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Ministerial

COKE ON THE MINISTRY

By

Thomas Coke, LL.D.

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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COKE ON THE MINISTRY

Four Discourses

On

The Duties

Of

A Minister of the Gospel

BY THOMAS COKE, LL. D.

Of the University of Oxford

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PREFACE

The work of the ministry must be acknowledged, by all who believe the truths of revelation, and hope for happiness beyond the grave, to be the most important in which a human being can possibly engage. It extends, in its effects and consequences, beyond the boundaries of time, and involves the future happiness or misery of millions, by leading them to felicities or woes which baffle all our calculations.

The political decisions of senates may afflict nations with calamity, or deliver them from it; but the good and evil which they administer must terminate with the present life. It is not so with the ministry of the gospel. The effects which result from the pious or unfaithful labors of those who act as ambassadors for God, may, indeed, be perceived in every stage of human probation; but they will appear more conspicuous as life draws toward a close: -- they will remain unextinguished at death, and assume, in eternity, a visible and permanent form. The man who engages in this solemn work is not merely accountable to God for his own soul, but becomes responsible also for the souls of those who have been committed to his care. The sacred writings have guarded his office with the most awful sanctions. Both promises and threatenings conspire to keep alive his hopes and fears, by holding out, in the most pointed language, the rewards or punishments which await him in a future world. On the one hand, we are assured that "they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever;" while, on the other, we are clearly informed that "those watchmen who see the sword coming, and neglect to give the people warning, shall have their blood required at their hands."

Impressed with these momentous realities, the author of these discourses, having at an early period of life undertaken the sacred task, turned his thoughts to an examination of the various duties which became his station. In this survey he saw them to be both numerous and diversified, blending and incorporating themselves with every department of life and he was soon convinced that nothing but a strict attention to these varied connections, could preserve that consistency of character which should always distinguish the heralds of everlasting peace. With an eye to this end, occasional incidents became his monitors; -- real life furnished him with many instructive lessons; and experience and practice have since confirmed him in his adherence to obligations which were first adopted from principle. These discourses may, therefore, be considered as the result of practical observation, rather than of learned inquiry; and of real experience, rather than of deep reflection.

But, though the author turned his attention to this subject in the manner that has been hinted, and for reasons that have been assigned, he had no desire to publish his thoughts to the world. This originated in another circumstance.

Having been called upon, occasionally, to preach before the Methodist conferences, where the great bodies of preachers belonging to the connection were assembled, he could not but express his ideas of the nature of the gospel ministry, and advert to the duties which should be sustained, by all those who conscientiously engage to preach Christ and him crucified. The approbation with which his views were received, particularly in America, induced many who heard his observations to solicit their publication; from a persuasion that they might prove as useful in the closet as they had been satisfactory to those who had received them from the pulpit.

These importunities he, however, for a long time withstood; till, in crossing the Atlantic Ocean on one of his voyages, the pages now presented to the reader assumed nearly their present form, undergoing such amendments and corrections, and receiving such additions, as were thought necessary to prepare them for the public eye. A train of favorable circumstances concurred during the voyage to facilitate the completion of the author's undertaking. He was secluded from the world, -- had nothing to fear from interruption, -- was going on a ministerial errand, and had with him the works of some French authors, particularly those of M. Massillon, the pious bishop of Meaux, whose views on the subject were congenial with his own.

Thus circumstanced, he began to arrange his thoughts; but found, as he proceeded, that what he had originally compressed into a single discourse, actually branched itself into four; no part of which he could possibly retrench without doing injustice to a subject that he was endeavoring to elucidate, or rejecting that assistance of which he was anxious to avail himself. In years that are past, he trusts that these sermons have been rendered a blessing to many; and, as truth is not to be impaired by age, he has reason to hope that their republication will continue to be attended with the divine blessing. This is his primary inducement to send a new impression of them into the world. He feels confidence that the leading features of the ministerial character and duties are delineated agreeably to the doctrines of the gospel, as he endeavored in every part to take the prophets and apostles for his guides. Relying, therefore, on the promises of Him who has declared that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church, he commits this little book to the world, with an earnest hope that God will make it a blessing to many souls.

That the united exertions of all who faithfully labor in the patience and tribulation of Jesus may lead to the universal spread of the gospel, till a nation shall be born in a day, and till all shall know God, from the least unto the greatest, is the sincere desire and earnest prayer of

The Author
May 24, 1810

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DISCOURSE 1

"I charge thee, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall the heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry," 2 Tim. iv, 1-5.

PART I

1. The ministerial office is the most important to the human race of any which is exercised on earth for, according to the order of the dispensation of grace, the preaching of the gospel is indispensably necessary to raise mankind out of the ruins of their fall, to deliver them from all the miseries which spring from an everlasting banishment from God, and to bring them to the eternal enjoyment of Him, the Sovereign Good, at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.

The ministers of the gospel are particularly charged with these high interests of mankind: they are like those angels whom Jacob beheld on the sacred ladder, ascending and descending to and from heaven: they are the mouth of the congregation at the throne of God, and open the bosom of His mercies upon the miseries of man. They officially speak in the name of Christ, whom the Father always hears.

2. In a word, my brethren, a faithful ministry is the greatest blessing God can bestow upon a people: it is the greatest he ever did bestow, except the gifts of his Son and of his Spirit. What were the peculiar blessings which the Lord promised by his prophets to the Israelites, if they would turn to him, and obey his laws? Were they not the conquest of nations the entire destruction of their enemies, the final period of all the miseries and calamities which afflicted them, and a country which flowed with milk and honey for their own habitation? These were the magnificent promises he made them; and yet they prevailed not upon them to yield obedience to the divine law, nor restrained them from prostituting their homage to the gods of the heathen. He then ceased to press upon them these promises, which were so flattering, and so likely to operate on the minds of a people who in general were influenced by worldly motives; but it was to make them one promise more which was a thousand times greater and more precious than all the rest: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the

Lord, and I will give you pastors accord in to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding," Jer. iii, 14, 15.

3. "Raise then in thy church, O most gracious Lord, a sufficiency of faithful pastors according to thine heart; and particularly call forth from our connection chosen vessels to carry the savor of Christ's name to all people; and, in separating them for the work of the ministry, separate them also for the sanctification of those to whom they may be sent. We do not so much request the end of any trials or calamities which afflict us; we ask not favorable seasons, abundance, or prosperity; we only request a sufficiency of holy ministers who will die by thy cause, and with them thou wilt give us all things else."

4. If we thus consider the gospel in the light of the sanctuary, we shall not be surprised at the awfulness of the charge which the apostle, in my text, gives to Timothy, his spiritual son: "I charge thee before God," the omnipotent Jehovah, who sees and marks every word and action of our lives, who tries the heart and reins; from whom no covert can screen us, no darkness hide us; "but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike" to him, Psalm cxxxix, 12. I charge thee also before "the Lord Jesus Christ," your Redeemer, who shed his blood for you, and for the souls intrusted to your care: before Him whose minister you are, and to whom you must account for the use or abuse of all your talents: before Him "who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom:" before whose awful bar you must stand in the presence of an assembled universe, when he shall appear on his throne with all the splendor and glory of the King of kings, to establish the eternal reign of his saints, and to banish all evil ones, and all evil, from the glory of his power for ever: when thou, O Timothy, shalt receive the exceeding great reward of thy faithful ministry, or the greater condemnation which awaits the abuse of the most precious gifts which can be intrusted to man.

Let us now proceed to the particulars of the apostle's charge, omitting to enlarge upon the reasons which he gives in the 3d and 4th verses, as they primarily respect the people, and would lead us into too large a field of discourse.

I. 1. First, "Preach the word" -- The word of God, which is able to save the soul. You are not ignorant, my brethren, what multitudes of immortal beings have been brought by this divine word "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." In those happy moments when a whole congregation has been softened by this quickening fire, and the hearts of the people all opened to receive the word, a single expression has pierced to the quick, and produced its full effect. hundreds of thousands in the course of the present revival have been enlightened by it, and have been undeceived concerning the abuses and pernicious maxims of the world, which they once thought innocent, because authorized by the common usage of mankind, or by the preaching of blind guides. Innumerable have been the profanations and disorders which have been prevented; and innumerable the precious souls which have been drawn out of the abyss of misery and sin in which they had so long lain. It is impossible for any but God to number of the cries of compunction which have arisen from awakened hearts, or the holy desires inspired into them. Scores of thousands have been brought to God, and established in grace, who either have been safely lodged in Abraham's bosom, or are now living witnesses of Christ's power to save. It is impossible to enumerate the graces and blessings which have been conferred upon the world, and especially from these kingdoms, by the means of the

present revival. Surely it may be said of every faithful minister, as it was of his Lord, that "he is set for the rising again of many in Israel," Luke ii, 34.

2. The good which one single minister, true to the cause in which he has engaged, can do in the course of his life by a faithful ministry of the word, is not easily to be described. How many of the ignorant he may instruct, how many sleepy consciences arouse, how many daring sinners confound; how many mourners he may bring into the liberty of the children of God, how many believers confirm in grace, yea, lead into the enjoyment of perfect love! Blessed be the Lord, we have had our ministers, who were formed according to the model of Jesus Christ, according to his simplicity, his unction, his sacred zeal. We have had our WESLEYS, our FLETCHERS, our GRIMSHAWES, and our WALSHES. Every thing was borne down by their holy eloquence, and by the power of the Spirit of God, who spoke through them. The villages, the towns, the cities, could not resist the impetuosity of their zeal, and the eminent sanctity of their lives; the tears, the sighs, and the deep compunction of those who heard them, were the commendations which accompanied their ministry. The strictness of their manners left nothing for the world to say against the truths which they delivered. The simplicity of their spirit, and the gentleness of their conversation and conduct toward others but severity toward themselves, belied not the gospel of which they were ministers. Their examples instructed, persuaded, and struck the people almost as much as their sermons: and the Spirit of God, who inflamed their hearts, the divine fire with which they themselves were filled, spread itself through the coldest and most insensible souls; and enabled them almost everywhere to raise chapels, temples to God, where the penitents and believers might assemble to hear them, and each return inflamed like themselves, and filled with the abundance of the Spirit of God. O what good is one apostolic man capable of working upon earth! There were no more than twelve employed to begin the conversion of the world.

3. Elijah, ascending to heaven, and leaving his spirit of zeal to his disciple Elisha, was designed as a type of Jesus Christ; who, after he had ascended to the right hand of the Father, sent down on his disciples that spirit of zeal and of fire which was the seal of their mission; by which they were to set on fire and purify the world, and carry to all nations the knowledge of salvation and the love of truth and righteousness. Scarcely are they thus filled with the Holy Spirit, but these men, before so timid, so careful to hide themselves, to withdraw themselves from the fury of the Jews, leave their retreat like generous lions, know danger no more, bear in their countenance an intrepidity in the way of duty which sets at defiance all the powers of the earth, boldly bear their testimony for Christ before the assembly of chief priests, and depart from the council, rejoicing to be thought worthy to suffer reproach for Jesus' holy name.

4. Judea cannot satisfy the ardor and extent of their zeal. They pass from city to city, from nation to nation; they spread themselves to the extremities of the earth; they attack the most ancient and most authorized abuses; they tear away from the most barbarous people the idols which their ancestors had at all times adored. They overturn the altars which continual incense and homage had rendered respectable; they preach up the reproach and foolishness of the cross to the most polished nations, who piqued themselves most upon their eloquence, philosophy, and wisdom. The obstacles which all things present to their zeal, instead of abating it, only give it new force, and seem everywhere to announce their success: the whole world conspires against them, and they are stronger than the world: crosses and gibbets are shown them, to put a stop to their preaching; and they answer

that they cannot but declare what they have seen and heard; and they publish on the housetops what was confided to them in secret: they now expire under the axe of the executioner: new torments are invented to extinguish with their blood the new doctrine which they preach; and their blood preaches it still more after their death; and the more the earth is watered with it, the more does she bring forth new disciples to the gospel. Such was the spirit of the ministry and apostleship which they received, for these are in some sense but one and the same: every minister of the gospel is an apostle and ambassador of Jesus Christ among men. O that God would increase the number of those who are willing to preach and to die for Jesus Christ! "Preach," then, "the word."

II. But I proceed to the second particular contained in the apostle's charge: "Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

1st. Be always ready and always zealous for the public duties of your office.

1. You are perhaps afraid of dissipation of mind, and of all the unavoidable dangers to which your zeal will expose you; but it is this fear, which, through grace, will support you under them: we cannot fill our office with fidelity and safety without possessing much of this holy, filial fear. You think yourself unworthy of a ministry so holy and so glorious; but it is this sentiment itself which makes you evangelically worthy of it. No one can exercise it in a manner worthy of God, who does not feel himself extremely unworthy of it. You have a taste perhaps for retirement; but is this the taste or the rule which should determine your duties? Are you become a public minister, that you should live to yourself alone? indeed, your taste for retirement, if properly used, and duly restrained, will, under the blessing of God, assure the success of your public labors. Perhaps you are diffident concerning your gifts; but is it not a great gift to possess an ardent desire for the salvation of souls? With a heart penetrated and inflamed by this desire, a minister will always succeed; it is in some degree a substitute for other talents: what shall I say? It forms them in him. Whereas, with the most shining talents, without this tender love for souls, this apostolic zeal, we are but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Only put yourselves into the hands of those who are appointed to govern; they will employ you according to your gifts and strength; it is not in you that in this instance it appertains to judge. Blessed be the Lord, the field is various; they will find out for you the place which suits you; and if nature has not bestowed on you all the powers of oratory, the grace of God, and the spirit of the missionary, will give you every thing necessary.

2. Let us all, fathers and brethren, remember that, whatever be our talents, whatever be our views, we are essentially wrong if we suffer them to lead us out of the path of duty or the order of our station. We are commanded to "be instant in season, out of season:" a minister, therefore, must perish in the inutility of a life of retirement and repose; the duties of his ministry, and the wants of the church of God, permit him not to enjoy them. "Nothing is more opposed," says St. Chrysostom, "to the spirit of the ministry to which the church of Christ has joined us, than a quiet and retired life, which many erroneously regard as the kind of life the most sublime and perfect." No, my brethren, nothing is safe for us but that which God requires of us. True devotion is not the work of human taste and caprice; it is a divine gift, and always in the order of God. The distrust of ourselves is a great virtue when it makes us more attentive to the fulfillment of our duties; but it is an illusion, a vice, when it draws us from them.

3. Let us now, my brethren, in concluding this division of our subject, call to mind the different sources from whence arises the defect of zeal in ministers of the gospel. Indeed, we cannot too often set them before our eyes; for they are the poisoned fountains from whence flow all the evils of the church of Christ.

The first is, the love of this world and its conveniences: no sooner does every thing commodious in the present life offer its tempting baits, but with too many that fire of zeal, that flame of love for the salvation of souls, vanishes away like the morning dew, to the astonishment of the discerning beholder.

The second is, a defect of the love of God: it must be nearly extinguished in our hearts, if we can daily behold the disorders and infidelity which continually dishonor the name and holy religion of our God, without embracing the most effectual method, if we be really called to the ministry of the word, to stem the torrent.

The third is, a defect of love to mankind: for can those who are chosen of God to the great work of snatching immortal spirits out of the burning, love them, and yet calmly see them perish?

The fourth is, such a respect for men as makes us seek their friendship and esteem at the expense of truth; I mean that baseness of spirit which ties our tongues before them, and makes us prefer our own glory and our own interests to the love of Christ and the interests of his church. Fortitude, disinterestedness, a holy generosity, a wise and heroic firmness, are the constant fruits of the true ministerial grace and office; and if these sentiments be effaced from the heart of a minister, the grace of his vocation is utterly extinct.

The fifth is, the indulgence of some secret vice; for what true zeal can that preacher have against the vices of the world, who indulges himself in any secret sin?

The sixth is, a dull, lukewarm spirit: zeal is a holy fervor, which gives its first attention to ourselves. Alas! he who can indulge in himself a stupid, lethargic spirit, will make but a miserable reprover of the deadness of devotion which he observes in others.

The seventh, and last, is a timid and misinformed piety. Some refuse to devote themselves wholly to the work of the ministry, or give it up when they have entered upon it, through a pious delusion. They make piety itself a pretext to dispense with the rules of piety: they are afraid to lose their own souls; but they are not afraid to lose the souls of those whom they are called of God to be the instruments of saving. They believe they ought to fly from those dangers to which the order of God, and of the church to which they belong, calls them: and this flight is the only danger of which they are ignorant, and yet the greatest they have to fear.

4. In short, my brethren, it is in vain that our morals are otherwise irreprehensible: it is not sufficient to lead a prudent and regular life before the eyes of the world: if we be not penetrated with a lively sorrow at seeing the lost estate of the souls around us; if we do not arm ourselves with the seal of faith and love, and with that sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, to bring them out of their ways of error; if we do not exhort them "with all longsuffering and doctrine;" if we be not

"instant in season and out of season"; if we content with our own fancied righteousness, we imagine ourselves safe in reproving and rebuking by our examples, or, like old Eli, in only softly condemning the vice of others; our pretended virtue or holiness, indolent, inactive, lethargic, is a crime, an abomination before God: we feel not ourselves charged with the interests of God upon earth; we live only for ourselves; we are no more ambassadors of Jesus Christ; we are easy, useless spectators of the reproaches cast upon him and his holy religion; and, by our silence and insensibility, consent to the crimes, and are partakers of the guilt, of those who crucify him afresh. No, my brethren let us not deceive ourselves; for, as I have already said, and must repeat again, however well regulated the life of such a minister may seem, he has but the appearance of piety; he has not the foundation and truth of it: he seems to live, but he is dead in the sight of God: men perhaps may praise him, but God curses him: the regularity of his life now lulls him to sleep; but a terrible sound, and the clamors of the souls which he has suffered to perish, shall one day awaken him thoroughly: he calms his mind, because he bears a cold, dry testimony in favor of evangelical truths; or because he compares the regularity of his life with that of many others called ministers; but he shall one day see that his righteousness was but that of a Pharisee, and shall in the end be ranked with the hypocrites and unprofitable servants, Matt. x xv, 30.

5. Ah! What, my brethren! A minister of Jesus Christ, sent to do his work upon earth, to enlarge his kingdom, to advance the building of his eternal city for him to see the reign of the devil prevail over that of Jesus Christ in the place or places where he labors; and his faith, his love, his pretended piety to suffer him to be quiet and at rest! Can a minister of the gospel hear the name of Jesus, and the truth as it is in him whose place he fills, and whom he professes to love and honor, daily derided or denied by word or deed, and not be filled with zeal for the cause of his great Master so opposed! What shall I say? Certainly he would speak with the authority which the dignity of his office always gives him, and endeavor to inspire sentiments more worthy of religion in those perverse, corrupted men: or he would be a base coward, a prevaricator, a minister who betrayed his ministry, if a criminal insensibility, or a carnal or timid prudence, could on such occasions shut his mouth; and he all this time believe himself innocent of the blood of souls! Can a faithful shepherd see his sheep precipitate themselves into the abyss without running after them, and making them at least to hear his voice? Nay, when a single sheep had wandered, he would traverse the mountains, and endure the most painful toils, to bring it back again on his shoulders, Luke xv. No, my brethren, the man just now described is not a shepherd, not a minister of Jesus Christ; I reclaim the name; he is a usurper, who falsely bears that honorable title; and, notwithstanding all his profession, has willfully made himself a vessel of reprobation and shame, placed in the temple of God!

6. But it may be urged, that a traveling preacher in our connection is responsible only for the societies under his care. The objector must certainly have forgotten, or never have read, the rules of a preacher, which we have all so solemnly promised to obey. The eleventh runs thus: -- "You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work; and go always not only to those that want, but to those that want you most. Observe! It is not your business only to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society, but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and, with all your power, to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord."

PART II

2dly. -- A faithful minister of the gospel will be "instant" for the cause of his great Master, in every company into which he may happen to fall.

1. Our manners, our walk, our language, our whole exterior conduct, should upon all occasions support the holy dignity of our calling. The most accustomed familiarities of the world, the discourses of pleantry the most entertaining, are for us real indecencies: all that is unworthy of our ministry is at all times unworthy of us. Some ministers persuade themselves that it is necessary to accommodate themselves to the taste, the language, and maxims of the world, that they may not appear bad or morose company: but remember, my brethren, a minister is never in his place while he suits the taste of the world; never, unless he be what is called bad company for the world. From the time that the world seeks him, adopts him, associates with him, and is pleased with his company, he gives a certain proof that he respects not the propriety and decency which should invariably accompany his office. And we may continually observe, that those ministers whom the world seeks, whom the world applauds, and with whose company the world in general is delighted, are carnal men, who have reserved nothing of their holy vocation but the name: the spirit of the world shows itself in their whole exterior deportment; it discovers itself in the impropriety of their dress, in the lightness of their conversation, and even of their walk: nay, often in the little true gravity and sanctity manifested in the performance of their public duties. "If ye were of the world" says Christ, "the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you," John xv, 19. No, my brethren, the men of the world seek not the company of a holy and respectable minister; nor is he desirous of associating with them. It is when they want consolation under affliction: it is when the approaches of death make them feel themselves near to eternity: ah! it is then they have recourse to a holy minister; they then regard not those of whom they were before so fond; they are then conscious that such ministers can be of no service to them; that they may be good for the things of the world, but are useless as to the things of heaven. Depend on it, my brethren, it always costs us something of the dignity and holy gravity of our office to purchase the friendship and suffrages of men of the world: it is not they who will abate of their prejudices and false maxims to unite themselves to us; it is we only who must abate of the holy rules of the gospel to be admitted to their societies. Let us, then, never lay down before the eyes of the men of the world the holy gravity of our vocation, or the due and respectable appearance of a minister of Jesus Christ: let them not be able to distinguish between the minister in the pulpit and the minister in his usual commerce with mankind. Let them find him throughout the same; throughout respecting his character, and making it respectable to others; throughout discovering the spirit of piety, yea, even by his presence alone.

2. Then, my brethren, if we be at any time witnesses of those vices which the customs of the world justify, we have a right to condemn them. If the people of the world, whether rich or poor, indulge themselves before us in such discourses as are but too common, and which offend either piety, Christian love, or modesty, our character authorizes us to reprove them. Nor will the world in general find fault with us, if we endeavor to sanctify their conversations with pious, edifying remarks; for, as it is somewhere observed in the Apocrypha, the Lord has dispersed us among the Gentiles, among the people of the world, who know not God, that we may make known the wonders of his holy law. No, my brethren, it does not become a good minister to depart from the company of the people of

the world, without having mixed with their discourse some spiritual and edifying reflections. When a minister is duly touched with the truths he preaches; when he daily meditates upon them at the footstool of the throne; when he is penetrated with an ardent, holy desire for the salvation of souls, it will be difficult for him to see them wonder and perish, without at least complaining to them, without taking occasion from their errors and prejudices to say to them some word of salvation. And how know you, but a simple and edifying reflection, delivered at a time when he expects it not, may become to your brother a word of eternal life? He may be on his guard if he hear you in public, and come prejudiced against the truths you are delivering; but in a familiar conversation, truth takes the sinner unawares. Candor, meekness, and simplicity, with the grace of God, will sometimes, in private discourse, give to a truth, when least looked for, a strength which it would not otherwise have. The unforeseen arrow is the most sure to reach its mark. At least, you have done honor to your ministry, and been faithful to that command of God, "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation."

3. When I entered on this division of any subject, I only intended to touch it cursorily. But, considering the magnitude of it, and how seldom it has been fully treated, I afterward determined to enlarge. And need I here remind you, brethren, of that peculiar characteristic of the Methodists, that they are a race of reprovers. It is their reproach, it is their honor, it is the glory of the cross they bear, that every Christian, of every sect and party, who dares to become a reprover of vice, is immediately stigmatized with the name of Methodist. May we never lose that cross, that glory, till vice is banished from the world, and "the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea!"

4. "But is there not reason to fear, that by becoming thus importunate, we shall often expose the truth to the contempt and derision of those to whom we speak?" No, my brethren. A dissipated worldly preacher, I allow, could but with an ill grace introduce observations of a spiritual nature into the conversations of people of the world. He has by his vain conduct lost his right. He would render himself ridiculous indeed, if he should labor to recall to the minds of others truths which he himself appears to have forgotten. The doctrines of piety would blush in his mouth; he would be heard with contempt; and might be asked with a sneer, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" 1 Sam. x, 11, 12. But, on the contrary, a holy minister gives respectability to all his wise and edifying counsels; the men of the world themselves will grant him attention, and, even if tired, will not be surprised; they may reject the truth, but must in secret esteem him who declares it.

I grant that this duty, as well as every thing else, should be guided by Christian prudence. Christian love, which only desires to be useful, labors to find out the most opportune moments; and many such will present themselves in the course of the useless conversations of the men of the world. They speak together of their affairs, their projects, their embarrassments, their subjects of complaint against their enemies or competitors, of their disappointments, and of their misfortunes. Now, cannot the Spirit of God, which actuates a holy minister, find in all this innumerable occasions to deplore the sad and agitated life of those who love the world; to describe to them the peace, the sweetness, the consolations of a holy Christian life; and to mourn over them, as enjoying no genuine happiness in the present life, but preparing for themselves in this world a thousand disturbances, a thousand pains, and misery eternal in the next?

5. On the other hand, my brethren, there are occasions when the fear of offending should be entirely banished. A minister of the gospel is a public character, charged with the interests of the glory of God, and the honor of religion, among men: he ought, therefore, never to suffer men of the world, whoever they may be, to pass without a bold, though holy, reproof, when the respect due to the majesty of God is wounded, when the precious and sublime doctrines of the gospel are treated with derision, when vice is justified, or holiness and virtue turned into ridicule: in short, when licentiousness or impiety in discourse dishonors the presence of God and the presence of his ministers. Ah! it is then that the piety and dignity of a minister should no more prescribe to him any other measure or bounds but that of zeal -- the zeal which is the flame of love, mixed with the just indignation of a lover of God. It is then that, charged by his office with the interests of religion, he should know no one after the flesh; he should forget the names, the titles, the distinctions of those who forget themselves; he should remember that he is appointed of God a preacher of righteousness, and endued with power from heaven to oppose all manner of sin: and, especially, to set himself with a sacred intrepidity against that impious and detestable pride which would exalt itself against the knowledge of God. Whatever persons they be who do not treat with respect in your presence that which is the most respectable of all things in the universe, should not be respected by you: we ought to hear them with that kind of indignation with which we believe Christ himself would have heard them. I am persuaded that the pointed strength of reproof is the only kind of propriety which our character then imposes upon us; We are not then required to use soft expressions, "Nay, my son, it is no good report that I hear." Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, we should deliver our own souls.

It is esteemed honorable by the world to support the interests of a friend pointedly and boldly, if he be insulted in our presence. Have we then at such a time a right to impose silence with firmness on the calumniator? Shall we not disgrace ourselves, and be accounted treacherous, yea, base and dastardly cowards, if we can suffer our friends to be abused in our presence without undertaking their defense? And shall we not have the same zeal to stop the mouth of the impious, and support aloud the interests of Jesus Christ? Can we imagine that we are his friends, according to that saying of our Lord, "Henceforth, I call you not servants, but I have called you friends?" John xv, 15; -- can we suppose that we have performed all which that tender and honorable title requires, by dissembling, -- by contenting ourselves with strengthening through our dastardly silence the insults with which he is treated, and by sacrificing, through a dishonorable weakness, through the fear of man, his name and his glory? No, my brethren, we are not the friends whom Jesus Christ has chosen -- this title disgraces us, if his insulted name does not rouse in us all our love and all our zeal for his adorable person.

6. O that I could impress these important truths with the fullest conviction upon all our hearts! What a flame would soon be kindled in the world! What could not a thousand traveling preachers in Europe and America do for their Master, if all were thoroughly filled with this spirit of holy zeal! But should we confine our observation to these alone? Certainly, our local preachers, exhorters, and even our leaders, are in their respective degrees called to reprove, rebuke, and exhort. The whole together probably make not less than fifteen thousand lights to illuminate the world. O that they were all faithful. "O God, inspire them all with the love of thy glory!" Yes, fathers and brethren, I know and rejoice in the mighty good which has been wrought upon the earth by your instrumentality: but

you may still do abundantly more: yea, we might all of us have already been much more useful than we have been. "Lord, humble us before thee for our past unfaithfulness."

7. But I must here observe, brethren, that a minister faithful to his duty, who respects his office, and loves the people intrusted to his charge, will find but little time to sacrifice to the useless conversations and dissipated spirit of the world. He seldom appears among the people of the world; for, having no taste for their pleasures or amusements, or even for their company, the unavoidable calls of duty or propriety which require him to be among them are but rare. We cannot often be in their company, without not only injuring the divine life within us, but more or less debasing ourselves and our sacred office in their eyes. All corrupt as the world which lieth in the wicked one is, it exacts from us virtue without spot, without clouds, and even without any of those infirmities which are inseparable from humanity.

8. The more the world is indulgent to itself, the more severe it is in respect to us: it believes that it may indulge itself in every thing, and yet in us will pass over nothing. It has perpetually upon us the eyes of malevolent censors. A word out of order, a simple inattention, the least motion which may be construed into impropriety, a compliment paid without due reflection, become in us faults which will not soon be forgotten. The men of the world, if possible, will give a shade to all our words and actions; draw from them the most invidious consequences; and even in those moments when we relax ourselves in their favor from the gravity of our character they will attribute the whole to a taste of their spirit, and to a secret approbation of their views which we dare not avow, rather than to condescension and complaisance toward them. They will at last be bold enough to tempt us to imitate them in the liberties they take; will treat our precautions and reserve as the fruits of a minute and contracted spirit; and for the little we abate in the dignity of our character for the sake of pleasing them, they will in our absence pay our complaisance with the most insolent derisions and dishonorable reflections.

9. There is nothing, therefore, my brethren, more deceitful than the idea of gaining the esteem and good opinion of the world, by familiarizing ourselves and mixing often with it. The more the world sees us, except in our public duties, the more will it either hate or despise us. It hates us from the instant it feels that we will not put up with its manners. Let us very rarely have any thing to do with it, and we shall appear in its eyes with greater dignity, and be treated with greater respect. Let us attend to every due and proper call which the world may justly require of us, as well as to all the demands of charity and good works; but let us always conduct ourselves as the ambassadors of Jesus Christ, as in some sense filling his place. It is then only that our ministerial character, under the grace and providence of God, will be to us a safeguard against every temptation. But if we seek the world for the sake of the world, we must conform to its taste and its manners. We should be badly received upon the present ground, were we to carry there that holy gravity which should never forsake us. We should derange its pleasures, disconcert its assemblies, and its liberty of speech. We should be an intolerable burden to it. Our presence alone would be horrible; and it would say of us, as the enemies of holiness say of the righteous man in the Wisdom of Solomon, "He is grievous to us to behold!" There is no alternative. We must die to the world; or partake of its spirit. We cannot serve God and mammon.

10. I am very conscious, brethren, that our itinerant plan is to be preferred to any other in this as in a thousand respects. We are seldom tempted to be in the world. We must love it exceedingly if we find many occasions to be in it. Our time is spent between the mount, the multitude, and our own people. We almost continually reside in families which look for, and which love and honor, the seriousness and gravity of their preacher. It is their delight to converse with us on the things of God: if it were not so, they would be disgraceful members of our society. Yes, it is food to the souls of our people to have what they have heard in the pulpit pressed upon them in conversation at the fireside: and we should be the most inexcusable of men, if we did not improve these precious opportunities among the families we visit. The Methodist preachers," said the late Rev. Charles Wesley to me once "do not fully consider all the blessings of their situation; one of the greatest of which," added he, "is that wall of contempt with which you are surrounded, and which preserves you from a thousand temptations to which the clergy in general are exposed, by keeping the world at a distance from you." But though our calls to mix with the men of the world are but rare, let us never on such occasions betray our Master, but conduct ourselves as faithful servants, ambassadors, and friends of Jesus Christ.

11. I may sum up the whole in these words of the apostle, "But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, love, patience, meekness," 1 Tim. vi, 11. If you were of the world, its interests, its prejudices, its vanities, would be your portion: you would be obliged to conform to its maxims and language, to justify it, and to rise up against all those who dare condemn it: but you are men of God; you are in the world, but you are not of the world: you are charged in the midst of it with the interests of God, with the care of his glory, and with the honor of his spiritual worship. The ambassador of a king speaks only in the name of him employer: he knows no other man while he acts from the authority, and is concerned with the interests, of the kingdom he represents: he lays aside the private character, and appears always in his public capacity. And shall we, brethren, who are ambassadors for the King of kings, men of God in the midst of a world which is at war with him -- shall we lay aside our holy and public character with which he has invested its, and become men of the world, his enemies, friends? Shall we blush to speak the language of Him who employs us? Shall we suffer him to be insulted in our presence without supporting his interests and his glory -- without using the authority with which he has clothed us to set ourselves with a holy zeal against the despisers of his name, his laws, and his truth? Shall we, my brethren, forgetting the majesty of Him we represent, and the honor he has conferred upon us by intrusting his embassy and authority to us -- shall we authorize by our conduct the maxims of the world, his enemy? Shall we appear to hold intelligence with it, that its errors and prejudices may prevail over his divine doctrines, and sacred morals, of which he has made us the public dispensers and defenders? No, my brethren; let us bear our holy title of men of God, as it were, upon our foreheads, and through all the minutest particular of our conduct: let us throughout be men of God: let all our most common actions, conversation, fellowship, and commerce with mankind, be ennobled and sanctified by this holy and honorable character: let us never abase ourselves by laying it aside for a moment; and let us remember that the world will always respect it in us as long. as we respect it in ourselves.

12. Destroy, then, O our God, in the hearts of thy ministers the strength of all those obstacles which the world, the flesh, and the devil incessantly oppose to that zeal which renders them instruments of thy mercies to mankind: inflame them with that spirit of fire and wisdom which thou

didst shed abroad in the hearts of thy first disciples: let the succession of this apostolic zeal be transmitted with increasing abundance in thy church, with the succession of that ministry which thou hast promised to be with always, even unto the end of the world. Matt. xxviii, 23. Send forth more laborers into thy vineyard, men "mighty in deed and word," whom the world may not intimidate, whom all the powers of the earth may not be able to shake, whom worldly interests may never influence, whom thy glory and the salvation of souls may regulate and animate in all their undertakings; and who will esteem the opinions of men as nothing, but as far as they contribute to make thee adored and glorified in all ages!

COKE ON THE MINISTRY
Four Discourses
On
The Duties
Of
A Minister of the Gospel

BY THOMAS COKE, LL. D.
Of the University of Oxford

DISCOURSE 2

"Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof thy ministry," 2 Tim. iv. 5.

PART I

In my discourse on the former part of the apostle's charge to Timothy, I considered the zeal which the ministers of the gospel should constantly manifest for the salvation of souls; particularly in all the public duties of their office, and by the improvement of every opportunity afforded them to bear a testimony for God to the people of the world. We now proceed to speak upon the remaining particulars of this solemn charge.

I. "Watch thou in all things." The duty of watchfulness cannot be too strongly impressed on every private Christian; for, without the constant exercise of it, the life of God cannot possibly be preserved in the soul. But to enlarge on the duty as it respects the private character would carry me beyond the limits of a discourse; and therefore I shall chiefly consider it as it belongs to the office of a minister of the gospel.

The spirit of our ministry is a spirit of separation from the world; of prayer and secret intercession for the souls of men, and, especially for the church of Christ; of labor; of firmness and fidelity; of knowledge; and of piety. Our watchfulness, therefore, as ministers, should be particularly directed against those things which oppose the above essential properties of the spirit of our calling.

1st. Against the spirit of the world, because the spirit of our ministry is a spirit of separation from the world.

1. That unction from above which reserves us, sanctifies us, sets us apart for the ministry, (and if we have not received it we are no ministers,) withdraws us also from all the other public functions of society; not that we cease from being citizens of our country, or from the obedience and submission due to the king, and all that are in authority -- to the powers that are; for "the powers which be are ordained of God," Rom. xiii, 1; but the ministry of the word is become our great employment; the public temples of God, "where his honor dwelleth," are our places of public resort; the visitation of the sick and the poor, and all the other works of piety and charity, our subordinate tasks; and prayer and praise our recreation and pleasure.

2. All things then should be holy in a minister of the gospel, and separated from common use. His tongue should only discourse of God: useless conversations at least, however harmless in themselves, defile his tongue; as, under the law, a holy vessel would have been defiled by common meats. His eyes have entered into covenant not to behold vanity; or if they do, they lose, without genuine repentance, the right of entering into the interior of the tabernacle, to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In short, the whole person of a minister of Christ should be a living example of true religion, which ought always to be surrounded with decency, gravity, and respect.

3. This, then, is the first point -- to watch against the desire of worldly things: for the cares, the solicitudes, the employments of the world, when you enter into them, will rob you of your unction, however your natural or improved talents may remain; and will not only profane, but in time entirely destroy all the genuine virtue of your vocation, and bring you thoroughly under the yoke of the world. The vessels and ornaments which were used in the temple under the law were never appropriated to common use; it would have been a crime which would have defiled their consecration: now a minister of the gospel, consecrated to God by his own blessed Spirit, in a manner infinitely more holy than that of the sacred vessels and ornaments under the law, defiles and profanes abundantly more his consecration, if he makes his person, his talents, his spirit, his heart, to serve to dead works and the common employments of the world. O thou holy doctrine of the cross, how little art thou known by those ministers who enter into the affairs, agitations, and commotions of this miserable world! The apostle has warned them in vain, that "no man who warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier," 2 Tim. ii, 4. Alas! these become principal actors on the stage of the world. The dispensers of the truths and blessings of Heaven become the ministers of carnal views and projects: those whom God has charged with the eternal interests of the people, neglect them, and make it their glory to spend their strength in carrying on worldly affairs.

2dly. We must watch against the light and trifling spirit of the world, because the spirit of our ministry is a spirit of prayer and intercession.

Although it is the privilege of a faithful minister to have a river of peace continually flowing in his soul, yet, paradoxical as it may appear, his life, at the same time, is a life of prayer, lamentation, and complaint. The Prophet Isaiah, on a prophetic view of the great millennium, "when all flesh should come to worship before the Lord," cried out, "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her; rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her," Isa. lxvi, 10, 23. When we see so large a part of the inhabitants of the globe lying in the wicked one, covered with heathen or Mohammedan darkness; -- or, what is still worse, when we see infidelity reigning in the midst of the blaze of gospel day, it is impossible, if we breathe the true spirit of the gospel ministry, but we shall be daily, yea, habitually praying between the porch and the altar, with groanings which cannot be uttered. Joel ii, 17; Rom. viii, 26. Jesus Christ, the prince and model of ministers, wept over Jerusalem, when he saw her hardened in her blindness. Yes, my brethren, as long as Satan reigns upon earth, the true ministers of God will more or less mourn and lament. As long as the children of Israel, on the plain, employ themselves in dances and revels, forget the God of their fathers, and madly prostitute their homage to the golden calf, the true Moseses on the mountains will tear their garments -- will break their hearts before the Lord. "The world will rejoice," says Christ to his apostles: its children will run on dancing and sending forth cries of joy, till they precipitate

themselves into the abyss. Let their laughter and their sports be their portion: let that holy sorrow which is consistent with constant joy in the Holy Ghost be ours. The world, in the midst of which we live, will be continually to us a spectacle of grief and concern; and even when they persecute us not, though crosses and gibbets do not attend us, their entire depravation will itself alone be an unexhausted source of lamentation before God.

3dly. We must watch against indolence, because the spirit of our ministry is a spirit of toil.

1. We fill a laborious office. The church of Christ upon earth is a vineyard, a field, a harvest, a building which should be daily rising and growing to perfection, and a holy warfare -- all terms which announce cares and fatigues; all symbols of labor and application.

2. This the time of a minister of the gospel is due to the church: all the days and moments which he employs in the commerce of the world, in dissipation, or in the vanities of worldly society, except where occasional duties call him, are days and moments which were due to the salvation of his fellow-creatures, and of which those souls which suffer through his neglect will demand a strict account at the tribunal of Jesus Christ. By the divine unction he has received, and by his devotion of himself to the ministry -- the church of Christ has acquired, a peculiar property in his person, his leisure, his occupations, and his talents. These are all now consecrated things, which form part of the property of the church of God. He is only the depository of them, and has no right to dispose of them at his pleasure: he is responsible for them to God and his church. It is not for himself that he has been numbered among the ministers of Christ, but for the church, that he may bear his part in her toils and ministry. He degrades the title she has given him when he abandons the labors she has appointed for him: he ceases to be a minister, from the moment he ceases to be a laborer: he spends in worldly commerce and frivolous occupations that time on which rolls the salvation of the souls among whom he should have toiled -- that time on which depends the eternal destiny of his brethren -- that time to which God has attached the salvation of sinners, the strengthening of the weak, and the perfecting of the strong. "May the Spirit of the Holy One increase our zeal!"

4thly. We must watch against the betraying of our trust -- against unfaithfulness, because the spirit of our ministry is a spirit of firmness and fidelity.

1. We are appointed to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, in season and out of season, with all longsuffering and doctrine." The public vices should always find us inflexible, inexorable. The countenance of a minister of Christ should never blush at the reproaches which never fail to accompany the liberty and faithful execution of his office. He bears written on his forehead, with much more true majesty than the high priest of the law, HOLINESS TO THE LORD, Exodus xxviii, 36. The divine unction which the Spirit of God has bestowed upon him for the ministry of the gospel is a grace of strength and courage it inspires the soul marked by this divine zeal with an heroic disposition, which raises it above its own natural weakness; which puts into it noble, great, and generous sentiments, worthy of the dignity of its ministry; and gives it an elevation of mind which raises it above the fears, the hopes, -- the reputation, -- the reproaches, and every thing else, which rule over and regulate the conduct of the generality of men: yea, which bestows upon us that ministerial vigor and apostolic fire which so gloriously manifested themselves in the founders and first heroes of our divine religion.

2. Now this spirit of firmness and fidelity is precisely the character the most opposed to the spirit of the world. For the spirit of the world is continually shown in a commerce of attentions, complaisance, art, and management: it seems to have hardly an opinion of its own: it can overlook, if not applaud, an improper sentiment covered with art and delicacy: it can bend, yea, accustom its ears to the witty, but cruel touches of smooth malevolence; and can suffer, without reproof, rebuke, or exhortation, the preference which is daily given to the gifts of nature over those of grace. In short, the minister (so called) who will live in the bustle of the world, must think, or at least speak, as the world does: he must not discover the firm and serious spirit of a minister of God: if he did, he would soon become its butt and its laugh; and all his worldly plans would be entirely defeated. No: we, who should be the salt of the earth, would in such case be obliged to lend ourselves, to accommodate ourselves, and to putrefy with the children of this earth. We who are called to be the censors of the world, would soon become in some sense its panegyrist: we, who should be the lights of the world, would by our open suffrage, or by our base, dastardly silence, perpetuate its blindness: in short, we, who should be instrumentally the resource and salvation of the world, would miserably perish with it.

3. Nothing, my brethren, so softens the firmness and fidelity of the ministerial spirit as the busy commerce of the world. We enter by little, and imperceptibly, into its prejudices, its excuses, and all its vain reasonings. The more we meddle with it, the less we find it culpable. We can at last even plead for its softness, its idleness, its luxury, and its ambition. We begin, like the world, to give soft names to all these passions and indulgences; and that which confirms us in this new system of conduct is, that we have the universal plaudit of worldly men; for they will give to our baseness and cowardice the specious names of moderation, elevation of spirit, and a talent for making virtue amiable; while they give to the contrary conduct the odious names of littleness, rusticity, excess, and hardness of heart, only fit to withdraw men from goodness, and render piety hateful or contemptible. Thus we treat obligingly a world which gives to our baseness and unfaithfulness all the honors due to prudence; and we believe it not to be so guilty as is commonly imagined among believers, from the time we love its esteem. For, alas! my brethren, there are too few of the Sauls and Barnabases who would not relax from the truth, though they thereby caused themselves to be stoned even by those people who, a few moments before, would have offered incense to them as gods just descended from heaven!

4. The spirit of ministerial firmness and fidelity is therefore absolutely incompatible with the busy commerce of the world: you will no more find any thing there to reprove, in proportion as you familiarize yourselves with those things which are reprehensible in it: you will lose the views of those great rules of conduct which have governed the faithful ministers of God in all the ages of the church: you will no longer cultivate those seeds of divine science which, through grace, have helped to make you useful in the Lord's vineyard: the Scriptures, and the writings of the best divines, will become strange and tiresome: you will soon have lost your taste for them; and you will prefer to those serious studies, so conformable to your ministerial duties, books which, to you, should be comparatively vain and frivolous; but which render you more serviceable and agreeable to the world to which you have delivered up yourself. These observations lead me to a fifth reflection on this head; namely, that,

5thly. We should watch against a neglect and distaste of study, because the spirit of our ministry is a spirit of divine science.

1. The lips of a minister of the gospel are the public depositories of the doctrines of divine truth: we are required, like the prophet, to devour the book which contains the law and the gospel, notwithstanding all the bitterness which may accompany our studies and watchings: we must nourish our souls with the bread of the word of God, as it were by the sweat of our brow; and adorn our souls internally with the divine law, as the Jewish priests adorned themselves eternally with their sacred garments. The divine writings are the basis and substance of our gospel ministry, which we may compare to the two great lights which God has set in the firmament: like them, we should rule over the day and the night; over the day, in guiding the faith and piety of believers; and over the night, in clearing our minds from all darkness of error, and filling them with spiritual light. We are the chief interpreters of the divine law and gospel, the guides of the people, the seers and prophets appointed by Christ to clear their doubts, and from the divine word to discover to them the whole will of God.

2. But can these titles be supported in the hurry of worldly commerce? Alas! nothing is so fatal as that to a taste for study and retirement. I am not now speaking of profound studies, of sounding all the depths of antiquity for the elucidation of the doctrines and discipline of Christianity, or of furnishing the church of God with new and useful publications: these are not the things which the spirit of your vocation exacts from you: these are studies and talents manifested in an eminent degree by only a small number of the wisest ministers whom God has raised up to be general lights of their age. But I say that for those common, ordinary studies, which are indispensably necessary to qualify a minister to "divide the word of truth aright, and to give to each their portion of meat in due season;" in short, to be in a situation to exercise his functions with light and success: I say that for these studies he must have a spirit accustomed to think, to meditate, and to be with and in himself; he must fly from that commerce with the world which soon annexes to his books a weariness which is insupportable; he must have a desire of increasing in divine knowledge; a character of mind which is an enemy to frivolous employments; a habit of retirement and reflection; an arrangement of life, whereby he can give an account to himself of his progress, and whereby the moments set apart for the different duties of his situation will always find them selves in their own place, and conformable to their destination; in a word, a kind of uniform, occupied, regulated life, which can in nowise have the least alliance with the perpetual variations and derangements of a worldly life and conversation.

6thly. I shall finish this head with one reflection more; namely, that we should watch against the least alienation of our minds from God, because the spirit of our ministry is a spirit of piety.

1. By this spirit of piety, I understand not only blamelessness of morals, but that candor of conscience, that tenderness of religion, that taste of God, that delicacy of soul, which the appearance alone of evil alarms. Behold that spirit of piety, which is the soul and safeguard of our ministry!

2. We live, as it were, in a continual commerce with holy things. But what a life of prayer, of retirement, of circumspection, of faith, and of rigorous attention to the senses, ought we not to lead, that we may be always prepared for our holy duties! All the dispositions, desires, and affections of our hearts, should be purified, sanctified, consecrated by the unction of the Holy Spirit, residing within us. How can we appear before the congregation of the Lord, in their name to raise ourselves

up to the footstool of the eternal throne, there to humble ourselves with the dominions and powers of heaven into a sort of self-annihilation, there to sing praises with them to the majesty of God, when just before we were drawn a hundred different ways through the dirt of the world? How can we in such case ascend the pulpit, and manifest to the people all the seriousness and grief of true zeal? With what grace can we speak of a death to the world, of avoiding the dangers to which it exposes us, and the snares which Satan there lays in our way, of the necessity of prayer, retirement, and watchfulness, of the eye which should be plucked out, of the hand and foot which should be cut off; Matt. xviii, 8, 9, of the account we must render even for every idle word, Matt. xii, 36, and in short of all those crucifying maxims so unknown to the world, and so contrary to its manners? To be good preachers of Jesus Christ, and of him crucified, we must ourselves be fastened to the cross of Jesus Christ: to inspire a taste of God, and the things of heaven, we must feel them ourselves: to touch the hearts of the people, our own hearts must be touched with the living coal.

3. I grant, as observed in my former discourse, that our itinerant plan keeps us at a considerable distance from the world in general. But among the families which we visit, are there not, in most of them, some who do not make even a profession of religion? How cautious should we then be that we do not enter into their spirit, thereby hardening them against the truth, and injuring the minds of those who are truly religious! And of our own people, alas! all are not Israel who are of Israel. To such, instead of indulging them in their vain conversation, how closely, how faithfully should we speak, as being peculiarly responsible for their souls! If in a family there be any mourners in Zion, how dangerous, how dreadful would it be for such to hear any thing trifling from the lips of him to whom they are looking for a word of comfort! No time can be lost in laboring to bring such to Christ. All reading and study should be laid aside, while the opportunity is afforded us of leading to the Savior's blood an immortal soul under the convincing operations of the Holy Spirit. Such occasions should be peculiarly prized -- occasions of fixing jewels of the highest value in our crown of glory, for "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever," Dan. xii, 3. Again, when we meet with souls which enjoy the love of God, how careful should we be to feed them with spiritual food, -- how careful to say nothing which might injure the tender spiritual life within them, or grieve that holy Comforter who has thus far brought them on their way to heaven! But, especially, when we meet with those who have drunk deep of the waters of life, and live in close fellowship with God, then we should improve the precious moments for the welfare of our own souls; and from their spiritual observations learn more to enlarge in our public addresses on the most important of all subjects, Christian experience. Here is a field of action! Here are opportunities for doing good! What mighty privileges do we enjoy as traveling preachers! "May the Lord enable us to improve them to the uttermost, for his glory and the salvation of millions!"

4. But I must here observe, once for all, that these discourses are addressed only to ministers of the gospel. The private members of the church of Christ have a different calling; and if they improve the means which the Lord affords them, he will preserve them in the midst of all their business; and use many of them in their respective stations in his church for the advancement of his kingdom upon earth. One grand truth which I have been laboring to establish is this, -- that when any receive a full call to the ministry, it is their duty to sacrifice every secular employment to it; and if not, that divine unction which they received for their office -- that peculiar apostolic spirit which, according to their measure, was bestowed upon them, and which none can comprehend but those who possess it, will

soon be extinguished; and they themselves will incur the guilt of unfaithfulness to the vocation of God, in the high office to which he has called them, or in which he has been pleased to station them.

PART II

I now proceed to consider the next grand particular in the apostle's charge to Timothy: "Endure afflictions."

1. We have reason to bless God that we are not called to suffer like the faithful ministers of Christ in former ages. A spirit of civil and religious liberty has accompanied even the spirit of infidelity; whereby the enemies of revelation have, in a considerable degree, disarmed and incapacitated themselves from injuring the church of God: and the earth has been made in a wonderful manner to help the woman. Rev. xii, 16. We have succeeded to the ministry of that noble army of martyrs, who suffered "for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God," Rev. xx, 4; and we are sent forth like them as "sheep in the midst of wolves," Matt. x, 16. No thanks are due to our opponents, if we be not persecuted like our predecessors. If we had reason, like the martyrs of old, to fear the barbarity of the enemies of our religion -- if the most cruel torments were the only recompense we could promise ourselves in this life for all our zeal and labors, we also should be brought to the alternative of renouncing Jesus Christ, and the sacred ministry with which he has honored us, or to face these dangers with holy joy. But, on the contrary, what in comparison have we to suffer? Only the insults occasionally of the vilest of the people, which will not touch even the skirts of our clothes, if we suffer them not to affect our hearts; and those crosses which are indispensably necessary to keep us at the feet of Jesus Christ, and to render us fit instruments for His service who will not give his glory to another.

2. If we will be disciples, much more ministers of Christ, we must daily take up his cross. Without this, he refuses to acknowledge us as his disciples, or to make us partakers of that glory into which he entered not himself but by the way of the cross. "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, says Christ, "and come after me, cannot be my disciple," Luke xiv, 27. "If [we be] children," says St. Paul, "then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together," Rom. viii, 17.

1st. But, perhaps, you will say, "I am too weak to endure afflictions." Alas! it is because we are weak; because the least disappointment in our favorite pursuit makes us revolt against the will of Providence; because contradiction raises our anger, or commendation and success our vanity and pride, that the Lord sees it necessary we should pass through tribulation and trials.

2. In short, what is it to be weak in the present sense of the word? It is to love ourselves excessively: it is to live more by nature than by faith: it is to suffer ourselves to be conducted by the vivacity of our own natural inclinations, and not by the wisdom from above. Now, with this excessive fund of self-love, if the Lord were not to manage our weakness, and to humble us by affliction; if he did not strike our bodies with some habitual languor, to render the world insipid to us; if he did not prepare for us some losses in our substance; if he did not defeat some of our most favorite projects; if he did not place us in such situations, that the most trying and yet unavoidable duties should fill up our happiest hours; if he were not to raise up a against us opposition by false

brethren or by true brethren in a word, if he were not to fix between us and our weakness some kind of barrier, which might be strong enough to arrest and retain us, we should soon be deceived by our false peace and prosperity; we should soon be without a bridle for ourselves or our desires. The same weakness and self-love which make us so sensible of trials and afflictions would make us still more sensible of; and less prepared for, the dangers of pleasure and prosperity.

3. If; therefore, we be discouraged under trials and afflictions, let us not endeavor to excuse ourselves, by saying we are weak. The weakness of our hearts arises only from the weakness of our faith; the soul of a Christian should be a strong soul, proof against persecutions, reproaches, infirmities, and death itself. The Christian may be oppressed, but he cannot be subdued; you may snatch from him his goods, his reputation, his whole fortune, yea, his life itself; but you cannot rob him of the treasure of faith and grace which lies at the bottom of his heart; and abundantly compensates for all his frivolous and temporary losses: you may, perhaps, make him shed tears of sensibility and sorrow, for religion does not extinguish the feelings of nature; but his heart in an instant resists, disavows, as it were, his weakness, and turns even his tears into tears of piety. What shall I say? A Christian rejoices even in tribulations; he regards them as marks of the benevolence and watchful providence of him God, as precious sureties of future promises, and as the happy characters of his resemblance of Jesus Christ.

4. All the precepts of the gospel require strength from above; and if we have not sufficient to support the crosses which the Lord is pleased to lay upon us, we have not sufficient for those other duties which the gospel prescribes. It requires strength of grace to pardon an injury; to speak all the good we can of those who calumniate us; or to hide the defects of those who would destroy our reputation or usefulness. It requires strength of grace to fly from a world which allures us; to snatch ourselves from pleasures, or to oppose inclinations, which would draw us into evil; to resist customs to which the usage of the world has given the authority of laws or to use prosperity in a Christian spirit. It requires strength of grace to conquer ourselves; to repress the rising desire; to stifle the pleasing sentiments; continually to recall to the strict rules of the gospel a heart which is so given to wander. In short, were we to review all the precepts of the gospel, there would not be one which does not suppose a strong and generous soul, fortified by grace. Throughout it is necessary that we do violence to ourselves. The kingdom of God is a field, which must be cleared and rooted up; a vineyard, in which we must bear the heat and burden of the day; a career, in which we must perpetually and valiantly fight the battles of the Lord. In a word, the whole life of a true disciple of Jesus Christ bears the character of the cross; and if we lose for an instant this strength of grace, we fall. To say then that you cannot endure afflictions because you are weak, is to say that you are destitute of the spirit of the gospel.

5. But, besides this, my brethren, however weak we may really be, we should have a confidence in the goodness of our God, that he will never prove, afflict, or try us beyond our strength; that he always proportions the afflictions to our weakness; that he gives his chastisements, as he does his judgments, in weight and measure; that in afflicting he wills not to destroy us, but to purify and save us, and qualify us for greater usefulness in his church; that he who aids us, himself bears the crosses which he himself imposes upon us; that he chastises us as a father, and not as a judge; that the same hand which strikes us, supports us; that the same rod which gives the wound, brings the oil and the honey to soften it. He knows the character of our hearts, and how far our weakness goes; and, as in

afflicting us his will in Christ Jesus is our sanctification, 1 Thess. iv, 3, he knows how far to weigh his hand, and lay the burden upon us.

6. Alas! What other design can our gracious Lord have in afflicting his ministers and disciples? Is he a cruel God, who takes pleasure in the sufferings of his servants? Is he a barbarous tyrant, who finds his grandeur and safety only in the tears and blood of the subjects who adore him? It is then for our benefit alone that he punishes and chastises us; his tenderness suffers, if I may so speak, from our woes; and yet his love is so just and wise, that he still leaves us to suffer, because he foresees that by terminating our afflictions he would in the end increase our misery, and prevent our usefulness and glory. He is like a skillful surgeon, who has pity indeed on the cries and sufferings of his patient, and yet cuts to the quick all that he finds corrupted in the wound; he is never more kind or beneficent to his servants than when he appears to be most severe; and it is indubitably evident that afflictions are necessary and useful to us, since a God so good and so kind can resolve to lay them upon us. We read in the histories of the martyrs, how weak girls could set at defiance all the barbarity of tyrants! how children, before they were able to support the labors of life, could run with joy to meet the rigors of the most dreadful deaths! how old men, sinking already under the weight of their bodies, seemed, by their cries of triumph, to feel their youth renewed like that of an eagle, in the midst of the torments of slow martyrdoms! And are you weak, my brethren? Then that weakness itself if you be faithful to the grace of God, will bring glory to the faith and religion of Jesus Christ. It is on that account that the Lord has chosen you, to make known in you and by you how much stronger grace is than nature. He "hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence," 1 Cor. i, 27-29. If you were born with any spiritual strength, you would do no honor to the power of grace; that patience which is now the pure gift of God, would then be justly attributed to man. Thus, in a sense, the weaker we are, the fitter instruments we become for the designs and glory of God. He delights to choose the feeble for his greatest purposes, that man may attribute nothing to himself; and that the vain constancy of the wise and the philosophers may be confounded by their example. His first disciples were but feeble lambs when he sent them into the world, and exposed them in the midst of wolves. These are the earthen vessels which the Lord is pleased to break, like those of Gideon, that in them the light and power of faith might shine with greater splendor and magnificence. And if you enter into the designs of his mercy and wisdom, your weakness, which in your eyes justifies your murmurs or unfaithfulness, would prove one of the sweetest consolations of your trials.

8. "Lord," you would say to him all your days, "I ask not that proud reason or philosophy, which seeks all the consolations of its pains in the glory of suffering with constancy. I ask not that insensibility of heart which either feels not its miseries, or despises them. Give me, Lord, that sweet simplicity, that tender sensible heart, which appears so little fit to support its tribulations and trials: only increase thy comforts and thy graces. Then, the weaker I appear in the eyes of men, the greater wilt thou appear in my weakness; and the more will the children of this world admire the power of faith, which alone can raise the feeblest and most timid souls to that point of constancy and firmness which philosophy has never been able to attain." "Endure," therefore, "afflictions."

2dly. 1. Nothing is more common, than for ministers and private professors to justify their murmurs or unfaithfulness, by the character or peculiarity of the afflictions themselves. We easily persuade ourselves that we could bear crosses of another nature with resignation; but those which the Lord has laid upon us are of such a character as can yield no consolation; that the more we examine what passes among men, the more singular we find our trials or afflictions to be, and our situation almost without example.

2. But to remove this feeble defense -- of self-love, so unworthy of genuine faith, I would answer, That the more extraordinary our trials or afflictions are, the more clearly may we discover the hand of Providence in them; the more evidently may we observe the secret designs of a God ever attentive to our interests; the more may we presume, that under such new events he conceals new views and singular designs of mercy, for the welfare of our souls, and for our future usefulness in his church.

3. Now, what is the most powerful consolation under trials and afflictions? "God sees me." He counts my sighs; he weighs my afflictions; "he puts my tears in his bottle;" he blesses the whole to my present sanctification and usefulness in his church, and to my eternal happiness. Since I have felt his heavy hand upon me, in so singular a manner that there seemed to be no resource remaining here below, I feel myself more than ever under his immediate inspection. O! if I had enjoyed a more tranquil situation, his eyes would not have been upon me as they are at present; perhaps I should have been forgotten, and confounded among those who have their portion in this world. Lovely sufferings! which, in depriving me of all human succor, restore to me my God, and make him my refuge and resource through his blessing. Precious afflictions! which, in making me forget the creatures, have rendered me, through the co-operation of rich and suffering grace, a continual object of the remembrance and mercies of my Lord!

4. But is there any one among us who wishes that he may not be called to endure afflictions? Alas! take care that the Lord does not hear thee in his wrath: take care that he does not punish thee in granting thee thy desire; that he does not find thee unworthy of his temporal afflictions; for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," Heb. xii, 6.

5. To all these truths, so consoling to an afflicted soul, I could still add, my brethren, that if our pains and trials appear excessive, it is only through the excess of corruption in our affections, which gives strength to our sufferings: our losses or afflictions become so grievous to us, only through those attachments which bind us to external objects; and the excess of our sorrows or chagrin is always the excess of an unjust love of the creatures. Alas, brethren, the woes and afflictions of others are too often nothing in our eyes. We do not observe that the trials of thousands around us are greater than our own; that our afflictions have innumerable resources, which theirs have not; that in our habitual infirmities, or in our trials in the church, we find in the number of persons who are still attentive to our wants, an abundance of comforts denied to others -- when we have lost a warm and faithful friend, we have many ways to soften our bitterness: when persecuted by our relations or families, we can find in the tenderness and confidence of our friends and brethren, attentions and kindness which we found not at home. In short, we have an abundance of human sources of satisfaction, to compensate for our trials; and if we put into the scale, on one side our comfort, and on the other our afflictions, we shall find that our comforts, if improved, far overbalance our sorrows, BESIDE THE CONSOLATIONS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

6. Truly, my brethren, it is not only the excessive love of ourselves, but hardness of heart toward our fellow creatures, which magnifies in our eyes our own afflictions. Let us daily enter under the unfurnished and miserable roofs of the poor, where shame frequently conceals miseries the most frightful and affecting: let us go to those asylums of wretchedness, where calamities seem to be heaped together: it is there we shall learn what we ought to think of our own afflictions: it is there that touched with the excess of so many and great miseries, we shall blush to have given names to the lightness of our own: it is there that our murmurs and unfaithful attentions will change into expressions, and into the very spirit of gratitude and thankfulness: and, less occupied with the thoughts of those light crosses which we bear, than with the many from which we have been delivered, we shall almost begin to fear the indulgence of our God, so far from complaining of his severity. Endure," therefore, "afflictions."

3dly. 1. I will conclude this head of the apostle's charge with the following important reflection: That God, in all the trials and afflictions which he lays upon, or suffers to happen to, his zealous ministering servants, has but two ends in his view and in his gracious intention; first, their sanctification and eternal happiness; secondly, their usefulness in his church. Every thing he permits or does for them here below, he does it, or permits it, only to facilitate these gracious designs: every agreeable or afflictive event which any way concerns them, he has prepared for them, to make them more holy, useful, and eternally glorious. All his plans concerning them have reference to these purposes alone: all that they are in the order of nature, their birth, their talents, the age in which they live, their friends, and their vocation -- all these, in his views of mercy toward them, and mercy toward the world, have entered into his divine impenetrable designs for the eternal salvation of themselves and others; and not all the powers of earth and hell, no, **NONE BUT THEMSELVES**, can possibly defeat or counteract them. All this visible world itself was only made for the world which is to come: all that passes here has its secret connection with eternity: all that which we see is only the figure of things invisible. This world would not be worthy of the care of an infinitely wise and merciful God, but as far as, by secret and wonderful connections, its various revolutions tend to form that church in the heavens, that immortal assembly of the redeemed, where he will be eternally glorified: he acts not in time but for eternity; and he is in this the great model which we should in ever thing follow.

2. "Ah! When shall it be, O our God, that our souls, raised by faith above all the creatures, shall no more adore but thee in and through them all; shall no more attribute to them events, of which thou alone, in thy immediate or permissive providence, art the author; shall acknowledge in all the various situations in which thou hast placed us the adorable conduct and wisdom of thy providence; and in the midst of crosses themselves shall taste that unutterable peace which the world and all its pleasure can never bestow!"

3. Religion alone, my brethren, can afford us solid comfort under all our trials and afflictions. Philosophy may stop our complaints, but can never truly soften our grief. The world may stupefy our anxiety, but can never heal it; and in the midst of all its employments or amusements, the secret sting of sorrow will remain always deeply plunged in the bottom of the heart. God alone can prove the effectual comforter of all our pains; and is there need of any other for the faithful soul? Weak mortals, by their vain discourse and ordinary language of tenderness and compassion, may speak to the ears of the body; but it is the God of all consolation who alone knows how to speak to the heart.

4. It would perhaps be presumption in me to call any afflictions heavy which I have experienced; and it was probably owing to my want of grace, that they to me appeared to be great. But I can bless God that ever I was tried and afflicted; and hardly know for which to thank him most, his disguised or undisguised mercies. O how he has broken my stubborn will, and humbled my proud heart, and moderated my ambitious views, (though all seemed to be for his glory,) by trials and afflictions! And I doubt not but many of my brethren, as well as myself, (though not in the same degree with me, because they did not equally need it,) can bear testimony to the grace and power of God in the use of this profitable means. Let us, then, my brethren, "endure afflictions:" let us "take unto us the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand," Eph. vi, 13.

5. "O God, it is thou alone who canst support us under all our trials: we are weakness itself without thee. It is thy grace alone which can sanctify the means, and make our afflictions profitable. Lord, teach us to depend wholly upon thee: it is with thee alone we desire to forget all our trials, all our pains, all the creatures. But, alas! too often have we wished that the foolish projects of our own hearts should serve as the rule of thine infinite wisdom! We have wandered, and been lost in our thoughts: our imaginations have formed a thousand flattering dreams; our hearts have run after phantoms. We have desired more favor from men, more health of body, more talents, more glory, as if we had been wiser and better acquainted with our true interests than thou, O omniscient Lord God! We have not entered, as we might, into the gracious designs of thy love in our favor. But O! from this time thou shalt be our only comforter; and we will seek, in the meditation of thy holy law, those solid and lasting consolations which the creatures can never afford. Lord, take us into thyself; be thou the joy of our hearts, be thou the delight of our eyes, be thou our portion for ever! Even so, Lord Jesus. Amen."

COKE ON THE MINISTRY

Four Discourses

On

The Duties

Of

A Minister of the Gospel

BY THOMAS COKE, LL. D.

Of the University of Oxford

DISCOURSE 3

"Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry, 2 Tim. iv, 5.

PART I

1. In my former discourses on St. Paul's charge to Timothy, we considered the necessity of true zeal in all the public duties of the ministry, and in our intercourse with the people of the world, and the necessity of watchfulness and enduring afflictions. We come now to enlarge on the two remaining particulars of the charge, "Do the work of an evangelist, "make full proof of thy ministry."

2. The apostle's solemn and pointed manner of writing to Timothy, not only for his own sake, but for the benefit of the church in all ages, will appear the more necessary and indispensable, if we recollect that the corruption of the ministry has been alway the grand source of the corruption of a people, of the general depravation of their manners, and of the extinction of all the faith.

3. Those who are acquainted with the religious history of Christendom, well know, that in proportion as the ministers of a church are holy, holiness will reign among the people. The purity of Christianity, wherever it has flourished, never has begun to decay but with the fall of the ministry; and disorder has generally begun at the house of God. Thus it is in a considerable measure we who decide, if I may so speak, on the salvation or damnation of the people: upon us, in some sense, depend the increase or diminution of the reign of Jesus Christ upon earth, the consummation or destruction of his work, the utility or inutility of his blood and mission, the glory or reproach of his religion, and all the designs of God concerning the salvation of man.

4. From the moment we enter on the ministry of the gospel, we become either holy pillars to support the feeble, or stones of offense against which the strong themselves may break in pieces: we become either brazen serpents raised on high, to heal through grace the plagues of the multitude, or golden calves placed in the camp of the Lord, to be an occasion to them of apostasy, wickedness, and idolatry. We are so situated, that we can neither stand nor fall alone: the destiny of those souls over whom we are set is in a considerable degree awfully attached to ours!

5. Now, what a frightful situation is this for an unfaithful pastor! He may continually say to himself, "I am employed in the church to destroy and not to build up: I am become the tempter and murderer of those souls of whom I ought to have been instrumentally the savior and the father. I am

charged with a dispensation of the gospel, and yet only make every thing which should facilitate the salvation of souls turn out to their ruin; and I, in effect, employ against religion all that which religion has intrusted me with for its maintenance and support." Behold here, without exceeding the truth, the character of a bad minister. Certainly, my brethren, a bad minister is the greatest plague which the wrath of God can suffer to spring up among any people.

6. But the more the situation of an unfaithful pastor is to be deplored, the more full of consolation is the character of a true minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. He continues on earth the mission and ministry of his adorable Master. He co-operates with him in the consummation of the happiness of the saints, in the edification of his mystic body, and in the accomplishment of all his designs of mercy toward man. He is instrumentally here below, as Christ himself, a savior of his people, a reconciler of heaven and earth: and when he shall one day appear before the throne of the great Judge of quick and dead, with all his own, he will be able to say to him with confidence, "Behold me, and the children thou hast given me. Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost. I render them back to thee, because thou didst deliver them to me, that they might be sanctified through thy truth, and might sing with all thy redeemed the eternal praises of thy grace."

7. O what a heavenly calling, my brethren, is ours! But our duties are as great and as heavenly as our vocation. Let us, then, together animate each other, both by the eminence and importance of our ministry, and by the glorious and comfortable fruits which are the consequences of its faithful administration!

8. Can we now be surprised at the repetition, in effect, which we find in the apostle's charge; or rather the different points of view in which he holds forth the duties of the gospel ministry? 1st. "Preach the word." 2dly. "Be instant in season, out of season: reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine." 3dly. "Watch in all things." 4thly. "Endure affliction." 5thly. "Do the work of an evangelist." 6thly. "Make full proof of thy ministry." The first four of these we have enlarged upon. We now come to the fifth, -- "Do the work of an evangelist."

The word "evangelist," in its most comprehensive sense, implies a preacher of glad tidings, or, in other words, a preacher of the gospel, with all his concomitant duties. In the apostolic age, it more particularly signified an extraordinary minister, appointed to assist the apostles in preaching and publishing the gospel -- in watering what the apostles planted: and in this sense also it contained a very extensive meaning. But, at present, it is generally applied to those inspired writers who were employed by the Spirit of God to record the life and actions of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must here, however, consider the word in its most enlarged sense; for Timothy was, without doubt, in every point of view, a minister of the gospel.

1st. In considering this division of our subject, we shall, first, take a review of the numerous advantages of a zealous gospel ministry.

1. A faithful minister, who consecrates himself to every good word and work, who enters into the minute examination of all the miseries and wants of his brethren, and labors to find a remedy for them all -- represent, if you can, all the works of salvation and mercy among men, of which such a minister will be the instrument, through the blood of the covenant and the grace of the Spirit! He

heals those hearts which are sick and alienated from God: he pierces the darkness with which shame so often covers the indigent, and in affording them, by the means at least of his benevolent friends, a secret succor, spares them even the confusion of being relieved: useful institutions for the instruction or relief of the poor and the stranger, which come within his circle, find in his care, or in his zeal, resources which establish them, or which preserve them from falling, and give them a new solidity. O what public disorders does he prevent; what occasions of salvation does he improve! He stirs up the pious, and makes them useful in the conversion or sanctification of others; he presides at every holy enterprise; he is, as it were, the soul of piety in his circuit; even the greater part of those sinners who attend his ministry, but still live in sin or vanity, feel a hope that some day they shall be converted by his means. He animates all; he finds remedies for all. There is no public good within his circle, and consistent with his calling, to which he does not sacrifice himself; no good undertaking which he prevents; no sinner who does not appear worthy of his zeal. In short, there is nothing which can quench or stop his divine ardor, or the holy fervor of his love; "and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof," Psa. xix, 6.

2. We read, 2 Kings xiii, 21, that the corpse of a man being thrown near the dead body of Elisha, it instantly revived; those eyes which death had closed, open again; his tongue is unloosed; and we see him come from the abode of death, and again enjoy life and light. Alas, my brethren, carcasses the most putrefied, souls in which spiritual death and the corruption of sin have reigned abundantly longer, can hardly approach a holy minister, an ambassador of God, dead to himself, to the world and all its hopes, but they instantly, through grace, feel a virtue go from him, a breath of life which begins to reanimate them, to inspire into them good desires, and to rouse them from their lethargy; and which, in those who are faithful to these beginnings, will produce the fruits of grace and salvation.

3. And then his example! His piety, his disinterestedness, his mortified spirit, his modesty, his ministerial gravity, have such a secret, constant, powerful influence, that he may be truly said to be sent for the salvation of many. It is true, that neither the example nor labors of the holiest ministers can have the least influence in the regeneration or salvation of souls without the unction of the Holy Spirit; but the person, the words, the actions of a devoted ambassador of Christ, are all anointed, and breathe forth the savor of Jesus' name. What a happiness must it be to a people when God raises among them holy ministers, whose deep piety and crucified lives serve, so to speak, as spectacles to angels and men. They are a continual gospel before their eyes! "Do," therefore, "the work of an evangelist."

2dly. From hence appears the necessity of eminent zeal; in order to inflame with divine love the hearts of the people, and to bear down all the obstacles which oppose the spread of the gospel.

1. Frozen discourses will never set on fire the souls of the hearers. Indeed, how can those ministers even appear to the people as animated with that divine fire which carries the sparks of grace to the coldest and most insensible hearts, who themselves are all ice in the practice of every duty; and who feel not themselves all alive for the salvation of either their brethren or themselves? If we fill up our public duties with an air of custom, of weariness, of reluctance, (which is inseparable from a life of lukewarmness,) and of unfaithfulness in the pastoral office, we shall leave the same dispositions in those who hear us. Our labors will rouse neither our faith nor piety, and will

leave the same spiritual death on the minds of our audience. Alas! my brethren, even in a holy and fervent minister, it calls for prodigies of zeal, application, patience, and labor to bear down all the obstacles which the world, the devil, and the present corruption of manners, oppose to the success of his ministry. What then can the cowardly, idle minister promise himself from his baseness and idleness? What fruit can he expect from a field to which he never puts but a feeble, languishing hand; and which seems to be intrusted to him, to be the sport of his cruel neglect, rather than the object of his care?

2. "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth," Rev. iii, 16, says Christ. If a private professor, who lives in the spirit of lukewarmness, is unfit for the kingdom of heaven, and is rejected out of the mouth of Christ, as a lukewarm and disgusting drink which raises the stomach; what is a minister good for, who does the particular work of God negligently? What an object of disgust for a God who is jealous of his gifts! What an afflicting spectacle to that part of the church of God which beholds it -- to see a place in that ministry which is designed for zeal, for labor, and for the salvation of souls, filled by a lukewarm, idle minister, instead of a faithful laborer; instead of one who would have enlarged the kingdom of Jesus Christ who would have snatched from their miseries a glorious number of sinners, who would have edified and built up believers, and been the glory of Christ. 2 Cor. viii, 23.

3. Could the gospel have been spread through so large a part of the world, and the foolishness of the cross have triumphed over numerous and great nations, if those apostolic men who have preceded us had regarded the oppositions which the people, yea, which the whole pagan world, made to the progress of the gospel? Where should we have been, if difficulties insurmountable by human prudence had abated their zeal or suspended their labors; or if, in the persuasion of finding us as we were, savage and rebellious, they had unhappily left us to the darkness of our primitive ignorance? Do you fear inconveniences? But what is there to fear for a pastor who fills up his ministry with edification and fidelity? "What?" it may be answered, "Contempt, reproaches, and contradictions." But these are his glory, and form part of the present consoling reward of his zeal. "What?" it may be added, "Evil treatment and insults of various kinds." But these are the most honorable seals of his apostleship. I grant, however,

3dly. 1. That all this zeal should be continually guarded; and that the universal maxim, which binds every private member of the church of Christ, should be particularly written on the hearts of his ministers -- "Let your moderation be known unto all men," Phil. iv, 5. There is a modesty which should run through the whole character of a minister of Christ, and should manifest itself in all his words and actions; yea, even upon those occasions when he most unbends his mind.

2. Nothing is of more importance than the moderation and modesty of ministers who are consecrated to the Lord. The same decency, the same circumspection, the same majesty, which accompanies them in their public duties, should follow them everywhere; and as they are everywhere to consider themselves as the ambassadors of Christ, they ought everywhere to support the dignity of this character, in the wisdom of their words, in the chaste decency of their dress, and in the seriousness of all their actions. I have already, in a former discourse, spoken on this subject; but I would wish to enlarge a little farther, on account of its importance.

3. If the sacred writings, by which we shall be judged, make every idle word a transgression; if the gospel exacts from every private Christian such circumspection, reserve, and modesty in conversation -- what does it not require from the immediate ministers of Jesus Christ! The lips of ministers are, next to the word of God, the depositaries of divine knowledge, which they are incessantly to administer to the people; and when the Spirit of God calls them to the ministry, he says to them in some sense, as formerly to the prophet, "I have put my words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people," Isa. li, 16. That is to say, to the end that you may make -- as a new heaven and a new earth, or at least as a part of it, -- the people intrusted to your care; that you may accustom them to regard me as the only God who deserves their affections and homage; that they may learn to regard themselves as a holy people, consecrated to me alone; that the heaven and earth which they behold are the works of my liberal hand, which, with all things they contain, deserve not their affections; and that I have prepared for them a heaven infinitely more glorious and eternal, where they shall enjoy, with my redeemed, pleasures for evermore. What follows from hence but that our tongue is no more our own; that it is consecrated to the Word of God, and the edification of the people; that witticisms and vain discourses are unlawful amusements in the mouths of believers; but that they are profanations in ours!

4. Far be it from me to speak against the relaxations of innocent society: but that which I would say, my brethren, is this -- that our conversation should be always marked with a peculiar character of piety, gravity, and modesty; that, in conversing, we should with a holy joy endeavor to edify each other; and all around us, with words of love and truth; and that we should banish from our discourse all profane and immoderate joy, and all the low and all the genteel pleasantries of the world.

5. I would just add, that all our relaxations, even when we most unbend our minds, should have in them a peculiarity of decency, reserve, and seriousness. I know that both the soul and body need relaxation but those moments which we give to nature are neither useful nor permitted, but as they dispose us for our duties, and prepare us for farther toil. Repose is appointed for us, to the end that we may gain new strength to continue our course; and therefore every kind of relaxation which tends to estrange us from it, to discourage us, or to inspire us with a distaste of our toil and public labors, is to us improper, yea, criminal.

6. But as for you, my brethren, permit me to finish this head of my discourse with those words of the apostle, "Ye have not so learned Christ," Eph. iv, 20. No, brethren: it is not thus that you dishonor your ministry: it is not thus that you turn into a stumblingblock the sacred character which you have received from Jesus Christ for their salvation. Continue, then, my brethren, to conduct yourselves before your people in a manner worthy the holiness and gravity of your vocation. We live in times when infidelity moves with gigantic strides; when the licentiousness of the public manners leaves us nothing to avoid the malignity of suspicion, and the contempt of the world, but this respectable gravity, modesty, and piety, supported throughout the minutest particulars of our conduct and manners. Irreligion is come to a point; and the world is charmed to find so many ministers like themselves. It seems to be a victory and gain to them, when they can persuade themselves, or when they can perceive, that any ministers tread under foot the duties of their station. They see not that the unfaithfulness and misconduct of ministers consecrated to the service of religion is the greatest judgment God can inflict upon a people, except the entire removal of the candlestick of the gospel.

Rev. ii, 5. Let none of us then, my brethren, increase the blindness of the world, by confirming it in its errors through our example. O! let none of us become stones of stumbling, and the most grievous plagues to those to whom we should be guides in the way of salvation!

7. In a word, my brethren, feed the flock which is intrusted to your care, with the tenderness of fathers, with the vigilance of guides, and with all the modesty, simplicity, and holiness, which becomes ministers of Jesus Christ. Let your example, under the grace of God, give you assurance of the fruit and success of your ministry: appear not occupied or touched with any thing but their salvation: forget, as it were, your own temporal interests; or never put them in the balance with the interest of their souls. Consider yourselves as theirs. Your calling, your mission, your functions, are only for them: give yourselves then wholly to them, as if you were created only for their benefit. "Do the work of an evangelist."

PART II

I now proceed to the last head of my subject "Make full proof of your ministry." So fulfill the whole, that none may charge you with the neglect of your duty. Let the world see that you make it your own and only work to win souls.

1. How strong and comprehensive is this commandment! Should we not therefore frequently examine ourselves concerning the purity of our zeal and of our motives in respect to all the parts of our ministerial office -- whether "we make full proof of our ministry" in the sight of God as well as man? When we enter on any employment, should we not first inquire, Will God be glorified by this undertaking? Is it his work which I am entering upon? Is that which I purpose to myself; really my duty? Does divine love influence me to comfort the afflicted, to strengthen the weak, and to bring sinners to Christ? Does divine zeal urge me to cultivate in secret the fruits of my public labors; to support the rising conversation by spiritual discourse; to heal domestic dissensions by the counsels of meekness and wisdom; to reconcile fathers to their children; to restore to wives the affections of their husbands; and to carry the peace of Jesus Christ into all the families I visit? Does the spirit of ministerial vigilance and holy solicitude lead me into every work of mercy and piety? Do I "make full proof of my ministry?"

2. Do I visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions? James i, 27. Do I prefer "the house of mourning to the house of feasting?" Eccles. vii, 2. Can a father see his children on the point of being taken from him, without running to their succor, and leaving with them at least some farewell marks of consolation and tenderness? And is he a shepherd, or a savage, who sees his infirm, perhaps dying sheep, and condescends not to offer them at least his spiritual assistance? No, my brethren; a pastor who neglects the sick of his flock must have a heart as hard as a stone, or as light as vanity. "I was sick," will Christ say, "and ye visited me not," Matt. xxv, 43.

And if a poor sinner on the verge of eternity, though not a member of our society implore my assistance at that awful period; shall I refuse him my hand? How little must I know of, or at least how little regard, the value of a soul, if I do not fly to his rescue? for who knows but he may be called, even by my instrumentality, at the last hour of the day? And what shall I answer before the tremendous Judge at his awful bar, when all the intricate threads of human events are fully

unraveled, if I find that that immortal soul, now lost for ever would have been saved if I had been faithful? Will not his blood, will not his soul, be required at my hands? God enable us to "make full proof of our ministry!" But again,

3. Do I faithfully visit the poor? If such as neglect to feed the poor with material bread, shall on the great day be placed on the left hand of the Judge, how can those escape condemnation whose office is to dispense to them spiritual bread, if they neglect so sacred a charge? I well know that the generality of our traveling preachers are unable, out of their little pittance, to afford much to the poor, for the supply of those temporal remedies or comforts which their miseries demand; and therefore this is not what the gospel particularly requires of them; nor do the poor in general, who know them, expect it from them: though I have no doubt but you, my brethren, give according to your ability, yea, and many of you, as the apostle says, beyond it; softening at least by your cares, your sensibility, your advice, and your prayers, the pains and distresses of your poorer brethren, and suffering and sympathizing with those whom you cannot temporally relieve. We are, you know, ministers of things future; and the riches which God showers upon the people by our means, are the riches of grace and eternal glory.

Let us then be, if possible, more ready to succor, with our prayers and advice, those among our people whose poverty incapacitates them from recompensing our labors, than those who might reward them by temporal kindnesses, and at the same time least need our counsels. Let us not divide our cares among our people according to the means they possess to compensate for them but according to the need they have of the assistance of our ministry. Let the name of the poor be honorable in our eyes. Let us not have the hardness of heart to add to the distresses of their situation that of our neglect and indifference; but let us make ample amends for our want of power to supply their bodily necessities, by our zeal and assiduity in the things which relate to their souls: let us make them conscious that their poverty is a title which only endears them the more to us, as making them more dependent upon us, and ourselves in consequence more responsible for them. Let us consider them as the most privileged part of our flock; as, in their outward condition, most resembling Christ when he abode upon earth in the flesh. Let us consider ourselves happy in a constant interest in their prayers. "The Lord heareth the poor," Psa. lxxix, 33 says the psalmist. When they are poor in spirit, also, then it is the voice of that dove which is always heard and answered, that groans within them. Let us suffer with them in compassionating their pain: let us remember that our mission, like that of our adorable Redeemer, is peculiarly to the poor. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," says Christ by Isaiah, "because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; and "this day," says he in the synagogue, "is this scripture fulfilled in your ears," Isa. lxi, 1; Luke iv, 18, 21. "Go," says our Lord to the disciples of John the Baptist, "and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them," Matt. xi, 4, 5.. As if he had said to them, Your master is so perfectly acquainted with the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and the entire crucifixion to the pomps and vanities of the world which its members must necessarily experience, that one of the strongest proofs to him that I am Christ, will be this -- that "the poor have the gospel preached unto them." Let us then, my brethren, be thankful that we labor among a people who are in general poor; for it is among such that the grace of the Spirit of God is most abundantly shed abroad. We receive, it is true, but little from their indigence; but the harvest is always rich for Jesus Christ! Well did the primitive bishop, on the demand of the Roman emperor, that he should

deliver up all the treasures of his church, bring to him the poor indigent members of his flock, who, though destitute of worldly comforts, were rich in faith! So it has been, is, and probably will be, till the great millennial year rushes in upon the world.

Let us then take delight in daily visiting the poor: let none of us manifest so little faith and crucifixion to the world as to regard those ministers most happy who labor among the rich. They may be better paid; but will their usefulness be greater? They may find those who are most ready, because most able to supply their temporal wants; but will they find those who are most ready to profit by their instructions? The thorns and anxiety accompanying riches, generally choke and stifle the word of God. Matt. xiii, 22. The field may be more adorned, but the soil in general is barren and ungrateful. While, on the contrary, a minister who faithfully labors among a poor people, possessing simple and teachable spirits, penetrated with a love of the great obvious and essential truths of the gospel, and submissive in their indigence to the divine hand which corrects them such a one, I say, has the consolation of daily seeing his ministry abundant in fruits for heaven. Let us then consider it as one of our highest duties to visit the poor: let us not account our labors in any wise recompensed, but when they produce the fruits of life and salvation; and let us not estimate concerning our duties or station, except by the gains we can make thereby for Jesus Christ our Lord.

4. When all these holy duties, privileges and vocations are duly estimated, may not the minister of the gospel profitably enter into some such soliloquy as the following? "I can neither through my unfaithfulness damn, nor through grace save, myself alone. From the time that I enter the holy ministry, I must necessarily be either a plague sent from God, or permitted in his wise providence for the punishment of mankind, or a gift from heaven for their blessing and felicity. I must resemble either that dragon in the Revelation, who, in falling, drew with him the third part of the stars of heaven, or that great antitype of the brazen serpent, Jesus Christ, who being lifted up draws all who believe to himself, and heals all the diseases and infirmities of the people. I have only this alternative.

"What a most powerful motive is this for fidelity in my office; for watchfulness over my conduct; for zeal in my ministry; for filial fear in my situation; for a continual renewal in the spirit of my vocation for glowing hope, or confusion, in the expectation of the coming of the great Bishop of souls, who will then demand from me an account of the use or neglect of my talents, and who will present to me those souls which he had intrusted to my care, either as my condemnation, if they have perished through my neglect, or as my glory and crown if they have under his grace found life and salvation by the means of my ministry!"

5. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue. and if there be any praise, think on these things," Phil. iv, 8.

"Whatsoever things are true," -- hold in its purity that most sacred depository of faith and truth, the holy word of God. Draw from the pure sources, from the Scriptures, all the principles of holiness and morality, by which you should regulate your own conduct, and that of your flocks. Never depart from those rules of truth, without which all that bears the name of piety is nothing but hypocrisy, and a scandal to others.

"Whatsoever things are honest," -- show a due reservedness in your manners and conversations. Let nothing which is in the least degree indecent, or contrary to the sanctity of your ministry, ever escape you. Bear always on your countenance a holy modesty, and that ministerial gravity, which make religion respectable even to those who love it not: avoid all suspicious familiarities; and remember, that your willfully saying or doing any thing which may cause suspicion, is a crime in a minister, which innocence itself cannot justify.

"Whatsoever things are just," -- let the most delicate and in violable equity be manifested in all your conduct, disinterestedness in all the exercises of your ministry, prudence and love in your zeal, and an equal affection (as ministers) toward all the faithful who are in trusted to your care, as you are equally the spiritual fathers of them all; no animosity, except against vice; no predilection, but in favor of holiness: no acceptance of persons; but let the wants alone of your flocks regulate all your cares and all your attention.

"Whatsoever things are pure," -- Inspire the people with a due respect for all the ordinances of the gospel, by administering them yourselves in the fear of God and with holy dignity. On all such occasions, appear as the elders before the throne of the Lamb, struck with the majesty of God, and expecting a revelation of his love to your own souls and those of the people; and let such modesty, awe, and depth of piety be manifested in all your administrations, that your people may learn from your whole deportment what dispositions are necessary for themselves on such occasions. But, above all, and in all, and through all, let us press upon every one the necessity of holiness. Let us never forget our calling -- that we were called and sent forth to raise a holy people. Let all your doctrines, and all your discipline, all your labors, and all your conversation, center in this. Let this be the grand burden of your testimony -- "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

"Whatsoever things are lovely," -- render yourselves amiable in the eyes of your people, if you would be useful to them; amiable, not by improper familiarities, but by partaking of their afflictions, and becoming their comforters in all their distresses. Gain their hearts, and draw their souls to Jesus Christ. Render not your sacred function odious by the rudeness, the moroseness, or the caprice of your humors; nor contemptible, by a baseness of sentiment. Refuse not upon any occasion, to the believers or penitents who are committed to your charge, your assistance or advice, since you owe to them your very life. Be their consolation, and they will be yours; love them as your children, and they will love you as their fathers.

"Whatsoever things are of good report," -- Neglect nothing which can preserve your reputation pure and spotless in the judgment of your people. Abstain from every thing, even the most lawful, which can become a cause of offense to your brethren. Remember that the fruit of your ministry is in a great measure attached to the good opinion they have of you. Disgrace not, therefore, our holy religion, by disgracing yourselves. Let your examples prepare the way for the success of your instructions. Let no one have occasion to reproach you for doing that which you are obliged to testify against to others; and let the sweet savor of your lives spread through your circuits, and become itself a constant censure of the vices or faults of others.

In short, my brethren, if the remembrance of the glorious army of martyrs, whose blood became the seed of the church, can affect you; if the example of your late venerable father in the gospel [John

Wesley], and of the first Methodist preachers, who endured the heat and burden of the day, and bore the ark of the testimony against an opposing world, can move you; if you have ruling within you (as I doubt not you have) the principles of holiness and truth -- "if there be any virtue, think on these things." If our most excellent discipline, so faithfully enforced by your predecessors, inspire you with a sacred emulation; if you be ashamed to degenerate from the holy fortitude of those who have gone before you, whose praise is in all our churches, -- "if there be any praise, think on these things." Then, under almighty grace, you will continue to do honor to your holy ministry; you will be the blessed means of sanctifying the people, and "the God of peace will be ever with you.

COKE ON THE MINISTRY
Four Discourses
On
The Duties
Of
A Minister of the Gospel

BY THOMAS COKE, LL. D.
Of the University of Oxford

DISCOURSE 4

"But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word," Acts vi, 4.

PART I.

1. Attention to, and fidelity in the exercise of, the duty of prayer, is not one of those obligations which are peculiar to the ministry of the gospel. It is one of the most essential duties of Christianity. Every real Christian is a man of prayer: his views, his desires, his hopes, his affections, yea, even his conversation, are all in heaven. Every Christian is a citizen of the world to come, and a stranger here below: all exterior objects which here surround him should be to him only so many ties and obstacles, which, retarding his course and prolonging his banishment, ought to increase and inflame his desire after his country: all the temptations which the world offers or throws in his way, all his secret conflicts with his passions -- all these should lead him to lift up his eyes continually to heaven; there to send up his sighs and prayers, and to address himself in secret, and in every place, to that faithful, heavenly, invisible witness of all his dangers, and all his troubles, from whose protection alone he expects his consolation and his strength. Every Christian, then, is a man of prayer; and he who lives not in the exercise and spirit of prayer, is a man without God, without divine worship, without religion, without hope; and if this be an incontestable truth, what instructions are not due to the people, to animate them to the love and exercise of prayer.

2. But, my brethren, if the spirit of prayer be the soul of Christianity; if that homage of love which we render to God in publishing his greatness and loving kindness, or in soliciting his mercies and succors -- if all other ordinances of the gospel are only helps and assistants to this spirit of prayer; if all external worship be established only to form of the simple believer the man of devotion, the man of prayer; if he who calls himself a Christian, and possesses not this spirit, and of course lives not in the exercise of it, be without religion, without God, without hope; what a monster must be the minister of this religion, an interpreter of its laws, an expounder of its doctrines, a dispenser of its graces, a public intercessor before God for the faithful, if he himself be not a man of prayer; if he be not faithful to this essential duty! O, my brethren, if there be any among you who do not feel the full power of these truths, what cause have we to lament on your account, before that holy dove, that true source of the spirit of prayer, who groans and prays incessantly in the hearts and by the mouths of his ministers!

3. St. Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, Acts x, 9. In our text we are informed, that all the apostles were resolved to give themselves continually to prayer: and from the gospels we find that our Lord himself spent whole nights in prayer, on mountains, and in other secret places, Matt. xiv, 23, &c. And shall any of us presume to live in the omission of the frequent and habitual exercise of this supporting, nourishing, quickening, indispensable duty? But I have known many of you, my brethren, for years; and am confident that one of the most leading features of your character is the exercise of this holy duty in its spirit and power. I therefore chiefly desire to stir up your pure minds to remembrance: and O that I may be the means, under divine grace, by this little mite of love, of confirming you in your present spirit: yea, of animating you to still greater fidelity and to higher degrees of fervor in this blessed conversation with Heaven.

4. We are called to be the lights of those who are in darkness: but it is prayer and study, always accompanied to the sincere minister of the gospel with the divine light, which truly renders us lights to the people. Prayer may be termed the science of the heart, that alone renders useful those studies which form the science of the mind.

5. It was the indubitable and experimental conviction of this truth, confirmed to them by the infallible inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, which induced the college of apostles to come to the determination in my text, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word:" not that they did not before live in the exercise, and spirit, and very life of prayer; but they were determined now to lay aside every weight which duty could dispense with, and give themselves up more entirely than ever to this holy communion with God.

6. It is probable that, like Moses of old, the apostles had, from motives of pure love, taken an active share in all the minutest parts of the temporal affairs of the church: but a murmuring arising between the Grecians (that is to say, such converted Jews as had been dispersed abroad among the Greeks) and the Hebrews, in respect to the distribution of the church's money among their widows respectively, the apostles embrace this opportunity of shaking off that heavy burden, which so intruded upon the more important parts of their ministerial and apostolic functions; declaring that they would give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word"

7. We must here observe to prevent mistakes, that though the apostles delivered up the management of the poor, and other inferior points, to the direction of subordinate officers of the church, they still reserved in themselves the ultimate power of decision in all matters which they judged of sufficient importance to call for their interference: this is evidently clear from the following chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. But we proceed to show how indispensably necessary the duty of constant prayer, which the apostles themselves could by no means dispense with, is for every minister of the gospel; having already enlarged upon the other subject, of the ministry of the word, in my former discourses.

8. In considering the present subject, we shall, first, show the necessity of continual prayer, as it respects ourselves, particularly considered in our ministerial capacity; and then, secondly, as it respects our flocks.

I. First, As it respects ourselves.

1st. The temptations we meet with, to distaste and weariness in our duties, can only be overcome by the exercise and life of prayer.

If we would fill up our ministry with fidelity, we must wholly devote ourselves to it; we must sacrifice our ease, our rest, to fill up its various calls; we cannot dispose of our time as we please: it is a holy servitude, which makes us no longer our own, but wholly the people's: we must be able to say with the apostle, that heat and cold, fatigue, difficult roads, hunger and thirst, are some of the fruits of our ministry, and signs of our apostleship. We even often labor among the ungrateful: our pains are often recompensed with indifference, unteachableness, and murmurs; yea, they sometimes draw upon us the aversion of those whose salvation we seek. When we are under these trials, we have reason to guard against disgust and discouragement. We are ready, perhaps, to throw up the great work in which we are engaged, when we see not the end of it, and but little of the fruits. On such occasions, self-love, unsupported by the wished for success, reclaims its rights, and secretly insinuates, that such painful and apparently almost useless cares cannot be our duties. Now how can we possibly support ourselves under such temptations to disgust as these are, which are dangerous, and so frequent in the course of a long and laborious ministry, if we do not continually renew our strength at the feet of Jesus Christ -- If we have not the consolation of continually drawing near to him to open to him all our sorrows and discouragements, as to the great Shepherd whose place we occupy. It is there we shall be confounded before him, for making any account of the light troubles of our functions, when compared to those of the first propagators of Christianity, who sacrificed their lives for the truth: it is there we shall blush to have indulged a temptation to lay down our arms almost before we had begun the combat, and to have been disheartened and discouraged by labors so light; when those holy ministers of God had defied tribulations, anguish, hunger, nakedness, persecution, fires, gibbets, and all the fury of tyrants, who would have separated them from the love of God in Christ Jesus their Lord: it is from thence, my brethren, that we should always return with a new taste for all the functions of our office -- with a new zeal for the salvation of souls: returning from thence, what before appeared burdensome and painful, would now become light, yea, delightful to us; and the fatigues and contradictions of sinners, inseparable from the duties of our office, would be to us a most comfortable proof of our calling to the ministry of the word. Let none of us, my brethren, deceive ourselves: without the constant exercise and life of prayer, we continually feel every thing which is disagreeable and distressing in our ministry: we draw in a yoke which overpowers us: we bear with reluctance the burden and heat of the day. But by prayer all is sweetened: the yoke is no more heavy: the labors increase; but the pain, the disgust, the discouragements, vanish away. You sometimes, my brethren, perhaps, are ready to complain of the oppression and weariness of Spirit which the multitude and difficulties of your avocations bring upon you, and of your inability to fulfill your duties: but if you address yourselves constantly to him who changes our weakness into strength. If you be faithful to the duty of prayer, these difficulties will disappear; the mountains will become plains; you will find your selves new men; and you will no longer complain, but that you have not labored or suffered enough for Jesus Christ.

2dly. If prayer alone can sweeten all the pains and discouragements attendant on the exercise of our sacred functions, it alone can prevent, or deliver us from, all the dangers to which they expose us.

1. As there is nothing, perhaps, more dangerous in our situation than the dissipation of mind which is, almost unavoidably, more or less produced by the constant administration of exterior duties, I will venture to assert that the exercise and spirit of prayer can alone preserve us from its bad effects. It is in reality but too true, that the inward man weakens, and the life of God decays in the soul, in the midst of all the public exercises and constant activity which our ministerial office requires, if we do not continually give ourselves to prayer. We are real losers ourselves, while we give up ourselves incessantly to the wants of others; we lose the secret and hidden life of faith, in which consists the whole soul and life of piety: we accustom ourselves to be all outward, always from home, and never within our own hearts: we at last appear before the people to perform the public duties of our office with dissipated spirits, divided by a variety of foreign and tumultuous images which occupy them; and we no more experience the silence of the senses and of the imagination, in respect to every thing but the great and solemn work on which we are entering, which is so necessary to call us back to a holy recollection, and to a secret consciousness of our utter unworthiness and incapacity of ourselves to stand between the living and the dead. Alas! we are no more acquainted with these things! Thus, in laboring always for others, and hardly ever for ourselves, the spiritual strength of the soul wears out we live entirely out of ourselves; we give ourselves up to this life of hurry and agitation; and we at last become incapable of any profitable communion with ourselves or with God; we even seek for occasions and pious pretexts to fly from retirement; we cannot be in any wise comfortable without the company of others, and are immediately tired with God alone.

2. Now, this conduct and disposition of mind, which have nothing blameable in them in the judgment of the world, appear in a very different light in the sight of God. Alas! we quite exhaust our spiritual strength, if we be not continually repairing it at the footstool of the throne of grace; all our cares and solitudes are confined to external things; we act and stir outwardly for God, but we do not commune and wrestle privately with him, though true love thinks all hours too short in communing with its Beloved. We run, but we run alone: the Lord, whom we neglect to call to our assistance, leaves us to our own weakness; and our ordinary humor, temper, vivacity, vanity, d love of popularity, rule us, rather than the genuine love of our duty, and the love of so n Is.

3. There is nothing but faithfulness in the exercise of prayer, which can save us from these rocks: and, without neglecting in the least degree the necessary functions of our ministry, we may live in this blessed exercise; we may continually carry with us that spirit of piety and recollection, which moderates, regulates, and sanctifies all our external duties, and even makes them so many preparations for returning with still greater advantage to retirement, recollection, and communion with God. It is for these reasons, that we are repeatedly informed in the gospels, that our Lord warned his disciples to watch and pray, that they might not enter into temptation, Matt. xxvi, 41. In St. Luke he says, " Watch ye, therefore, and pray always;" Luke xxi, 36. And in St. Mark, "Take ye heed, watch and pray," Mark xi n, 33.

3dly. Our necessary intercourse with the world makes the constant exercise of prayer an indispensable duty.

1. Though the exercise, the spirit, the very life of prayer, are absolutely necessary for the salvation of every private Christian, we ministers, more than others, have continually need of the help of

prayer. The more our duties lead us into the midst of the world, the more do they expose us to its vanity and seductions, if they be not supported by the spirit of prayer. It is not sufficient, that we are not infected or debilitated by the contagious air which we must there breathe; we are required to appear among men, clothed with more strength, more modesty, more virtue, more holiness, than the generality of professors themselves, in the midst of whom we must daily be: we ought everywhere to be the sweet savor of Jesus Christ. But how difficult must it be for a minister, if the habit of prayer has not established in him a certain solidity of virtue, to find himself continually in the midst of the abuses and dissipations of a vain world, to hear daily the apologies which the world makes for itself and not be shaken or weakened in the spiritual life thereby! He carries with him a heart void of all those deep sentiments of religion which the habit of prayer alone can engrave upon the soul, and influenced by all those inclinations which can render the world amiable to him! There are but too few among believers, who do not, sometimes, feel themselves inwardly seduced and shaken by the objects which surround them: what then can that minister do, who carries with him but his weakness and his frailties? And though decency may keep him within certain bounds; yet still the world is in his heart; he adopts it for his own; and there is nothing now to be observed, even in his public administrations, of that firmness and becoming majesty which announce the minister and ambassador of God: he is now like salt which has lost its savor; and which is not only unable to preserve other things from corruption, but is itself changed into rottenness and putrefaction.

2. A minister, therefore, who lives without the habit of prayer, without fidelity to that sacred and indispensable means of grace, however irreprehensible he may otherwise be in the eyes of men, is but the shadow of a minister; he is but a bare representation of a pastor of the flock of Christ: he has not the soul, the reality of that holy vocation; and his whole ministry has nothing in it but an empty title; which neither binds him to God, with whom he has no communication, nor to the church of God, to which he is of no manner of use.

3. When I speak of the necessity of prayer for a minister of the gospel, I do not mean that this holy exercise should occupy the greatest part of the day: he owes himself to his flock, and his public duties ought never to suffer by the length of his prayers. But I understand hereby that prayer should always precede his public duties, and sanctify them; I mean, also, that the spirit of prayer should accompany him throughout; that he should in every thing, even in the most indifferent of his actions, show forth that "inward man, which is renewed" through prayer, "day by day," 2 Cor. iv, 16, -- that secret commerce with God, wherein consists the essence of religion and piety; that he render his ministry in all places respectable, and make his very presence alone an instruction to all those who approach him. Behold what I understand by the spirit of prayer, so essential for a minister of the church of God.

4. We are, my brethren, divinely appointed to combat the vices and unruly passions of the world, to destroy the empire of the devil among men, and to establish and to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Our ministry snatches us from external repose, and clothes us with armor: but our arms are only prayer and faith working by love. It is from these divine arms, under grace, that all our instructions, all our labors, and all our efforts, derive their whole strength and success: without these, we are but weak, rash men, exposed without defense in the midst of enemies, with whom we ought to have been prepared to fight; and soon become the miserable sport of their seductions, and of the snares which they continually throw in our way: that is to say, we soon ourselves become like to

them, whom we ought to have converted to God and gained for Jesus Christ. Like minister, like people! Would to God my observations were never verified. But, alas! from long experience in the ministry of the word, I am indubitably convinced, that a minister, without the spirit of prayer and habitual recollection, cannot long be supported in the divine life; he becomes dissipated; he neglects his duties, especially where a cross accompanies them; or he performs them without piety, without any of that deep inward sentiment of true religion, and often without that respect and holy dignity which the world itself expects: till at last he becomes a stumbling-block and an offense to the flock, and sometimes even a public reproach to the church to which he belongs.

PART II.

II. I now proceed to the second head of my discourse; namely, to show the necessity of our living in the constant exercise and spirit of prayer, as it respects the interests of our flocks.

1st. The exercise, spirit, and life of prayer, are necessary, not only to preserve us from disgust and discouragement in our duties, and from all the dangers with which we are surrounded in all our pastoral engagements, in our intercourse with the world, and otherwise; but also to assure fruit and success to our ministry.

1. It is not sufficient that we run no hazard of losing our own souls; (if that were possible, in respect to any prayerless person;) it is still more necessary for the church of God that we be useful to others. Now, you well know, my brethren, that we may cultivate the ground, we may plant and water, but it is God alone who gives the increase 1 Cor. iii, 6. But how can we expect it if we be not faithful in asking it -- if we do not, by our fervent and continual prayers, draw down from heaven those blessings on our labors which alone can make them fruitful? Too many labor without fruit, without success, because they labor all alone, and as if the success depended only on themselves. They expect it from their own gifts, their own cares, and the improvement of their own understandings. They call not Him to their assistance, who alone can give the blessing to all their toils, and render them useful.

2. I repeat it, my brethren, the little usefulness of many ministers, even when they fill up all the public parts of their office, is entirely owing to the want of living in the spirit of prayer. They think they have discharged every thing required, when they have fulfilled all the external duties of their ministry; and never infer from the little fruit of their labors that there is some secret vice or essential neglect which renders them useless. Thus, while they engage not God by their prayers in the success of their undertakings; while they begin them without solemnly and earnestly addressing themselves to him, that he himself would prepare the hearts of those they are going to instruct -- they spend their days, as at one time did the apostles, in casting their nets and taking nothing. They live, perhaps, a long and painful life, (if they do not entirely plunge into the world,) and at last die, with having done little, if any thing at all, in the gaining of immortal souls for Jesus Christ.

2dly. The constant exercise and spirit of prayer are indispensably necessary to obtain divine unction.

1. What success can that minister promise himself; on Scripture grounds, who accustoms not himself to live within the veil -- who comes not constantly to the throne of grace, there to fill himself with the love of those truths which he is about to declare, and with that spirit of unction which alone can render them lovely and profitable to the people -- to draw from thence that affecting zeal, that grace, that strength, which is irresistible? What success, I say, can he possibly promise himself, who comes to address his audience as from God, who yet never himself speaks to God? What dryness in his discourses! He announces truths; but they come from his mouth, and not from his heart; nor are they those which the Father has revealed to him in secret. He instructs with spirit; but it is with the spirit of man, and not with the Spirit of God. He shows forth the truth; but he does not make it amiable. Those external actions which he gives himself in order to persuade, do not even appear to persuade, to touch, to penetrate himself. A spiritual person easily perceives that he speaks a strange language, which is not drawn from the bottom of his heart. Solomon, from the language of the two women, quickly discovered the true mother. It is very easy for a truly spiritual person to distinguish between a true and a false shepherd, from their language and discourses -- to determine which is the true father of the flock; which is he who speaks the language of paternal love, who bears his children on his heart; who is continually employed before God in their behalf, and who is abundantly more jealous of their safety and salvation than of his own titles of shepherd, minister, or ambassador of Christ. And I appeal to you, my brethren, for the truth of my observation -- that a holy minister, a man of prayer, with only moderate talents, will be more successful, will leave his congregation more affected and influenced by his discourse, than many others whose talents are vastly superior, but who have not by prayer drawn down that unction, that tender taste of piety, which alone knows how to speak to the heart. A minister speaks very differently the truths he loves, and which he is accustomed to meditate upon, and taste all his days, at the feet of Jesus Christ! The heart has a language which nothing can imitate. In vain does a minister thunder from the pulpit, and put his studied actions and forced clamors in the place of zeal and piety. We may always perceive the man: we may always feel that it is a fire which descends not from heaven. All that vehement and forced noise in the preacher never announces the descent of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of those who are assembled to hear. I am not now speaking of the genuine cries of sinners and mourners in Zion, when struck and humbled under the word. I well know that thousands, in these lands, can refer, under grace, their conviction or conversion to those times of weeping, of melting, of crying, of apparent confusion in the sight of the world, but of blessed order in the sight of God. I speak only against the substituting, on the one hand, of human wisdom and human art, or, on the other, of noise and clamor, for the unction of the Holy One of Israel.

2. I cannot, my brethren, help dwelling on this important subject. I must repeat the question -- what success can our discourses produce, if the habit, and life, and spirit of prayer draw not down upon them that grace, that unction, which alone makes them useful to those who hear? Without this, the whole is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. The preacher speaks only to the ears of his audience, or at best to their understandings, merely because the Spirit of God speaks not by his mouth. The spirit by which he speaks, and which animates his tongue, is not that spirit of unction, of force, of fire, which, as it formerly moved on the face of the waters, so now moves upon the passions of the heart quiet in its sins, troubles it, agitates it, and then separates and clears up the chaos. It is in vain for him to thunder or borrow his zeal from without -- throughout the whole, he only, as the apostle speaks, beats the air: his language is as cold, as barren, as insipid as his heart; and the ministry of the word is no longer to him but a forced duty, which disgusts him, which

overwhelms him, and from the labor of which he excuses himself as much as possible; or otherwise it is a theater of vanity, where he rather seeks for the vile commendations of those that hear him than for their conversion and salvation.

3. How can that minister make the people taste the sweetness and power of the truths of God, who has never tasted them himself, or does not at least now taste them at the footstool of the throne? How can he ever inspire the people with a love of prayer, or a conviction of the necessity of it, who experiences not the consolations, nor feels the wants, which make the habit of prayer so essential to every true believer? How can he form real Christians, that is to say, spiritual men, "whose life is hid with Christ in God," -- he, whose whole life is a life out of himself and out of God, and whom the life of prayer does not cause to enter into himself, and into an examination of his own heart? No, my brethren! Take from a minister the spirit of prayer, and you take from him his soul, his strength, his life: he is no more than a dead carcass, which quickly infects those who approach it.

3dly. Ministers of the gospel "are ambassadors for Christ, to pray the people to be reconciled to God," 2 Cor. v, 20, and not only so, but to plead with God, through the great atonement, in their behalf.

1. But how can they who are not known or acknowledged of God plead with God for the people, when the want of the spirit of prayer has shut up all access to his throne; when they have not contracted, by their fidelity in the exercise of prayer, that holy familiarity with him which authorizes them to lay before him with confidence the wants of their flocks, and to bring down into the hearts of the penitent the blessings of pardoning love, and into those of believers the blessings of establishing grace, strength against temptation, and the perfect love of God; in a word, to use a sacred violence to the mercy of God in Christ, and to speak to him all the language of tenderness, pity, faith, and zeal in behalf of their flocks that language which the constant habit of prayer alone can teach us?

2. "Howbeit," says our Lord, speaking of bodily diabolical possessions, "this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting," Matt. xvii, 21. And can we imagine that less prayer is necessary to overturn the kingdom, the power, yea, the very nature of the devil in the souls of men? What is then sufficient for this? I answer, faith and prayer, with the promises and blessings annexed thereto. "Verily, I say unto you," says Christ to his disciples, "if ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree; but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive," Matt. xxi, 21, 22. O that we had all of us but faith and piety sufficient to give full credit to the word of God! then should we know and be astonished at the truth of those words of our Savior, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father: and whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it," John xiv, 12, 14. Accordingly, the great apostle, that close copier of the life of Christ, writes to the Colossians, "We do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," Col. i, 9, &c.; and to the Thessalonians, "What thanks can we render to God again for you, &c., night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your

faith," 1 Thess. iii, 9,10. And we may be assured that the apostle would never have prayed so continually and exceedingly for his flocks, if he had not been certain that his prayers would be heard for many of them in a glorious manner.

Therefore, 4thly. If prayer were not so indispensable for ourselves in particular as it is, we owe it to our people.

1. Are we not charged, by our character of pastor and minister, to pray for them without ceasing? Is it not a duty incumbent on us to lay before God the wants of our flocks, and to solicit for them the riches of his mercy? Should we not groan before him by reason of the vices with which too many of our hearers among whom we labor are infected; and which all our cares and all our zeal are not able to correct? Are we not bound to ask at the throne strength for the weak, compunction for hard-hearted sinners, and perseverance for the righteous? The more numerous the wants of our people, the more earnest and frequent should be our prayers. We should never appear before God, but, like the high-priest of the law, bearing before the Most High the names of the tribes written on our hearts; that is to say, the names of the people intrusted to our care: this should always be a principal subject of our prayers. Such is the order of the dispensation of grace. Though every genuine Christian is a king and priest to God and the Father, ministers especially are the public conduit-pipes, through which the divine grace and blessings run to the people: they form the grand public resource, by the instrumentality of which the goodness of God in Christ corrects the disorders which reign among men.

2. You see, then, my brethren, on the whole, that prayer is the most intimate and inseparable duty of a gospel minister: it is, if I may so speak, the soul of his office: it is, under the grace of God, his only safety. This alone sweetens all the distastes and discouragements he meets with: this alone guards him from all the dangers with which he is surrounded from his intercourse with the world, or from the spirit of professors themselves: this alone, under grace, assures success to his ministry; alone imparts the divine unction to his discourses; alone enables him to give a taste of the divine truths to the people, having first tasted them himself in communion with his God; alone qualifies him to plead successfully with God in behalf of his flock; and therefore is an absolutely indispensable debt which he owes to his people.

I shall now conclude the whole with a few general deductions from what has been advanced.

1. A minister, who lives not in the spirit and exercise of prayer, who prays only in a formal manner at set seasons, to satisfy a hardened conscience, is no pastor; he is a stranger, who is nowise interested by the wants of his flock: the people who are intrusted to his care are not his children; they are poor orphans without a father; his heart, his bowels, say nothing in their behalf; he loves the title which puts them under his direction, but he loves not that which is a grand means of their conversion and salvation: he loves not the office of a shepherd he loves not the flock: for if he loved it, could he omit any essential duty in behalf of the faithful, the mourners, or the sinners, intrusted to his care, to the end that none of those whom the Father had given him might perish? What say you, my brethren? A pastor, who lives not in the exercise of prayer for his people, not only loves them not, but deprives them of that which they have a right to exact from him: in depriving them of his prayers he deprives them of a resource to which God is always pleased to adjoin many graces, many

blessings: he fills the place of a holy shepherd, whose prayers would have drawn down a thousand blessings on the poor flock, and is absolutely guilty, in a great degree, of all the crimes which the prayers of that holy man would have prevented. Examine, therefore, if you be faithful in representing to God all the wants of your people; if you be solicitous, importunate, to draw down upon them the gracious regard of a good God. O, brethren, the fervent prayers of a faithful pastor are rarely useless. That God, who has charged us to pray for our people, has also promised to hear us.

But, 2. May I venture, without offense, to urge the following objection (conscious how inapplicable it is to most, if not all of you, my brethren) -- "How can a traveling preacher have much leisure for prayer, in the midst of the vast multiplicity of business which a circuit requires?" Alas! In the midst of all our labors and cares, how many vacant, unemployed moments have we? Can a pastor, an ambassador of Christ to mankind, God's minister, charged with the important office of presenting the wishes and prayers of the congregation before the throne, not have time to present his own -- a dispenser of the doctrines and graces of the gospel not hold constant intercourse with Him who has intrusted to him this glorious ministry, and in the name of whom he speaks and acts -- never render an account to God of the gifts and celestial riches with which he has been intrusted! The royal psalmist says of himself, "I give myself unto prayer," Psa. cix, 4. And again, "Evening and morning and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice," Psa. lv, 17. And once more, "Seven times a day do I praise thee," Psa. cxix, 104. Now, can any of us imagine that the concerns of a mighty empire, which lay on the mind of the royal psalmist, were less than the care of a circuit? Again, the Scripture informs us that Daniel, when prime minister of the greatest kingdom in the world, "kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before God," Dan. vi, 10. O that the Lord would now pour out upon us all, more abundantly than ever, the spirit of grace and supplication!

But, 3. It is not, my brethren, the devotion of a part of your lives in the exercise of prayer which we so much press upon you, as the privilege and consolation of those souls, retired into themselves, who are occupied in meditating on the wonders of the law and grace of God; and who taste, far from the world, and in the secret places of his tabernacle, what happiness they enjoy who love nothing in comparison to him, and who hold communion incessantly with him. That which is essential to us, is the spirit of prayer, which we ought to carry with us continually and into all our duties: that which is particularly requisite for us, is, before we enter on our public offices, always to go to the feet of Jesus Christ, there to fill ourselves with that spirit which enables us to perform our duties holily for ourselves, and usefully for others: it is, when we have finished our public duties, to go for some precious moments to refresh ourselves before God, and there to recover fresh strength to begin them again with new zeal: it is, to accustom ourselves to this secret and almost perpetual intercourse with God; to find him everywhere; to find ourselves always with him; and in every place, and every thing, to find occasion to raise ourselves up to him. Behold in what sense a minister of the gospel should be a man of prayer. O, my brethren, if this spirit of prayer animate not all our duties, we shall have much reason to complain while we are performing all that is painful in them, and omitting the only thing which can soften them, support us under them, and give them, under God, the wished-for success.

4. What a misfortune then is it, for a people to have over them a prayerless pastor; I mean one who does not live in the life, and spirit, and exercise of prayer; one who is governed by a spirit of

dissipation, destitute of the spirit of prayer and recollection; who is kept only by the fear of man from falling into scandalous disorders! What assistance can this unfortunate people promise themselves from such a minister! Can he administer to them those words of piety, unction, and consolation, which can only be received from Him "in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells for the church which is his body?" Can he successfully oppose the vices and public disorders which surround him? O! to be properly affected by these, he must be filled by that zeal which is the flame of love; he must feel the value of the souls among which he labors: but, to have a heart susceptible of this zeal and this sympathy, he must be often softened and melted down at the foot of the cross, in meditating on the price which these souls have cost our adorable Redeemer. I therefore once more say, in what a miserable state is that unfortunate people who are cursed with a prayerless minister! He should have been like a salubrious cloud, placed between the heavens and the precious field confided to his care. He should, by the habitual exercise of prayer, have received from on high those holy influences with which he should incessantly have watered, enriched, and rendered fruitful, that land which he is charged to cultivate. But, having no communication with heaven by prayer, he is only one of those "clouds without water, carried about of wind," Jude 12. No heavenly dew flows from his bosom; he imparts nothing, because he receives nothing: or, if he do impart any thing, it is only some dreadful rumor, a stench and a public noise of his scandal and fall!

5. Let us, my brethren, lay to heart these sacred truths. Let us never lose sight of them through the course of our lives. The spirit of prayer is the essential spirit of Christianity: but **IT IS THE SOUL, THE SUBSTANCE, THE LIFE OF A GOSPEL MINISTRY.** Every thing in our exterior duties tends to unite us to God -- To raise us up to him: and shall our spirit and our heart only be unmoved, in the midst of so many sacred employments, which call us back to him: in the midst of so many graces and lovingkindnesses as we are continually endeavoring to dispense in the ministry of the word, and which flow from him alone: in the midst of so many errors, disorders, and vices, which we daily see increasing among the people who surround us, and which call so loud upon us to implore his pity, and to have recourse to Him alone who can correct them? All these things considered is it possible for any one of us to regard a secret and constant intercourse with God as a pain and a cross; and in respect to present the experience, be obliged to consider him as the people did formerly in the midst of Athens, **AN UNKNOWN GOD!**

6. In short, a real minister of the gospel is a man of prayer. Prayer is his grand employment, his safety, his first and perpetual duty; and, I may add, is, under grace, the grand source of his consolation. Our instructions will be always barren, if they be not watered with our tears and prayers. Even if our gifts be small, but we support them by our prayers, our defects will be in a great measure supplied, and divine unction become the blessed substitute.

7. Therefore I once more, for all, repeat it again, a minister who prays not, who is not in love with prayer, is not a minister of the church of God: he is a dry tree, which occupies in vain a place in Christ's garden: he is an enemy, and not a father, of the people, he is a stranger, who has taken the place of the shepherd, and to whom the salvation of the flock is an indifferent thing. Be then, my brethren, faithful in prayer, and your ministry will be more and more useful; your labors will be more and more delightful to you; and the evils of the church of Christ, and of the world in general, will the daily diminish.

"O my God, give to all the ministers of thy gospel a tender and paternal heart toward their people; then will they always know how to address thee in their behalf; then will their zealous spirits be one continual prayer, speaking to thee for the souls which lie so near to their hearts! But, more particularly, bless the preachers of our connection, throughout Europe and America, with the abundance of thy grace, and of this spirit of prayer. Glory be given to thee, thou hast already bestowed much of it upon them: O! preserve it, increase it, enflame it, till their very life be one constant sacrifice to thee; till, by being daily stamped with brighter and brighter characters of thyself, they continually bring down, like thy servant Moses, a bright shining from the Mount."

FINIS