

The necessity of eminent Piety in the Gospel Ministry.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED

IN THE REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH,

AT NEW-BRUNSWICK, N. J.

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*New-Brunswick, March 2, 1838.*

REV. AND DEAR SIR,—

At a meeting of the Students on the afternoon of the last Thursday in February, it was resolved by a majority of the pious students of the College and Seminary, that the Sermon preached by you on the morning of that day, on the qualifications of the gospel minister, be requested for publication. \* \*

We believe that the proper perusal of the Sermon with the divine blessing will be the means of leading pious laymen and the students of our institutions who are preparing for the pastoral office, to see more clearly the importance, and thus to seek more earnestly and constantly for the attainment of eminent piety as the best qualification for the holy and awfully responsible work of the gospel minister. \* \* \* \* \*

With these views the committee would respectfully request of you the Sermon for publication. \* \* \* \* \*

Yours most respectfully,

ISAAC P. STRYKER, *Chairman.*

## A SERMON.

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2. TIMOTHY, II. 2.—“And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.”

FIDELITY to a trust, and ability to discharge the duties which result from it, give dignity and worth to character; and in proportion to its importance will be the beneficial effects that result from these qualities, or the disastrous consequences of their absence. In our text, the Apostle specifies both as essential requisites in those to whom the ministry of the gospel is committed. It is not our intention to consider the various and high qualifications which fit a man for this sacred office, but simply to notice the indispensable necessity of true piety in all who bear it. The term translated *faithful* is used in both an active and passive signification. Sometimes it means one who confides in another; and sometimes one who may be confided in by others. When it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, it denotes both a true believer in him, and one who is faithful to him. *Faith in Christ is the gift of God.* The spirit of truth glorifies Him by revealing to men his grace and glory. *God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* They who are thus enlightened and renewed, receive Christ as their Redeemer, commit themselves to him and rest on his power and grace for salvation: and this faith in him is the foundation of all fidelity to him. It is the root of every christian virtue: it produces

supreme love to God and unreserved consecration to his glory. It virtually includes all that we mean by true piety. Hence there is not only a fitness, but an absolute necessity that all should possess it and be truly pious men, to whom so important a trust as the gospel ministry is committed. It is to the elucidation and establishment of this point that your serious attention is invited in the ensuing discourse.

1. The *nature of the office itself*; its origin, design and responsibility, with the near relation to God into which it brings men, all show that genuine piety is of indispensable necessity to one who holds it.

It is of *divine appointment and origin*; for it was instituted by Christ as the Head of his Church and the Lord of the Universe, and it derives its authority and dignity from Him. Previous to his advent, prophets had been inspired to reveal the will of God to men, and clothed with authority from Him they had rebuked kings on their thrones, and called nations to repentance. But their ministry was confined chiefly to the nation of Israel, and they had no power to transmit their office to others. But when our Lord Jesus had finished his work on earth, and just before he ascended to heaven, as one of his last acts, he established a permanent ministry in his Church. He commissioned his apostles to *go and teach all nations*, and to show that they were invested with power to transmit their office as preachers of the gospel to successors, he added, "*lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*" Pastors are mentioned among his ascension gifts to his Church. Eph. 4. xi. The apostle Paul charged the elders or pastors of the Church at Ephesus to *take heed to themselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers*: Timothy was not only ordained to this work, but in our text he is admonished to beware of admitting to it any who do not possess the requisite qualifications for it.

The *design* of the ministry is to promote the glory of Christ in the salvation of sinners. As the gospel means the

glad tidings of salvation through the incarnation, sufferings, death, resurrection and intercession of the Son of God, so preaching the gospel, means the declaring to mankind his glory in the dignity of his person—his grace in his humiliation and death, the benefits which he bestows, and the readiness of God to pardon and save all who return to him through Christ. *We preach Christ crucified*, says the apostle, speaking of the subject and design of his ministrations. This preaching God blessed to effect the recovery of sinners to spiritual life, for he immediately adds that "*unto them who are called it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" By the preaching of Christ, the Church is edified, believers are built up in their most holy faith, and thus the glory of the Redeemer is displayed.

The *dignity and responsibility* which are attached to this office are peculiarly great. It is to be feared that this is realized by but few, even among ministers themselves. It brings man into close connexion with God, and makes him a co-worker with Him in his highest purposes with relation to our world. The splendor of earthly grandeur does not indeed belong to it, but it derives from heaven a greater glory than earth can give. Invested with authority from God, designed to maintain his cause and exhibit his grace, and operating with immediate and decisive effect on the eternal destinies of men, it has a dignity which is peculiarly its own and which eclipses all human greatness. Its responsibility is equal to its dignity; for ministers watch for souls as they who must give account." While the faithful servant will be applauded and honored, he who has been unfaithful will be condemned and rejected.

From the contemplation of the nature of the ministry, it is evident that an unconverted man is wholly disqualified for holding this office. He regards it as merely a secular calling, and follows it for the sake of its worldly emoluments. Indifferent to his own salvation he cannot be concerned for that of others. Impenitent and unbelieving he neither

knows nor seeks the glory of Christ, but lives in sin and is hastening to the abodes of wo. His carnal mind is enmity against God. Shall then the honor of the Redeemer and the highest interest of souls be entrusted to such? *Unto the wicked God saith what hast thou to do to declare my Statutes, or that thou shouldest take my Covenant in thy mouth?*

2. An unconverted minister is guilty of dreadful inconsistency of conduct, and cannot be a suitable guide to souls. How can he preach Christ who himself knows not his grace or glory, and has never believed in him for forgiveness? How can he call others to repentance and holy obedience who himself is in bondage to sin? who has never realized its malignity or danger; nor the spirituality of the divine law? who does not suitably apprehend the holiness and justice of God, nor the fearfulness of falling under his displeasure? Without true piety no man is sensible of the worth of the soul, and the blessedness of being at peace with God; of the beauty of holiness, and the sweetness of a good hope of heaven; of the pleasures of devotion, and a pure mind; and unless his conscience is stupified, such a minister must be constantly unhappy and self-condemned through the conviction that he is acting under a feigned character; that he is criminally omitting the duties and wholly destitute of the spirit of his office.

He is unfit to direct awakened sinners to Christ, for he cannot sympathise with them under the troubles of their conscience, nor administer the encouragements and consolations of the gospel. The excellent Commentator Dr. Scott it is well known was for many years a preacher, while he was yet in an unconverted state. In his "Force of Truth" in which he gives an account of his conversion he informs us that after he had been some years in the ministry, a new and unexpected effect was produced by his preaching which surprised and alarmed him not a little. He says "application was made to me by persons in great distress about their

souls ; their consciences being awakened to a sense of their lost condition by nature and practise, they were anxious in enquiring what they must do to be saved. I knew not well what to say to them, my views being very clouded and my sentiments very perplexed concerning justification, but being willing to give them the best counsel I could, I exhorted them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, though I was neither capable of instructing them in the true nature of faith ; nor in what manner they were to seek for it." He who has not felt the pains of godly sorrow for sin, nor fled by faith to Christ as the refuge of his soul, cannot instruct or guide others in their spiritual concerns. Neither is he fitted to take charge of the church ; for not having experienced the renewal of the Holy Ghost he is unacquainted with christian experience and the religion of the heart, and cannot admonish, and counsel, and encourage the people of God in their warfare. Consequently,

3. An unconverted minister will mislead and ruin others ; will bring guilt upon himself, and most probably will finally perish. *If the blind lead the blind both will fall into the ditch together.* The greatest calamity which can befall the church is the introduction into it of many such men : for each of them spreads around him spiritual desolation and death.

The life of such a man is a series of hypocrisy. When he entered on his office he professed "to feel in his heart that he is lawfully called of God's church and therefore of God himself to the Holy Ministry:" whereas he was an entire stranger to any saving work of the Holy Spirit upon his soul. He professes that the object at which he aims in his ministry is the glory of God, the edification of his church and the salvation of men, while he never intends these things, but is influenced in all he does by self-seeking and self-pleasing. Instead of love to God and man, faith in Christ, zeal for his glory, devotion and heavenly mindedness ; unholy passions reign unmortified in his breast, and he is habitually

influenced by ambition, pride, or covetousness. He watches not his heart; he is not concerned to obtain inward purity; he does not hunger and thirst after righteousness; nor does he deny himself and take up his cross and follow Christ. He may probably live in the allowed practice of some known sin, and it would not be surprising if in the hour of temptation, he should fall into gross and scandalous crime and so ruin his reputation and bring disgrace on the sacred cause which he professes to serve. But if he is withheld from falling into infamous sin he may become a corrupter of the church and a disturber of its peace; for unholy ministers have always been the first to introduce false doctrines and to pervert the truth; or he may sow discord and stir up strife among brethren; or through ambition and pride, and the love of distinction as a scholar, or a man of genius and eloquence, he may labour to become the head of a party and thus destroy much good, and do great harm by creating schism, and causing bitterness and contention.

The end of such a man, of such a minister will be that of the hypocrite—that of Judas the traitor. "*He will go to his own place.*" His hope will be *as the giving up of the ghost.*" As he possessed the spirit of the world, and was chiefly concerned for it, while he was careless of his soul, so he must take the bitter consequences of his wickedness and folly in the loss of his soul. He sported with hell, and he must endure its pains. He trifled with heaven, and he is excluded from its bliss. He mocked God, and he must endure his wrath. He insulted Christ, and he must fail of his salvation.

A man then who is without genuine piety is wholly unfit for the office of the gospel ministry, and if he assumes it, he does so at the peril of perishing with aggravated condemnation.

It is to be remembered however that piety is progressive, and exists in different persons in different degrees, and that some far exceed others in their attainments in spiritual knowledge and holiness. We therefore observe,

II. That in order to the comfortable and useful discharge of the duties of his office, a minister of the gospel should be *eminently pious*. This will appear from the following considerations.

1. It is necessary in order that he may suitably apprehend the sacredness and importance of the office which he holds. It is a mark either of the entire want, or of the low state of piety when the members or ministers of a church undervalue, or attempt to alter, any of the institutions of God, or to substitute in their place others which he has not appointed. The instrumentality which above all others he honors and blesses for the restraining of wickedness, the reforming of the world, the preservation and extension of truth, and the salvation of sinners is the gospel ministry.

“ The pulpit, in the sober use

Of its legitimate peculiar powers

Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,

The most important and effectual guard,

Support, and ornament, of virtue's cause.

There stands the messenger of truth ; there stands

The legate of the skies ! His theme divine,

His office sacred, his credentials clear.

By him the violated law speaks out

Its thunders ; and by him in strains as sweet

As angels use, the gospel whispers peace.

He 'stablishes the strong, restores the weak,

Reclaims the wanderer, binds the broken heart,

And, armed himself in panoply complete

Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms

Bright as his own ; and trains by every rule

Of holy discipline, to glorious war,

The sacramental host of God's elect.”

To bear to sinners a message of peace from the God of heaven, to proclaim to dying men that for all who believe in Jesus eternal life has been purchased by the blood of the Cross, to be instrumental in the recovery of fallen men to holiness and happiness is the noblest and most useful work

to which we can be called; and the highest seraph may envy such an employment. There must be however a vivid and realizing apprehension of what awaits us in eternity; suitable views of the majesty and holiness of God; of the glory and grace of the Redeemer; of the worth of souls; of the joys of heaven and the misery of hell; there must be delight in holy living, consecratedness of affection to Christ our Saviour; and a fixed resolution to live for God and for the spiritual welfare of our fellow men; in fine there must be eminent piety to enable us to estimate aright the grandeur of the work to which the holy ministry is called; or to apprehend its sacredness, importance and responsibility. Without this learning, genius and eloquence will be of no avail. This will make the preacher feel his accountability to God and that he must speak as "a dying man to dying men;" that he is engaged in no light cause, but that "he is *unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish; to the one he is the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life; and who is sufficient for these things?*" This will awaken in him that holy zeal, and those pious affections which will give elevation and unction, pathos and power to preaching, and create that mysterious sympathy between the speaker and the hearer, which, with convincing energy, carries the truth home to the heart. The great end of preaching is to win souls to Christ. It is a fearful error, marked alike by criminality and infatuation, for a minister to labour only for fame; and to be satisfied if the polite and learned of his hearers commend his preaching as judicious or eloquent. What if his discourses contain every thing that can gratify a cultivated mind: cogent reasoning, splendid imagery, striking illustration, vast learning and polished style, but the only effect produced is, that the audience has retired, charmed with the preacher; should this content him who transacts for eternity between God and man? who watches for souls and must give account

of his faithfulness? He who fears God will shudder at the thought. That preaching is the best, which God blesses most to effect the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers. The man who seeks not his own, but the glory of Christ, will esteem it an infinitely greater honor to be the instrument of converting one sinner, than to receive the applause of admiring thousands.

2. Eminent piety will give a suitable apprehension of the vast importance of gospel truth and holiness. Men, until renewed by the Holy Spirit, love error on the great points of religion, and a lax morality in practice. They have always disliked the peculiar and great truths of the gospel, "*for the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God.*" Sometimes they treat them with neglect and indifference, as though they were unimportant speculations; and sometimes they oppose them with bitter scorn. But God assures us in his word, that our eternal destiny in bliss or wo, depends on our receiving or rejecting the truths which he has revealed. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.*

The cardinal doctrine of the gospel, which includes or infers all others is *Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God to them who are saved.* The cross is the central point, in which all the plans and purposes of heaven, in relation to our world meet, and are fulfilled; where the divine perfections mingle in beauteous harmony, and whence they shine forth transcendently glorious. Mercy, infinite and incomprehensible mercy, here makes its strongest and most affecting appeal to our hearts to return from our apostacy and be reconciled to God. If from the Cross we learn his holiness and justice; the malignity of our sins and the depth of wo to which we have fallen, we also learn that there is forgiveness for transgressors, peace and reconciliation with God, and eternal life and glory for the redeemed.

True piety is the impress of gospel truth upon the soul. By the preaching of the cross sinners are converted; and generally in proportion as the great doctrines of the gospel are fully, frequently, faithfully and pungently preached, will conversions be multiplied. The man who has once felt their efficacy to enlighten, purify and console, will never regard them with indifference; will never be induced by a false liberalism to yield them; but in obedience to the command of God, will *buy the truth and sell it not*, will *earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered to the saints*. The doctrines revealed in the Bible, rest on the same authority as its precepts. Both are from God; and must therefore both be received through reverence to him: while the rejection of a doctrine, clearly taught by him, exhibits the same temper as leads to the violation of a precept.

Truth is in order to holiness; for all the doctrines of the gospel are practical and in proportion to the degree in which they are impressed on the heart, and received with love, do they awaken devout affections, and lead to a conscientious, and useful life. *Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth*, is the prayer which the Redeemer offered for his disciples.

To glorify God and enjoy him forever, is the great end of man; and he, who has sincerely devoted himself to the service of the Redeemer, in the work of the gospel ministry, is specially required to relinquish this world as his portion, and to expect his rest and reward in heaven. Whatever unfits him for his work, or impairs his usefulness, or dishonors his Redeemer, he must cheerfully renounce; and since error and vice are most formidable foes to the souls of men, and the honor of the Redeemer, he abhors and rejects them, and cleaves to truth and holiness as his safety and glory.

3. Eminent piety will give to a minister the assurance of his own safety and acceptance, and so will make his work easy and pleasant. Intimate intercourse and acquaintance

with God, is highly becoming in those who are sent as his messengers to men, who serve in his house and defend his cause. When this is cultivated, when frequent communion and a close walk with God are maintained, christian graces flourish; the Holy Spirit sheds forth in larger measure, his sanctifying influences, piety assumes a more marked and vigorous character, and the assurance is produced that we are born of God and are the heirs of his kingdom. This is a powerful incentive to diligence and zeal, to self-denial and fidelity, to entire consecration to the service of Christ. It is easy to labour or to suffer for those whom we love; and gratitude and affection to the blessed Redeemer, will constrain his faithful servants cheerfully to undergo toil, to bear privations, and to encounter hardships for his glory and the extension of his gospel.

Weak piety, by creating in the mind of the minister doubts of his own safety, makes him feeble and uncomfortable in his work. How dreadful is it for such an one to be self-deceived, and prove a castaway at last—to have no interest in that Saviour, whom he preaches to others—to be excluded from the bliss of heaven, to which he invites others; and to experience those torments of hell, of which he warns them. Such thoughts produce discouragement and alarm. The only remedy against them is to attain to fervent piety, and then to such desponding fears, will succeed the joys of salvation.

4. Eminent piety will render a minister very useful in life, and cause a sweet remembrance of him to remain after death. It will produce *simplicity and godly sincerity in his ministrations*, and make him *by manifestation of the truth to commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God*.

His holy conduct will give weight and efficacy to his preaching, for men receive with deference instructions from the lips of one in whose purity and integrity they repose entire

confidence. It is an old maxim that, example is better than precept. To be useful his conduct out of the pulpit, must correspond with his preaching in it. A large portion of his hearers form their sentiments and habits from what they see in him; and do as he does rather than as he says. Too many justify their own defects by pleading his. But even the worst of men respect him who is conscientious and upright in his whole behaviour, while by his example the pious are strengthened and encouraged. Hence holy living is powerful preaching. To maintain however uniform consistency of conduct, there must be deep seated piety. No sight is more lovely than that of a faithful minister breathing the spirit, and walking in the steps of his master; filled with love and zeal; incorrupt and pure in all he says and does; meek and self-denied; rich in christian knowledge and experience; ready for every good work, and ripening for heaven.

The memory of such men is blessed. Their names shed forth a sweet fragrance of piety to encourage and cheer those who follow. Though dead they yet speak; and after they have gone to their rest many who through their labours have been won to Christ, shall pronounce their names with veneration and love; and at death shall be joined with them to the spirits of just men made perfect. For finally,

Eminent piety ensures a glorious admittance into heaven. Blessed end of a holy and useful life. *They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.* In conclusion we remark,

1. It has pleased God, during the past year, to pour out his Holy Spirit upon us, and to bring several young men to the saving knowledge of himself. As their pastor, I affectionately remind such that it becomes them seriously to enquire, whether it is not their duty, to turn their attention to the gospel ministry. It does not follow that because a young

man becomes pious, he must, as a matter of course, enter on this sacred work. On this point much of rash and blind zeal has been exhibited. But it will become you, my young friends, to study well the nature of a call to the ministry; to think and to read much on the subject; to converse with experienced christian ministers; and to pray for divine instruction and guidance. Beware of rashly rushing into an office, so weighty and responsible; lest the rebuke which was given to some of old, should be applicable to you, *what hast thou to do to declare my statutes; or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth.* I trust my young friends that you will consider the subject seriously and prayerfully, and if after having done so, you conscientiously believe that God has called you, we shall most gladly welcome you to the work.

2. It should be deeply impressed on the minds of all, who are preparing for the gospel ministry, that by far the most important qualification for that office, is ardent and elevated piety. There is, if I mistake not, a disposition generally prevalent, even among clergymen, greatly to overrate splendid intellectual powers and attainments, while sufficient importance is not given to high religious worth. We frequently hear ministers spoken of as very learned, and able, and eloquent, but seldom are they commended for their superior piety. Nay we sometimes hear them slightly spoken of as good, though weak men. Weakness and wickedness are often associated; but no eminently holy man is a weak man, for distinguished holiness indicates and confers strength.

It is owing to this criminal admiration of mere intellectual power and attainments, that it has become, to a great extent, fashionable among us to cry up the writings of modern infidel professors of Theology and pastors; as though no one ever did, or could, understand the Bible, before they favoured the world with their improvements; and as though

all the venerable and holy men of God who lived and wrote before them, and who were distinguished for the elevation of their piety and learning, and for the extent of their labours and usefulness, were mere babes in theological knowledge, compared with these famous modern neological Germans. It will surprise common christians to be told that in Germany, there are professors of Theology, Doctors of Divinity, pastors of churches and celebrated preachers, who are as rank infidels and enemies to the gospel as were Paine, and Voltaire, and Hume, and who deny and burlesque its most sacred truths. It will probably surprize them still more to be told, that it is fashionable to extol the writings of these same infidel professors and preachers, as though no one could understand the Bible who has not read them: and that we may hear many a flippant, half taught young man, speak in disparagement of the writings of holy men of God, who lived before the days of these infidel theologians; and represent the Calvins, and Bezas, and Lightfoots, and Vitringas, and men of that class, as pigmies in Theology, when perhaps in his whole life he has not read a page in them, and most probably could not read a single page if it were to save his life. This disposition to undervalue the writings of those who were eminently pious, and learned; nay who were giants in theological knowledge, and to substitute for theirs the works of neologists and infidels, is a sure mark of the decay of piety in the ministry, and is fraught with mischief to the church and to the interests of true godliness. So far as I have had the opportunity of examining the writings of the modern neologists, I unhesitatingly deny their superiority, as expositors of the scriptures, over the eminently pious men who flourished one or two centuries back; and I hesitate not to assert, that in all that is calculated to form the useful pastor, and the exemplary christian, the superiority is decidedly with the old divines. We see in them the fear of God, and reverence for his word; attachment to the truth

and zeal for godliness ; while in the modern neologists, we see bold hypothesis, rash and unwarranted assertion, irreverence for the scriptures, and impiety of spirit. However intellectual and learned they may be, and I deny not that they are so, their writings are marked with irreligion and levity ; they are unsafe teachers, and guides ; they give instructions that cause to err ; and to whatever other character they may form those who listen to them, they will never make them eminently pious, but may cause them to become infidel like themselves, and to treat with irreverence subjects which should never be approached without the deepest solemnity and awe.

Let this truth then be impressed upon our minds that sincere, ardent and elevated piety is the first, the chief, the most important qualification for the sacred office ; that it is its brightest ornament, its highest glory ; that nothing can compensate for its absence ; and that without it, great learning and splendid talents will only cause a minister to be more hurtful to the church and the world, and consequently will aggravate his final condemnation and wo. The plainness of these remarks may possibly displease some, but I have long since learned to despise the friendship of the man, who is offended with me because I have done my duty. Placed, by the providence of God, in the immediate vicinity of a Theological Seminary, and called on the present occasion to address myself more especially to you who are students in this Institution, I take you to witness that I have faithfully declared to you the truth, and that if you enter the sacred ministry with improper views and feelings, and are finally lost, I am clear of your blood. Tremble my young friends who are looking forward to this office, tremble at the thought of entering it in an unconverted state. Examine your own hearts ; give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Few ministers, said an ancient Father, will be saved. In every Theological Seminary diligent attention should be

paid to the cultivation of true piety; and it has long been my opinion, that this subject is too much neglected in our Theological Seminaries generally. As it relates to all useful results from their labours, it will be in vain to make ministers learned, if they are not holy. Cultivate then my young friends a spirit of elevated piety. Form habits of deep meditation and retired devotion, as well as of active exertion; and seek an extensive and accurate acquaintance with God's word. Prayerfully study your Bibles, not merely as critics, but as sinful creatures, who need the salvation which it reveals. Consecrate yourselves wholly to the service of God your Redeemer. Live exemplary, self-denied and useful lives, and then when the last trump shall sound, and the destinies of countless millions shall be fixed, you will hear, with thrilling joy, the Judge of all pronounce the plaudit, *well done good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* Amen.