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THE
IMPORTANCE
OF

AN ENLIGHTENED MINISTRY.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING

OF

The Virginia Baptist Education Society,

SATURDAY, JUNE 7th, 1834.

BY

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IMPORTANCE

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A HISTORY

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IMPORTANCE OF AN ENLIGHTENED MINISTRY.

“A BISHOP MUST BE APT TO TEACH.”—1 Tim. iii. 2.

The epistle containing this text was written by Paul to Timothy, his “own son in the faith,” a young minister, whom the Apostle had left at Ephesus, that he “might charge some, that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables, and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith.”

The third chap. contains a minute and clear description of the character and qualifications which a “Bishop” should possess. This term is employed by the New Testament writers to denote an officer of a Christian church. It signifies *overseer*. It is used in the same sense as the term *elder*. “I left thee in Crete,” said Paul to Titus, “that thou shouldest ordain *elders* in every city:—If any be blameless, &c. for a *bishop* must be blameless as the steward of God.”—Tit. i. 5—7. If the terms *elder* and *bishop* denote the same officer, this language is perfectly intelligible and appropriate, otherwise, it is inexplicable.—Why in directions concerning the ordination of *elders*, should the Apostles describe the qualifications of a *bishop*, if the terms are not synonymous? Every *teacher*, or *pastor*, or *elder* of a Christian church, is a “*bishop*,” in the Apostolic sense.

A “*bishop*” is required to possess, among other essential qualifications, “*Aptness to Teach*.”

I shall endeavor to show,

I. *What is included in this qualification*;—and,

II. *Its importance*.

1. *I will attempt to explain what is implied in the expression, “Apt to Teach.”*

Aptness to teach includes knowledge. A man who is himself ignorant, *cannot* instruct others. This is the decision of common sense. “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” Matt. xv. 14. This is the dictate of infinite wisdom.

Nothing can be more absurd than for a man unacquainted with the “first principles of the oracles of God,” to assume the office of spiritual guide. As well might a person born blind attempt to give instruction in the art of painting.

✓ A "bishop" must have a *knowledge of the sacred scriptures*. Human learning alone, however profound, can never qualify a man for the christian ministry. The Bible—the Bible *only*, reveals the way of salvation. Here the amiable and awful attributes of God are unveiled. In this we are taught the origin, responsibility, apostacy, guilt, wretchedness, and impotence of man. Here, as in a glass, we behold the loveliness and majesty, the fulness and compassion, the faithfulness and immutability, of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. This offers to a guilty race, pardon, peace, sanctification, and eternal life. A "bishop" is not only bound to teach and preach, but to "teach and preach Jesus Christ." Acts vi. 42. It is perilous to preach any other gospel than that of Christ. "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Gal. i. 8. The scriptures then, are the principal source from which a pastor must derive the knowledge to qualify him to perform the duties of his office.

✓ "Aptness to teach" includes, not only a knowledge, but a *deep and enlarged knowledge, of the scriptures*. Superficial knowledge cannot enable a man to instruct. Without distinct views of the gospel, a preacher will but bewilder, or at best amuse his hearers. A religious instructor should be well acquainted with the whole system of Divine Truth,—its harmony, beauty, and perfection; the proofs by which every important doctrine is established; the precepts and promises; the threatenings and invitations: the arguments by which the judgment may be convinced, and the motives by which the heart may be moved.—Then not being "a babe," unskilful in the word of righteousness, but of "full age," having his senses "exercised to discern both good and evil," he will be able to "feed others with knowledge and understanding." Heb. v. 12, 13. Jer. iii. 15.

✓ An *intimate and experimental knowledge of the scriptures* is included in "Aptness to teach." Mere speculation cannot qualify a man to teach the way of life. To teach with success he must believe the scriptures; love them; realize their supreme importance; imbibe their spirit; and be transformed and elevated by their influence. A spiritual man—a heart which relishes sacred truth, will enable an intelligent man to understand more of the import of the scriptures than all the ponderous volumes of commentaries. There is "an unction from the Holy One," and those who possess it "know all things." John ii. 20. Paul experienced the power of the gospel. It changed him from a bloody persecutor of the saints into a devoted servant of Jesus Christ. Hence he gazed on a sinking world; desired its salvation; wept over it; prayed for it; and toiled, and travailed to rescue it from darkness, sin and death. And hence the unparalleled success of his labors. He who preaches a gospel which he does not feel and love, will not profit the people.

It is not indispensable, but much to be desired, that every christian teacher should read the word of God, in the languages in which it was originally written. No translation can be perfect: however faithful, it will lose much of the beauty, spirit and force of the original. Why should a christian "bishop" be dependant on fallible translators, when he may have access to the fountain of Divine truth? I concur with the pious and eminent Dr. Watts, that, "scarce any man should be thought worthy of the name of a solid divine, or a skilful preacher—unless he has a pretty good knowledge of the Greek."

2. "Aptness to teach" includes a facility of communicating knowledge. All who possess knowledge are not qualified to teach. A man may possess a vigorous and cultivated mind, a sound judgment, rich stores of scriptural knowledge, and ardent piety, and yet lacking self-possession, an easy style, or a distinct voice, he may be unfit for the episcopal office. An easy and distinct arrangement of ideas is needful in imparting instruction. Every sermon should be directed to some end; the elucidation of an obscure text, the confirmation of an important truth, the enforcement of a duty, the reproof of a vice, or the refutation of an error. To this point every argument, every illustration, and every sentence should tend. By this method an impression distinct, deep, abiding and useful may be made. Many sermons appear to have no other design than to occupy, or rather, to waste the time of the hearers, and to prove that the preachers can utter words. No plan is adopted, no argument is finished, and no train of thought is pursued: the ideas resemble particles of dust in a whirlwind; or the labyrinths of a dungeon in which the bewildered inmates wander in vain to find a cheering ray. By such confusion, no light can be shed, and no good can be achieved. As reasonably might we expect sinners to be converted by the roaring of the wind, or the humming of a bee, as by such nonsense.

An appropriate style is essential in the communication of knowledge. It is said of an inspired teacher, "Because he was wise he still taught the people knowledge: he gave good heed and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth." Eccl. xii. 9, 10. Though the "speech and preaching," of Paul, as he informs us, "were not with enticing words of man's wisdom!" yet, he "used great plainness of speech." Read the discourses of our Saviour. How simple! how pathetic! how grand is the style! The language of the pulpit, in imitation of these illustrious examples, should be easy without vulgarity; dignified without affectation; mild without timidity; and bold without rashness. It should be such as becomes a dying man in God's presence—speaking in God's name, to dying and

immortal sinners, on the awful subjects of sin and death, heaven and hell. For a vulgar, or a ridiculous style in the desk, no apology can be offered: it is a desecration of the sanctuary, and an insult to the Majesty of Heaven. If the preacher's style be plain, appropriate and impressive, he will scarcely fail to interest, instruct, and profit his hearers.

A *distinct delivery* is indispensable in the art of communicating instruction. It is not essential that a bishop should be an orator, but he must be able to interest, convince, and affect the heart. But the soundest and most conclusive arguments, the most important and affecting truths, the most solemn and weighty appeals, when uttered in a confused, and indistinct tone, tend only to weary and disgust. If a preacher would enlist the attention, and profit the souls of his hearers, he must pronounce his words in a voice distinct, but not vociferous; solemn, but not affected; slow, but not dull; and varied to suit the different subjects of pathetic or awful, pleasing or gloomy.

The preacher who possesses a deep and experimental knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and the power of imparting it with ease and energy to others, is "Apt to teach."

II. *I will now endeavour to show the importance of this qualification.*

Its importance will appear from its adaptation to the ends designed to be gained by the episcopal office.

1. *The conversion of sinners is the primary object of the gospel ministry.*

The gospel is the means appointed, by infinite wisdom and goodness to free men from sin. "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." By preaching, the gospel, ordinarily, becomes effectual for this purpose. "For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?" Rom. x. 13, 15.—How astonishing were the effects of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. He preached to Jews, the most bigoted people on earth; the rancorous and bloody persecutors of Messiah; in Jerusalem, the scene of his humiliation and sufferings; and while his blood, mingled with that of the malefactors with whom he was crucified, still crimsoned the top of Calvary. His words were "in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power." His hearers were pricked in their hearts; gladly received his word; were baptized; and on that day three thousand souls were added to the church. Nor was success like this peculiar to inspired men. In the last century Whitfield, went forth with apostolic zeal, publishing the apostolic doctrine, and turning thousands from "darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." How de-

sirable is this *end* of the gospel ministry! conceive, if you can, my brethren, the value of an immortal soul; the odiousness of sin; the terrors of the worm which never dies, and of the fire which is never quenched; and the brightness of that glory which awaits the servants of Christ, then you will be prepared to estimate the "*importance of the conversion of sinners.*" But this object *cannot be attained without the "ability to teach."* The minds of sinners must be enlightened; their objections answered; their sophisms dissipated; their prejudices subdued; their slumbering consciences aroused; and their affections won. The citadel, in which they are defended, must be stormed by the resistless weapons of truth and reason. Surely, "he that winneth souls is wise." And the gospel minister has need to be "thoroughly furnished;" "wise as a serpent;" "well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."

2. The *edification and comfort of the church is another end of the christian ministry.* Christ said to Peter, "Feed my lambs: Feed my sheep." This command was not peculiar to Peter. When Christ, the great Shepherd, ascended on high, he gave, with some extraordinary officers, "pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Eph. iv. 11, 12. In perfect accordance with the design of the Saviour in bestowing "pastors and teachers," the apostle exhorted the "elders" of "Ephesus:" "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," or bishops, "to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Acts. xx. 28. No church can prosper without a pastor "after God's heart." Like a flock in the mountain, without a shepherd, they will be scattered and wasted. But with a "faithful" bishop "able to teach others," a church may be expected like a garden well watered and cultivated, to flourish, and bring forth much fruit. They will increase in knowledge and wisdom, in purity and loveliness, in zeal and usefulness: in a word, they will "attain to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." To the importance of *this object* those can bear testimony whose hearts have been refreshed, strengthened and established in the sanctuary. But, "Aptness to teach" is obviously needed for the attainment of this *end*. Without it, how can the doubts of the saints be dispelled; their minds stored with useful truth; their hearts fortified against temptation; their follies reprov'd and corrected; their affections refined and elevated; and their energies directed to the most valuable purposes.

3. The *refutation of errors is the third object of the gospel ministry.* Errors have prevailed in all ages of the church of God. Every important truth of Revelation has been denied or perverted, either by

weak or wicked men. Legalists, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, have gone about to establish their own:" Antinomians have nullified the law of God, and "turned his grace into lasciviousness:" Universalists, have labored to extinguish all dread of "the wrath to come:" Socinians have endeavored to strip the Saviour of his glory and authority, and to convert him into a mere man—a worm: Deists have rejected the light of Revelation,—the only light by which we can be guided and cheered through this vale of tears:—Atheists, to complete the climax of absurdity and impiety, affirm "there is no God." These errors originate mostly in that depravity which "loves darkness rather than light." To refute these, and similar errors, is the business of every christian minister. "There are many unruly and vain talkers, and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped; who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre's sake." Tit. i. 9, 11. How very *needful and important is this work!* All errors are injurious; most are dangerous; and many are fatal. They bewilder weak saints, disturb churches, stupify sinners, and dishonor God. But errors *cannot be refuted, without the "Ability to Teach."* They are generally specious; pleasing to carnal minds; not unfrequently supported by men of genius and learning; fortified by the most plausible sophisms; venerable for their age; formidable by the number, respectability, and influence of their adherents; and almost invincible, through the prejudices they have enlisted, and the worldly benefits they confer. The dogma of "transubstantiation," a tenet which sets all the senses at defiance, and scarcely yields in absurdity and impiety to atheism itself, is maintained by millions with as much tenacity, as if it were a self-evident truth. Surely he who ventures to attack such errors—and such abound in the world—has need to wield with a strong hand "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

4. *The promotion of the glory of God, is a fourth end to be gained by the episcopal office.* To glorify God is the supreme wish and aim of every Christian. God is honored by the gospel ministry. If a Milton, or a Newton is honored by the circulation of his writings, much more will God be exalted by the publication of his "glorious gospel." Here the supreme excellence of God is manifested; his law is vindicated and enforced; the wonderful scheme of redeeming love is developed; the clouds which hover over the ways of Providence, are, in a measure dispersed; and we are led to contemplate, with joy, that day, "when Christ shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." 2 Thes. i. 10. God is glorified in the conversion of a single sinner. When Peter had related to the christian Jews,

the miraculous conversion of Cornelius, and his friends, the first fruits of the gospel among the Gentiles, "they held their peace"—their prejudices were slain, and their objections demolished—"and they glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." God's mercy, condescension, and faithfulness are displayed no less in the salvation of a sinner, than are his wisdom, power, and grandeur in the creation of the world. But, I ask, my brethren, can God be honored by the babblings of ignorance, the ravings of fanaticism, or the effusions of vanity? No: it is absurd to think so. By a plain, faithful, and earnest exhibition of truth—sacred and Divine truth—God is glorified. But, evidently, *truth cannot be thus exhibited without the qualification which is the subject of this discourse*

Perhaps an objector may ask, "hath not God chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise?" I answer, "Christ crucified," or the gospel, was esteemed, by the proud and philosophic Greeks, "foolishness." God chose the things deemed among men foolish, and weak, and base, to confound those who were wise and mighty in their own conceit. But can any rational man believe the apostle meant to affirm, that the gospel is indeed *foolishness*, or that God employs *ignorance and stupidity* to promote his cause? Hear his own explanation of this subject. "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect,"—fully instructed in the christian faith—"yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory." 1 Cor. ii. 6, 7.

In conclusion I will remark:—

1. *It is unwise to thrust unqualified men into the episcopal office.*—"A bishop must be apt to teach." We have no more right to dispense with this qualification in a bishop than to permit him to have two wives. The requirement and the prohibition are equally plain and obligatory. God has not promised to bless ignorance in building up his kingdom; and he will not do it. "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me." Hos. 4, 6. If a man does not desire and seek a knowledge of sacred truth, he had better be a galley slave than a preacher, and fill any place on this side perdition, than the pulpit. Many of our fathers in the gospel, without liberal learning, were very useful; but they prized knowledge, and by persevering application remedied, in a measure, the defects of an early education. Such men were my venerated predecessors in the pastoral office, Lunsford and Straughan. Excluded in youth from the advantages of academic instruction, they rose by native vigor of intellect, and unwearied diligence, to the first distinction among their brethren; and many are now living to bear testimony to the efficacy

of their ministrations. If any proof of the correctness of this position were needed, it is furnished by the unfruitful, languishing, and distracted state of churches under the guidance of men who "cannot teach, and will not learn."

2. *Pastors are bound to improve their gifts.* "Till I come," said Paul to his son Timothy, "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 1 Tim. iv. 13—15; 2 Tim. ii. 15.

Timothy was not less than thirty years old at the date of these epistles; from his childhood he had known the holy scriptures; he had been, for years, the travelling companion and pupil, of the inspired Paul; and yet he was required to read—to study—to improve his gift. Surely it will not be maintained that any minister of the present day may dispense with these duties.

Timothy, the young evangelist was required to read and study; but he was to exercise his discretion as to the books which he should read; the teachers of whose instructions he should avail himself; the place in which he should study; and generally of the means to be employed for the improvement of his gifts. So every bishop is bound, not only to study, but to adopt the best practicable means "to stir up the gift of God which is in him."

Should any person endeavour to avoid this fair deduction by affirming that Timothy was not a "bishop;" I will only remind him that no reason, I presume, can be assigned why Timothy, the "evangelist," should study, which does not apply with equal, or greater force, to every minister of the gospel.

3. *Our Seminary presents many advantages to young men preparing for the ministry.* Its location is retired, healthful, and pleasant. Its contiguity to the Metropolis of the State will furnish numerous and valuable opportunities for acquiring general information. The laboring system, connected with the institution, will, it is hoped, impart health and cheerfulness, and contribute to check the growth of formality and pride; evils too frequently seen among young collegians. The Seminary will be constantly supplied with pious, competent, and assiduous teachers. The course of study adopted, is such as tends directly to qualify ministers for the discharge of their arduous and important duties. It is contemplated to furnish, as early as practicable, a select and valuable library, to which they will have free and constant access. Association with young men of piety, genius, and applica-

tion, cannot fail to invigorate their minds, and increase their zeal for God.

Permit me before I sit down to address four classes of persons.

1. *Opposers.*—If any persons present oppose our efforts to educate young ministers, I will refer them to the prudent counsel of Gamaliel, "Now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight, even against God." Acts v. 38, 39. Your opposition may involve you in consequences more serious than you are aware of.

2. *Christians generally.* You should pray, my brethren, for an increase of faithful ministers. It is God's prerogative to "send out laborers into his harvest." He must awaken the desire of usefulness; impart useful gifts; furnish the means of improving them; and open the fields of labor. "Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

You should, my christian friends, afford young ministers "facilities for acquiring useful knowledge." As they are bound to read and study, it is your duty and privilege to assist them. Look around you, my brethren. "The fields are already white to harvest. The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." Many of our churches are destitute of pastors; large sections of our own State are without a regular ministry; the world lieth, in a great degree, in wickedness; and millions are perishing in heathen darkness. The unrepealed command of the Saviour sounds in our ears, "go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The christian church are waking up. They are weeping over the desolations which sin hath wrought. They are putting forth their energies to evangelize the world. God is smiling on their efforts. He is raising up multitudes of young men, of ardent piety, and vigorous intellect, for the "work of the ministry." They thirst for divine knowledge; but many of them are poor—they have no books—no instructors—and no means of improving their gifts. They must be supported by christian liberality, or by their own secular labors. Look, my brethren, on the 9th verse of the eighth chapter of 2d Cor. Ponder its meaning: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." And say, how much will you give, from the stores with which God has blessed you, for the education of young ministers? Answer as you will wish, at the bar of God, that you had done.

3. *The Board of Managers.* You, brethren, are the pillars of our institution, your wisdom, prudence, zeal, and liberality will, I trust,

sustain and prosper it, your unostentatious labors, little heeded on earth, are recorded on high, and you shall in no wise lose your reward.

4. *Beneficiaries.* My young brethren, the highest expectations of your future usefulness are indulged: to you we look for our pastors and missionaries—our Cloptons; our Semples and our Boardmans. Do not, we beseech you, disappoint us. You have superior advantages for the acquisition of knowledge: avail yourselves of them. These are your golden moments: do not waste them. Remember the maxim of the venerable Roger Williams: “One grain of Time’s inestimable sand is worth a golden mountain.”

Guard, my dear friends, against a *spirit of jealousy*. It is an unreasonable, loathsome, and destructive passion. Rejoice that some possess talents superior to your own. Be willing to occupy the lowest seat. Humility is before knowledge.

Aim to be *spiritually minded*. Pray much, and fervently—examine yourselves, often and carefully. Meditate on Divine things; and give yourselves wholly to them. Catch the spirit of the lamented James B. Taylor; or rather of his Lord, and yours.

Let your whole behaviour be upright, amiable, and dignified. The eyes of the world, and of the church are on you—these with affectionate solicitude, and those with cold suspicion. The reputation of the Seminary is in a good degree suspended on your improvement and your conduct. I cannot better close than in the language of Paul to Timothy: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” 1 Tim. iv. 12.

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory forever and ever.—AMEN.” Heb. xiii. 20, 21.