

Lecture Xi. - a Wise Minister Will Be Successful

by Charles Finney

A minister needs great wisdom to overcome the opposition of sinners, use moral means to convert them, and reach different classes of sinners in order to be successful in their ministry.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:30, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 10:2, Romans 10:14-15, 1 Corinthians 9:22, Ephesians 4:11-12, Colossians 4:5-6, 2 Timothy 2:15, James 1:5, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Soul Winning", "Wisdom in Ministry"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity of wisdom in the ministry, arguing that a minister's success in winning souls directly reflects their wisdom and understanding of the Gospel. He outlines the various challenges ministers face, including opposition from sinners and the need to engage the church effectively in the work of conversion. Finney stresses that true wisdom involves knowing how to apply truth to different classes of sinners and understanding the human mind to lead them to Christ. He concludes by urging both ministers and laypeople to recognize their responsibility in soul-winning and to seek the wisdom necessary for this vital task.

Transcript

TEXT. --He that winneth souls is wise. --PROVERBS xi. 30.

I PREACHED last Friday evening from the same text, on the method of dealing with sinners by private Christians. My object at this time is to take up the more public means of grace, with particular reference to the

DUTIES OF MINISTERS.

As I observed in my last lecture, wisdom is the choice and pursuit of the best end by the most appropriate means. The great end for which the Christian Ministry was appointed, is to glorify God in the salvation of souls. In speaking on this subject I propose to show,

I. That a right discharge of the duties of a minister requires great wisdom.

II. That the amount of success in the discharge of his duties (other things being equal) decides the amount of wisdom employed by him in the exercise of his office.

I. I am to show that a right discharge of the duties of a minister requires great wisdom.

1. On account of the opposition it encounters. The very end for which the ministry is appointed is one against which is arrayed the most powerful opposition of sinners themselves. If men were willing to receive the Gospel, and there were nothing needed to be done but to tell the story of redemption, a child might convey the news. But men are opposed to the Gospel. They are opposed to their own salvation, in this way. Their opposition is often violent and determined. I once saw a maniac who had formed designs against his own life, and he would exercise the utmost sagacity and cunning to effect his purpose. He would be as artful and make his keepers believe he had no such design, that he had given it all up, and would appear as mild and sober, and at the instant the keeper was off his guard he would lay hands on himself. So sinners often exercise great cunning in evading all the efforts that are made to save them. And to meet this dreadful cunning, and overcome it so as to save men, ministers need a great amount of wisdom.

2. The particular means appointed to be employed in the work show the necessity of great wisdom in ministers. If men were converted by an act of physical omnipotence, creating some new taste, or something like that, and if sanctification were nothing but the same physical omnipotence rooting out the remaining roots of sin from the soul, it would not require so much sagacity and skill to win souls. Nor would there then be any meaning in the text. But the truth is that regeneration and sanctification are to be effected by moral means--by argument and not by force. There never was and never will be any one saved by any thing but truth as the means. Truth is the outward means, the outward motive, presented first by man and then by the Holy Spirit. Take into view the opposition of the sinner himself, and you see that nothing, after all, short of the wisdom of God and the moral power of the Holy Spirit, can break down this opposition, and bring him to submit to God. Still the means are to be used by men, and means adapted to the end, skillfully used. God has provided that the work of conversion and sanctification shall in all cases be done by means of that kind of truth, applied in that connection and relation, which is fitted to produce such a result.

3. He has the powers of earth and hell to overcome, and that calls for wisdom. The devil is constantly at work, trying to prevent the success of ministers, laboring to divert the attention from the subject of religion, and to get the sinner away from God and lead him down to hell. The whole framework of society, almost, is hostile to religion. Nearly all the influences which surround a man from his cradle to his grave, in the present state of society, are calculated to defeat the design of the ministry. Does not a minister then need great wisdom to conflict with the powers of darkness, and the whole influence of the world, in addition to the sinner's own opposition?

4. The same is seen from the infinite importance of the end itself. The end of the ministry is the salvation of the soul. When we consider the importance of the end, and the difficulties of the work, who will not say with the apostle, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

5. He must understand how to wake up the church, and get them out of the way of the conversion of sinners. This is often the most difficult part of a minister's work, and requires more wisdom and patience than any thing else. Indeed, to do this successfully, is a most rare qualification in the Christian ministry. It is a point where almost all ministers fail. They know not how to wake up the church, and raise the tone of piety to a high standard, and thus clear the way for the work of conversion. Many ministers can preach to sinners very well, but gain little success, while the counteracting influence of the church resists it all, and they have not skill enough to remove the difficulty. There is only here and there a minister in the country who knows how to probe the church when they are in a cold, backslidden state, so as effectually to wake them up and keep them awake. The members of the church sin against such light, that when they become

cold it is very difficult to rouse them up. They have a form of piety which wards off the truth, while at the same time it is just that kind of piety which has no power nor efficiency. Such professors are the most difficult individuals to arouse from their slumbers. I do not mean that they are always more wicked than the impenitent. They are often employed about the machinery of religion, and pass for very good Christians, but are of no use in a revival.

I know ministers are sometimes amazed to hear it said that churches are not awake. No wonder such ministers do not know how to wake a sleeping church. There was a young licentiate heard brother Foote the other day, in this city, pouring out truth, and trying to wake up the churches, and he knew so little about it that he thought it was abusing the churches. So perfectly blind was he that he really thought the churches in New York were all awake on the subject of religion. So some years ago there was a great controversy and opposition raised, because so much was said about the churches being asleep. It was all truth, yet many ministers knew nothing about it, and were astonished to hear such things said about the churches. When it has come to this, that ministers do not know when the church is asleep, no wonder that we have no revivals. I was invited once to preach at a certain place. I asked the minister what was the state of the church. "Oh," says he, "to a man they are awake." I was delighted at the idea of laboring in such a church, for it was a sight I had never yet seen, to see every single member awake in a revival. But when I got there I found the church sleepy and cold, and I doubt whether one of them was awake.

Here is the great difficulty in keeping up revivals, to keep the church thoroughly awake and engaged. It is one thing for a church to get up in their sleep and bluster about and run over each other, and a widely different thing for them to have their eyes open, and their senses about them, and be wide awake, so as to know how to find God and how to work for Christ.

6.* He must know how to set the church to work when they are awake. If a minister attempts to go to work alone, calculating to do it all himself, it is like attempting to roll a great stone up a hill alone. The church can do much to help forward a revival. Churches have sometimes had powerful revivals without any minister. But when a minister has a church who are awake, and knows how to set them to work, and how to sit at the helm and guide them, he may feel strong, and oftentimes may find that they do more than he does himself, in the conversion of sinners.

7. In order to be successful, a minister needs great wisdom to know how to keep the church to the work. Often the church seem just like children. You set children to work, and they appear to be all engaged, but as soon as your back is turned they will stop and go to play. The great difficulty in continuing a revival lies here. And to meet it requires great wisdom. To know how to break them down again, when their heart gets lifted up because they have had such a great revival; to wake them up afresh when their zeal begins to flag; to keep their hearts full of zeal for the work; these are some of the most difficult things in the world. Yet if a minister would be successful in winning souls, he must know when they first begin to grow proud, or to lose the spirit of prayer, and when to probe them and how to search them over again, how to keep the church in the field gathering the harvest of the Lord.

8. He must understand the Gospel. But you will ask, Do not all ministers understand the Gospel? I answer, that they certainly do not all understand it alike, for they do not all preach alike.

9. He must know how to divide it, so as to bring forward the particular truths, in that order, and to make them bear upon those points and at such times as are calculated to produce a given result. A minister should understand the philosophy of the human mind, so as to know how to plan and arrange his labors

wisely. Truth, when brought to bear upon the mind, is in itself calculated to produce corresponding feelings. The minister must know what feelings he wishes to produce, and how to bring such truth to bear as is calculated to produce these feelings. He must know how to present truth calculated to humble Christians, or to make them feel for sinners, or to awaken sinners, or to convert them.

Often, when sinners are awakened, the ground is lost for the want of wisdom in following up the blow. Perhaps a rousing sermon is preached, Christians are moved, and sinners begin to feel, and the next Sabbath something will be brought forward that has no connection with the state of feeling in the congregation, and that is not calculated to lead the mind on to the exercise of repentance, faith or love. It shows how important it is that a minister should understand how to produce a given impression, at what time it may and should be done, and by what truth, and how to follow it up, till the sinner is broken down and brought in.

A great many good sermons preached are all lost for the want of a little wisdom here. They are good sermons, and calculated, if well timed, to do great good; but they have so little connection with the actual state of feeling in the congregation, that it would be more than a miracle if they should produce a revival. A minister may preach in this random way till he has preached himself to death, and never produce any great results. He may convert here and there a scattering soul; but he will not move the mass of the congregation unless he knows how to follow up his impressions, to carry out a plan of operations and execute it, so as to carry on the work when it is begun. He must not only be able to blow the trumpet so loud as to start the sinner from his lethargy, but when he is waked, he must lead him by the shortest way to Jesus Christ. And not as soon as sinners are roused by a sermon, immediately begin to preach about some remote subject that has no tendency to carry on the work.

10. To reach different classes of sinners successfully requires great wisdom on the part of a minister. For instance, a sermon on a particular subject may start a particular class of persons among his hearers. Perhaps they will begin to look serious, or perhaps talk about it, or perhaps they will begin to cavil about it. Now, if the minister is wise, he will know how to observe those indications, and to follow right on with sermons adapted to this class, until he leads them into the kingdom of God. Then let him go back and take another class, find out where they are hid, break down their refuges, and follow them up, till he leads them into the kingdom of God. He should thus beat about every bush where sinners hide themselves, as the voice of God followed Adam in the garden--"ADAM, WHERE ART THOU?" till one class of hearers after another are brought in, and so the whole community converted. Now a minister must be very wise to do this. It never will be done so, till a minister sets himself to hunt out and bring in every class of sinners in his congregation, the old and young, male and female, rich and poor.

11. A minister needs great wisdom to get sinners away from their present refuges of lies, without forming new hiding places for them. I once sat under the ministry of a man who had contracted a great alarm about heresies, and was constantly employed in confuting them. And he used to bring up many such heresies as his people never heard of. He got his ideas chiefly from books, and mingled very little among the people to know what they thought. And the result of his labors often was, that the people would be taken with the heresy, more than with the argument against it. The novelty of the error attracted their attention so much that they forgot the answer. And in that way he gave many of his people new objections against religion, such as they never thought of before. If a man does not mingle enough with mankind to know how people think now-a-days he cannot expect to be wise to meet their objections and difficulties.

I have heard a great deal of preaching against Universalists, that did more hurt than good, because the preachers did not understand how Universalists of the present day reason. They have never mingled with Universalists, and know not what they believe and how they argue, now, but have got all they know of Universalism from books that were written long ago, and are now out of date among Universalists themselves. And the consequence is that when they attempt to preach against Universalism they oppose a man of straw, and not Universalist sentiments as they are now found in the community. And people either laugh at them, or say it is all lies, for they know Universalists do not hold such sentiments as are ascribed to them by the preacher.

When ministers undertake to oppose a present heresy, they ought to know what it is at present. For instance, almost all those who write and preach against Universalism think they are called upon to oppose the idea that God is all mercy. They suppose Universalists hold the doctrine that God is all mercy, and that when they have refuted this doctrine, they have got Universalists down. But this is not true. They do not hold such doctrine. They deny it altogether. They reject the idea of mercy in the salvation of men, for they hold that every man is punished in full according to his just deserts. Of what use is it, then, to argue against Universalists, that God is a God of justice and not a God all mercy, when they hold to the justice of God alone as the ground of salvation, and do not admit the idea of mercy at all? In like manner, I have heard men preach against the idea that men are saved in their sins, and they supposed they were preaching down Universalist doctrine. Universalists believe no such thing. They believe that all men will be made holy and saved in that way. This shows the importance of knowing what people actually hold, before you try to reason them out of their errors. It is of no use to misrepresent a man's doctrines to his face, and then try to reason him out of them. You must state his doctrine just as he holds it, and state his arguments fairly. Otherwise, if you state them wrong, you either make him angry, or he laughs in his sleeve at the advantage you give him. He will say, That man cannot argue with me on fair grounds; he has to misrepresent our doctrines in order to confute me. Great hurt is done in this way. Ministers do not intend to misrepresent their opponents; but the effect of it is, that the poor miserable creatures who hold these errors go to hell because ministers do not take care to inform themselves what are their real errors. Errors are never torn away by such a process. I mention these cases to show how much wisdom a minister must have to meet the cases that occur. He must be acquainted with the real views of men in order to meet them, and do away their errors and mistakes.

12. Ministers ought to know what measures are best calculated to aid in accomplishing the great end of their office, the salvation of souls. Some measures are plainly necessary. By measures, I mean what things should be done to get the attention of the people and bring them to listen to the truth. Building houses for worship, and visiting from house to house, etc., are all "measures," the object of which is to get the attention of people to the Gospel. Much wisdom is requisite to devise and carry forward all the various measures that are adapted to favor the success of the Gospel.

What do the politicians do? They get up meetings; circulate handbills and pamphlets; blaze away in the newspapers; send their ships about the streets on wheels with flags and sailors; send coaches all over town, with handbills, to bring people up to the polls--all to gain attention to their cause and elect their candidate. All these are their "measures," and for their end they are wisely calculated. The object is to get up an excitement, and bring the people out. They know that unless there can be an excitement it is in vain to push their end, I do not mean to say that their measures are pious, or right, but only that they are wise, in the sense that they are the appropriate application of means to the end.

The object of the ministry is to get all the people to feel that the devil has no right to rule this world, but that they ought all to give themselves to God, and vote in the Lord Jesus Christ as the governor of the universe. Now what shall be done? What measures shall we take? Says one, "Be sure and have nothing that is new." Strange! The object of our measures is to gain attention, and you must have something new. As sure as the effect of a measure becomes stereotyped, it ceases to gain attention, and then you must try something new. You need not make innovations in everything. But whenever the state of things is such that anything more is needed, it must be something new, otherwise it will fail. A minister should never introduce innovations that are not called for. If he does they will embarrass him. He cannot alter the Gospel; that remains the same. But new measures are necessary, from time to time, to awaken attention and bring the Gospel to bear upon the public mind. And then a minister ought to know how to introduce new things, so as to create the least possible resistance or reaction. Mankind are fond of form in religion. They love to have their religious duties stereotyped, so as to leave them at ease; and they are therefore inclined to resist any new movement designed to rouse them up to action and feeling. Hence it is all-important to introduce new things wisely, so as not to give needless occasion or apology for resistance.

13. Not a little wisdom is sometimes needed by a minister to know when to put a stop to new measures. When a measure has novelty enough to secure attention to the truth, ordinarily no other new measure should be introduced. You have secured the great object of novelty. Anything more will be in danger of diverting the public mind away from the great object, and fixing it on the measures themselves. And then, if you introduce novelties when they are not called for, you will go over so large a field, that by and by when you really want something new, you will have nothing else to introduce, without doing something that will give too great a shock to the public mind. The Bible has laid down no specific course of measures to promote revivals of religion, but has left it to ministers to adopt such as are wisely calculated to secure the end. And the more sparing we are of our new things, the longer we can use them, to keep public attention awake to the great subject of religion. By a wise course this may undoubtedly be done for a long series of years, until our present measures will by and by have sufficient novelty in them again to attract and fix public attention. And so we shall never want for something new.

14. A minister, to win souls, must know how to deal with careless, with awakened, and with anxious sinners, so as to lead them right to Christ in the shortest and most direct way. It is amazing to see how many ministers there are who do not know how to deal with sinners, or what to say to them in their various states of mind. A good woman in Albany told me, that when she was under concern she went to her minister and asked him to tell her what she must do to get relief. And he said God had not given him much experience on the subject, and advised her to go to such a deacon, who perhaps could tell her what to do. The truth was, he did not know what to say to a sinner under conviction, although there was nothing peculiar in her case. Now if you think this minister a rare case, you are quite deceived. There are many ministers who do not know what to say to sinners.

A minister once appointed an anxious meeting, and went to attend it, and instead of going round to the individuals, he began to ask them the catechism, "Wherein doth Christ execute the office of a priest?" About as much in point to a great many of their minds as anything else.

I know a minister who held an anxious meeting, and went to attend it with a written discourse which he had prepared for the occasion. Just as wise as it would be if a physician, going out to visit his patients, should sit down at leisure and write all the prescriptions before he had seen them. A minister needs to know the state of mind of the individuals, before he can know what truth will be proper and useful to administer. I say these things, not because I love to do it, but because truth, and the object before me, requires them to

be said. And such instances as I have mentioned are by no means rare.

A minister should know how to apply truth to all the situations in which he may find dying sinners going down to hell. He should know how to preach, how to pray, how to conduct prayer-meetings, and how to use all the means for bringing the truth of God to bear upon the kingdom of darkness. Does not this require wisdom? And who is sufficient for these things?

II. The amount of a minister's success in winning souls (other things being equal) invariably decides the amount of wisdom he has exercised in the discharge of his office.

1. This is plainly asserted in the text. "He that winneth souls is wise." That is, if a man wins souls, he does skillfully adapt means to the end, which is, to exercise wisdom. He is the more wise, by how much the greater is the number of sinners that he saves. A blockhead may, indeed, now and then stumble on such truth or such a manner of exhibiting it, as to save a soul. It would be a wonder indeed if any minister did not sometimes have something in his sermons that would meet the case of some individual. But the amount of wisdom is to be decided, "other things being equal," by the number of cases in which he is successful in converting sinners.

Take the case of a physician. The greatest quack in New York may now and then stumble upon a remarkable cure, and so get his name up with the ignorant. But sober and judicious people judge of the skill of a physician by the uniformity of his success in overcoming disease, the variety of diseases he can manage, and the number of cases in which he is successful in saving his patients. The most skillful saves the most. This is common sense. It is truth. And it is just as true in regard to success in saving souls, and true in just the same sense.

2. This principle is not only asserted in the text, but it is a matter of fact, a historical truth, that "He that winneth souls is wise." He has actually employed means adapted to the end, in such a way as to secure the end.

3. Success in saving souls is evidence that a man understands the Gospel, and understands human nature, that he knows how to adapt means to his end, that he has common sense, and that he has that kind of tact, that practical discernment, to know how to get at people. And if his success is extensive, it shows that he knows how to deal with a great variety of characters, in a great variety of circumstances, who are yet all the enemies of God, and to bring them to Christ. To do this requires great wisdom. And the minister who does it shows that he is wise.

4. Success in winning souls shows that a minister not only knows how to labor wisely for that end, but also that he knows where his dependence is. You know that fears are often expressed respecting those ministers who are aiming most directly and earnestly at the conversion of sinners. People say, "Why, this man is going to work in his own strength; one would imagine he thinks he can convert himself." How often has the event showed that the man knows what he is about, very well, and knows where his strength is too. He went to work to convert sinners so earnestly, just as if he could do it all himself; but that was the very way he should do. He ought to reason with sinners, and plead with them, as faithfully and fully as if he did not expect any interposition of the Spirit of God, or as if he knew there was no Holy Ghost. But whenever a man does this successfully, it shows that, after all, he knows he must depend on the Spirit of God alone for success.

OBJECTION.--There are many who feel an objection against this subject, arising out of the view they have taken of the ministry of Jesus Christ. They ask us, "What will you say about the ministry of Jesus Christ, was not he wise?" I answer, Yes, infinitely wise. But in regard to his alleged want of success in the conversion of sinners, you will observe the following things:

(1.) That his ministry was vastly more successful than is generally supposed. We read in one of the sacred writers, that after his resurrection and before his ascension "he was seen by above five hundred brethren at once." If so many as five hundred brethren were found assembled together at one place, we see there must have been a vast number of them scattered over the country.

(2.) Another circumstance to be observed is, that his public ministry was very short, less than three years.

(3.) Consider the peculiar design of his ministry. His main object was to make atonement for the sins of the world. It was not aimed so much at promoting revivals. The "dispensation of the Spirit" was not yet given. He did not preach the Gospel so fully as his apostles did afterwards. The prejudices of the people were so fixed and violent that they would not bear it. That he did not, is plain from the fact that even his apostles, who were constantly with him, did not understand the atonement. They did not get the idea that he was going to die, and consequently, when they heard he was actually dead, they were driven to despair, and thought the thing was all gone by, and their hopes blown to the winds. The fact was, that he had another object in view, to which every thing else was made to yield, and the perverted state of the public mind, and the obstinate prejudices prevailing, showed why results were not seen any more in the conversion of sinners. The state of public opinion was such, that they finally murdered him for what he did preach.

Many ministers who have little or no success, are hiding themselves behind the ministry of Jesus Christ, as if he was an unsuccessful preacher. Whereas, in fact, he was eminently successful, considering the circumstances in which he labored. This is the last place in all the world where a minister who has no success should think of hiding himself.

REMARKS.

1. A minister may be very learned and not wise. There are many ministers possessed of great learning; they understand all the sciences, physical, moral, and theological; they may know the dead languages, and possess all learning, and yet not be wise, in relation to the great end about which they are chiefly employed. Facts clearly demonstrate this. "He that winneth souls is wise."

2. An unsuccessful minister may be pious as well as learned, and yet not wise. It is unfair to infer because a minister is unsuccessful, that therefore he is a hypocrite. There may be something defective in his education, or in his mode of viewing a subject, or of exhibiting it, or such a want of common sense, as will defeat his labors, and prevent his success in winning souls, while he himself may be saved--"yet so as by fire."

3. A minister may be very wise, though he is not learned. He may not understand the dead languages, or theology in its common acceptation; and yet he may know just what a minister of the Gospel wants most to know, without knowing many other things. A learned minister and a wise minister are different things. Facts in the history of the church in all ages prove this. It is very common for churches, when looking out for a minister, to aim at getting a very learned man. Do not understand me to disparage learning. The more learning the better, if he is also wise in the great matter he is employed about. If a minister knows how to win souls, the more learning he has the better. But if he has any other kind of learning, and not this,

he will infallibly fail of the end of his ministry.

4. Want of success in a minister (other things being equal) proves, (1.) either that he was never called to preach, and has taken it up out of his own head; or (2.) that he was badly educated, and was never taught the very things he wants most to know; or (3.) if he was called to preach, and knows how to do his duty, he is too indolent and too wicked to do it.

5. Those are the best educated ministers, who win the most souls. Ministers are sometimes looked down upon, and called very ignorant, because they do not know sciences and languages; although they are very far from being ignorant of the great thing for which the ministry is appointed. This is wrong. Learning is important, and always useful. But after all, a minister may know how to win souls to Christ, without great learning, and he has the best education for a minister, who can win the most souls to Christ.

6. There is evidently a great defect in the present mode of educating ministers. This is a SOLEMN FACT, to which the attention of the whole church should be distinctly called; that the great mass of young ministers who are educated accomplish very little.

When young men come out from the seminaries, are they fit to go into a revival? Look at a place where there has been a revival in progress, and a minister is wanted. Let them send to a theological seminary for a minister. Will he enter into the work, and sustain it, and carry it on? Seldom. Like David with Saul's armor, he comes in with such a load of theological trumpery, that he knows nothing what to do. Leave him there for two weeks, and the revival is at an end. The churches know and feel, that the greater part of these young men do not know how to do anything that needs to be done for a revival, and they are complaining that the young ministers are so far behind the church. You may send all over the United States, to theological seminaries, and find but few young ministers fitted to carry forward the work. What a state of things!

There is a grand defect in educating ministers. Education ought to be such, as to prepare young men for the peculiar work to which they are destined. But instead of this, they are educated for any thing else. The grand mistake is this. They direct the mind too much to irrelevant matters, which are not necessary to be attended to. In their courses of study, they carry the mind over too wide a field, which diverts their attention from the main thing, and so they get cold in religion, and when they get through, instead of being fitted for their work, they are unfitted for it. Under pretence of disciplining the mind, they in fact scatter the attention, so that when they come to their work, they are awkward, and know nothing how to take hold, or how to act, to win souls. This is not universally the case, but too often it is so.

It is common for people to talk loudly and largely about an educated ministry. God forbid that I should say a word against an educated ministry. But what do we mean by an education for the ministry? Do we mean that they should be so educated, as to be fitted for the work? If they are so educated, the more education the better. Let education be of the right kind, teaching a young man the things he needs to know, and not the very things he does not need to know. Let them be educated for the work. Do not let education be such, that when young men come out, after spending six, eight, or ten years in study, they are not worth half as much as they were before they went. I have known young men come out after what they call "a thorough course," who were not fit to take charge of a prayer meeting, and who could not manage a prayer meeting, so as to make it profitable or interesting. An elder of a church in a neighboring city, informed me recently of a case in point. A young man, before he went to the seminary, had labored as a layman with them, conducted their prayer meetings, and had been exceedingly useful among them. After

he had been to the seminary, they sent for him and desired his help; but oh, how changed! he was so completely transformed, that he made no impression; the church soon began to complain that they should die under his influences, and he left, because he was not prepared for the work.

It is common for those ministers who have been to the seminaries, and are now useful, to affirm that their course of studies there did them little or no good, and that they had to unlearn what they had there learned, before they could effect much. I do not say this censoriously, but it is a solemn fact, and I must say it in love.

Suppose you were going to make a man a surgeon in the navy. Instead of sending him to the medical school to learn surgery, would you send him to the nautical school to learn navigation? In this way, you might qualify him to navigate a ship, but he is no surgeon. Ministers should be educated to know what the Bible is, and what the human mind is, and know how to bring one to bear on the other. They should be brought into contact with mind, and made familiar with all the aspects of society. They should have the Bible in one hand, and the map of the human mind in the other, and know how to use the truth for the salvation of men.

7. A want of common sense often defeats the ends of the Christian ministry. There are many good men in the ministry, who have learning, and talents of a certain sort, but they have no common sense to win souls.

8. We see one great defect in our theological schools.--Young men are shut up in their schools, confined to books and shut out from intercourse with the common people, or contact with the common mind, Hence they are not familiar with the mode in which common people think. This accounts for the fact that some plain men, that have been brought up to business, and acquainted with human nature, are ten times better qualified to win souls than those who are educated on the present principle, and are in fact ten times as well acquainted with the proper business of the ministry. These are called "uneducated men." This is a grand mistake. They are not learned in science, but they are learned in the very things which they need to know as ministers. They are not ignorant ministers, for they know exactly how to reach the mind with truth. They understand the minds of men, and how to adapt the gospel to their case. They are better furnished for their work, than if they had all the machinery of the schools.

I wish to be understood. I do not say that I would not have a young man go to school. Nor would I discourage him from going over the field of science. The more the better, if together with it he learns also the things that the minister needs to know, in order to win souls--if he understands his Bible, and understands human nature, and knows how to bring the truth to bear, and how to guide and manage minds, and to lead them away from sin and lead them to God.

9. The success of any measure designed to promote a revival of religion, demonstrates its wisdom with the following exceptions:

(1.) A measure may be introduced for effect to produce excitement, and be such that when it is looked back upon afterwards, it will look nonsensical, and appear to have been a mere trick. In that case, it will react, and its introduction will do more hurt than good.

(2.) Measures may be introduced, and the revival be very powerful, and the success be attributed to the measures, when in fact other things made the revival powerful, and these very measures may have been a hinderance.[sic.] The prayers of Christians, and the preaching, and other things may have been so well

calculated to carry on the work, that it has succeeded[sic.] in spite of these measures.

But when the blessing evidently follows the introduction of the measure itself, the proof is unanswerable, that the measure is wise. It is profane to say that such a measure will do more hurt than good. God knows about that. His object is, to do the greatest amount of good possible. And of course he will not add his blessing to a measure that will do more hurt than good. He may sometimes withhold his blessing from a measure that is calculated to do some good because it will be at the expense of a greater good. But he never will bless a pernicious proceeding. There is no such thing as deceiving God in the matter. He knows whether a given measure is, on the whole, wise, or not. He may bless a course of labours notwithstanding some unwise or injurious measures. But if he blesses the measure itself, it is rebuking God to pronounce it unwise. He who undertakes to do this, let him look to the matter.

10. It is evident that much fault has been found with measures, which have been pre-eminently and continually blessed of God for the promotion of revivals. We know it is said that the horrid oaths of a profane swearer have been the means of awakening another less hardened sinner. But this is a rare case. God does not usually make such a use of profanity. But if a measure is continually or usually blessed, let the man who thinks he is wiser than God, call it in question. TAKE CARE how you find fault with God!

11. Christians should pray for ministers. Brethren, if you felt how much ministers need wisdom to perform the duties of their great office with success, and how ignorant they all are, and how insufficient they are of themselves, to think anything as of themselves, you would pray for them a great deal more than you do; that is, if you cared anything for the success of their labors. People often find fault with ministers, when they do not pray for them. Brethren, this is tempting God, for you ought not to expect any better ministers, unless you pray for them. And you ought not to expect a blessing on the labors of your minister, or to have your families converted by his preaching, where you do not pray for him. And so for others, the waste places, and the heathen, instead of praying all the time, only that God would send out more laborers, you have need to pray that God would make ministers wise to win souls, and that those he sends out may be properly educated, so that they shall be scribes well instructed in the kingdom of God.

12. Those laymen in the church who know how to win souls are to be counted wise. They should not be called "Ignorant laymen." And those church members who do not know how to convert sinners, and who cannot win souls, should not be called wise--as Christians. They are not wise Christians; only "he that winneth souls is wise." They may be learned in politics, in all sciences, or they may be skilled in the management of business, or other things, and they may look down on those who win souls, as nothing but plain, simple-hearted and ignorant men. If any of you are inclined to do this, and to undervalue those brethren who win souls, as being not so wise and cunning as you are, you deceive yourselves. They may not know some things which you know. But they know those things which a Christian is most concerned to know, and you do not.

It may be illustrated by the case of a minister that goes to sea. He may be learned in science, but he knows nothing how to sail a ship. And he begins to ask the sailors about this thing and that, and what is this rope for, and the like. "Why," say the sailors, "these are not ropes, we have only one rope in a ship, these are the rigging, the man talks like a fool." And so this learned man becomes a laughing-stock, perhaps, to the sailors, because he does not know how to sail a ship. But if he were to tell them one half of what he knows about science, perhaps they would think him a conjurer, to know so much. So learned students may understand their hic, hœc, hoc, very well, and may laugh at the humble Christian, and call him ignorant, although he may know how to win more souls than five hundred of them.

I was once distressed and grieved at hearing a minister bearing down upon a young preacher, who had been converted under remarkable circumstances, and who was licensed to preach without pursuing a regular course of study. This minister, who was never, or at least rarely, known to convert a soul, bore down upon the young man in a very lordly, censorious manner, depreciating him because he had not had the advantage of a liberal education, when in fact he was instrumental in converting more souls than any five hundred ministers like himself.

I would say nothing to undervalue, or lead you to undervalue a thorough education for ministers. But I do not call that a thorough education, which they get in our colleges and seminaries. It does not fit them for their work. I appeal to all experience, whether our young men in seminaries are thoroughly educated for the purpose of winning souls. DO THEY DO IT? Everybody knows they do not. Look at the reports of the Home Missionary Society. If I recollect right, in 1830, the number of conversions in connection with the labors of the missionaries of that society did not exceed five to each missionary. I believe the number has increased since, but is still exceedingly small to what it would have been had they been fitted by a right course of training for their work. I do not say this to reproach them, for from my heart I pity them, and I pity the church for being under the necessity of supporting ministers so trained, or none at all. They are the best men the Missionary Society can obtain. I suppose, of course, that I shall be reproached for saying this. But it is too true and too painful to be concealed. Those fathers who have the training of our young ministers are good men, but they are ancient men, men of another age and stamp, from what is needed in these days of excitement, when the church and world are rising to new thought and action. Those dear fathers will not, I suppose, see this; and will perhaps think hard of me for saying it; but it is the cause of Christ. Some of them are getting back toward second childhood, and ought to resign, and give place to younger men, who are not rendered physically incapable, by age, of keeping pace with the onward movements of the church. And here I would say, that to my own mind, it appears evident, that unless our theological professors preach a good deal, mingle much with the church, and sympathize with her in all her movements, it is morally, if not naturally, impossible, that they should succeed in training young men to the spirit of the age. It is a shame and a sin, that theological professors, who preach but seldom, who are withdrawn from the active duties of the ministry, should sit in their studies and write their letters, advisory, or dictatorial, to ministers and churches who are in the field, and who are in circumstances to judge what needs to be done. The men who spend all or at least a portion of their time in the active duties of the ministry, are the only men who are able to judge of what is expedient or inexpedient, prudent or imprudent, as to measures from time to time. It is as dangerous and ridiculous for our theological professors, who are withdrawn from the field of conflict, to be allowed to dictate, in regard to the measures and movements of the church, as it would be for a general to sit in his bed-chamber and attempt to order a battle. (This was said in 1833)

Two ministers were one day conversing about another minister whose labors were greatly blessed in the conversion of some thousands of souls. One of them said, "That man ought not to preach any more; he should stop and go to" a particular theological seminary which he named, "and go through a regular course of study." He said the man had "a good mind, and if he was thoroughly educated, he might be very useful," The other replied, "Do you think he would be more useful for going to that seminary? I challenge you to show by facts that any are more useful who have been there. No, sir, the fact is, that since this man has been in the ministry, he has been instrumental in converting more souls than all the young men who have come from that seminary in the time." This is logic! Stop, and go to a seminary, to prepare himself for converting souls, when he is now converting more than all who come from the seminary!

FINALLY.--I wish to ask you, before I sit down, who among you can lay any claim to the possession of this Divine wisdom? Who among you, laymen? Who among you, ministers? Can any of you? Can I? Are we at work, wisely, to win souls? Or are we trying to make ourselves believe that success is no criterion of wisdom? It is a criterion. It is a safe criterion for every minister to try himself by. The amount of his success, other things being equal, measures the amount of wisdom he has exercised in the discharge of his office.

How few of you have ever had wisdom enough to convert so much as a single sinner!

Do not say now, "I cannot convert sinners; how can I convert sinners? God alone can convert sinners." Look at the text, "He that winneth souls is wise," and do not think you can escape the sentence. It is true that God converts sinners. But there is a sense, too, in which ministers convert them. And you have something to do; something that requires wisdom; something which, if you do it wisely, will insure the conversion of sinners in proportion to the wisdom employed. If you never have done this, it is high time to think about yourselves, and see whether you have wisdom enough to save even your own souls.

Men--women--you are bound to be wise in winning souls. Perhaps already souls have perished; perhaps a friend, or a child is in hell, because you have not put forth the wisdom which you might, in saving them. The city is going to hell. Yes, the world is going to hell, and must go on, till the church finds out what to do, to win souls. Politicians are wise. The children of this world are wise, they know what to do to accomplish their ends, while we are prosing about, not knowing what to do, or where to take hold of the work, and sinners are going to hell.

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