

A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Mr. Samuel Wilson, Baptist Minister.

by John Gill

John Gill's sermon reflects on the sorrow of parting with a beloved minister, emphasizing the importance of faithful ministry and the emotional bonds formed within the church community.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:18, Psalm 46:10, Daniel 12:3, John 16:19-21, Acts 20:38, Philippians 2:26-27, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 13:7, 1 Peter 5:4

Topics: "The Role of a Minister", "Grief and Loss"

Description

John Gill delivers a heartfelt sermon on the occasion of the death of Reverend Mr. Samuel Wilson, emphasizing the deep sorrow felt by the congregation at the loss of their beloved pastor. He reflects on the Apostle Paul's farewell to the Ephesians, drawing parallels to the emotional pain of parting with a faithful minister who served with humility, compassion, and dedication. Gill highlights the importance of a minister's role in guiding and nurturing the spiritual lives of their congregation, and he encourages the church to remember the teachings and legacy of Mr. Wilson while also submitting to God's will. The sermon serves as a reminder of the profound impact a minister has on their community and the grief that accompanies their departure.

Transcript

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

THE REVEREND MR. SAMUEL WILSON.

Preached October 14, 1750.

ACTS 20:38.

Sorrowing most of all for the word which he spake, that they should see his face no more.

BEING desired by you, the brethren and members of this church, to assist in your sorrow, on account of the death of your late dear pastor, in which I sincerely bear a part with you; and no passage of scripture being left by the deceased, nor any given me by his surviving relative, or by you, I considered with myself what would be most proper and suitable on such an occasion; I thought of one portion of scripture, and of another, but none hung upon my mind so much, and continued with me so long as the words I have read

unto you; and therefore I determined, through divine assistance, to make them the subject of the following discourse.

The words manifestly refer to a single expression used by the apostle Paul, in a very moving and pathetic address, delivered by him to the elders of the church of Ephesus at Miletus, where he had convened them for that purpose; but before I enter into a particular consideration of them, I shall take leave to make some few remarks upon the address itself; and the rather, as it will not lead us out of sight of the text, but will open to us the true source of the sorrow expressed in it, and furnish us with reasons accounting for it.

And, 1. The apostle observes what was his constant work and employment whilst he was in Asia, and his manner of performing it, ver. 18, 19. His work was, serving the Lord; not himself and his own belly; not seeking to gratify his sensual lusts, or to acquire riches and honor to himself, as the false teachers did; he was no time-server or man-pleaser, for then he would not have been the servant of Christ; but he served the Lord, Jehovah the Father, in the gospel of his Son, with all his heart and soul; and he served the Lord Christ by fully and faithfully preaching him; and in so doing, became the servant of the churches for Jesus' sake.

His manner of performing this service was, with all humility of mind; for though he was favored with extraordinary gifts, and was called to an extraordinary office, by which he was set not only above common saints, but above ordinary ministers of the word, and was not behind the chief of the apostles; yet he was not lifted up with these things, but thought himself less than the least of all saints; being sensible of his own unworthiness to be employed in such service, and his insufficiency for it; and well knowing it was by the grace of God he was what he was, and did what he did, he therefore walked humbly before God, and in the sight of men; not assuming a dominion over the faith of any, or lording it over the heritage of God.

And it was with many tears that he went through his work; he sowed the precious seed of the word in tears, and watered it with them; grieved he often was at the hardness, impenitence, and unbelief of many that heard him, and was greatly affected with the troubles of the saints, both inward and outward: who was offended or afflicted, and he burned not? and would frequently weep over the scandalous lives of carnal professors. And his service also was attended with temptations that befel him, not only from Satan, and his own heart, but from a wicked world, and especially by the lying in wait of the Jews, who fought to take away his life; and which were trials of his faith and patience, and of his courage and constancy in the service of his Lord: and now a minister so constant and laborious, so humble, so compassionate, and so self-denying, is it to be wondered at, that sorrow should be felt and expressed at parting with him? 2.

The apostle goes on to take notice of the subject-matter of his ministry, or of what he chiefly insisted upon in it, ver. 20, 21. In general it was what was profitable, suitable, and convenient for them. He did not amuse his hearers with philosophical notions, or read lectures of mere morality to them, or deliver out speculative notions in divinity; but he taught them solid and substantial truths, the doctrines of the everlasting gospel, the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus, such as men are nourished up with unto everlasting life; things profitable for doctrine, and instruction in righteousness; even such doctrines as relate to the knowledge of the divine Being, Father, Son, and Spirit, to the state and condition of man by nature, as a fallen creature; and to his recovery, both by redeeming and efficacious grace: and of these things he kept back nothing; he did not withhold them either in whole or in part; nor did he withdraw or fetch back, as the word^[1] used may signify, what he had before said to them; but abode by it, and pronounced an anathema on such who preached any other gospel than what had been preached and received already; and this he shewed unto them, and made it clear, plain, and evident; and taught them it

publicly, and from house to house; first publicly in the Jewish synagogue, then in the school of Tyrannus, chap. 19:8-10, and in whatsoever public place of worship the people met together; and also privately in their own houses; which shows his diligence, and industry, and concern for their spiritual welfare: and what he taught in the one place, and in the other, was uniform and all of a piece.

In particular, the doctrines he chiefly insisted upon, or the whole of his ministry, were reducible to these two heads, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus. God, against whom man has sinned, is the object of the one; and Christ, who is the Redeemer and Savior, is the object of the other: repentance must be toward God; it lies in a true sense of sin, and godly sorrow for it, in shame and blushing at it, and in owning and forsaking it, flowing from a view of the love of God, and of pardoning grace and mercy through Christ, attended with faith in him, and hope of salvation by him: faith has Christ for its object; and it is a believing in his person, blood, righteousness, and sacrifice; a looking to him, leaning on him, trusting in him, and expecting grace, life, and salvation from him.

These two doctrines went together in Christ's ministry, and are what he ordered his disciples to teach, and which they did; endeavoring first to bring men to a sense of sin, and then encouraged them to believe in Christ: and this is the usual order in the Spirit's work upon the soul, through the ministry of the word, first to convince men of sin, then to work faith in their hearts, and take of the things of Christ, and show and apply them to their souls for their peace and comfort: and those doctrines were taught by the apostle without respect to persons; he terrified them both to Jews and Greeks; and now a minister who made it his business to deliver out such interesting truths, doctrines of such moment and importance to the souls of men, and was so faithful and diligent herein; is there not good reason that those to whom he had ministered should be filled with sorrow and trouble, and show deep concern of mind at his departure from them? 3.

The apostle declares the view he had of what sufferings he was to endure for the sake of the gospel, and which was not at all discouraging to him, ver. 22-24. He says, he was going bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem; not in his own spirit, as being bound in conscience to perform a piece of service he had undertaken to do to the poor saints there from the Gentile churches; and much less as if he was compressed, and straitened, and uneasy in his mind at what he was to suffer at Jerusalem, for this would be contrary to what he after says; but in and by the Spirit of God, by which he was moved to go up to Jerusalem, notwithstanding the persuasions of his friends to the contrary, and what he should endure there; by which he knew he should be put in bonds there; and by the revelation of the Spirit he saw it as clearly as if he was bound already.

Yet not knowing the things that should befall him there: that is, other things beside bonds, which are after excepted; or whether those would issue in death there or elsewhere; as yet this was not made known unto him; save that the holy Ghost witnessed in every city, that bonds and afflictions abode him, or waited for him. This he knew, not only from the common lot of Christ's ministers, and his own experience, but from the holy Ghost in the prophets, which were in every city where there was a church; who were all in this tone, having a spirit of prophecy in them, that he was going to endure great sufferings for the sake of Christ and the gospel; or the holy Ghost in himself testified beforehand to him of his sufferings, assuring him that in every city he came unto, and particularly in Jerusalem, persecution and affliction would attend him; and which, by the way, is no inconsiderable proof of the Deity of the blessed Spirit.

But none of these things moved him from his intended journey to Jerusalem, which he was resolved upon; nor from preaching the gospel as he went along; nor did they disturb and distress his mind; neither did he

count his life dear unto himself, than which nothing is dearer to men: Skin for skin, yea all that a man hath, will he give for his life. (Job 2:5.) Yet this he made no account of; he did not value or regard it; he was willing to lay it down, so that he might but testify the gospel of the grace of God; or bear a testimony to it, which he was willing to do both by life and by death; even to that gospel, which is a declaration of the love, grace, and mercy of God, which asserts salvation to be all of grace, and is the means of conveying and implanting the grace of God in the hearts of men; and in so doing fulfill the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus; and which he had, as also gifts for it, as well as a commission to enter upon it, and execute it; and by all which he would finish his course, the race of his life, and course of his ministry, with joy, as he did; for a little before his death he could say, 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 at that day. (2 Tim. 4:7, 8.)

Now who could forbear shedding tears at parting with such a brave and courageous minister of the gospel; so undaunted at sufferings, so willing to lay down his life for the sake of the gospel, and the dear interest of the Redeemer? 4. The next thing observable in this moving speech, is the apostle's solemn appeal to those to whom he addressed himself for his faithfulness in the ministration of the gospel to them, ver. 25-27, which is introduced after this manner; he tells them, that he knew, and was assured, and which therefore was not a mere conjecture of his, but he had it by revelation, that none of them all, meaning not only those before him, but all the christians in Asia, among whom he had gone preaching the kingdom of God; the kingdom of the Messiah, the kingdom of grace and glory, more especially the latter, and the things appertaining to it; as what is a man's meetness for it, regeneration by the Spirit of God; and what is his right unto it, the justifying righteousness of Christ; and what the glories of it, which are in some measure brought to light by the gospel; all such persons to whom he had preached these things in Asia, he affirms, should see his face no more; which was the cutting, wounding stroke, which touched them to the quick, pierced to the very heart, and set them a weeping and sorrowing as they did.

And this is the word referred to in our text: upon which he calls them to bear witness that day, that he was pure from the blood of all men; he had acted the part of a faithful watchman, in giving warning from the mouth of the Lord; he had laid before men their state and danger; he had truly represented their condition to them; he had told them, that without repentance towards God, and faith in Christ, they would die in their sins; he had pointed out the only way of life and salvation by Christ unto them, so that they would not perish for want of knowledge and the means of it; nor was he any ways accessory to their ruin; their destruction was of themselves; their blood was upon their own heads; he had nothing to answer for, he had faithfully discharged his duty to them: for, says he, I have not shunned to declare to you all the counsel of God; not the secret purposes and decrees of God, those counsels of old which are faithfulness and truth, which are only known by prophecy, or by the dispensations of providence; but the gospel-revelation, and the whole scheme of it, which is the produce of divine wisdom; this he fully made known to all to whom he ministered, so that they, as well as Timothy, (2 Tim. 3:10.) knew fully his doctrine as well as manner of life: he made use of no artful methods to conceal his principles, no ambiguous phrases, or words of double, or doubtful meaning; he renounced all such hidden things of dishonesty, and by manifestation of the truth, commended himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God: and now is it at all marvelous, that the persons to whom the apostle said these things, should have their hearts filled with sorrow, or that there should not be a dry eye among them, when a minister, so honest and ingenuous, so faithful and open-hearted, was taking his leave of them; and especially when they are told, that they should see his face no more? 5.

Next follows the pressing exhortation of the apostle, ver. 28-31, to the elders of the church at Ephesus, to take heed to themselves; to their doctrine, that it be agreeable to the word of God; and to their conversation, that it was becoming the gospel of Christ: and to all the flock; the whole church of God, and every member of it, and watch over them, and preserve them from the error of the wicked: over the which the holy Ghost had made them overseers; by bestowing gifts upon them, qualifying of them for such an office, and inclining their hearts to take the oversight of them cheerfully; and which is an argument why they should be careful of them, to feed the church of God; with wholesome food, with the substantial truths of the gospel, which hold forth Christ and his grace, as the bread of life, and water of life; and the rather they should look upon themselves under obligation so to do, since Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever, has purchased this flock or church, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with his own blood; which is exceeding precious, and of great value and efficacy.

And the reason why the apostle was so importunate, and so pressing in this matter, was, because he knew by divine revelation, that after his departing from hence, or by death, grievous wolves, false teachers, wolves in sheeps clothing, fierce, ravenous, and greedy ones, would enter in among them privily; not sparing the flock; but fleecing and worrying it: yea, not only such should enter from without, but even of themselves: out of their own community, there should rise up men speaking perverse things; contrary to the scriptures, to the gospel, and things very pernicious to the souls of men, whereby they would draw away the disciples after them; make rents and schisms in the church, form new parties, and set up themselves at the head of them: now of this the apostle had warned them incessantly for the three years last past, in the most tender and pressing manner, even with tears, which he desires them carefully to remember.

And can it be thought that such an affectionate servant of Christ could be parted with, without tears shed for him, who had so great a regard both to the present and future well-being of the church, to which these elders belonged? 6. In the most affecting manner he takes his farewell of them, ver. 32, commending them to God; to his grace to supply and support them, to his wisdom to direct them, and to his power to preserve and keep them; and to the word of his grace; either the written word, the same with the gospel of the grace of God, to make it the rule and subject of their ministrations; or Christ the essential Word, who is full of grace and truth; each of which, both God, and his word, were able to build them up on their most holy faith, and carry on and finish the work of grace upon their souls, and make them useful to build up others on the rock of ages; and when they had done their work, to give them an inheritance among all them which are sanctified; both a meetness for, and a right unto the incorruptible and undefiled inheritance, that fades not away, and is reserved in the heavens, and will be only enjoyed by sanctified persons; for it is an inheritance of the saints in light.

And the whole speech is concluded with the apostle's declaration of his being free from the sin of covetousness; for the truth of which he appeals to the persons present, and exhorts them to imitate him, provide for themselves, and support others; to which he animates them by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, ver. 33-35, and then closes all in prayer to God with them, and for them; upon which they all burst out into tears, and lift up their voice and weep, and one after another fall upon the apostle's neck and kiss him, ver. 36, 37.

A most moving scene this! It is hard to form just and adequate ideas of it, and still more difficult to express them in proper language; I cannot do it better than in the words of a very spiritual and affectionate commentator[2] on the place, who represents it in the following manner. "How can I part with this dear creature, this blessed Paul, faith one, in whom my life is in a manner bound up? Farewel, my dear friend,

faith another, a thousand thanks to thee, and ten thousand to God for thee, and for all the pains thou hast taken with me for my good: And must we part? faith another, must I lose my spiritual father, nurse, and guide?

What will become of us now, saith another, when we shall no more have him to apply to, and receive directions from? What shall I do, if the Lord take away my master from my head? My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." And then follow the words I first read, Sorrowing most of all for the word which he spake, that they should see his face no more. There were several things in this farewell-discourse, which affected them, and filled their hearts with grief and trouble; as what the apostle was like to suffer for the sake of Christ and his gospel, and what sad havock false teachers would make in the church under their care hereafter; but what most of all afflicted them was, that they were now just going to part with the apostle, and should never see him more.

What I shall further do with these words, will be, I. To consider what that is which chiefly and principally affects and afflicts a people at parting with a gospel-minister, which is, that they shall see his face no more. II. Show the nature of that sorrow which is, and may be expressed on such an occasion. III. Observe some reasons which induce such a sorrow, and which will serve to justify it when it is within due bounds. IV. Offer some things to consideration, in order to abate it, on the above account, and to regulate it, and keep it within proper limits.

I. I shall consider what that is, which of all things does mostly affect and afflict a people at parting with a gospel-minister, which is, that they shall see his face no more. And let it be observed. 1. That there are many cases which affect, but not so much affect, as this as for instance, to part with a minister for awhile, for a few weeks or months, when his urgent affairs call him elsewhere, or his presence is necessary in another branch of Christ's interest, for the service of it; this is not grateful to a people by whom he is beloved; it is with some reluctance he departs from them for a season; but then they hope for his return, and, with as much patience as they can, wait for it: had this been the case here, it would have been bearable.

The saints at Ephesus had an experience of this before. When the apostle was first with them, his stay was short; they would fain have had him continued longer with them, but he refused, which no doubt was grieving to them; but he returned again, and abode with them for the space of two years, and then was obliged to leave them through an uproar, but not without expressions of their tender regard to him; they embraced him in their arms, and no doubt wept over him: and now a third time he visits them, by sending for them at Miletus, and tells them, that they shall see his face no more; had he given some hopes of visiting them again, though he should for the present depart, or signified his intentions to do so, if it was the will of God, this would have been tolerable; but to assure them they should never see him again, this cut them to the heart.

Again, To part with a gospel-minister wholly, to have him removed from one part of a country to another, from one church to another, there to abide, and not return again; this is more affecting and afflicting than the other case, but not like this in the text. This may be, and sometimes is the case, that a minister does, and lawfully may remove from one people to another; as when errors and heretics obtain, and they cannot be rooted out; or immorality prevails, and no reformation can be made, the discipline of Christ's house is neglected, and the people will not suffer his laws to be put in execution; or when a due maintenance is not, or cannot be provided for him, but both he and religion are exposed to the reproach of the world; or disaffection between him and the people rises so high, on one account or another, that peace and

fellowship cannot be maintained, nor the ends of the ministration of the word, and administration of ordinances be answered: but then in such a case as this, as there may be some persons to whom he has been a spiritual father, or who have received comfort and edification by his ministry, and consequently must be greatly troubled and distressed at his removal from them; so they may, if convenience will permit, go along with him; or however they may hope to see his face, and hear his voice again one time or other.

Moreover, to have a gospel-minister drove away by the force of persecution, and removed into a corner, so that a people cannot behold their teacher in the place where they were wont to see him; this must be very grieving and distressing, but not like this, seeing his face no more; because in such times of persecution, they may both see and hear him in private houses, in cellars, and solitary places, in fields and woods, as our forefathers did. The witnesses prophesy, though in sackcloth; and the church is fed and nourished with the word and ordinances, though in the wilderness: besides, hope may be entertained, that such a state of persecution will not last always; God will not suffer the rod of the wicked always to continue on the lot of the righteous; he gives his churches rest from adversity, and they walk in his fear, and in the comforts of his spirit, and are edified and multiplied.

For a gospel-minister to be ill treated, reviled, and persecuted, to be haled to prison, and laid in fetters and bonds, must be very grievous to such to whom he has been useful; but this is not like to that, of being in such a case as never to see his face more; because such, as they have compassion on him in his bonds, and sympathize with him, so they may visit him in prison, see his face, hear his voice, and be the more strengthened in their faith in Christ, and in the good ways of God, by his bonds.

The care of the apostle Paul is a most affecting one, when he was stoned by his furious persecutors, and dragged out of the city, and left for dead, round about whose bruised and mangled body, and as supposed, dead, the disciples stood, no doubt sorrowing and weeping; and yet on a sudden he rose up alive and well, and they saw his face with pleasure. (Acts 14:19, 20.) When a minister of the gospel is indisposed, and through sickness cannot attend his charge and work, it greatly affects a people that love him, and to whom he has been serviceable; as the sickness of Epaphroditus was distressing to the Philippians, when they heard of it, which caused heaviness in him, who knew it would be so to them, though it was not unto death: (Phil. 2:26, 27.) whilst there is life there is hope of seeing him again; but when death has done its work, there is no more hope of seeing him again, in his ministerial work; and this is the cutting thought.

Wherefore, 2. What is the affecting case of all, is parting with a minister by death, when the eye that has seen him shall see him no more, in the place it formerly did; and that place in which he has been seen shall know him no more; death changes his countenance, alters his face, and the lineaments of it, so that it is not to be seen as it was before; and he is sent away, his body returns to the dust, and the spirit to God that gave it; so that his prospect, "his person," as the word also signifies, is not to be beheld anymore.

The phrase here used supposes, that they had seen his face, and that with pleasure; for it is used of beholding persons and things with rapture and joy;^[3] so a people may, and often do see the face of their minister in the time of life and health with pleasure; and especially when in his master's work, personating his Lord, and speaking in his name: they have sometimes seen his face as the Jews did Stephen's, as if it had been the face of an angel; and have received and embraced him as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ; (Acts 6:15, Gal. 4:19.) how beautiful are the feet, and much more the mouth and lips, of a messenger of peace, and publisher of the glad-tidings of salvation by Christ!

But when a minister is dead, though his face may be seen before his interment, yet not without an alteration, and not with joy and pleasure. But let it be observed, that when the apostle told the persons spoken of in the text, that they should see his face no more; and they believed him and therefore sorrowed, it is not to be understood as a contradiction to, or a denial of the resurrection of the dead: the apostle knew, and so did they, that though he would die, and never pay them another visit; yet he would rise again in power, in glory, in incorruption, and with a spiritual body; and so would they, and have the same eyes they had, and with them behold, as the God-man and mediator-Christ, or Christ in human nature, and that for themselves, and not another, so they should see each other, and that face to face; but the meaning is, that he would die, and should not rise again till the heavens be no more, till the Lord shall descend from heaven with the voice of an archangel, when the dead in Christ will rise first; till the last trumpet sounds, and the dead rise incorruptible, and immortal. 3.

It may be very well thought, that there is in these words a figure which Rhetoricians call a meiosis, by which less is said than is understood, and more is designed than is expressed; and besides, the word here used not only signifies face or countenance, and also person, but all exterior, attending and surrounding circumstances; and so we may consider it as expressing the person of a gospel-minister in every view of him, and in every part of his office, who ceases to be viewed in it when death has done its own.

And then, His people see his face no more in his own house, to which they have at times resorted, to have their cases of conscience answered, their doubts resolved, or advice given them in matters of moment and difficulty. They see his face no more in their own houses; that is, they have no more of his friendly visits; no more his fervent prayers with them, and for them; no more his hearty counsel to them, and feel no more his sympathizing heart with them in their troubles, whether of a spiritual or temporal nature; the weak are no more supported, nor the feeble-minded comforted by his private instructions.

They see his face no more at their church-meetings, there presiding over them, showing the house to the house, the form and fashion of it, the goings-out and comings-in, and all the laws and ordinances of it; pointing who are to be admitted, and who to be rejected from the communion of the church; directing to every part of discipline, and to the rule of God's word for it; exhorting and reproving with all long-suffering and doctrine, such sharply, who have erred, that they be found in the faith, and such publicly who have sinned before all; laying on, and taking off censures, by the suffrage of the church; all which is no more to be seen as done by him.

They see his face no more in the pulpit: they hear no more the silver trumpet blown by him, nor the joyful sound pronounced with delightful accents, nor the messages of peace, life, and salvation by Christ brought by him: they now remember how his mouth spoke wisdom, and his tongue talked of judgment; how their hearts have burned within them, while he has been opening the scriptures to them; how he has stirred up their minds by way of remembrance of gospel-truths, and endeavored to establish them in them; in what a clear light he has placed them, and with what strength of argument he has defended them; and with what fervency, and in what a pressing manner he has exhorted them to love and good-works, and to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior.

But the cutting thought is, he is gone, and is no more seen, nor no more to be seen and heard. They see his face no more at the table of the Lord, there delivering out the memorials of his sufferings and death; setting forth so evidently before their eyes a crucified Christ, as if he was just then crucified and slain among them; pointing to his bleeding side and wounds, and directing to his pierced hands, and feet; explaining the divine emblems, as representing the body of Christ bruised and broken for their sins, and

his precious blood shed for the remission of them; insensibly, and at an unawares, leading them at once into the height, and depth, and length, and breadth, of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge; engaging and encouraging their faith and hope in his blood and sacrifice; stirring up their love, and exciting them to thankfulness to him, and not forget his benefits; such as healing their diseases, and "forgiving their iniquities, redeeming their lives from destruction, and crowning them with loving kindness and tender mercies."

And the thought of this, that they shall see his face no more, or him concerned in such delightful services, makes their hearts to bleed within them. But, II. I go on to shew the nature of that sorrow which is, or may be expressed on such an occasion. And, 1. When it is properly expressed, and kept within due bounds, it is not criminal, but lawful: it is not in the least suggested, that the persons in the text sinned in doing what they did, nor does the divine historian leave any censure upon them for it.

Religion does not strip us of our affections, or destroy them, but regulates, and directs to the proper use of them;[4] it does not teach us, or form us into, a Stoical apathy, a stupid indolence, and brutal insensibility: it is neither unmanly nor unchristian to weep for deceased friends and relations, or for any good man, and especially for the loss of a gospel-minister. The God of nature has placed the affections in us for proper uses, and christianity leads unto them, and assists in them; it is not counter-acting the man, or the christian, to express a proper degree of sorrow on such an occasion: persons of the most brave and heroic spirits, of the greatest firmness and resolution of mind, have shown a tenderness of spirit, and have been melted into tears on a like account.

The apostle Paul, that man of spirit, and greatness of soul, suggests, that had Epaphroditus died, he should have had sorrow upon sorrow; such a load of it, as would be scarcely bearable; devout men carried out Stephen, when dead, to his grave, and lamented over him; and even our Lord Jesus Christ, when he saw the Jews and Mary weeping at the grave of Lazarus, not only groaned in spirit, and was troubled, but wept over him himself. 2. Such sorrow is not worldly, but spiritual; there is the sorrow of the world, which worketh death, a sorrow which worldly men have, and for the loss of worldly things; as for loss of trade, and loss in trade, and for the loss of a man that is a good neighbor, and a good customer; but of this nature is not the sorrow expressed in our text; there was no worldly loss sustained by parting with the apostle; but there was a spiritual one, and on that account the sorrow was: and so when a gospel-minister is removed by death, the sorrow for him is of a spiritual nature; it is because he has been a spiritual father to some, and has been of use for the spiritual welfare of others: and a sorrow on this account is not blame-worthy, when it does not hinder the exercise of spiritual graces, as faith, hope, patience, resignation, and submission to the will of God. 3.

This sorrow was universal; as they all wept, they all sorrowed; there was not a dry eye in the whole assembly; it was a general loss, a loss to them all, and it occasioned a general lamentation: so the loss of a gospel-minister is a general loss, a loss not only to his family, and to that particular church, and every member of it to whom he ministered, but to the whole interest of Christ: when a great man is fallen in Israel, all Israel will be concerned for it; when a prophet dies, there will be a general weeping for him; when Samuel the prophet died, all the Israelites gathered together, and lamented him. (2 Sam. 2:38, 1 Sam. 25:1.) 4.

This sorrow was very painful; the elders found great pain and uneasiness in their breasts, when they were told by the apostle they should see his face no more. The word, by which it is here expressed, is used to set forth that anguish of spirit, and distress of mind, which were in Joseph and Mary, when they had lost,

and were seeking for the young child Jesus; yea, it is used of the most excruciating torments:[5] the sensation here felt, and the sorrow they were filled with, were like the pains and sorrow of a woman in travail; by which our Lord sets forth the sorrow of the disciples when he should be taken from them, and they should not see his face for awhile: (John 16:19-21.) and such like furrow is occasioned by the death of a gospel-minister to his people; it is like separating the nearest relations, husband and wife, parents and children; it is like plucking the flesh from the bones, and rending one member from another; so exceeding afflicting and painful is it.

But, I proceed, III. To assign the reasons which induce a people to sorrow after this manner, upon the death of a gospel-minister; and which will serve to justify such sorrow when it is kept within due bounds. And, 1. The characters which a minister of the gospel bears, lay a foundation for such sorrow, and furnish out a reason for it: he is a servant of the most high God; not only by creation, as all men are, and by grace, as every saint is, but by his office as a minister; whose work and business it is to show unto men the way of salvation: he is a minister of Christ; of his appointing and sending, of his calling and qualifying, and whom he owns and makes useful: he is a steward of the mysteries of God, and of his manifold grace; and if he is faithful, which is required of stewards, and also wise, and gives to everyone their portion of meat in due season, as on that account he is highly esteemed and valued in the family, so his loss will be justly lamented.

He is an ambassador of Christ; personates him, stands in his stead, and speaks in his name, bringing a message, being sent on an embassy of peace, from him: he is a spiritual guide and governor in the church, whose faith is to be followed, and the end of his conversation considered, which is Christ, the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever. And now in proportion to the characters he bears, is the loss of him, and in proportion to the loss of him, is sorrow for him; persons of figure and character, as in the state, so in the church, the death of them is to be lamented. 2.

The relations which a gospel-minister stands in to his people, are another reason why they do, and why they may sorrow for him after a godly sort, and in moderation, when he is parted from them by death, and they cannot see his face anymore: he stands in the relation of a father to them, of a spiritual father to some of them, as he has been the instrument of begetting them again to Christ by the gospel; so that he is not only an instructor of them, but a father to them; as he also is to the rest that are under his care, he having a paternal affection for them, and a fatherly regard to them: he lays up for them on weekdays, as parents do for their children, and then he freely spends it on them on Lord's-days, and most gladly spends, and is spent, for them; though the more he loves, the less is he loved by them.

And, O how does he exhort, comfort, and charge them, as a father does his children! and therefore when he is removed from them by death, who can blame them for weeping and crying out, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! Likewise he stands in the relation of a shepherd to them; as he is their father, and they his family, he is their pastor, and they his flock, whom he has willingly took the oversight and charge of; and whom he feeds with knowledge and understanding, and watches over, and for their souls, that he may give an account of them with joy, and not with grief; and when therefore he is taken from them, can it be otherwise, but that they must be filled with grief and sorrow on account of it? 3.

The work of a gospel-minister, from which he is taken off by death, is such, that when it is seriously considered, and thoroughly thought of, will justly occasion sorrow in those among whom he has labored. His business is to deliver out the pure gospel of Christ, to publish salvation by him, to proclaim peace by

his blood, to preach pardon and righteousness through him, and every other important truth; to state and defend the same, and to show the influence they have, and the argument they carry in them, to engage to holiness of life and conversation: and as he is highly to be esteemed of for his work sake, and to be accounted worthy of double honor, especially if he labors in the word and doctrine; and if he is a workman approved of God, and that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth; as he will not fail of meeting with respect and value from those who love the truth, as it is in Jesus; so when he comes to die, and has done his work, his death will be bewailed for the same reason, for which he was highly esteemed in life. 4.

The usefulness of a gospel-minister is another reason of sorrow with those to whom his labors of love have been acceptable and serviceable. Such an one is made use of by the Lord to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; to convert sinners from the evil of their ways, whereby souls are saved from death, and a multitude of sins covered; he is a minister by whom others believe in Christ, and have peace and comfort; the word preached by him is the means by which faith comes, and the holy Spirit with his several graces is received.

He is a Boanerges, a son of thunder, to some, to awaken and convince them of their sins, and of their dangerous state and condition by nature; and he is a Barnabas, a son of consolation, to others, through whose ministry their distressed minds are relieved, their disconsolate souls are comforted, their faith is increased, the joy of it furthered, and they are fed, nourished, refreshed, and edified: when therefore it is the pleasure of the Lord to call home such an useful servant of his, and take him off from his work and usefulness, and especially in the midst of it, it must be very afflicting and grieving, to such particularly, who have received much spiritual benefit and advantage by him. 5.

It increases the sorrow, when at such a time as this, a gospel-minister is removed, in which there are not many of that character, and so small a prospect of more. The harvest is great, and faithful and painful laborers are few. There are scarce any that naturally care for the estate and souls of men, and are heartily concerned for their spiritual and eternal welfare; all comparatively seek their own things, their honor and applause from men, their ease, reputation, and riches; and none, or few, the things that are Jesus Christ's, or relate to his honor, glory, kingdom and interest in the world: and what adds to the sorrow is, that there are so few rising up to fill up the places of those that are removed; few that come forth with the same spirit, and are zealously attached to the truths of the everlasting gospel: blessed be God, there is here and there one that promises usefulness, or otherwise the sorrow and grief, at the loss of gospel-ministers, would be insupportable.

To all which may be added, that a faithful minister of the gospel can be very ill spared at this time of day, when errors and heresies of all kinds are rampant among us; it is the last day, and there are many antichrists in the world, many false prophets are gone forth into it; there are many saying, lo here is Christ, and lo there; to the great confusion and distraction of the weak and simple. These come not in privily, as they formerly did, bringing in damnable heresies, denying the Lord that bought them; but openly spread their poison, and declare for their wretched schemes with fury and rancor, charitably scattering firebrands, arrows, and death; raging waves of the sea they are, foaming out their own shame; there is scarce an error or heresy that has appeared in the world from the first ages of christianity, but what is revived in this; and there is no truth of the gospel, but what is opposed and denied: and to lose an able and zealous defender of them, at such a time as this, is a double loss, and cannot fail of affecting the minds of such who heartily espouse the Redeemer's cause.

But, IV. Give me leave to offer some few things to prevent immoderate sorrow, to restrain grief, and keep it within due bounds and limits; though it is lawful, and there is cause for it, yet care should be taken that it is not exceeded, and even in this your particular case, who have so lately lost your dear pastor. And, 1. Let it be observed, that it is the will of God that so it should be, and you ought to acquiesce in it; the will of the Lord is done, and it cannot be undone: when the disciples had endeavored to dissuade the apostle from going up to Jerusalem, and could not prevail, they ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done: (Acts 21:14.) so you have been praying and entreating the Lord to spare the life of your pastor, but he has not thought fit to grant your request; and it now becomes you to cease, and be still, and not complain and murmur, since the will of the Lord is done; who does all things not only after his own will, but after the counsel of it; he does all things well and wisely, for the best, for his own glory, and his people's good; and there is nothing in which you can more imitate Christ, and be like unto him, than by resigning your wills to the will of God, who said, not my will, but thine be done; (Luke 22:42.) you should remember that God is a sovereign, and must be submitted to: he "does according to his will in heaven above, and in the earth below, and none can stay his hand, nor ought any to say to him, what doest thou?"

Good old Eli said, with respect to a case more afflicting, more distressing, and more severe than yours, it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good; (1 Sam. 3:18.) he has a right to do what he will with his own, and he does so without giving any account of his matters to the children of men: the Lord gave you your minister, and he gave him his gifts for the ministry, and all his usefulness was owing to him; and now he has taken him away; and you should be still, and know, own, and acknowledge that he is a sovereign God, and does as he pleases; and, with David, it becomes you to be dumb, and not open your mouth in a way of complaint against him, because he has done it. (Ps. 46:10 and 39:9.) 2.

Your minister's work was done, which was appointed for him to do. There is nothing that more manifestly falls under the decrees and determinations of heaven, than a minister's life and work; it is appointed of God where he shall minister, to whom, and how long; how many souls shall be converted by him, and what comforts shall be administered through his means, and to what length of time he must continue in his service. Now there was not one sinner more to be converted by your minister, nor any more comforts to be conveyed to you through his hands; all the work that was cut out for him was done by him: but this cannot be better expressed than in his own words; and because these will, in all probability, have a greater influence upon you, and more weight with you, than anything I can say, give me leave to read a passage or two out of a discourse,[6] published by him.

"God, says he, never calls home an useful minister till his work is done, till every sinner is brought in, whom he was in any degree to be instrumental to awaken, convince, or direct to Jesus; and till every saint is so far instructed, edified, and comforted by him, as was settled and agreed in the divine counsels, when God was pleased to determine and appoint, that he should be called to labor in his vineyard.--And as all the names of the elect are particularly set down in the Lamb's book of life, so under shepherds are sent forth by the great Lord of the harvest, who, as he assigns them their work, so he has settled every circumstance relating to it; how long each shall be employed, and when he is to be removed to make way for a successor: how far he shall be owned, and succeeded; what temptations and difficulties will attend him; what discouragements he will meet with, and how he shall be supported and carried through it, in the midst of all opposition, till his warfare is accomplished, and his work is finished.--We are ready to entertain hard thoughts of God, continues your dear Pastor, and to open our mouths against heaven, when he is pleased to take away a minister whom we valued, in the bloom or meridian of life, especially if he is called off when we think he was best furnished for, and had the greatest run of success in his work; not

considering that one reason why he was so very useful, whilst with us, was, because his work was to be cut short in righteousness, and his stay upon earth limited to a few years: it is not so material how long ministers are continued with us, as how useful they are to us, whilst that is our mercy.

God can easily dispatch a great deal of work by his servants, in a little time; and if he is then pleased to dismiss them, the advantage is theirs, by being taken the sooner to regions of everlasting rest and triumph.--This should serve then, adds he, to still our murmurings, and hush our complaints, even though we should lose a minister dearer to us than the apple of our eye: let us remember he had his particular work to do, that now his work is finished and compleated; and when this is the case, what can be more merciful than for a faithful servant to enter into the joy of his Lord?" 3.

The residue of the Spirit is with the Lord; Christ your ascended Lord and King has received gifts for men, yea for rebellious ones; and he has a fullness of them in his hands, which he can give, if he pleases, to others to fit them for the work of the ministry; that they may be useful for the perfecting or gathering in of the saints, and for the edifying the body the church: instead therefore of mourning over the death of your pastor, especially in an immoderate way, be praying to the Lord of the harvest to send a faithful laborer into this part of his vineyard; and who knows what a blessing is in reserve for you?

Your Elijah is gone; it may be, a double portion of his spirit may fall upon some Elisha or another, who may be sent to you. 4. Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church, lives, and will live for evermore, to protect, defend, and provide for you; though your spiritual father is gone, your everlasting Father, on whose shoulders the government of the church is, continues; though the under-shepherd is removed from you, the chief and great shepherd, and bishop of your souls, is still the same, yesterday, today, and forever; an everlasting friend, that sticks closer than a brother.

And moreover, though the fathers, where are they, and the prophets, do they live forever? No; they do not, yet the word of God lives and abides forever: the gospel is an everlasting gospel, and there will be men to preach it to the end of the world. Christ has promised his presence with his ministers so long, which supposes that they will be continued to the end of all things. Christ has, and ever will have a standing ministry in the world, until all his elect are gathered in, and "these are come to the unity of the faith, to the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." 5.

It should be observed by you, that what is your loss, is your minister's gain; he is taken away, perhaps from evil to come; he is safe housed before the storm falls upon the churches and ministers of Christ, which seems to be gathering thick; and can you be sorry for that? could you have seen the saint when he entered into the joy of his Lord, clad with robes of immortality and bliss, how he was received into the Father's presence, embraced in the arms, and laid in the bosom of Jesus, and the Spirit of glory resting on him; could you now view him, as you have reason to believe he is, inheriting the throne of glory, with the crown of righteousness on him, encircled with the glorious forms of angels and fellow-saints made perfect, it would surely bid you wipe off your tears, and dry your eyes.

To all which I would only add, that though you will see his face no more in this world, which is the cause of your present sorrowing, you will see it in another; he will rise again in the resurrection of the just, and you that believe in Christ will rise too, when the dead in Christ shall rise first; and then he and you will meet, and be with the Lord, be forever with him; with which words you should comfort one another. Your minister will appear at the head of you, to whom he has been a spiritual father, and you will be then his joy and crown of rejoicing; he will look upon you with pleasure, and you will see his face to great advantage, which

will then be as the face of an angel, and shine like the sun in the Father's kingdom; for they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever. (Dan. 12:3.)

Thus have I gone through what I proposed; and there is nothing remains now but to give you the character of my deceased brother, and your pastor, which I suppose is expected from me: and here I want the eloquence of the deceased to paint him out in his proper colors, and to describe him as the accomplished man, the real christian, and excellent minister. Something I shall attempt to do, and you that knew him most intimately, will supply the rest in your minds, from your own observation.

The Reverend Mr. SAMUEL WILSON, descended from godly ministers of the denomination of Protestant Dissenters, both by father and mother's side. He was the son of the Reverend Mr. EBENEZER WILSON, a worthy minister of Christ in this city; whose father also was an eminent preacher of the gospel, at Hitchin in Hertfordshire; and as he had a religious, so a liberal education. His grammar and classical learning, he received under some of the best masters of it,[7] in this city: his academical studies he went through, under the direction of Dr.

Ridgely and Mr. Eames, under whom he made great advances in polite and useful literature; with which being furnished, he shone out and made that figure in the church and world, he afterwards did. His natural parts were very quick and strong; he had great vivacity of spirit, a lively fancy and imagination, a retentive memory, a penetrating mind, and a solid judgment; which, with the above advantages of human literature, and above all, having the grace of God bestowed upon him, and spiritual light and knowledge given him in the mysteries of the gospel, made him the great man he was.

He was favored with many preservations and providential deliverances, in his infancy and younger years, when life was in danger: which he has remarked with his own hand,[8] as expressive of the tender care of providence over him; and no doubt the Lord saved him, in order to call him by his grace, reveal his Son in him, and make him an able minister of the New Testament. He received his first serious impressions, under the ministry of the late Reverend Mr. Daniel Wilcox, an eminent minister of the Presbyterian denomination in this city; as he himself relates in a discourse[9] he published on occasion of the death of that minister, upon the same words which I have been treating of: and that he was truly a partaker of the grace of God, was not only the judgment of the church to whom he first gave up himself, but will easily be admitted by all good men that have known him, heard him, or read him.

And it was your happiness as a church, that you had such a minister, who himself had tasted that the Lord was gracious: an unregenerate ministry has been the bane of the Established church, and is like to be the ruin of the Protestant dissenting interest. Though the father and grandfather of our deceased brother were both of the Baptist denomination, yet it was not this that determined him to become of the same persuasion himself; besides, his father dying when he was young, he was under another influence; and when he entered upon the inquiry about baptism, no one, he himself says, could enter into it with a more earnest desire, to find truth on the side of the common practice, all his conversation and prospects leaning strongly that way; but, upon taking the method which he did to search the scriptures, collect the whole evidence from them, and consider every part separately, he found himself obliged to conclude the balance was greatly on the side of adult-baptism by immersion; and therefore determined to comply with his duty, and on the closest reflection never saw reason to repent of it:[10] this inquiry, or which he calls a scripture manual, was published a little before his death, and is worthy the perusal of every serious inquirer into truth; and by which, - and other printed performances of his, though dead, he yet speaks.

After he was fully satisfied in his mind about the point of baptism, he joined himself with the church then under the pastoral care of the Reverend Mr. Edward Waltin; and when he had finished his studies, was called forth by that church to the work of the ministry, into which he came not only with the entire approbation of that church, but with great acceptance to the public: he was soon called to be an assistant to the Reverend Mr. John Noble, in whose meeting place[11] Lord's-day evening lecture was opened for him, where he preached to a crowded audience: he came forth even at first with clear evangelical light, with great warmth, zeal, and fervency of spirit; and, like another Apollos, with a torrent of eloquence, being mighty in the scriptures; all which recommended him to all sorts of people, and made him exceeding popular.

After some time, you, this church of Christ, being destitute of a pastor, called him to take the pastoral care of you, which he accepted of, and was solemnly invested with the office of a pastor, elder, or overseer, many ministers assisting in that service, who, all rest from their labors, excepting myself; this, I think, was about five or six and twenty years ago. His ministry among you has been greatly owned to the conversion of many sinners, and to the comfort and edification of you all present, as well as of many that are gone to glory before him.

The low estate in which you were, when he came to this place, and the numbers of which you now consist, and the flourishing condition in which you now are, abundantly show the success of his ministration among you; notwithstanding the breaches, which by one providence or another, have been made upon you; his popularity continuing to the last. Need I describe him as a preacher to you, who, at least many of you, have so long sat under his ministry; his mien and deportment in the pulpit was grave and venerable; his gesture graceful; his address very moving and pathetic; his language striking; his discourses spiritual, savory, and evangelical; having a tendency to awaken the minds of sinners to a sense of sin and danger, and to relieve and comfort distressed minds: he was indeed an eloquent preacher, and a warm defender of the peculiar doctrines of the christian religion; and in one word, laborious, indefatigable, and successful; not a loiterer, but a laborer in the Lord's vineyard; as in his public work, so in the more private duties of his office, visiting the church and members of it, without respect of persons; fervent in his prayers for them, and with them; hearty in his advice unto them, and unwearied in doing any service for them he undertook.

And let me not forget his conduct at your church-meetings, where he presided, becoming his character and office; what authority he used when necessary; what prudence in all things; what patience in bearing with the infirmities of the weak, and it may be sometimes the rudeness of some, and the invectives of others; what lenity to offenders; what compassion to backsliders; what reluctance to pass the awful sentence on the incorrigible, and with what tears in prayer he would weep over such unhappy professors!

His gift in prayer was very remarkable and extraordinary; with what fullness of matter, freedom of mind, and fervor of spirit, as well as pertinency of expression, and propriety of language, would he pour out his soul before God, and wrestle with him; what a compass would he fetch, and reach every case, both private and public; and not only express the sense of his own heart, but that of others that joined with him, in a better and fuller manner, than they could do it for themselves.

He was affable and courteous in his behavior to all men, of a cheerful spirit, his conversation pleasant, profitable, entertaining, and useful: which made him generally beloved by all sorts of persons. In social life, he was the tender husband, the affectionate father, and the faithful friend. In his last illness he was seized at first with such a stupor, as rendered him very little conversible during the whole time; so that nothing of his gracious experience could be taken from him, only some broken words and expressions now and then

were dropped by him, which showed him to be in a spiritual frame: but from a small manuscript, written by him in health, I shall give a few extracts, in which he not only expresses his sense of mercies, temporal and spiritual, but observes the gracious dealings of God with him, and his experience of his divine favor.

"I have had, says he, many sweet visits of his love, especially in secret, and at his table. God, in Christ, adds he, I hope is my portion, his providence my defense, and his good Spirit my guide and comforter." And in another place, he expresses his sense of the corruption of his heart, the infirmities of his life, his faith and hope in a bleeding Savior, and his desires after unspotted purity and holiness; he complains of "a polluted, proud, peevish heart, prone to atheism, folly, and every evil--and of a life tarnished with many blemishes, sad indiscretions, and heart-breaking ingratitude--surely, says he, God hath hardly done more for any, nor any left to do more against him!--then expresses an hope limited to a bleeding mediator--and concludes, blessed day that will bring perfect purity."

Which day is come to him, and has brought it to him. A word or two more, and I have done. To you, the mournful widow of the deceased, give me leave to say, your loss is indeed great; you have lost a kind and indulgent husband; but remember, Christ your spiritual husband lives; and from him, and his love, you can never be separated; put your trust in him, he will never leave you nor forsake you. To you his dear offspring, whom he most affectionately loved, you have lost one who has been, and still would have been, the guide of your youth, and constant monitor; follow his example, remember his instructions; shun the pleasures of sin, and the vanities of this world; flee youthful lusts; seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and serve your father's God, and things will be well with you.

And to you, this church of Christ, among whom he has ministered many years, I would only say, abide by the truths he preached to you; imitate him in everything praiseworthy, and of good report; you have lost your shepherd, keep close to one another, and do not scatter and stray from the fold; preserve the order and discipline of Christ's house; seek peace and pursue it, unite in your counsels, be frequent and fervent in prayer; and I doubt not but in due time, God will send you a pastor to feed you with knowledge, and with understanding. FOOTNOTES:

[1] Upeseilamen. See Hebrews 10:38, 39.

[2] Not at bottom of page.

[3] Qewrou, See John 17:24. Acts 7:56.

[4] Quare non in eo sita est perfectio fidelium, ut affectus omnes exuant, sed ut eos ex justis tantum causis suscipiant & moderentur. Calvin. in loc.

[5] Odunwmenoi. See Luke 2:48. and 16:24, 25.

[6] The Blessing of a Gospel-ministry, etc. p. 30, 32-34.

[7] Dr. Hay, an eminent clergyman, and Professor Ward of Gresham-College.

[8] In a bloody-flux; when cut near the eye by a catstick; when swimming in a mill-pond--wading through a river once and again, etc. MS. penes me.

[9] The Blessing of a Gospel-ministry, etc. p. 3.

[10] See his Scripture Manuel, p. 3, 39.

[11] Tallow-Chandlers Hall.

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