

*THE SACRED OFFICE MAGNIFIED:*

A

S E R M O N ,

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN THE CITY OF BALTIMORE, .

SEPTEMBER 15, 1836;

AT

THE INSTALLATION

OF

THE REV. JOHN C. BACKUS,

AS PASTOR OF THE SAID CHURCH.

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**ANNEX**



BALTIMORE, *September 29th*, 1836.

*Rev. and Dear Sir :*

The undersigned, in behalf of the Congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of this city, desire to express their very sincere acknowledgments for the able and eloquent discourse delivered by you on the evening of the 15th inst. at the Installation of the Rev. John C. Backus, and respectfully request a copy for publication.

In making this request they are prompted by a desire to possess that discourse in a more permanent form, and at the same time to impart its benefits to others by a more extended circulation.

Yours, very respectfully,

MAXWELL M'DOWELL,  
ALEXANDER NISBET,  
STEPHEN COLLINS.

REV. S. MILLER, D. D.

PRINCETON, *October 3d*, 1836.

DR. MAXWELL M'DOWELL, HON. ALEXANDER NISBET, and DR. STEPHEN COLLINS.

*Gentlemen :*

Your polite and kind letter of Sept. 29th, reached me on the 1st instant. For your request, that I would furnish a copy of my Sermon at Mr. Backus's Installation for the press, I thank you, and those in whose name you make the application :—and although I do not consider the discourse itself as worthy of this distinction; yet as I am not unwilling to leave some humble memorial of my cordial respect and friendship for your Church, and also for Mr. Backus, whom I love as a son—I will try to prepare and transmit the manuscript as soon as my numerous engagements will permit.

I am, Gentlemen, with great respect,

Your friend and brother in Christ,

SAMUEL MILLER.

(RECAP)

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*THE SACRED OFFICE MAGNIFIED:*

A SERMON.

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ROMANS XI. 13.

—I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE.

THE apostle Paul was, eminently, a modest and humble man. In all the memorials which he has left of himself we find nothing that savours of arrogance, ambition or selfishness; but every thing directly the reverse. He gave up all his worldly prospects for the sake of Christ. He sought neither riches nor honours for himself. He even declined receiving a temporal support from some of those for whose benefit he was wearing out his life. Nay, instead of seeking his own aggrandizement or pleasure, he voluntarily submitted to hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, bonds and imprisonments, for the sake of serving his fellow men, and extending the reign of truth and righteousness. In the midst of these disinterested and self-denying labours, his mode

of speaking of himself is marked with peculiar meekness and humility. He speaks of himself as "less than the least of all saints;" as "not worthy to be called an apostle."\* But while he abased himself, he "magnified his office." *I speak unto you gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the gentiles, I magnify mine office.*

The office here spoken of is, of course, the apostolical office. This office was, in some respects, confined to the first century. The apostles, in their original, distinctive character; as having "seen the Lord;" as immediately commissioned by him; and as endowed with inspiration, and the power of working miracles—were to the primitive church what the New Testament is to us—the unerring directory and guide. In this character they had no successors. Their mission was altogether extraordinary; intended to answer special purposes; sustained by special aids; and endowed with special prerogatives. The necessity of ministrations of this peculiar character was superseded by the inspired writings of those holy men, recorded and embodied as the directory of the church in all succeeding ages. But the apostle probably intended here to speak chiefly of his general ministry, as an am-

\* *Ephesians* iii. 8; *1 Corinthians* xv. 9.

bassador of Christ ;—of that authority with which he was invested to preach the gospel ; to administer the ordinances of Christ ; and to gather the gentiles as well as the Jews into his fold. For in writing to the *Ephesians* (iii. 7, 8), he declares that he was made a minister, and that the requisite grace was given unto him—for what purpose ? “That he might preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Here his inspiration and his miracles are left out of the account, and nothing mentioned but his office as a dispenser of the glorious gospel. This office was intended to be perpetual. In the discharge of its duties, the Saviour promised to be with his ministers “to the end of the world.” This office,—the apostle declares—THIS OFFICE—not himself—he “MAGNIFIED.”

To “magnify” an object, in popular language, is often intended to express the idea of swelling its importance beyond its real value ; in other words, stretching its magnitude inordinately. But no such meaning is intended in our text. The slightest recurrence to the original will show that the apostle means to say—“I highly esteem, or honour mine office.” Surely there is no pride or ambition in such language. If the humblest and meekest citizen be placed in an elevated and important office in the civil community, if he be

a wise man, while he cherishes sentiments of the deepest personal humility, he will not suffer his *office* to be despised or trampled upon. *That* he will always endeavour to sustain and to honour, whatever may become of his own individual claims. So in the church of God. An "ambassador of Christ" ought to be the meekest, and the humblest of men. But while he lies in the dust of abasement himself, he ought to "magnify his office;" to regard it as one of unspeakable importance, which he is altogether unworthy to bear.

The doctrine of our text, then, is THAT THE OFFICE OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY IS A GREAT OFFICE. To illustrate this doctrine, and to apply it to the occasion on which we are convened, is the design of the present discourse.

When we say, that the office of a gospel minister is a great office, we have no reference either to those secular honours which ecclesiastical men in past ages have coveted and proudly worn; or to those ghostly prerogatives, which have been so arrogantly claimed and abused by a tyrannical priesthood. There are those among professing Christians who consider the clergy as a great privileged order; as "lords over God's heritage;"\*

\* 1 *Peter* v. 3.

as having dominion over the faith of men; as the only channel of grace; as empowered to absolve from the guilt of sin; and to dispense the "covenanted mercies of God;" and, of course, as holding in their hands the eternal destiny of their fellow men. This doctrine we not only reject, but abhor. When such a doctrine is once admitted, there are no bounds to the power which it involves, or to the unhallowed dominion over conscience to which it naturally leads. It is the fundamental principle on which the whole superstructure of papal tyranny has always rested. It cannot fail to give a despotic triumph to the ecclesiastical over the civil power; and to generate all that array of spiritual penalties and coercions, of which the history of the world presents so many mournful examples.

Neither does our text countenance the doctrine of those who build much of their confidence in the legitimacy and value of the office in question on dreams of ecclesiastical genealogy. There are Protestants who, when speaking of this office, dwell much more on the "uninterrupted succession" of the "priesthood," by which gospel ordinances are dispensed, than on that atoning blood, and life-giving Spirit which alone can render ordinances effectual. For this doctrine we are persuaded there is no foundation either in reason or

the word of God. We are very sure that tracing the succession spoken of, from the apostles, as a matter of historical deduction, by any denomination of Christians whatever, is utterly impossible; and if it were possible, would be of little value. To imagine that it is practicable, is a delusion; to assert that it has been attained, is a fraud on public credulity; to attach importance to it, is to teach for doctrine a commandment of men. We consider ministers of the gospel as the servants of Christ, and the "servants of the church for Christ's sake." We have no doubt that the regular act of the church, for the time being, through her authorized officers, constitutes a sufficient title to office in the visible family of Christ; and we believe that the great work of those who bear the office of which we speak, consists, not in exalting or enforcing their own prerogatives; but in recommending and glorifying their Master, and promoting the salvation of their fellow men. And, therefore, when the word of God speaks of the highest honours of gospel ministers, it represents them as consisting, not in titles and places; not in establishing a certain course of ancestral descent; not in being "called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi," or in being loaded with worldly honours; but in humility, in meekness, in benevolence, in purity of heart and life, in zeal for the salvation



of men, in resemblance and devotedness to their Master in heaven : and it represents the efficacy of the ordinances, which they administer, as resulting, not from the inherent power of the ordinances themselves, or of those who administer them ; but only from the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them. But, to be more particular :

I. The office of the gospel ministry is a great office on account of its DIVINE ORIGIN. This is an office absolutely peculiar to the religion of Christ. No similar office has ever existed in any of the various forms of false religion. Priests, indeed, those religions had, and still have ; but not to perform duties such as those for which the ambassador of Christ is commissioned. The office, as it appears in the Christian church, is exclusively and pre-eminently an ordinance of Jesus Christ. To his authority its functions are all to be traced ; to his power its usefulness is all to be ascribed. To this consideration the inspired apostle frequently and most pointedly refers. He declares that he was an apostle, “not of man, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father.” He represents himself as “an ambassador of Christ ;” as “not taking this honour on himself, but as called of God, as was Aaron ;” as having an authority committed to him by the great Head

of the church, for edification and not for destruction." And he every where represents all true and faithful ministers as "called of God;" as "set in the church" by his authority; as "put in trust with his gospel;"\* and as commanded and commissioned to declare his will. Nor does this representation apply to those only who were clothed with the sacred office in the days, and by the immediate agency of the apostles. The ministry is God's ordinance, and manifestly intended to continue such to the end of the world. The ascending Saviour's last mandate to his disciples implied its perpetuity, as well as its emanation from his authority. "That which thou hast received of me," said the inspired Paul," the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."† And the same apostle has declared, that the office is intended to last until we all come to be "perfect men in Christ Jesus," that is, until the consummation of all things. And although ministers who are set apart to their office now, by the regular act of the ecclesiastical ministry, are not immediately commissioned by the Saviour himself; yet they are as really his ministers; as really sent by Him, as if his own

\* *Galatians* i. 1; *2 Cor.* v. 20; *Heb.* v. 4; *2 Cor.* x. 8; *1 Cor.* xiii. 18; *1 Thess.* ii. 4.

† *2 Timothy* ii. 2.

sacred hands had actually been laid on them. They as really bear his office, and are as truly authorized to speak in his name, and to administer his ordinances, as were any of the apostolic men whom our Lord himself immediately commissioned to disciple the nations.

This is a doctrine, my friends, which, however acknowledged in theory, seems to be but little practically regarded by the mass even of professing Christians:—and as to the unbelieving and impious world, they love to keep out of sight the sacredness and the authority of the gospel ministry, because they do not wish to be pressed by the message which it brings. But if we admit that the gospel is a message from God; that the visible church was constituted by the authority of Christ; and that an order of men to preach the doctrines and to administer the ordinances of his religion, was divinely appointed from the beginning, and intended to last to the end of the world;—all that we desire follows of course. If these premises be admitted, the consequence is inevitable;—that all true ministers of Christ come in his name; clothed with an office which he has appointed; authorized as his servants to announce all that his word contains; and to administer all the ordinances which he has instituted in his house. We may, therefore, consider the great

Head of the church as addressing to every minister the following solemn language of his word—  
 “Son of man, I have set thee as a watchman on the walls of Zion; therefore preach the preaching that I bid thee: hear the word at my mouth, and give men warning from me. He that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth me.” Every time, therefore, that the faithful minister rises in the pulpit, he may, without impropriety, say to every hearer, “I have a message from God unto thee.”\*

How deeply interesting, how unspeakably solemn is this consideration both to those who bear the sacred office, and to those who hear them! Are they “ambassadors of Christ?” Are they bearers of a message from “the King of kings, and the Lord of lords?” How can we estimate the solemnity, the awfulness of the trust committed to their charge, or the magnitude of the privilege enjoyed by those to whom they are sent? And if they come, not in their own name, nor bearing their own message; but in the name of Christ, and confining themselves to that preaching which he has enjoined in his word; how great is the obligation of those who hear them, to receive the word with meekness from their lips;

\* *Ezekiel* iii. 17; *Matthew* x. 40; *Judges* iii. 20.

and to "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."\* And although the fact, that ministers come to us bearing an office which is of divine appointment, ought never to prevent our "searching the Scriptures daily, to see whether what they say be so," that is, be in conformity with the written word;—yet as long as they speak to us in conformity with "the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth," we are bound to honour their office; to hear the word from their mouth with reverence and love; and to consider their message, not as their own, but his who sent them.

Let none object to this statement, that many of those who bear the office of which we speak manifest much weakness and imperfection, and some, the most revolting moral delinquency. Can men, it has been asked, be considered as bearing a divine commission, when they display so much of human error and frailty? I answer, it has pleased God to make the bearers of the gospel to our fallen race, not angels, but men, by nature partakers of the fall, even as others; men "of like passions" with their fellow creatures, and needing themselves the same pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace with those whom they address. "He has chosen weak things of the world

\* 1 *Thessalonians* v. 13.

to confound the mighty, that no flesh might glory in his presence." We have the treasure of the gospel committed to "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."\* Besides, in conformity with this sovereign arrangement, let it never be forgotten, that neither the authenticity nor the value of the message which ministers bear, depends on their personal character. The overture which an ambassador to an earthly court brings from his government, is the same whatever his personal conduct may be. He is only the channel by which it is conveyed. And although it is highly desirable that he should not contradict it by his own conduct; yet, whatever that conduct may be, his instructions, and his official functions remain the same. The principle is, in substance, the same with the ambassador of Christ. His office is from God; his message is from God. And although it is unspeakably important to himself and to the church that he set an example corresponding in holiness with his message; yet if he disgrace himself and lose his own soul, still the treasure which he bears remains unsullied; the overtures and the seals of mercy which he dispenses, lose none of their intrinsic value by passing through an

\* 1 *Corinthians* i. 27; 2 *Cor.* iv. 7.

unworthy channel. In a word, it is the glory of our system as Protestants, that we regard the BIBLE as “the only infallible rule of faith and practice;” that we consider the authority of those who bear the sacred office as wholly *ministerial*; that is, that they are authorized to declare nothing but what the Master has said; to dispense nothing but what He has instituted; and, in judicial decisions, to apply no laws but those which he has promulgated for the government of his spiritual family.

II. The office of the gospel ministry will appear to be a GREAT OFFICE, if we consider its NATURE and DESIGN.

The importance of any institution or profession is plainly to be measured by the objects which it is intended to promote; by the chief ends which it is appointed and adapted to accomplish. The office of a *Lawyer* is justly deemed important, because he guards our property, and pleads our cause before the dispensers of justice. The office of the *Physician* is still more important to each individual, because he watches over our health, and may be the means of saving our lives, in comparison with which worldly possessions are nothing. For “all that a man hath will he give for his life.”\* But, estimated by this standard, how

\* Job ii. 4.

shall we measure the importance of the *gospel ministry*? We cannot measure it. It is literally infinite. What is worldly property; what is even life itself, when compared with the great interests of the soul and eternity? They are "less than nothing and vanity." But what is the great design of the gospel ministry? It is nothing less than the eternal salvation of the soul. It is nothing less than to publish, explain, and recommend the religion of Jesus Christ; to proclaim its glad tidings, and to extend its holy reign. But, it may be asked, Is this religion of any real value to mankind? Is it of any real importance that the children of men be instructed in the way of salvation; that they be brought under the genuine power of the gospel; that their sins be pardoned; that their hearts be sanctified; that they be prepared for every holy duty and enjoyment here, and for eternal blessedness hereafter? We need not wait for an answer. Nothing can be plainer than that these are interests in comparison with which all the temporal concerns of men are as the "small dust of the balance" weighed against "the everlasting mountains." Yet these are the great matters about which ministers of the gospel are primarily and constantly conversant. The grand object of their commission is to "turn men from darkness to light;" from Satan to God; from



pollution, condemnation and misery, to purity, pardon and happiness; and, finally, to prepare them for the enjoyment of an "incorruptible crown," an "undefiled inheritance," an "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" in the heavens.

It might be supposed, indeed, that a system so pure, reasonable and glorious as the gospel of Jesus Christ, when once made known, would always be found to work its own way in the world, without the efforts of the living advocate to urge it on the attention and the consciences of men. But the word of God gives us no reason to expect such a result, and all experience is equally against it. However pressing the need in which human nature stands of such a remedy for its maladies as the gospel presents, it is never itself disposed to seek after it. "The carnal mind is enmity against God. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned."\* So that, left to himself, no one would ever embrace or obey the gospel. To say nothing, therefore, of the unnumbered millions of the world's population, who have never heard of the religion of Jesus Christ, and who can never be expected to

\* *Romans viii. 7; 1 Corinthians ii. 14.*

hear it "without a preacher," ministers may be said to be indispensable for maintaining the power of the gospel even where it is already known. To keep alive religion in the world; to prevent Christian knowledge, public worship, the sabbath, and the various ordinances of the visible church from utterly perishing among men; in short, to preserve those who have enjoyed Christianity from relapsing into real heathenism, it is necessary that ministers of religion be constantly employed to rouse men to a sense of their condition. It is necessary not only that the people be furnished with the written word, but also with the living teacher, who shall, from sabbath to sabbath, and "from house to house," bring their minds, if I may so express it, into contact with the word, and constrain them to give it their serious and practical attention. It is necessary that they be called together, instructed, warned, entreated, conjured, again and again, day by day, to attend to the things which belong to their eternal peace. For nearly eighteen centuries the standing means, both of maintaining and extending the knowledge of Christ and his salvation in the world, has been the office of which we speak. And without the use of this divine ordinance still, we have no reason to expect either that sinners will be converted, or saints edified and comforted.

It is not, of course, meant to be alleged, either that no conversion is ever effected but by means of the authorized ministry; or that this ministry is ever made effectual to the conversion of a soul by any virtue or power of its own. But the position meant to be maintained is, that God, in his sovereign wisdom, has appointed and promised "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe;"\* and that, consequently, on the one hand, where the gospel is not preached, we have no reason to expect that the work of conversion and salvation will, to any extent, go forward; and that, on the other, where it is faithfully and ably dispensed, it will generally be accompanied, in a greater or less degree, with the sanctifying and saving power of the "Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."

In short, it is the great design of this office instrumentally to accomplish that for man, which no human laws; no political economy; no physical force can possibly reach. It is to effect the conversion of the world to God; to raise men from the death of sin to the life of holiness; to sanctify the heart; to regulate the practice in secret, as well as before the public eye; to strike at the root of all those vices which disturb socie-

\* 1 *Corinthians* i. 21.

ty ; to render man kind, forgiving and benevolent to man ; to train up our children in the way they should go ; to wipe away the tears of mourners ; to comfort the sick and dying ; in a word, to furnish the only effectual remedy for all the woes to which flesh is heir ; and to prepare for a world of perfect peace and blessedness for ever. Surely, my friends, an office, the design of which is to promote such objects as these,—objects great, boundless, inestimably precious, and everlasting—may well be styled a GREAT OFFICE. It is as much, in importance, above any other office known among men, “as the heavens are higher than the earth.”

III. Once more, the gospel ministry must be pronounced a GREAT OFFICE, if we consider not only its grand design, but its ACTUAL EFFECTS.

These have not, indeed, been found *in degree*, equal to the great *design* of which we have spoken. Amidst all the labours of gospel ministers, we see not yet all things brought under the power of the benign and holy religion which they announce. But we see a measure of benefit accomplished by the influence of this religion, in proportion to the extent of its reign, which cannot but fill with gratitude and joy every benevolent heart. In every department of life, and with respect to both worlds, its effects are unspeakably

beneficial and happy. In respect to all the intellectual and social interests of man; in regard to the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come, it is constantly exerting an influence, which, though silent, is powerful and all-pervading. "How admirable," said even the sceptical Montesquieu—"How admirable is that religion (and he might have added, that *office*) which while it seems to have in view only the felicity of the future life, constitutes the happiness of the present!"

A well qualified and faithful ministry never fails to exert a powerful influence in enlightening, enlarging, and cultivating the public intellect. It is probable that the instructions of the pulpit, and the various labours of the pastoral office, have done more to promote the expansion of the public mind, and the diffusion of useful knowledge, than any other single institution on earth. In confirmation of this remark, an appeal may be confidently made to those ages and countries which have been favoured with an enlightened, pious, and faithful ministry. In those ages, and in those countries, the mass of the population has been, invariably, most enlightened as well as most virtuous. How, indeed, could it possibly be otherwise, when such ministers are every where the patrons of learning; when their lives are devoted

to the instruction and exhortation of men on the most interesting and important subjects that can come before the human mind ; when it is a part of their daily work to put the Sacred Scriptures, and other pious books into the hands of the people ; when they constantly teach that it is the duty of all to think, to inquire, and to believe for themselves ; and to think and inquire, too, on the most sublime and solemn subjects that can engage the intellect of moral agents ;—how is it possible, I say, that such an order of men should fail of exerting an influence, in proportion to their fidelity, on the general intelligence of the community ? It cannot be. To this statement, I will venture to say, the whole history of the human race furnishes no exception.

No less precious has been the instrumentality of the sacred office in restraining every form of vice, and in promoting social order, domestic happiness, and all the best interests of the commonwealth. True, indeed, it cannot be denied that the office in question, in some ages and countries, has been grievously perverted to the promotion of an opposite influence. When those who styled themselves ministers of the gospel have lent their official character to those miserable superstitions which “ call evil good, and good evil ; ” when they have “ taught for doctrines the commandments

of men;" and have "made the word of God of none effect by their traditions," and their "doctrines of devils;"\* no wonder that their moral influence has been of the worst kind; no wonder that they have ever been panders to the most shocking vices. But where this great office has been true to its Author and its end, its effects, in regard to all the best interests of society, have never failed to be blessed and happy. Its influence has been ever found to strengthen and sanctify all the ties which bind man to man. It makes more regular and amiable members of the society of men on earth, thousands and millions who will never be prepared for "the inheritance of the saints in light." How much we are indebted to this office for the peace and security of our families, no one can estimate. Only suppose, my friends, the gospel ministry, together with all the ordinances with which it is connected, to be banished from this great City; and you might have left splendid buildings; rich monuments of art; large commerce; and a thousand external ornaments, adapted to gratify "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life;"—but upon every dwelling and monument might be written, "ICHABOD, the glory is depart-

\* *Isaiah* v. 20; *Matt.* xv. 9; *Mark* vii. 13; 1 *Tim.* iv. 1.

ed!" The real glory of your city would all be gone. The powers of darkness would claim it as their own; and it would, in a little while, more resemble the purlieus of hell, than the abode of civilized and Christian men.

But the effects of this office, in being made instrumental, by the grace of God, to secure the regeneration of the heart, and the eternal welfare of men, are still more precious and glorious. The gospel ministry is that great office, by means of which the religion of Christ is, as it were, brought to the view, and impressed on the minds of men, and made, under God, to accomplish its holiest and most blessed triumphs. It is the great office destined to keep alive in the world, and to propagate that gospel, which, when accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, "opens the blind eyes; raises men from the death of sin to the life of holiness;" and is, in a word, "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."\*

How often have we seen the bearers of this sacred office sent to proclaim their message in a region where all was dark and desolate, and miserable; where spiritual death reigned in all its gloomy horror; and where the most degrading profligacy was equally prevalent. And we have

\* *Isaiah* xlii. 7; *Romans* i. 16.



seen blessings immediately follow their footsteps. We have seen the whole face of society renovated and transformed. We have beheld light arising in darkness; the careless awakened; the ignorant made to think and inquire; the hardened to relent and feel; the profligate to renounce and forsake their sins; and order, purity, and the song of salvation to take the place of all that was opposite before. We have recorded examples of this in the apostolic age. The inspired Paul, after exhibiting mournful specimens of profligacy and wretchedness, says to the believers of *Corinth*,—“Such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are justified, but ye are sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Similar effects are also vouched by the early un-inspired fathers of the church, as occurring in cases almost numberless, under their own eyes. Nor has the King of Zion left us without ample testimony of the same great fact in modern times. In the frozen regions of *Greenland*; on the burning plains of *Africa*; among the degraded *Hindoos*, and over the wilds of the ferocious western savage, we have seen the holy triumphs of the religion of Christ, as far as the office of which we speak has borne it with faithfulness to the nations. And every where we have seen it producing the same effects;—enlightening the ignorant;

softening the ferocious; humbling the proud; purifying and elevating the slave of corruption; and raising men from brutality to holiness and to God.

Who can tell how many millions have been called by the instrumentality of this sacred office, "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan into the glorious liberty of the children of God?" Yes, my friends, of the ranks of those who are now serving Christ here below; and of the "multitude which no man can number," now adoring and rejoicing before the throne on high, an immense majority are ready to acknowledge with grateful joy, that it was by "the ministry of reconciliation," under God, that they were rescued from the power of unbelief and sin, and made the trophies of redeeming grace and love.

Not only so; but it is the invariable plan of our God to lift up the state of the world, by lifting up the character of the gospel ministry. Accordingly, when we are told, in the prophetic Scriptures, of that period of light and glory when "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea," and when "there shall be nothing to hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain;" we are also informed that the period shall be ushered in by the appearance of watchmen on the walls of Zion more wise, faithful and zealous than ever before; watchmen who

shall be filled with wisdom, and inspired with holy zeal ; watchmen who shall “ see eye to eye ; ” watchmen who “ shall not cease day or night,” to instruct and warn ;\* ministers, in a word, who shall be “ clothed with salvation, that the people may shout aloud for joy.”

Such is the greatness of the office of which we speak. Its divine *origin* ; its grand and infinitely interesting *design* ; and its mighty *effects*, all conspire to magnify it, to exalt it, and to clothe it with an importance unspeakable. In short, it is an office so great, that no other on this side of heaven can be compared with it ; so great, that no other seems, comparatively, worthy of our attention. Let the men of the world despise or calumniate this office. In their blindness and infatuation they do it. In the estimation of infinite wisdom, it is the greatest, noblest, most blessed office that man or angel can bear on this side of the throne of God.

The foregoing discussion suggests to us a variety of practical reflections, to some of which I beg leave to call your attention before closing the present discourse. •

1. It is evident, from what has been said, that the distinction, in popular language, between

\* *Isaiah* xi. 9 ; lxii. 6.

“*Clergy*” and “*Laity*,” is a just and scriptural distinction. Mr. *Gibbon* asserts, that this distinction was unknown in the primitive church, and was not introduced into the Christian community until the second century. If by this assertion he meant, that we do not find these precise terms, to distinguish between ecclesiastical men and others, in familiar use, in any Christian writings earlier than those of *Tertullian*, *Origen*, and *Cyprian*; and, especially, that the proud and arrogant claims with which one of these terms was afterwards connected, were, before the time of those Fathers in a great measure unknown;—he is probably correct. But if his meaning be, that the Christian ministry is not an institution of Jesus Christ; that he did not from the beginning annex to it a specific spiritual authority; that ministers were not, from the very origin of the church, distinguished from the mass of the members of the church; that there were not then appropriate functions assigned to them; and that these functions were not, in the primitive church, *confined* to ministers, but were common to all Christians;—if this, as would seem, be his meaning, there could hardly be a statement more palpably erroneous;—a statement more unequivocally contradicted by the New Testament itself, and by all the most authentic records of early antiquity.

Nor can I perceive any solid reason for the scruple which even some respectable theological writers have indulged respecting the popular use of the terms, "clergy" and "laity" at the present day. Distinguishing ministers of the gospel by the former title has been thought by some good men to savour of arrogance, and by others, of superstition. But wherefore this apprehension? The *term* is of little importance. There is nothing, either in its etymology or bearing, which can be considered as assuming or offensive.\* It

\* The word κληρος, properly signifies a *lot*. And as the land of *Canaan* was divided among the Israelites *by lot*, the word, in process of time, came to signify an *inheritance*. In this figurative, or secondary sense, the term is evidently employed in 1 Peter v. 3. Under the Old Testament dispensation, the peculiar people of God were called, (Septuagint translation,) his κληρος, or *inheritance*. Of this we have examples in *Deuteronomy* iv. 20, and ix. 29. The term in both these passages is, manifestly, applied to the whole body of the nation of Israel, as God's inheritance, or peculiar people. *Clemens Romanus*, one of the "Apostolic Fathers," speaking of the Jewish economy, and having occasion to distinguish between the priests and the common people, calls the latter λαοικη. *Clemens Alexandrinus*, towards the close of the second century, speaks of setting apart such persons for "clergymen," (κληρωι) as were signified by the Holy Ghost. And in the writings of *Tertullian*, *Origen*, and *Cyprian*, the terms "clergy" and "laity" occur with a frequency which shows that they were then in familiar use. *Jerome* observes, that ministers are called *Clerici*, either because they are peculiarly the lot and portion of the Lord; or because the Lord is *their* lot, that is, their inheritance. Hence the learned and pious father takes occasion to infer, "That he who is God's portion, ought so to exhibit himself, that he may be truly said to possess God, and to be possessed by Him." *Epist.* 2, *ad Nepotian.* 5. Others have thought, that, in giving

is impossible to read the Acts of the Apostles, and the several Epistles, especially those to *Timothy* and *Titus*, without perceiving that the distinction

this title, some regard was had to the ancient custom of electing persons into sacred offices *by lot*.

And as we have abundant evidence that ecclesiastical men were familiarly called *Clerici*, or "Clergymen," from the second century; so we have the same evidence that this term was employed to designate all ecclesiastical men. That is, all persons who had any public employment in the church, were called by the common name of *Clerici*, or "Clergymen." It was applied, continually to *Elders* and *Deacons*, as well as to *Bishops* or *Pastors*. Nay, in the third century, when not only *Prelacy* had crept in, and obtained a general prevalence; but when the same spirit of innovation had also brought in a number of inferior orders, such as *Sub-deacons*, *Readers*, *Acolyths*, &c., these inferior orders were all styled *Clerici*. *Cyprian*, speaking of a Sub-deacon, and also of a Reader, calls them both *Clerici*. The ordination of such persons (for it seems they were formally ordained) he calls *Ordinationes Clericæ*; and the letters which he transmitted by them, he styles *Litteræ Clericæ*. The same fact may be clearly established from the writings of *Ambrose*, *Hilary*, and *Epiphanius*, and from the canons of the Council of *Nice*. Indeed there seems reason to believe, that, in the fourth and fifth centuries, and subsequently, the title of *Clerici* was not only given to all the inferior orders of ecclesiastical men, but was more frequently applied to them than to their superiors; who were generally addressed by their more distinctive titles. Those who recollect that learning, during the dark ages, was chiefly confined to the clergy; that few, excepting persons of that profession, were able to read and write; and that the whimsical privilege, commonly called "*benefit of clergy*," grew out of the rare accomplishment of being able to read;—will be at no loss to trace the etymology of the word *clerk* (*clericus*) or secretary, to designate one who officiates as the reader and writer of a public body.

To distinguish the mass of private christians from the clergy, they were designated by several names. They were sometimes called *λαϊκοί*, *laici*, laymen, from *λαός*, *populus*; sometimes *ιδιωται*, "private men," from *ιδίος*, *privatus* (see Acts iv. 10.); sometimes *βιωτικοί*, "seculars," from *βίος*,

between ministers of religion and private Christians was clearly made from the very origin of the Christian church, and uniformly maintained. That the terms "clergy" and "laity" were not used at first, is of no importance in any view. The *thing intended* by these terms, as employed by Protestants, was beyond all doubt, familiarly recognised by the whole Christian community in the apostolic age. The titles of "rulers" in the house of God; "ambassadors of Christ;"—"stewards of the mysteries of God;"—"bishops, elders, shepherds, ministers," &c. as distinguished from those to whom they ministered, are so familiar to all readers of the New Testament, that further elucidation of that point is altogether unnecessary. We contend not, in the use of any ministerial title, for peculiar *honours* or *emoluments*; but for peculiar *duties*; for peculiar *devotedness*; for peculiar *labours*; for peculiar *responsibility* to the Sovereign and Lord of the church.

2. We may learn from this subject WHAT IS THE GREATEST HONOUR OF A GOSPEL MINISTER.

which signifies a secular life. Soon after the apostolic age, common Christians were frequently called *αὐτοὶ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ*—"men of the church"—that is, persons not belonging either to Jewish synagogues, or heathen temples, or heretical bodies, but *members of the church of Christ*. Afterwards, however, the title, *Ecclesiastics*, became gradually appropriated to persons *in office* in the church. See *Stephani Thesaurus*. BINGHAM'S *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, B. I.

Not to receive praise of men. Not to gain titles, emoluments, or rank in society. No, his highest honour is to be distinguished "by pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the armour of righteousness, on the right hand and on the left." His greatest glory is to be like Christ, and to be supremely consecrated to the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ. His laurels are not academical *diplomas*, nor the *hosannas* of admiring crowds; but CONVERSIONS. The highest eulogium ever pronounced on a gospel minister, was that bestowed on *Barnabas* of old—"He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith, and much people was added unto the Lord."\* Such seems to have been the estimate of this subject made by the heroic Paul. His talents, his acquirements, and his unparalleled labours entitled him to a great and indisputable pre-eminence among his brethren in the ministry. But what pre-eminence did he ever seek, unless it were a pre-eminence in privation, in danger, in zeal, and in indefatigable labours for the benefit of his fellow men? O that we might see a similar spirit reigning in the bosom of every minister of Jesus Christ!

\* *Acts xi. 24.*



3. If the sacred office be so great and weighty as you have heard, then WITH WHAT SOLEMN AWE OUGHT IT TO BE UNDERTAKEN, AND ITS DUTIES DISCHARGED! It is an office, the solemnity and responsibility of which might make an angel tremble. Well may we cry out, then, with the apostle, when we think of its being borne by a frail, imperfect man,—“Who is sufficient for these things?”\* The great reformer *Luther*, whom no one ever suspected of lacking moral courage, declared, that, even to the close of life, he never ascended the pulpit without trembling. And that minister of Jesus Christ who, whatever his powers or accomplishments may be, when he is about to address an assembly of dying men, and remembers that his sermon will be “a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death” to those who hear him,† has not “his spirit stirred within him” at the responsibility of his situation,—has but little of the spirit of Paul, or of Paul’s Master.

4. From the view which has been taken of the sacred office, we are led to reflect, HOW GREAT IS THE PREPARATION WHICH OUGHT TO BE MADE FOR IT! The man who undertakes to instruct hundreds, and, perhaps, thousands, of the learned as well as the ignorant, in the most important of all

\* 2 *Corinthians* ii. 16. † 2 *Corinthians* ii. 16.

knowledge ;—the man who offers himself as an expounder of the Bible, a book the thorough exposition of which requires deep and various learning, theoretical as well as practical ;—the man who proposes to act as a spiritual guide to immortal souls ;—to enlighten the perplexed ; to counsel the tempted ; to satisfy the doubting ; to silence the bold and literary infidel ; to refute the learned and ingenious heretic ; and to stop the mouth of the artful caviller :—the man who undertakes to be “a watchman on the walls of Zion ;” to discern when danger is approaching ; to estimate its nature and magnitude, and to give warning accordingly :—the man, in a word, who is preparing to go forth into the church and the world, as an adviser, a guide and a helper in all that is good ; as a centre of light, and counsel, and instruction, and consolation, and holy activity to thousands ;—surely such a man ought to have many qualifications which are not necessary, which do not belong to common Christians. What various and extensive knowledge ; especially what rich and familiar knowledge of the Bible ;—what deep and ardent piety ; what prudence ; what knowledge of the world, and of the human heart ; what command of his own spirit ; what zeal ; what patience ; what capacity for labour ; what diligence ; what perseverance, are indispensable here ! That no man

without unfeigned and ardent piety ought to engage in the duties of this office, is conceded, even by those who have no piety themselves. But there may be truly pious men, who are, nevertheless, totally unqualified for the ministerial work. No ignorant man; no strikingly weak man; no imprudent man; no habitually indolent man; no rash, headstrong, turbulent, contentious man, is fit to be a minister, even if we could suppose him to have the piety of an angel. Then let the candidates for the office of which we speak ever bear in mind, that every consideration which serves to illustrate its greatness, serves at the same time to show how great the intellectual and moral furniture, how mature the preparation, which must be considered as indispensable to a proper fitness for the great undertaking; and how great the infatuation of that young man who ventures to ascend the sacred desk after a hasty and slight preparation for so responsible and weighty an office!

5. It is evident from the view which has been taken of the sacred office that **IT DEMANDS THE WHOLE TIME, THE WHOLE STRENGTH, THE WHOLE HEART OF HIM WHO UNDERTAKES TO PERFORM ITS DUTIES.** It is truly wonderful that any man who has a spark of real love to Christ, or to the souls of his fellow men, can imagine, for a moment, that

less than **THE WHOLE** of **ALL HIS POWERS** ought to be devoted to this great office. Who that takes the slightest survey of the duties incumbent on him as an ambassador of Christ; as a leader and guide of immortal souls, as one commissioned, in every variety of way, and to every possible extent, to "feed the sheep and the lambs" of the great Shepherd;—can suppose that, after a faithful discharge of these numberless, ever recurring, and most weighty duties, he can have time or strength left for any other concerns? The truth is, the occupant of this office, in whatever part of the great vineyard his lot may be cast, if he has a heart for his work, will find every moment of his time, and every power of his soul and body put in constant requisition for the discharge of his duties. The voice of reason, therefore, as well as of God's word, is "**GIVE THYSELF WHOLLY TO THEM.**" How deeply to be pitied is that minister who can find hours to waste in idleness, or on trifles, when a world is dying around him, and when he is surrounded, not only with opportunities, but with importunate calls to labour for the temporal and eternal welfare of his fellow men!

6. Another obvious reflection from what has been said is, **HOW GREAT THE RESPECT AND AFFECTIONATE SUPPORT WHICH ARE DUE FROM THE**

## FRIENDS OF CHRIST TO HIS FAITHFUL MINISTERS !

We do not ask you, my friends, to idolize ministers ; to load them with praise or adulation ; or to follow them with that worldly pampering, which seems to be the only testimonial of esteem which the children of this world ever think of bestowing. Far less do we ask you to surrender your consciences into their hands, or to regard them as the only authorized expounders of the word of God, and the only medium of intercourse and of grace between God and man. This is not the kind of respect for the gospel ministry for which I plead. On the contrary, against all such idolatrous deference to ecclesiastical authority and power (though not, indeed, a sin of frequent occurrence in our beloved Church) I would solemnly warn you. The BIBLE, I again proclaim, is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. To this unerring test you are bound to bring all that ministers say or claim. They cannot be the keepers of your consciences. It is your indefeasible privilege to read, to examine, and to interpret the inspired oracles for yourselves ; and for yourselves to believe and obey them. The respect which I call upon you to pay to the sacred office is wholly of another kind. It is, that you regard it as an ordinance of God ; that when those who bear this office, faithfully dispense the truth and the ordinances of

Christ, you receive them with reverence and affection; that you "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake;" that you pray for them; that you be tender of their reputation; and that you endeavour by all the means in your power to strengthen their hands, and encourage their hearts in the arduous work in which they are engaged? These are testimonials of respect which those who possess the spirit of Christ are always ready to give to his ministers. And these are the testimonials of respect which are most dear to the heart of every faithful minister. To be loaded with worldly honours and treasures would not give half so much pleasure to such a minister, as the obedience of the heart to his message. Such was the sentiment uttered by the excellent and devoted Mr. *Hervey*, and which will be adopted by every pious pastor. When urged to accept the multiplied civilities, and to visit more frequently the luxurious abodes, of some of his gay, worldly parishioners, he in substance meekly replied, "It gives me no pleasure to be found and to receive caresses, in those dwellings from which my Master is excluded."

7. The subject on which we have been meditating suggests many serious reflections to the BELOVED YOUNG BROTHER, who is this evening to take on himself the pastoral charge of this church

of Jesus Christ. The great and responsible office, dear brother, of which we have been speaking, you bear:—and you are now about to pledge yourself for the more immediate and devoted discharge of all its duties in connection with this Church. Let me exhort you to **MAGNIFY YOUR OFFICE**;—not by making great claims, or seeking high honours for yourself; but by making a high estimate of the solemnity and responsibility of the office; by entering deeply into the spirit of its great design, and its hallowed bearing on the glory of Christ, and the salvation of a revolted and lost world; and by being ever supremely devoted to its active duties. Set your heart upon your office. Consider it as your great and single work. Turn not aside from its calls for the sake of the most fascinating objects which this world has to present. When you are solicited by the temptations of secular literature, or worldly wealth, or any temporal object, let your reply be that which was made by a devoted and heroic servant of God, many centuries ago—“I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you?” O my brother! look abroad on the wide spread desolation and misery of our sinful world, and think of that gospel which you bear as its only hope; and then say, whether

every power you possess to help it, is not put in solemn requisition? Rely on it, the more unreservedly and constantly you are devoted, with your whole heart, to your appropriate work, the happier you will be; the more beloved you will be, by all whose love is worth possessing; the more useful you will be; the more confidently may you hope to be instrumental in extending that kingdom which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

And, while you "magnify your office," remember also, beloved brother, to magnify the support and the aid on which you have a right to rely in the discharge of its duties. "Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."\* Place no confidence in your own strength; but remember that "through Christ strengthening you, you can do all things."†

Remember, too, my dear brother, that in proportion to the magnitude of your office, will be the solemnity of the account you have to render for the manner in which you discharge its duties. Study, and preach, and pray, and visit, with the judgment seat, and the final reckoning of yourself and your hearers, continually before your eyes. And when that solemn scene shall open upon

\* 2 *Tim.* ii. 1.

† *Philippians* iv. 13.



your spirit, may you be enabled to present large numbers of this flock in the arms of pastoral affection, and to say, with grateful joy—"Lord, here am I, and the children thou hast given me!"\*

8. Finally; the subject on which we have been meditating ought to inspire the most serious reflections in the mind of every one connected with this church of Christ. We, this evening, my respected friends, present to you, once more, a beloved young Brother, who bears the office of which you have heard. Every word which has been uttered to show its magnitude, furnishes an argument why you ought to receive him who bears it with respect, with confidence, and with thankfulness. If the gospel be the most precious gift of God to fallen man; and if those who bear it sustain an office so essential to the welfare of society, and the conversion of the world to God, as you have heard; then, surely, when you are about to receive another Pastor, as we hope, "after God's own heart," you ought highly to prize the gift. Never shall I forget the scene in which it was my happiness to participate, sixteen years ago, in which "a choice young man and a goodly," beloved by me as a son, and highly esteemed by all who knew him, was "set over you in the

\* *Isaiah* viii. 18.

Lord." I had the pleasure to witness the respect and the cordiality with which you received him, and the solemn interest with which he entered on his weighty charge :—and it is but strict justice to both parties to bear this public testimony, on the one hand, to the piety, the zeal, the talent, and the success with which he discharged his duties among you; and on the other, to the kindness and affection with which you ever treated him. We saw him commence his pastoral labours with acceptance, and with high promise. We saw him, by the grace of God, more than redeeming every pledge; rising higher and higher in zeal, fidelity, acceptance and usefulness, to the last year of his active ministry. We saw, with tender sympathy, the mysterious dealings of providence with him, in taking away one after another of his domestic circle; and, finally, in bringing down his own strength in the meridian of life and of usefulness. And we saw him eminently adorning his faith and hope, and setting a seal on his ministry, in the closing scene. Beloved man! his history does indeed form a mysterious, yet instructive and animating page in the volume of God's providence. That you will long cherish his memory with ardent affection, I cannot doubt :—that many of you have savingly benefited by his ministry, and have unspeakable reason to bless God that

you ever saw his face, and heard his voice, I am well assured:—and that some of your number, who have not hitherto obeyed the gospel, may yet “remember how you have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent,” is my fervent prayer. We now present you, my beloved Friends, with a successor to your late lamented Pastor;—a young servant of God, greatly respected and beloved by his teachers, and adapted, as we believe, to be at once an ornament and a blessing to yourselves and your children. Receive him as a minister of Jesus Christ. “Despise not his youth.” **MAGNIFY HIS OFFICE.** “Esteem him very highly in love for his work’s sake.” Pray for him without ceasing. Study not to add to his burdens, but rather, in every practicable way, to lighten them, and to encourage and aid him in every part of his arduous labours. Hold up his hands, by a punctual attendance on his ministry, and by every kind office, as well as by your daily prayers. Consider the extent, the magnitude, and the exhausting nature of his duties, contrasted with his youth and comparative inexperience; and then say whether he is not entitled to all your sympathy, your indulgence, and your affectionate co-operation? I have no fear, my friends, of your manifesting toward him any other than a spirit of respect and noble-minded generosity. Your past history furnishes

a pledge on this subject, which ought to forbid a doubt. But shall he have to mourn, that, while your external treatment is all that can be desired, some of you turn away from his message, and close your hearts against the grace and love of his heavenly Master? God forbid! O neglecter of the Saviour! whoever you are, the goodness of God in sending you another pastor, is a new call to repentance and faith. If you wish to give him the sweetest of all the pleasures that can fill the heart of a faithful minister; above all, if you wish to meet your God in peace, neglect not another hour the salvation which he offers you. Remember that for every such offer you must give an account. God grant that, when you meet him who is this evening to be "set over you in the Lord,"—as MEET HIM YOU MUST, before the bar of your common Judge—it may be a meeting "of joy and not of grief!" AMEN!