people heard John, and the publicans justified God, being baptised with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves." They despised the warning, given them to flee from the wrath to come. They disregarded the call to repent. They refused to relinquish their self-righteous hopes. They rejected the gracious design of God, by not complying with the proposed terms. Had John flattered their pride and supported them in their vain glorying, they would have heard him gladly. But this was inconsistent with truth and with the object of his ministry. Hence all the effect produced on them was indignation and contempt. Herod in particular, being severely reprov'd for his crimes, by the faithful preaching of John, was so exasperated against him that he caus'd him to be first imprisoned, then beheaded.

But far different effects were wrought in the minds of the

people generally. The important truths he uttered, and the loud appeals he made to their consciences, awoke their fears, and excited great solicitude and alarm. Publicans came to him, and said, "and what shall we do?" Soldiers came, and said, "what shall we do?" Indeed the general question was "what shall we do?" As if they were ready to undergo any hardships, undertake any labor, and make any sacrifice, provided they could but escape their impending doom. The very nature of the question, and the earnest manner in which it was put, denote a state of spiritual anxiety and concern. It is similar to the jailer's, who came to Paul and Silas saying, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And to that, of those thousands who were pricked in their hearts at the preaching of Peter, and said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" It is similar to that which we often hear in a season of religious revival, when God pours out his Spirit, makes the arrows of truth sharp in the heart of the King's enemies, when sinners in Zion are afraid, and fearfulness surprises hypocrites. Of all enquiries this is the most interesting, and deserves to be made with all that deep solicitude, and solemn concern which a view of the soul laden with guilt, and decending to endless perdition is calculated to awaken.

This was the reason why John's audience thus came to him and cried, what shall we do? He had so distinctly marked their moral defects, so clearly described their situation, so fully opened to their view their danger, and so pointedly warned them to flee from that wrath of God which is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness, that they were filled with anxiety for their souls. They were convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come. They perceived that they were in the bonds of iniquity. They felt the force of the remark, now the axe of impartial justice is laid at the root of the trees, and every barren tree must be hewn down, and burned. They discovered the fallacy of their former hopes, that they would not abide the scrutiny of conscience, or the trial of God's word. The invisible world was brought to their view, and they found that it was "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." They saw that there was a wrath to come, and they trembled

lest the endurance of it should be their eternal destiny. Such were the awakening effects, produced on a part of the assembly by the ministry of John. In witnessing these effects he felt a rich reward for his plain, affectionate, and faithful address to them. For he saw that in these hearts a way was preparing for the coming of Christ. That with them a Savior would meet with a cordial reception. And that they would be willing and loyal subjects in the new kingdom of grace. For such a state of conviction and alarm, would induce them to welcome a deliverer and to submit to the peaceful reign of Christ on any terms, however humiliating. Relinquishing all former hopes, they would readily take refuge in the hope of a Savior soon to appear.

But these effects were not produced simply by the efforts of the preacher; it was the Spirit of God accompanying his labors, that constrained the people thus to cry, what shall we do? Without this divine power attending the word, "Paul may plant, Apollos water," and John warn, but it will be in vain.

Thus we have considered the *manner* in which the harbinger of Christ executed his commission; the *matter* he delivered; the *object* he aimed at; and the effects produced. His *manner* was plain, distinguishing, affectionate, solemn, and commanding. His *matter* was doctrinal, and practical, that which was necessary, useful, and highly important. His *object* was to prepare men for the advent of the Savior, and for the kingdom of heaven. And the *effects* wrought, though in some, who perverted the truth, prejudicial, yet in others were powerful and salutary.

Some reflections from the subject, together with the customary addresses will now close.

1. We are led to contemplate the nature of the ministerial office. God has been pleased, by the preaching of that which the world calls foolishness, to save them that believe. From God, therefore ministers receive their authority to preach. John did not assume his office, and intrude himself upon the people, without proper authority. He exhibited his credentials, and declared that God had sent him. Neither did the apostles undertake their work, without a commission from heaven. But

they were appointed to their office, by the great Head of the church. The form of their commission is entered on the record of God's word. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, baptising them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." By virtue of this commission they sustained their office, and commenced their apostolic labors. Hence one of the most distinguished of them says, "To us is committed the ministry of reconciliation; now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." Hence also he observes, "We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." Again he enquires "how shall men preach except they are sent?" Thus authorised, they went forth bearing Christ's name, dispensing his Gospel, and establishing churches. This commission, having never been revoked, is still in force. From the apostles it has been transmitted down to the present age. And it is the only ground upon which the ministerial office rests. Most sacred, and responsible then, is the office which the ministers of the Gospel hold. To each of them the command is, "Go thou and preach the kingdom of God." "Diminish not a word." Be faithful to the trust reposed in you. Watch for souls as one who must give account. Sound the alarm to the stupid, warn the wicked, proclaim deliverance to the captives of Satan, and bind up the broken hearted. Ere long I shall come and summon you to give an account of your stewardship. So runs our commission. Weighty then beyond conception is the charge we have received, and the work in which we are engaged. In contemplating the nature and magnitude of the ministerial office, well may we, well might an Apostle enquire, who is sufficient for these things? On the preaching of the Gospel depend, the salvation of souls, the progress of religion, and the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom.

2. It is obvious to remark that the Gospel ministry is a benevolent institution. Men whose views are carnal, and whose thoughts and affections are wholly confined to the life that now is, consider the sacred ministry as a device of man, and of small conse-

quence to the world. Not knowing the sinfulness of sin, nor the value of the soul—not reflecting that there is a judgement to come, and an eternity before them,—they disregard that plan of reconciliation which God, in mercy, has devised.

But those who have correct views on these subjects, place a high value on the Gospel ministry. They consider it, as it is in reality, a most benevolent institution. They regard it as an ordinance of heaven, which is designed not only to make men better and happier in the present world, but to qualify them, for endless blessedness in the future. What would be the state of society without it? We must look at the consequences of being destitute of such an institution, if we would learn to appreciate its value and importance. There would be no Sabbath, no public weekly instruction to improve the mind, no director to enforce upon men moral obligation, and to enjoin by precept and example, the various duties of our social relations. There would be nothing to check the progress of vice in all its forms and shapes. Men would soon become uncivilized; and that community which, with the Gospel, is now peaceful and happy, without it, would become a community of heathen.

But what would be the consequences with respect to futurity? Remove the Christian ministry “out of its place,” and you will behold men living without a correct knowledge of God, and unacquainted with their duty, without religious instruction—without the friendly admonition to flee from the wrath to come—without the repeated offers of pardoning mercy—without a guide to point them to a Savior, and rapidly borne away on the tide of time, to death, to judgment; and, must we add? to a place of everlasting weeping, wailing and woe. Now are these the consequences of being destitute of the Gospel ministry? Then how benevolent is the institution of it, when its object is to prevent all these consequences, and to raise men from the horrible pit of darkness, of unbelief, of sin, and of exposure to eternal despair; to light, and hope, and peace, and joy in the Lord. If benevolence consists in doing good, in rescuing from misery, and in promoting happiness, then the ministry of reconciliation which God has established, is a benevolent institution. If to

instruct men in things most important to be known; to warn them of an end most dreadful to be endured, and to elevate them to a happiness most devoutly to be desired, be a benevolent work, then the work of the Christian ministry is benevolent.

3. Our subject leads us to notice the manner in which those employed in the ministry should perform their duty. An example is set us in the conduct of Christ's forerunner, worthy of our imitation. He conferred not with flesh and blood; made no compromise with his own feelings, or with the passions and prejudices of his hearers; studied not his own ease and indulgence; courted not the favor and applause of his audience, nor fed their pride; but most intent upon his great work of saving souls, and preparing the way of the Lord, he solemnly, affectionately, and plainly taught them their duty, described their characters, directed them to a Savior, and warned them to flee from the wrath to come. A similar course is to be pursued by all those servants of the Lord, who would hope to be found in the last great day either faithful or successful. No flattery is to be used, no encouragement is to be held out on account of privileges, or integrity of character, or religious observances, lest men deceive themselves, and build their hope of heaven on a false foundation. No truths are to be concealed, no warnings to be withheld, no denunciations of wrath are to be kept back, however unwelcome to the carnal mind. No minister can call heaven and earth to record against his hearers, that he is pure from the blood of souls, if he shuns to declare the whole counsel of God. The guilt and danger of men are to be exposed, as well as their remedy pointed out. Each hearer is to be addressed, according to his character, that he may not be suffered to depend on birth, or privilege, or works, but on Christ the eternal rock of ages. Blessed are a people who are favored with a workman who thus gives "without partiality, and without hypocrisy," a portion of meat in due season. And thrice "blessed is that servant whose Lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

4. Our subject shews us what effects are produced by the faithful preaching of the Gospel. Some among John's hearers were greatly enraged at his plainness in delineating their char-

acters, and fidelity in destroying their false confidence. Others again "heard him gladly," and were profited. Similar effects are often witnessed, and always to be expected from the faithful dispensation of the word. There are many who take offence at the cross of Christ. They will not endure sound doctrine. And their preachers, they esteem and treat as enemies, "because they tell them the truth." When directed to deny themselves, and bear the cross, like Naaman, when directed to wash in Jordan, they turn away in a rage.

But there are others on whom the word preached has a very different effect. They listen to the great, and solemn truths of the Gospel with a fixed attention, and a lively interest. They sit, not as unconcerned spectators, but as humble and anxious enquirers after the way of life. "The terrors of the Lord" persuade them to ask "what shall we do?" The Spirit carries the word home to their consciences with almighty power, and to *them*, sin is a reality, judgment is a reality, the wrath to come is a reality, eternity is a reality. It becomes a question of solemn moment, what they shall do to be saved. Thus impressed with a sense of their guilt and danger, they are prepared to take refuge in a Savior. Salvation is welcome to them on any terms. Cheerfully do they submit to the conditions of mercy offered in the Gospel, and with converted Paul, exclaim, "God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of Christ."

Finally. It is a just inference from our subject, that people are bound to attend upon the ministry of God's word, and to believe the doctrines dispensed. For if ministers are watchmen for souls, and are required faithfully to give the warning, and to exhibit to men the whole counsel of God, then it must follow that men are under obligation to attend, and to believe the truths delivered. A constant and diligent attendance upon the public instruction of God's word, is demanded of us, and is indispensable, if we would learn the way of salvation. Faith cometh by hearing the word of God. But how shall faith be obtained by those who refuse to hear? By what process shall those, who perpetually absent themselves from the house and worship of God, "as the manner of some is," be brought to love and enjoy

the work and worship of heaven? Shall God disregard his own institutions, and deviate from his ordinary method of proceeding, in order to save such despisers of his ordinances? This is never to be expected. It is essential, therefore, that people steadily attend upon the ministry of the word. The doctrines of the Gospel are also to be believed. No proposition is more evidently true than this. If Christianity be a religion from heaven, we are bound to believe it. If it contain truths important to be known, and absolutely essential to our salvation, then our salvation cannot be obtained while we reject them. Unless they are believed, they will lose their force and have no influence on the consciences, or minds, or conduct of men. It is a most corrupt sentiment which many adopt, that it is of no importance what a man believes, if his life be good. Full credit is to be given, therefore, to all the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, if we would hope to derive from them any saving benefit. Hence the Savior's caution, "Take heed how ye hear." This caution ought to be written as with a "sunbeam" on the doors of God's house, and on the walls of our "solemn assemblies;" for it of everlasting importance to us, how we hear, and what we believe.

We shall now close with an address to the candidate for ordination, and to this church and people.

To you, Sir, this is a most solemn and interesting hour. The scene now opening upon you, well deserves a pause in your other reflections. By prayer and the imposition of hands, you are now to be consecrated to the arduous, the benevolent, the responsible work of the Gospel ministry. The transaction is solemn, the consequences connected with it, *eternal*. No relation that can be entered into in human life, is so immensely important as that of a minister and his people. It has a direct bearing on the events of eternity. Into this relation you are now entering. Behold then this people, now to be committed to your charge. To them you are to break the bread of life. To them you are to dispense the everlasting Gospel. To them you are to administer warnings and reproofs, promises and consolations. Their chambers of sickness, their houses of mourning, you are to visit, that you may pour into their afflicted minds, the wine and oil

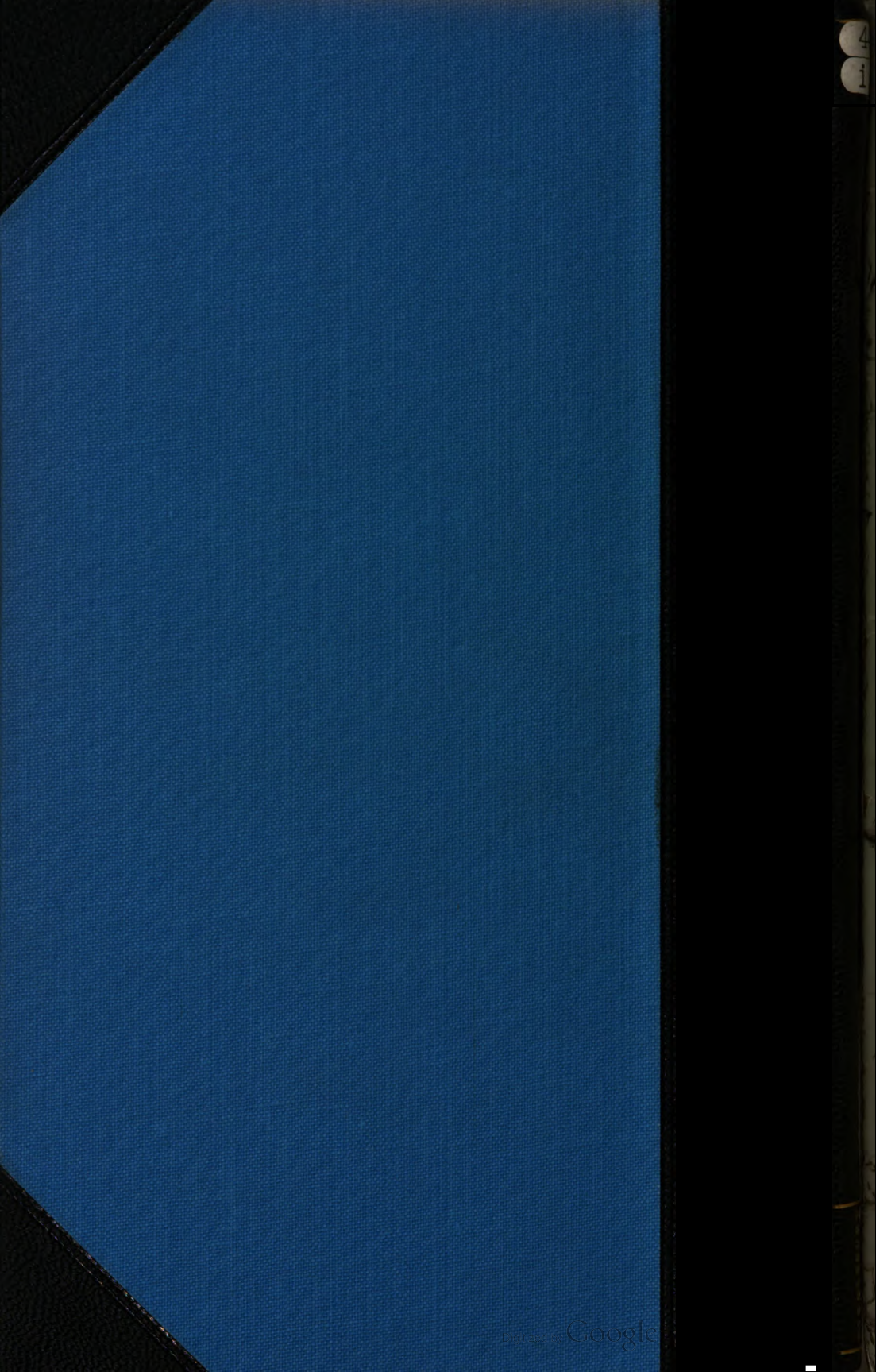
of Christian hope. To them all, you are to be, in Christ, either a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. With them you are one day to stand at the bar of your common Judge. If an apostle could exclaim, "who is sufficient for these things?" what must you feel? Contemplate these souls as entrusted to your care, by the great Head of the church. Harken to his voice now addressing you, "Son of man I have set thee a watchman. Remember that I shall require them at thy hands." Such is, dear sir, your commission and your charge. A most tremendous woe is denounced against an ambassador, who proves traitorous in his Master's cause, or does his work deceitfully. But if you are faithful, a crown of life is reserved for you. Examine thoroughly your personal qualifications. A renewed heart, alone, can make you feel for the souls of your people. Without this qualification you would preach an unknown Savior. You would be incapable of touching or alarming the sinner. Never could you console the desponding believer. Never could you point the convicted enquirer to the feet of a pardoning God. But we are persuaded better things of you, though we thus speak. Already have you conducted, here and there, a sin-sick soul to the divine Physician. Already have you been a son of consolation to mourning saints. Already have you, by that speech which ministers grace to the hearers, reclaimed the wandering, and witnessed in this gate of heaven, the public penitential tear.

Grace in the heart, will animate you in your work. It will influence you to labor more cheerfully. Come then to your people in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel. In all your discourses display the cross of Christ. Infuse the life and soul of religion into your sermons, that your people may be constrained to take knowledge of you, that in studying them, you have been with Jesus. Determine to know nothing among your people either in conversation, or in your example, or in this sacred desk, but Christ and him crucified. Then you may look for a blessing on your ministry, and hope to see your people walking in the truth. Then may you anticipate a glorious residence among the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and general assembly of the Church in heaven.

A few words we shall now address to this church and people.

This day, my brethren, you receive from heaven an ascension gift. Behold the man of your choice, now set over you in the labors of the Gospel. To him you are to look as your spiritual guide. Bear it in mind, that he is a messenger of God to you, and that you are bound to wait on his public ministrations. Give him a candid, unprejudiced, and self-applying hearing. Be willing that he should dispense to you the whole Gospel. Strengthen him by your prayers; encourage him by your union, and your friendship for him. Let the law of kindness reign among you. Take part in his sorrows, and be helpers of his joy. Wait diligently on his ministry. Remember that while he counsels, warns, and instructs, with fidelity, he delivers his own soul. But if you are careless, and inattentive, neglectful of the warnings he gives, and of the Savior he offers, the blood of your own souls will be required at your own hands. While, therefore, he tenders you salvation in the name of Christ, be solicitous above all things, to partake of it. Then when you and your pastor shall be called into the presence of your Judge, an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto you in the kingdom of heaven. Finally brethren, farewell. Be at peace among yourselves, and may the God of peace dwell among you, and keep and bless you.

To conclude. Let all this assembly duly prize the Gospel. From it, are the issues of life and death. Disregard its Author and its salvation, and you perish. And if you perish from under the hand of mercy, how dreadful must be the sword of justice. But if you submit to its Author, and embrace its salvation, you shall have peace in believing, hope in death, and in the end, life everlasting.



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