

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

A

DISCOURSE,

BEFORE THE

HUDSON RIVER BAPTIST ASSOCIATION,

DELIVERED

AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,

HELD IN THE CITY OF SCHENECTADY,

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The writer is too well aware of the defects of the present discourse, to mistake the reasons which induced his brethren to request its publication. The high importance of the topic, and their wish to bring that topic often, and in every and in *any* mode, before the minds of the Christian ministry, were the causes of their desiring its appearance from the press. The same considerations must be pleaded as his own apology; first, for having attempted an address upon this theme, and next, for having consented to its publication.

"I AM PURE FROM THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN."

ACTS, XX. 26.

No writer of the Bible has insisted more earnestly than did Paul on the great fact of the Divine sovereignty. He saw the plan of Infinite wisdom perfect in all its parts, and immutable in all its results, stretching away over the whole field of his labors; reaching over every country, and extending through all ages, the unchanged and unchangeable counsel of God. He rejoiced in it. He rested upon it. Yet it did not at all lower his views of human duty, nor with him did the Divine agency supersede the workings of an inferior and mortal instrumentality. He knew that, with all his counsel, nothing could be but as God ordered it; and with all his labor, nothing could prosper but as God wrought it. And yet, on the other hand, he saw that the commandments of God to man were part of his councils for man, and that one of the modes in which the Most High would work was his sending man to work. While looking at the cause of his Master on the one side, he was therefore seen soaring away, as on the pinions of seraphim, into the regions of fathomless wisdom, and his theme was the election of God, sure and indefeasible. Looking at that same cause under an opposite aspect, he saw the law of God and the duty of man, rising up to cast their shadow as over the whole breadth of the earth. He then felt himself a

debtor to all, and intense was his anxiety lest his skirts should bear the blood of any.

Fathers and brethren, permit one who feels deeply, that in holiness and in usefulness, as in the number of years and the weight of experience, he is far surpassed by those whom he addresses—permit him yet, to lead you to the same point of view at which the great Apostle of the Gentiles was often found. Like him, let us look abroad upon the field of duty as in the light of eternity. If the superiors of the speaker, you are the inferiors of that Saviour to whose feet he would summon, and in whose name, as brethren, he warns, or as fathers, he entreats you. Forgetting therefore, for the time, our relative position, as the younger and the older ministers of the New Testament, let us gather in one indiscriminate throng around the seat of our common Lord, and hear what He hath said to us by the mouth of his holy Apostle. And give to me your prayers that the Spirit of God may so replenish and aid him who speaks, that he may be saved from bearing the blood of the souls that now surround him.

Paul appealed to the Ephesian pastors, as his witnesses, that, in diligence and devotedness, he had escaped the stain of blood-guiltiness. Such stain was possible, or else it was idle to rejoice before God in having avoided a danger that never existed. His words imply that Christian pastors may be guilty of the blood of the souls that perish as under the shadow of their sanctuaries. Now they cannot be guilty where they have not first been responsible. Let us, then, inquire what the Scriptures have said indicating such responsibility. And if *the fact of ministerial accountability for the souls of their hearers* be found written, broadly and vividly, upon the pages of this volume, does it not behoove us, then, to inquire *the modes, in which*, as pastors and evangelists, *we may incur this tremendous curse*, the blood of our people? And since, in ad-

dressing the impenitent, we are wont to imitate Paul, and derive from themes of the most awful character our appeals to the human heart, and "knowing the terrors of the LORD" so to "persuade men," let us in the same spirit school ourselves; and allow a fellow-laborer to bring before you, pastors of the fold of CHRIST, *the fearfulness of the guilt thus incurred* — the overwhelming horrors of standing at the foot of the throne, with the blood of souls on the hand and on the head, perjured stewards, sentinels false to our trust, and pastors who have destroyed the flock of our charge.

I. To understand the phrase employed by the Apostle, here in his intercourse with the Christian pastors of Ephesus, and at an earlier period in his reply to the Jewish blasphemers of Corinth, it is necessary to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures from which this form of expression was borrowed. By the laws of Moses, the Israelite who reared not a battlement upon the roof of his house, brought upon himself the blood of the incautious stranger, who fell and perished in consequence of his neglect. He had not indeed lifted the murderous weapon, he had not lain in ambush, or drugged the cup of his guest with poison; nor had he even cherished a revengeful feeling or thought of anger. Besides all this, the stranger himself must have been careless, thus to perish. Yet the absence of any overt act, and even of any thought of crime on the part of the host, and the want of due caution on the part of his guest, did not relieve the former from blood-guiltiness, where he had neglected an enjoined duty. So when the murdered traveller was found on the way-side, felled by an unknown hand, the elders of the nearest city were not exonerated from guilt, and the innocent blood would be laid to the charge of the land, unless, washing their hands over a slaughtered victim, they would pray to GOD, and solemnly declare that their hands had not shed

the blood of the hapless stranger, nor had their eyes seen his fall. Now here was crime which not only was not committed by them, but the commission of which they perhaps could not have prevented by any precaution: yet was the blood upon them unless they thus protested against the deed. It was not then only an overt act of murder which condemned them, but the omission of due care, in providing that it should not occur, or in denouncing it when it had occurred, would also make them chargeable with guilt in the eyes of God. The same principle, and with the same phraseology to convey it, was carried out into the teachings of the prophets. Ezekiel was made a watchman. He was to see the coming vengeance, and lift aloud the note of warning. If he did it not, the man or the people who offended, perished indeed in their iniquity, and wrought out their own ruin; but the minister of God found upon his head also the blood of the evil-doer thus cut off in his transgressions.

The Apostle takes up this language and these principles, as being fully applicable to the new dispensation under which he labored. He spoke as a man to whom had been transferred the charge received by the prophet, who of old had seen the visions of God by the river Chebar. It was not the Jews only he had warned, for the Ephesian Church contained the Gentile as well, and from the blood of all men was he free, and every man had he warned, "testifying," as he asserts, "both to Jews and to Greeks." It was not of civil war, of the ruin of Jerusalem, or of temporal death that he warned them; but as he earnestly appeals to them, "repentance and faith"—repentance and faith—had been the topics of his warning; among them he had gone "preaching the kingdom of God," and the ministry which he had received, and would discharge to others as he had done it to them, was "*to testify of the Gospel of the Grace of God.*" Grace and the Gospel, then,

were not, in his view, inconsistent with this appalling responsibility. If he had unfaithfully executed his apostolical charge, wo was unto him, not only from the tortures of an accusing conscience, but from the added curses of a world betrayed and ruined by his neglect. But when his work had been fearlessly and fully done, he could turn, as he did to those of his own nation at Corinth, and warn them that their blood was on their own head; while, shaking his raiment, he declared of himself that he was "clear" from the clinging curse of their destruction.

Now it is not merely the number of passages containing any doctrine, that decides its certainty; for a single assertion of the HOLY GHOST is as true, as if it were thrice repeated. Had therefore the Bible contained nothing further of explicit testimony to this effect, it seems as if in the instances already quoted, we shall find the responsibility of the Christian ministry for the souls of their hearers placed beyond question. But there is other evidence, in the teachings of human reason as to the extent of our influence over each other, in the language of the Bible with regard to such influence, in the descriptions employed to represent the character and office of the Christian minister, and in the express testimony of the apostolical epistles, that the pastor owes to GOD an account of the flock, which he was appointed to fold and to tend.

The Bible, in the words already cited, only recognises a great truth, of which even unaided reason gives us testimony in part, we mean, *the influence of man over man*, and his evident accountability for the character of the influence that he is thus shedding over all around him. The world is filled with the countless and interlacing filaments of influence, that spread from each individual over the whole face and frame-work of society. The infant that lies wailing and helpless in the arms of his mother, is already wielding an influence felt through the

whole household, by his fretfulness disturbing, or by his serene smiles gladdening that entire home. And as, with added years, his faculties are expanded, and the sphere of his activity widens itself, his influence increases. And every man whom he meets, much more whom he moulds and governs, becomes the more happy or the more wretched, the better or the worse, according to the character of his spirit and example. Nor can he strip from himself this influence. If he flee away from the society of his fellows to dwell alone in the wilderness, he leaves behind him the example of neglected duty, and the memory of disregarded love, to curse the family he has abandoned. Even in the pathless desert he finds his own feet caught in the torn and entangled web of influence, that bound him to society; and its cords remain wherever he was once known, sending home to the hearts that twined around him, sorrow and pain. Nor can the possessor of it expect it to go down into the grave with him. The sepulchre may have closed in silence over him, and his name may have perished from among men, yet his influence, nameless as it is, and untraceable by human eye, is floating over the face of society. As in the external and visible world, the fall of a pebble agitates, not perceptibly indeed, yet really, the whole mass of the earth, thus in the world of morals, every act of every spirit is telling upon the whole system of moral beings to which God has bound him. No man leaves the world, in all things, such as he found it. The habits which he was instrumental in forming, may go on from century to century, an heirloom for good or for evil, doing their work of misery or of happiness, blasting or blessing the country that has now lost all record of his memory. In the case of some, this influence is most sensible. Every age beholds and owns their power. Such men have lived. And thus it is, that, although centuries have rolled their intervening tide between the age of their birth and our own, and the empires under which they flourished

have long since mouldered away from the soil whence they sprung, and the material frame of the author himself has been trampled down into the undistinguished dust, the writers of classical antiquity are yet living and laboring in our midst. The glorious dreams of Plato are yet floating before the eye of the metaphysician, and the genius of Homer has tinged with its own light the whole firmament of modern invention. Nor, unhappily, is this all. Corruption is yet oozing out, in lessons of profligacy and of atheism, from the pages of an Ovid and a Lucretius, and as from their graves streams forth the undecaying rankness of vice and of falsehood, though the dominion of the world has long since passed from the halls of their Cæsars, and the very language they employed has died away from the lips of the nation. The Church yet feels, throughout all lands, the influence of the thoughts that passed, perhaps in the solitude of midnight, through the bosom of Paul, as he sat in the shadows of his prison, an old and unbefriended man—thoughts which, lifting his manacled hand, he spread in his epistles before the eyes of men, there to remain for ever. They feel yet the effect of the pious meditations of David, when roaming on the hill-side, a humble shepherd lad, of the family piety of Abraham, and of the religious nurture that trained up the infancy of Moses. Every nation is affected at this moment by the moral power that emanated from the despised Noah, as that preacher of righteousness sat among his family, perhaps dejected and faint with unsuccessful toil, teaching them to call upon God, when all the families of the earth beside had forgotten him. And if the mind, taking its flight from the narrow precinct of these walls, were to wander abroad along the peopled highways, and to the farthest hamlets of our own land, and, passing the seas, to traverse distant realms and barbarous coasts, every man whom its travels met—nay, every being of human mould that has ever trodden this earth in earlier ages, or that is now

to be found among its moving myriads, has felt, or is feeling, the influence of the thoughts of a solitary woman, who, centuries since, stood debating the claims of conscience and of sin, amid the verdant glories of the yet unforfeited Paradise. Nor does this influence end with time. The shock of the archangel's trump will not break the line of its power, nor the gulf of eternity swallow up its steady stream. It travels on into the world of spirits. And the influence of the pious or the wicked parent, of the faithful or unfaithful pastor, will be felt through all the bowers of heaven, and course its way into all the caverns of hell. The benighted Pagan who has, within the last hour, shuddered on awaking in eternity to the full view of his doings and destiny, will through the ceaseless lapse of that eternity curse the moral power of the ancestors, through whose neglect of Divine Revelation, he himself was born amid the starless gloom of Heathenism.

Influence is, then, mighty and enduring. Now, if, as all will allow who believe in human accountability, man be accountable for his acts, and accountable for his feelings, then is he responsible for his influence, for his acts and his feelings are the elements which go to make up that influence. And, in proportion to his station and his opportunities, his influence growing, there grows with it a corresponding responsibility. And if the ministry occupy an eminent post, and cast abroad a wide influence, as its enemies and its friends alike allege, then the man who fills it stands answerable to his God and his race, as one bound by high and fearful obligations, the cords of which he cannot sever, and the burden of which he may not hope to transfer.

And are not these views taken up and set in a more full and appalling light in the *Book of Scripture*? See in what terms it denounces the guilt of exercising an unholy influence. How has the name of Jeroboam been branded with reprobation by

that fearful repetition—"he made Israel to sin." He made Israel to sin, not by the application of brute force, not that they ceased to be voluntary agents, (for every one of them continued accountable for his individual share in the national sin,) but by the moral power of his example and authority. It had been the aggravation of their guilt in the degenerate sons of Eli, that through their misconduct, shedding around a disastrous influence, "men abhorred the offering of the LORD," and therefore was their "sin very great." And the charge, which in a far distant day Malachi brought against the corrupted and corrupting priesthood of his own age, was that, whilst their fathers had by a holier influence "turned many to righteousness," they themselves had by their hypocrisy and scandals "caused many to stumble at the law." When our Saviour, with an unfaltering hand, tore the mask from the Pharisees, he described them as blind *leaders* of the blind. Others fell by their arts, or their negligence; and they drew in the sweeping train of their influence multitudes into ruin, as the dragon of the Apocalyptic vision dragged down in his fall to the earth a third part of the stars of heaven. Of the proselyte whom they made with such zeal, and at such cost of effort, our Lord declared, that they *made* him twofold more the child of hell than themselves. Not that he was a passive mass of matter to their plastic touch. But the strong hand of their moral influence left upon him the imprint of a hopeless hypocrisy. He bore about him a conscience which they had aided in searing as with a hot iron, and an understanding which they had garrisoned with pride, and walled about with prejudices, to guard it from the very access of truth. It is of the vast range and power of man's moral influence that CHRIST spoke, when he uttered the ominous words, "WO UNTO THE WORLD BECAUSE OF OFFENCES." It is of our rigid accounting to our GOD for the effects of that in-

fluence that he testifies, when declaring, "BUT WO UNTO THAT MAN BY WHOM THE OFFENCE COMETH."

But in addition to this general doctrine of influence, the Bible uses, in nearly all of its *appellations for the office of the Christian ministry*, terms which imply personal responsibility for the individuals intrusted to, or operated upon, by the Christian teacher. The shepherd answerable for his flock, the steward accountable for his lord's goods, the husbandman laboring and receiving wages or blame according to the character of his tillage, the leader by his steps guiding the steps of others, the overseer exercising a deputed authority of which he must return an account to his employer, and the ruler controlling others, and responsible for the conduct which such control has produced, are favorite titles with the inspired writers for the Christian pastor and evangelist. Now, do not nearly all of these imply accountability of a very high order as to the souls of men? Would the shepherd be allowed to cast all the blame of his desolated fold upon the ravening wolf, or the silly sheep; or would the steward be permitted to refer all his losses to the dishonesty of thieves or the wastefulness of servants, if he himself had not been careful?

As if to end all doubt, we find *the apostolic epistles* explicit in their testimony upon this subject. It is said of ministers by Paul in his letter to the Hebrew believers, that they watch for souls as those that *must give account*. They hold a fearful stewardship, and it *is required* in stewards *that a man be found faithful*. As to the extent of moral influence, he himself speaks of it as operating upon all whom the Christian minister met. If not for their salvation, then was it for their ruin—a savor of death unto death; where it healed not, it hardened, and where it could not melt there it cauterized. And the principle in its broadest ground he has adopted in an allusion to ministerial duty, where he bids his beloved associate

not to become "partaker of other men's sins." There is then a sense in which we may share the sins of others. And so, the death eternal which these sins produce, may be in some sense chargeable to us. As the vigilant pastor saves himself and those that hear him, even thus does the negligent minister destroy not only his own soul, but the souls intrusted to his faithless hands.

Do not the Scriptures then, brethren, fully publish the fact of ministerial accountability for the souls of their hearers? The Christian teacher stands not alone, and alone he cannot fall. His every act, his internal and hidden spirit, are telling day by day on three worlds. Heaven has sent forth from its expanded gates angels to minister to his onward career, or they have returned thither to rejoice over the sinners converted by his instrumentality. Hell is pouring out her hordes to thwart and to seduce, to allure and to alarm. And this earth, the great scene of interest, and the field of conflict for the two worlds of light and of darkness, is benefited or harmed by every step that he takes, as with the censer of intercession in his hands, he rushes forth between the living and the dead: to stay the desolating pestilence if he wave that censer aright, looking upward; and if he loiter and neglect it, then standing but to spread the contagion he was sent to rebuke. Prayer withheld, or prayer offered,—labor performed, or labor neglected,—faith in vigorous exercise, or faith imprisoned in unrighteousness,—a heart glowing with love to CHRIST, or a heart chilled with worldliness,—the Spirit of God grieved, or the Spirit of God obeyed,—these make up the history of every wakeful hour in that man's life. And who shall say, that such a man, standing in a relation so close and so momentous to this and other worlds, is not responsible for the character of each hour, and for the workings of that hour upon the eternal interests of all that surround him?

But where, then, are the limits of this influence? Is the sinner responsible for nothing? Is the guilt of his impenitence and ruin solely his pastor's?—Not so. There is a sense in which each of us lives for himself, dies for himself, for himself sins, or for himself believes. There is another sense, in which none of us lives for himself, dies for himself, for himself alone sins, or believes only for himself. According to the first of these, the sinner is chargeable with his own ruin, nor shall our unfaithful ministration be any plea at the bar of God, my unconverted hearers, for your offences. God gave to you personally a conscience and reason, warnings and invitations. You perish in your own iniquity. But, according to the latter sense, if you have been left unwarned by friend or teacher, the guilt of that iniquity and of your consequent ruin is in part shared by the Christian teacher who warned you not. His share in the sin and the punishment makes not your portion of both the less or the lighter, as the union of many accomplices in a deed of blood lessens not their individual criminality, but often aggravates it. But it may still be asked, if sinners perish at all, is it not always through unfaithfulness on the part of the Church?—We believe not. CHRIST'S own preaching, faithful, sincere and full as it was, did not save Jerusalem. The sinner may be warned with perfect fidelity, and the Christian's responsibility be fully satisfied, and yet the sinner perish. If he perish warned of his sin, his blood is on his own head. But if the ministry have not been faithful to declare to him the whole counsel of God, and that in the right spirit, it is evident that the Christian teacher in some sense partakes the sins, and may share the doom of him whom he thus neglects or perverts.

Nor let it ever be supposed, that, by thus stating the responsibilities and the influence of man, we forget or dispute the great doctrine of the Divine power in regeneration, and the great doctrine of the Divine sovereignty in the putting forth

of that power. It is of the grace of GOD that any are saved, and the instrumentality and influence of man, apart from that grace, are in themselves idle as the voice of music to the storms. It is for GOD to regenerate the man. But it is the pleasure of GOD to use in his kingdom human instrumentality, and human influence. It is the duty of man to put them forth. It is of the grace of GOD to bless them when put forth. It is of one only of these truths that we are now called to treat, that of human duty, and its connection in the order of the Divine purposes with the salvation of mankind. As the human eye cannot at once behold the two opposite sides of the object it confronts, thus is it difficult for the mind to bring into one view the two opposite aspects that belong to every great doctrine of the Bible. The other great truths to which we have alluded stand up in the volume of GOD in impregnable strength. Fully receiving them, it is sufficient now to remark, brethren, as we pass, that human agency cannot trench upon them, or prosper without them.

II. If such be the far-spreading power and the manifold and fearful responsibilities of our office, fathers and brethren, well might the man, who uttered the words before us, years after admonish the Colossian pastor Archippus, that he should *take heed* to the ministry which he had received of the LORD, that he *fulfill it*; and well might he bind upon the conscience of his beloved disciple and coadjutor the injunction, that he should make *full proof* of his ministry. And a fitting termination was it to the announcement of such a truth, that he should proceed, as he did, to admonish the Ephesian pastors that they take heed therefore *to themselves*, no less than to all the flock. Wherein have we failed to make this fulfilment and full proof of our ministry? For it is not the interests of others alone that are concerned: let us look to ourselves, for the responsibilities of our office are entwined with our own well being for

time, and through eternity. We pass therefore, to inquire the methods, in which we may by remissness have drawn upon our heads the blood of the sinners we may have failed to warn.

Were we to imagine a herald sent forth to the peopled villages of a revolted province with the proclamation of his prince, charged to promise a free pardon to all who might submit, and return to their allegiance, commissioned to denounce a sure and overwhelming vengeance against all persevering in their mad rebellion, and instructed withal to spread far and wide the royal edict, and to distribute it to every group of villagers he should meet by the way-side, and to every traveller who shared his journeyings, we can readily see in what mode his duties must be discharged, or he remain guilty, to his prince of unfaithfulness, and to the revolter of a murderous treachery. He might suppress the document, and substitute a forgery of his own imagination; or while disclosing it in part, he might interpolate and abridge, erase, and amend, suppressing one fact and distorting another, until the proclamation, as read to the crowds who gathered at his feet, might to their ears bring a meaning utterly alien to that which had stirred the heart of the king from whom it emanated. Or, passing to another hamlet, he might there, without marring a syllable of the document, so dispose of it that few would meet it. Wholly overlooking the general dispersion of it through the homes of the district, he might content himself with affixing the edict on high amid other and ordinary notices, to meet perhaps the gaze of a diligent inquirer, but scarce perceptible to the casual observer; and go his way, without further effort to bring home to the individuals whom he met their danger and their duty, or inquiring, as he past, who had read and who had heeded the momentous instrument. And when coming to yet another neighborhood, planted in the bosom of some quiet valley, we might see him, not without assiduity, gathering together from

its shades and from the hills which environed it, the population of the scattered cottages, and delivering to the tumultuous crowd the mandate, alike unmutated and incorrupt; but yet his whole statement might be marked with such listlessness, or such levity, and be uttered so heartlessly, or so scornfully, that the contemptuous group around him might at once adjudge him insincere, and declare the proclamation he bore a forgery of no value. And it would be evident that, in all or in either of these ways, the very intent of the embassy would have been frustrated, and a wrong would have been done to the prince thus unfaithfully served, and to the people thus unfaithfully warned. And in every battle-field which should afterwards be strewn with the slain of the unsuccessful revolters, and on every scaffold on which others of them should expiate their treason with their blood, he would be to some extent, implicated; and the blood of the deluded villagers would, alike by their kindred and their ruler, be asked at his hands.

Now the Gospel ministry is such a proclamation. The preacher derives his name from the office of the herald, thus publishing to a mingled and busy population the laws or the news of the day. And, in any one of the modes thus indicated, the Christian minister may sin, and bring down upon his head the curse of those who have perished through his imbecile and faithless demeanor. In the *substance* of our message, in the *scene and manner of its delivery*, and above all, in the *spirit that marks its announcement*, we may be misleading and hardening the souls we were sent forth to invite again to their God and ours. And such a three-fold fulfilment, as requisite to the Christian ministry, seems intimated in Paul's description of his own course: "By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience as in the sight of God." The manifested truth described the substance of his ministry; its commendation to every man—the manner of his labor, and

his appeal to the conscience of the hearer, and his constant sense in his own conscience that GOD was observing him, indicated the spirit of his ministry.

1. In the *substance* of our ministrations, we may contract the guilt of blood by delivering error in the stead of truth, and substituting the traditions of men for the testimonies and law of GOD. Or giving one portion of the truth, we may make it a virtual falsehood, by withholding the truth which in Scripture accompanies and guards it. We may preach human dependence to the subversion of the great truth of human obligation, or we may so insist on human duty and ability, as to mar the glorious truth of the necessity of the Divine influences. We may preach a Gospel that crucifies and tramples upon the law, the eternal and immutable law, that CHRIST came expressly to magnify : or we may hold up the law till it hides that Gospel of which it is but the precursor and the inferior. And even when we bring to the people of our charge the truth symmetrically, and in its fair proportions, we may fail to bring the well-timed truth adapted to the snares, the duties, and the trials of the passing day. We may be combating heresies they never knew, and indoctrinating a Church who are already but too proud of their orthodoxy, and too neglectful of their morals ; or we may be preaching practically to those who are yet ignorant of the first motives, the seminal principles of the Divine life—principles which the doctrines of the Bible, and those doctrines only, can minister. And we may utter truths not entirely unseasonable, yet comparatively of less moment, whilst from the sides of our desk, from our pews and our hearths, one and another is sliding into eternity, untaught in the great lessons of repentance and faith. We may give an undue and disproportionate attention to the necessary, but the minor truths of the Bible, more anxious to make men partisans than Christians ; whilst “the weightier matters” of its testimony are scarce ever felt by

our people, pealing over their heads, as with a voice of mighty thunderings, the shortness of life, the nearness of judgment, the worth of the soul, the value of the atonement, the need of regeneration, and the promises of the wonder-working spirit. And what will be the testimony borne against us by them, as they awake in the light of eternity to a vivid knowledge of the whole Gospel? Is there not, herein, guilt upon us, my brethren?

2. We may attract the displeasure of our God in our pastoral character, by overlooking the extent and the minuteness of the duties owed to the Church in the personal delivery and enforcement of truth, or in *the scene and mode of our labors*. We may dispense the Gospel too much in the generalizations of the pulpit, and too little in the special applications of private intercourse. When the Apostle vouched his own exemption from the curse of blood, he declared that he had not ceased day and night to warn every man, and with many tears, and from house to house. Although we would not give to these words the rigid interpretation employed by some, yet is it not but too probable, brethren, that we are all deficient in the faithful and earnest visitation of the flock, and that the truth is too little urged home within the bounds of the family? And are not much of the remissness and worldliness of Christians owing to the want of a more thorough endeavor, to follow home the impressions of the Sabbath by the less formal and more familiar and searching intercourse of the week? In the world, is not our ministry defective, by resembling too faintly that of the primitive Church, in its aggressive character, against the mass of impenitent and unsanctified mind, that never enters our sanctuaries, and which must be sought out and assailed in its own lurking places? And if not able ourselves to accomplish the work, need we not in our Churches to sustain a distinct class of men who shall thus go forth upon the world, and leave no home, where man is wretched and man is sinful, unvisited by that Gospel, which

reveals the only remedy of his wretchedness, and the only hope for his guiltiness? Should not the wonderful success which crowned the faithfulness, in this work, of Baxter at Kidderminster, be resounding in the ears of us all, until we had attempted a similar onset upon the hearths of our own neighborhoods? And is there not in our Churches the guilt of blood, in our failing to maintain the high and severe standard of primitive discipline, delivering the Gospel to the world anew in the holy lives of its professed disciples? Shall not the blood of the covetous, and formal, and sensual, the drunkards, extortioners, and revilers, that lurk in the Church, suspected or well known, but not warned or censured, cry out against us? Hardened, as they are, by impunity, shall not that impunity be loudly pleading against us in the great day of retribution? We preach the truth; is it enforced, and doled out anew upon the world, in the discipline of our Churches? Yet again, would not Paul have been guilty, had he, in teaching the Ephesians, forgotten the more destitute of other lands; or had he neglected to inculcate upon the converts at Ephesus their duty in sending the Gospel to the lands that were yet unevangelized? Paul and the Christians whom he now addressed, would not have been clear of the blood of the Heathen, had they forgotten them in their prayers, and confined their labors exclusively to the narrow province of their own home. Illyricum, and Spain, and Britain, were probably in the heart of the Apostle, while his hands were ministering to his own wants at Ephesus. The Gospel he preached was for the world; and he preached it in blood-guiltiness, if he did not regard and teach others to regard it, as going out over the length and breadth of the earth. And although God has blessed the Church and the pastors of the present age, with the spirit of missionary enterprise, is there not yet a deficiency? Are not the garments of the Church and her pastorship yet dripping with the blood of Pagan nations,

accessible but not approached by the word of God? And here again, is there not guilt, the guilt of blood upon us, my brethren?

3. But the greatest of the dangers, as we believe, to which those now present are exposed, regards the *spirit* in which we utter our message. We may deliver the true proclamation in hypocrisy, and an angered God withhold from our labors all blessing. Or, by formality and listlessness, we may contrive to throw an aspect of tameness over the most momentous and thrilling of all topics, and the vast realities of eternity may dwindle under our hands into a thrice-told and vapid "old wives' fable." In selfish avarice or ambition, we may be coveting with an evil covetousness to set our house on high, and build up our personal and social interests on the base of God's own Church. There may be bitter envying and strife amid the common members of one mystical body, and the fellow-combatants in one strenuous and hard-fought warfare. We may grieve in secret at the fulness of the net which our own hands cast not abroad upon the face of the waters, or drew not to the shore. We may enact again the contest rebuked by CHRIST, and whisper to ourselves, "*Who is the greatest?*" when in lowliness each should esteem others better than himself. Vain-glory and ostentation may be our companions in the study, and mount with us into the sacred desk; and while the famished Church is weeping, and fiends exult over the world rushing into ruin at our feet, we may be busily employed in endeavoring to carve our paltry names upon the rugged front of CHRIST'S own cross. We may preach ourselves, and not the Master. While bound to seek out acceptable words, we may proceed too far, and harm the sword of the Spirit by gilding and blunting its edge. Self-reliance and self-seeking may palsy our spiritual strength: and we may but beat the air, and labor in vain. While men admire, God may be writ-

ing upon us his fearful curse as pronounced by his servant Zechariah: "*Wo to the idol shepherd—the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.*" Spiritual vigor and spiritual discernment may depart from us, while bowing in secret at the shrine of vanity. Or carelessness, and frivolity, and worldliness, may eat out the heart of our strength, and we may lie along in the Church, the prostrate and rotting cumberers of the field we should have shaded with our foliage, and gladdened with our fruit. How difficult is it, brethren, to guard well our own hearts—to act ever as in the love of CHRIST—and to preach in sight of the bar of judgment. And even where we may be preserved watching and praying against the evils already indicated, how far may our piety be beneath the high standard commanded by our God, and attainable to us. How little, brethren, is our profiting, compared with that which it might be, did we, like the bride of the Apocalypse, stand before the Churches "clothed with the sun"—were there seen upon our example, our prayers, and our preaching, the lustre of a dazzling holiness, derived from intimate communion with God, and sending even into the eyes of the scoffer its vivid and blinding brightness. And shall we not be judged by the possible and attainable standard which was before us? Look to the wide and deep influence which has been gained by some devoted men in all ages, who, though often of inferior talents, were men mighty in prayer, in faith, and in the HOLY GHOST. See how the hearts of the world and the Church melted at the opening of their lips—how the Spirit of Glory and of God tracked all their steps; and, turning from the sight let us ask:—Why are we not all such? We need a deeper piety, and the guilt of blood is upon us,—is it not, brethren?—because we are not men of deeper piety, men baptized with the HOLY GHOST, and testifying to the

Churches what our own eyes have seen and our own hands have handled of the word of life.

Are we accused of disparaging our vocation? Our reply may be in the quaint, but expressive language of Baxter. "Had our sins been only in Latin, in Latin they might have been rebuked; but if our transgressions have been wrought before the people, in the tongue, and before the eyes of the people must they be assailed and confessed." We are crying out against the dangers of the Church from the rampant infidelity of the age. But, alas, it is not the feathered and barbed shaft of Voltaire, the refined scepticism of Hume and Gibbon, or the coarser blasphemies of a Paine, a Taylor, or a Carlisle, that most endanger us. Rather need we fear and deprecate the infidelity of the Church, the practical scepticism of the lukewarm pastor, the effective atheism of a worldly, and a time-serving, a vain-glorious, and a selfish ministry. It is not the most specious or the most active of the speculative heresies of the day, that we have cause, brethren, so much to dread, as the heresy of heart found in CHRIST'S own Church,—the want of a purer love, and a simpler faith, and a more vigorous hope. We cannot afford the time requisite to decide the nicer controversies of the day among true brethren, while this, the great controversy of the Church with her GOD, remains undecided. Our sin against the commandment that bids us love our God is as fearful a heresy as any in the list invented and propagated by human perverseness. No, brethren, it is not a fitting season for the Church to be compounding unguents for the freckled skin of a fancied, or at most a frivolous heresy; while the plague of lukewarmness is sweeping her streets, and the bier of spiritual death is passing on its way from door to door of her habitations. We have another and a sterner quarrel to settle. The stain of blood—of the blood of souls, is on the floor of our deserted and untrodden closets—upon our pul-

pits — upon our Communion tables. It is, as the prophet of old witnessed, “not found by secret search, but openly, and upon all these.” And yet we feel it not, or acknowledging it, we do not aright apprehend and repent of the evil of our ways.

III. Lastly, then, let us, brethren, endeavor to fasten upon our sluggish hearts the sense of the fearful character of the guilt thus incurred. We may learn it by looking to the worth of the soul. Is the life of the body, though so soon to terminate, guarded by all the terrors of earthly law — is the murderer so sternly hunted, and so sorely punished; and is there no guilt in flinging away, or in aiding others to cast away the life of the soul, its happiness and well-being, not for three-score years only, but for ages multiplied upon ages, and yet making no unit in the fearful sum of its eternity? Is the hand of the lapidary cautious when touching the gem whose very dust is precious? Is the touch of the surgeon most delicate, but most firm, when probing or severing the organs of our bodily frame: and what shall not be our care who have to do with the soul of man, so delicately framed, so easily and irremediably injured — that soul which is to sparkle as a gem on the Mediator’s brow through all ages, or to suffer under the venom of unhealed sin in the ever-growing pangs of the second death? The worth of the Gospel, neutralized by unfaithfulness in the ministry, that Gospel which angels announced with songs of gratulation, — which was sealed with the blood of a dying God — and which bears the only hope of life for the world, affords another standard by which to test the character of our guilt, if we fail to declare it in its whole counsel. The high claims of the Church, narrowed and famished, and degraded by pastoral infidelity, bid us to awake; for if any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy. The fearful dishonor brought upon the name of that God, who will be sancti-

fied in all them that come nigh him, may well fill us with dread. And the thought of the wide-spread influence we are to exercise through all time and through eternity, may well cause the stoutest heart to quail. Another argument might be derived from the brevity of the life we waste, and from its singleness. We have but one life — it is soon spent, and suddenly as well as speedily may it be ended. The dying are around us. They fill the seats of our sanctuaries. They are at our boards, by the way they meet, and in the house they surround us. Riches, and fame, earthly lore, and earthly power — what are they to the dying man? How soon will all earthly distinctions fade away from before the eye, as it glazes and settles in the last struggle — and mock the grasp of dying agony. We are from eternity. For it we live. Of it we testify. To it we pass. Into that world of waking reality this life of dreams and shadows is fast bearing us. Our kindred are there. The former occupants of our pews are there. Ears that once listened to the voice of our teachings are now filled with the songs of the seraphim, or tingle with the cry of the despairing and the lost. Eyes that have gazed into ours, as we have looked down from the pulpit, have already seen the Judge of all the earth.

What yet remains for them, and for us? — Men of God I cite you to his bar. Yet a little while, and we stand before the great white throne. The judgment is set. The books are opened. Heaven and earth have passed away before the glance that is transfixing our hearts. The history of every day, the motives of every sermon, the morbid anatomy of the soul, are bared to an assembled universe; and we with all the dead, stand up to give an account of the deeds done in the body. Who would then take the fearful tiara of the papacy, lined with the curses of its deluded millions? Who would then wear the earthly honors of the faithless pastor? “And

who shall live when God doeth this?" exclaimed an able but false-hearted prophet of former times. Who of *us* shall live when God doeth this, may we, taking up his lament, and prolonging it, say, for who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? Blessed be his name, the sentence is not yet pronounced. The books are not yet written out. On the leaf yet uninscribed, and perhaps the last, let us write our weeping penitence. For yet is there hope in Israel concerning this thing.

Oh, is it not from such scenes that we turn with deepest sensibility to the Cross of CHRIST? Were it not for the fountain opened in the house of David, were we not, brethren of the ministry, of all men most miserable? From his multiplied snares, from his burdensome sins, how delightful for the Christian pastor is it thither to flee, and to plunge in its cleansing and quickening streams. How vivid, when viewed after such contemplations, how vivid in beauty, and how vast the wealth of the promises which assure us the aid of the Spirit, and the workings of that Power by which the weak are made strong, and the foolish wise. Upon our Master we will cast ourselves. Often have we provoked him, but never has he spurned us. For the sake of his goodness, and his free and repeated forgiveness of our constant transgressions, will we endeavor to preserve our garments henceforth unspotted. Shall we loiter, or trifle, or engage in petty bickerings, or turn aside at the beck of sense or of pleasure? God helping us, brethren, we will not; for behind us are heard the steps of the avenger of blood, before us gleam the crown of righteousness and the palm of victory, and the pealing anthems of the blessed are heard in the distance. No, we will quit the plain of worldly strife, of sensual and secular pursuits, and climb the rugged mount of communion and transfiguration. We will relax our grasp of the polluting and perplexing vanities of this

life, that we may set our affection on things above, where CHRIST sitteth at the right hand of GOD. We will move onward through the people of our charge, as those who shall lead or follow them to the grave, and meet them again in the judgment. We will pass along, intent on this one thing, the glory of GOD in the salvation of souls. We will be the men of one book, aiming to throw over the literature and the arts of life, over the scenes of business and retirement, over man in all stations and under every aspect, its hallowed light. Our eyes have seen there the descending glories of an opened Heaven. We have looked downward upon a world sinking into the flaming abyss of hell. We have heard the commandment that we pluck men out of the fiery torrent. Where is our strength? Conscious of our utter weakness, we will fling ourselves back on Him who was our own deliverer—we will ask the Spirit of GOD in the name of CHRIST, and girt in his strength, we will labor, praying to make it, with holy Paul, our dying declaration: I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the Righteous Judge, shall give me in that day, when the pure in heart and the clean of hands shall see GOD.

