

The Reformed Pastor - Application

by Richard Baxter

Richard Baxter's sermon emphasizes the critical need for humility and self-examination among church leaders to enhance their ministry effectiveness.

Scripture: Matthew 23:12, Romans 12:18, 1 Timothy 4:3, 2 Timothy 2:21, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "Church Unity", "Pastoral Humility"

Description

Richard Baxter preaches about the importance of humility, diligence in the work of the Lord, selflessness, and unity within the Church. He emphasizes the need for ministers to humble themselves before God, lament their past sins, and seek forgiveness and cleansing. Baxter highlights the dangers of pride, negligence in studying and preaching, and prioritizing worldly interests over the work of Christ. He calls for a genuine devotion to God, a zealous pursuit of peace and unity within the Church, and a focus on the common good rather than individual or party interests.

Transcript

1. The Use of Humiliation

Reverend and dear brethren, our business here this day is to humble our souls before the Lord for our past negligence, and to implore God's assistance in our work for the time to come. Indeed, we can scarcely expect the latter without the former. If God will help us in our future duty, he will first humble us for our past sin. He who has not so much sense of his faults as unfeignedly to lament them, will hardly have so much more as to move him to reform them. The sorrow of repentance may exist without a change of heart and life; because a passion may be more easily wrought, than a true conversion. But the change cannot take place without some good measure of the sorrow. Indeed, we may here justly begin our confessions; it is too common with us to expect that from our people, which we do little or nothing in ourselves. What pains do we take to humble them, while we ourselves are unhumbled! How hard do we expostulate with them to wring out of them a few penitential tears (and all too little), while yet our own eyes are dry! Alas, how we set them an example of hard-heartedness, while we are endeavoring by our words to melt and mollify them! Oh, if we did but study half as much to affect and amend our own hearts, as we do those of our hearers, it would not be with many of us as it is (1 Cor. 11:31)! It is a great deal too little that we do for their humiliation; but I fear it is much less that some of us do for our own. Too many do somewhat for other men's souls, while they seem to forget that they have souls of their own to regard. They so carry the matter, as if their part of the work lay in calling for repentance, and the hearers' in

repenting; theirs in bespeaking tears and sorrow, and other men's in weeping and sorrowing; theirs in crying down sin, and the people's in forsaking it; theirs in preaching duty, and the hearers' in practicing it.

But we find that the guides of the Church in Scripture did confess their own sins, as well as the sins of the people. Ezra confessed the sins of the priests, as well as of the people, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God. Daniel confessed his own sin, as well as the people's. I think, if we consider well the duties already stated, and how imperfectly we have performed them, we need not demur upon the question, whether we have cause of humiliation? I must needs say, though I condemn myself in saying it, that he who reads but this one exhortation of Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus, and compares his life with it, must be stupid and hard-hearted, if he do not melt under a sense of his neglects, and be not laid in the dust before God and forced to bewail his great omissions, and to fly for refuge to the blood of Christ, and to his pardoning grace. I am confident, brethren, that none of you do in judgment approve of the libertine doctrine, that cries down the necessity of confession, contrition, and humiliation, yes, and in order to the pardon of sin! Is it not a pity, then, that our hearts are not as orthodox as our heads? But I see we have but half learned our lesson, when we know it, and can say it. When the understanding has learned it, there is more ado to teach our wills and affections, our eyes, our tongues, and hands. It is a sad thing that so many of us preach our hearers asleep; but it is sadder still, if we have studied and preached ourselves asleep, and have talked so long against hardness of heart, until our own has grown hardened under the noise of our own reproofs.

And that you may see that it is not a causeless sorrow that God requires of us, I shall call to your remembrance our manifold sins, and set them in order before you, that we may deal plainly and faithfully in a free confession of them, and that God who is 'faithful and just may forgive them, and cleanse us from all iniquity (1 Jn. 1:9).' In this I suppose I have your hearty consent, and that you will be so far from being offended with me, though I should disgrace your persons, and others in this office, that you will readily subscribe the charge, and be humble self-accusers; and so far am I from justifying myself by the accusation of others, that I do unfeignedly put my name with the first in the bill of indictment. For how can a wretched sinner, one chargeable with so many and so great transgressions, presume to justify himself before God? Or how can he plead guiltless, whose conscience has so much to say against him? If I cast shame upon the ministry, it is not on the office, but on our persons, by opening that sin which is our shame. The glory of our high employment does not communicate any glory to our sin; for 'sin is a reproach to any people.' And be they pastors or people, it is only those who 'confess and forsake their sins that shall have mercy,' while 'he who hardens his heart shall fall into mischief (Prov. 14:34, Prov. 28:13-14).'

The great sins that we are guilty of, I shall not undertake to enumerate; and therefore my passing over any particular one, is not to be taken as a denial or justification of it. But I shall consider it as my duty, to instance some few which cry loud for humiliation and speedy reformation.

Only I must needs first premise this profession, that, notwithstanding all the faults which are now among us, I do not believe that ever England had so able and faithful a ministry since it was a nation, as it has at this day; and I fear that few nations on earth, if any, have the like. Sure I am, the change is so great within these twelve years, that it is one of the greatest joys that ever I had in the world to behold it. Oh, how many congregations are now plainly and frequently taught, that lived then in great obscurity!

How many able, faithful men are there now in a county, in comparison of what were then! How graciously has God prospered the studies of many young men, who were little children in the beginning of the late troubles, so that now they cloud the most of their seniors! How many miles would I have gone twenty

years ago, and less, to have heard one of those ancient reverend divines, whose congregations are now grown thin, and their parts esteemed mean, by reason of the notable improvement of their juniors!

And in particular, how mercifully has the Lord dealt with this poor county of Worcester, in raising up so many who do credit to the sacred office, and self-denyingly and freely, zealously and unweariedly, lay out themselves for the good of souls! I bless the Lord that has placed me in such a neighborhood, where I may have the brotherly fellowship of so many able, faithful, humble, unanimous, and peaceable men. Oh that the Lord would long continue this admirable mercy to this unworthy county!

And I hope I shall rejoice in God while I have a being, for the common change in other parts, that I have lived to see: that so many hundred faithful men are so hard at work for the saving of souls, although with the muttering and gnashing of teeth of the enemy; and that more are springing up apace. I know there are some men, whose parts I reverence, who being, in point of government, of another mind from them, will be offended at my very mention of this happy alteration. But I must profess, if I were absolutely prelatical, if I knew my heart, I could not choose, for all that, but rejoice.

What! Not rejoice at the prosperity of the Church, because the men do differ in one opinion about its order? Should I shut my eyes against the mercies of the Lord? The souls of men are not so contemptible to me, that I should envy them the bread of life because it is broken to them by a hand that had not the prelatical approbation. O that every congregation were thus supplied! But everything cannot be done at once. They had a long time to settle a corrupted ministry; and when the ignorant and scandalous are cast out, we cannot create abilities in others for the supply; we must stay the time of their preparation and growth; and then, if England drive not away the gospel by their abuse, even by their willful unreformedness, and hatred of the light, they are like to be the happiest nation under heaven. For, as for all the sects and heresies that are creeping in and daily troubling us, I doubt not but the gospel, managed by an able self-denying ministry, will effectually disperse and shame them all.

But you may say, this is not confessing sin, but applauding those whose sins you pretend to confess. To this I answer, it is the due acknowledgment of God's kindness, and thanksgiving for his admirable mercies, that I may not seem unthankful in confession, much less to cloud or vilify God's graces, while I open the frailties that in many do accompany them; for many things are sadly out of order in the best, as will appear from the following particulars.

1. One of our most heinous and palpable sins is PRIDE. This is a sin that has too much interest in the best of us, but which is more hateful and inexcusable in us than in other men. Yet is it so prevalent in some of us, that it indicts our discourses, it chooses our company, it forms our countenances, it puts the accent and emphasis upon our words. It fills some men's minds with aspiring desires, and designs. It possesses them with envious and bitter thoughts against those who stand in their light, or who by any means eclipse their glory, or hinder the progress of their reputation. Oh what a constant companion, what a tyrannical commander, what a sly and subtle insinuating enemy, is this sin of pride! It goes with men to the draper, the mercer, the tailor: it chooses them their cloth, their trimming, and their fashion. Fewer ministers would ruffle it out in the fashion in hair and habit, if it were not for the command of this tyrannous vice. And I would that this were all, or the worst. But, alas, how frequently does it go with us to our study, and there sit with us and do our work! How often does it choose our subject, and, more frequently still, our words and ornaments! God commands us to be as plain as we can, that we may inform the ignorant; and as convincing and serious as we are able, that we may melt and change their hardened hearts. But pride stands by and contradicts all, and produces its toys and trifles. It pollutes rather than polishes. And, under

presence of laudable ornaments, dishonors our sermons with childish gauds, as if a prince were to be decked in the habit of a stage-player, or a painted fool. It persuades us to paint the window, that it may dim the light, and to speak to our people that which they cannot understand, to let them know that we are able to speak unprofitably. If we have a plain and cutting passage, it takes off the edge, and dulls the life of our preaching, under presence of filing off the roughness, unevenness, and superfluity. When God charges us to deal with men as for their lives, and to beseech them with all the earnestness that we are able, this cursed sin controls all, and condemns the most holy commands of God, and says to us, 'What! Will you make people do you think are mad? Will you make them say you rage or rave? Cannot you speak soberly and moderately?' And thus does pride make many a man's sermons; and what pride makes, the devil makes; and what sermons the devil will make and to what end, we may easily conjecture. Though the matter be of God, yet if the dress, and manner, and end be from Satan, we have no great reason to expect success.

And when pride has made the sermon, it goes with us into the pulpit, forms our tone, animates us in the delivery, takes us off from that which may be displeasing, how necessary soever, and sets us in pursuit of vain applause. In short, the sum of all is this: it makes men, both in studying and preaching, to seek themselves, and deny God, when they should seek God's glory, and deny themselves. When they should inquire, What shall I say, and how shall I say it, to please God best, and do most good? it makes them ask, What shall I say, and how shall I deliver it, to be thought a learned able preacher, and to be applauded by all that hear me? When the sermon is done, pride goes home with them, and makes them more eager to know whether they were applauded, than whether they did prevail for the saving of souls. Were it not for shame, they could find in their hearts to ask people how they liked them, and to draw out their commendations. If they perceive that they are highly thought of, they rejoice, as having attained their end; but if they see that they are considered but weak or common men, they are displeased, as having missed the prize they had in view.

But even this is not all, nor the worst, if worse may be. Oh, that ever it should be said of godly ministers, that they are so set upon popular air, and on sitting highest in men's estimation, that they envy the talents and names of their brethren who are preferred before them. As if all were taken from their praise that is given to another; and as if God had given them his gifts to be the mere ornaments and trappings of their persons, that they may walk as men of reputation in the world; and as if all his gifts to others were to be trodden down and vilified, if they seem to stand in the way of their honor!

What? A saint, a preacher of Christ, and yet envy that which has the image of Christ, and malign his gifts for which he should have the glory, and all because they seem to hinder our glory? Is not every true Christian a member of the body of Christ, and, therefore, partakes of the blessings of the whole, and of each particular member thereof? And does not every man owe thanks to God for his brethren's gifts, not only as having himself a part in them, as the foot has the benefit of the guidance of the eye; but also because his own ends may be attained by his brethren's gifts, as well as by his own?

For if the glory of God, and the Church's felicity, be not his end, he is not a Christian. Will any workman malign another, because he helps him to do his master's work? Yet, alas, how common is this heinous crime among the ministers of Christ! They can secretly blot the reputation of those that stand in the way of their own; and what they cannot for shame do in plain and open terms, lest they be proved liars and slanderers, they will do in generals, and by malicious intimations, raising suspicions where they cannot fasten accusations.

And some go so far, that they are unwilling that any one who is abler than themselves should come into their pulpits, lest they should be more applauded than themselves. A fearful thing it is, that any man, who has the least of the fear of God, should so envy God's gifts, and had rather that his carnal hearers should remain unconverted, and the drowsy unawakened, than that it should be done by another who may be preferred before him. Yes, so far does this cursed vice prevail, that in great congregations, which have need of the help of many preachers, we can scarcely, in many places, get two of equality to live together in love and quietness, and unanimously to carry on the work of God.

But unless one of them be quite below the other in parts, and content to be so esteemed, or unless he be a curate to the other, and ruled by him, they are contending for precedency, and envying each other's interest, and walking with strangeness and jealousy towards one another, to the shame of their profession, and the great wrong of their people. I am ashamed to think of it, that when I have been laboring to convince persons of public interest and capacity, of the great necessity of more ministers than one in large congregations, they tell me, they will never agree together.

I hope the objection is unfounded as to the most; but it is a sad case that it should be true of any. No, some men are so far gone in pride, that when they might have an equal assistant to further the work of God, they had rather take all the burden upon themselves, though more than they can bear, than that any one should share with them in the honor, or that their interest in the esteem of the people should be diminished.

Hence also it is that men do so magnify their own opinions, and are as censorious of any that differ from them in lesser things, as if it were all one to differ from them and from God. They expect that all should conform to their judgment, as if they were the rulers of the Church's faith; and while we cry down papal infallibility, too many of us would be popes ourselves, and have all stand to our determination, as if we were infallible. It is true, we have more modesty than expressly to say so. We pretend that it is only the evidence of truth that appears in our reasons, that we expect men should yield to, and our zeal is for the truth and not for ourselves. But as that must needs be taken for truth which is ours, so our reasons must needs be taken for valid. And if they be but freely examined and be found fallacious, as we are exceedingly backward to see it ourselves because they are ours, so we are angry that it should be disclosed to others. We so espouse the cause of our errors, as if all that were spoken against them were spoken against our persons, and we were heinously injured to have our arguments thoroughly confuted, by which we injured the truth and the souls of men. The matter is come to this pass, through our pride, that if an error or fallacious argument do fall under the patronage of a reverend name (which is nothing rare), we must either allow it the victory, and give away the truth, or else become injurious to that name that does patronize it. For though you meddle not with their persons, yet do they put themselves under all the strokes which you give their arguments; and feel them as sensibly as if you had spoken of themselves, because they think it will follow in the eyes of others, that weak arguing is a sign of a weak man. If, therefore, you consider it your duty to shame their errors and false reasonings by discovering their nakedness, they take it as if you shamed their persons. And so their names must be a garrison or fortress to their mistakes, and their reverence must defend all their sayings from attack.

So high indeed are our spirits, that when it becomes the duty of any one to reprove or contradict us, we are commonly impatient both of the matter and the manner. We love the man who will say as we say, and be of our opinion, and promote our reputation, though, in other respects, he be less worthy of our esteem. But he is ungrateful to us who contradicts us and differs from us, and deals plainly with us as to our miscarriages and tells us of our faults. Especially in the management of our public arguings, where the eye

of the world is upon us, we can scarcely endure any contradiction or plain dealing. I know that railing language is to be abhorred, and that we should be as tender of each other's reputation, as our fidelity to the truth will permit. But our pride makes too many of us think all men condemn us, that do not admire us, yes, and admire all we say, and submit their judgments to our most palpable mistakes. We are so tender that a man can scarcely touch us but we are hurt. We are so high-minded that a man who is not versed in complimenting and skilled in flattery above the vulgar rate can scarcely tell how to handle us so observantly--and fit our expectations at every turn--without there being some word or some neglect which our high spirits will fasten on and take as injurious to our honor.

I confess I have often wondered that this most heinous sin should be made so light of, and thought so consistent with a holy frame of heart and life, when far less sins are, by ourselves, proclaimed to be so damnable in our people. And I have wondered more, to see the difference between godly preachers and ungodly sinners, in this respect. When we speak to drunkards, worldlings, or ignorant unconverted persons, we disgrace them to the utmost, and lay it on as plainly as we can speak, and tell them of their sin, and shame, and misery; and we expect that they should not only bear all patiently, but take all thankfully. And most that I deal with do take it patiently; and many gross sinners will commend the closest preachers most, and will say that they care not for hearing a man that will not tell them plainly of their sins. But if we speak to godly ministers against their errors or their sins, if we do not honor them and reverence them, and speak as smoothly as we are able to speak, yes, if we mix not commendations with our reproofs, and if the applause be not predominant, so as to drown all the force of the reproof or confutation, they take it as almost an insufferable injury.

Brethren, I know this is a sad confession, but that all this should exist among us, should be more grievous to us than to be told of it. Could the evil be hid, I should not have disclosed it, at least so openly in the view of all. But, alas, it is long ago open to the eyes of the world. We have dishonored ourselves by idolizing our honor; we print our shame, and preach our shame, thus proclaiming it to the whole world. Some will think that I speak overcharitably when I call such persons godly men, in whom so great a sin does so much prevail. I know, indeed, that where it is predominant, not hated, and bewailed, and mortified in the main, there can be no true godliness; and I beseech every man to exercise a strict jealousy and search of his own heart. But if all be graceless that are guilty of any, or of most of the fore-mentioned discoveries of pride, the Lord be merciful to the ministers of this land, and give us quickly another spirit; for grace is then a rarer thing than most of us have supposed it to be.

Yet I must needs say, that I do not mean to involve all the ministers of Christ in this charge. To the praise of Divine grace be it spoken, we have some among us who are eminent for humility and meekness, and who, in these respects, are exemplary to their flocks and to their brethren. It is their glory, and shall be their glory; and makes them truly honorable and lovely in the eyes of God and of all good men, and even in the eyes of the ungodly themselves. O that the rest of us were but such! But, alas, this is not the case with all of us.

O that the Lord would lay us at his feet, in the tears of sincere sorrow for this sin! Brethren, may I expostulate this case a little with my own heart and yours, that we may see the evil of our sin, and be reformed! Is not pride the sin of devils, the first-born of hell? Is it not that wherein Satan's image does much consist? And is it to be tolerated in men who are so engaged against him and his kingdom as we are? The very design of the gospel is to abase us; and the work of grace is begun and carried on in humiliation. Humility is not a mere ornament of a Christian, but an essential part of the new creature. It is a contradiction in terms, to be a Christian, and not humble. All who will be Christians must be Christ's

disciples, and 'come to him to learn'; and the lesson which he teaches them is, to 'be meek and lowly (Mt. 11:29).' Oh, how many precepts and admirable examples has our Lord and Master given us to this end! Can we behold him washing and wiping his servants' feet, and yet be proud and lordly still (Jn. 13)? Shall he converse with the lowest of the people, and shall we avoid them as below our notice, and think none but persons of wealth and honor fit for our society? How many of us are oftener found in the houses of gentlemen than in the cottages of the poor, who most need our help? There are many of us who would think it below us, to be daily with the most needy and beggarly people, instructing them in the way of life and salvation; as if we had taken charge of the souls of the rich only! Alas, what is it that we have to be proud of? Is it of our body? Why, is it not made of the like materials as the brutes; and must it not shortly be as loathsome and abominable as a carcass? Is it of our graces? Why, the more we are proud of them, the less we have to be proud of. When so much of the nature of grace consists in humility, it is a great absurdity to be proud of it. Is it of our knowledge and learning? Why, if we have any knowledge at all, we must needs know how much reason we have to be humble; and if we know more than others, we must know more reason than others to be humble. How little is it that the most learned know, in comparison of that of which they are ignorant! To know that things are past your reach, and to know how ignorant you are, one would think should be no great cause of pride. However, do not the devils know more than you? And will you be proud of that in which the devils excel you? Our very business is to teach the great lesson of humility to our people; and how unfit, then, is it that we should be proud ourselves? We must study humility, and preach humility; and must we not possess and practice humility? A proud preacher of humility is at least a self-condemning man.

What a sad case is it, that so vile a sin is not more easily discerned by us, but many who are most proud can blame it in others, and yet take no notice of it in themselves! The world takes notice of some among us, that they have aspiring minds, and seek for the highest room, and must be the rulers, and bear the sway wherever they come, or else there is no living or acting with them. In any consultations, they come not to search after truth, but to dictate to others, who, perhaps, are fit to teach them. In a word, they have such arrogant domineering spirits, that the world rings of it, and yet they will not see it in themselves!

Brethren, I desire to deal closely with my own heart and yours. I beseech you consider whether it will save us to speak well of the grace of humility while we possess it not, or to speak against the sin of pride while we indulge in it? Have not many of us cause to inquire diligently, whether sincerity will consist with such a measure of pride as we feel? When we are telling the drunkard that he cannot be saved unless he become temperate, and the fornicator that he cannot be saved unless he become chaste, have we not as great reason, if we are proud, to say to ourselves, that we cannot be saved unless we become humble? Pride, in fact, is a greater sin than drunkenness or whoredom; and humility is as necessary as sobriety and chastity. Truly, brethren, a man may as certainly, and more slyly, make haste to hell, in the way of earnest preaching of the gospel, and seeming zeal for a holy life, as in a way of drunkenness and filthiness. For what is holiness, but a devotedness to God and a living to him? And what is a damnable state, but a devotedness to carnal self and a living to ourselves? And does any one live more to himself, or less to God, than the proud man? And may not pride make a preacher study for himself and pray and preach, and live to himself, even when he seems to surpass others in the work? It is not the work without the right principle and end that will prove us upright. The work may be God's, and yet we may do it, not for God, but for ourselves. I confess I feel such continual danger on this point, that if I do not watch, lest I should study for myself, and preach for myself, and write for myself, rather than for Christ, I should soon miscarry; and after all, I justify not myself, when I must condemn the sin.

Consider, I beseech you, brethren, what baits there are in the work of the ministry, to entice a man to selfishness, even in the highest works of piety. The fame of a godly man is as great a snare as the fame of a learned man. But woe to him that takes up the fame of godliness instead of godliness! 'Verily I say unto you, they have their reward (Mt. 6:25).' When the times were all for learning and empty formalities, the temptation of the proud did lie that way. But now, when, through the unspeakable mercy of God, the most lively practical preaching is in credit, and godliness itself is in credit, the temptation of the proud is to pretend to be zealous preachers and godly men. Oh, what a fine thing is it to have the people crowding to hear us, and affected with what we say, and yielding up to us their judgments and affections! What a taking thing is it to be cried up as the ablest and godliest man in the country, to be famed through the land for the highest spiritual excellencies! Alas, brethren, a little grace combined with such inducements will serve to make you join yourselves with the forwardest in promoting the cause of Christ in the world. No, pride may do it without special grace.

Oh, therefore, be jealous of yourselves; and, amid all your studies, be sure to study humility. 'He who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted (1 Peter 5:6).' I commonly observe that almost all men, whether good or bad, do loathe the proud, and love the humble. So far indeed does pride contradict itself, that, conscious of its own deformity, it often borrows the homely dress of humility. We have the more cause to be jealous of it, because it is a sin most deeply rooted in our nature, and as hardly as any extirpated from the soul.

2. We do not so seriously, unreservedly, and laboriously lay out ourselves in the work of the Lord as becomes men of our profession and engagements. I bless the Lord that there are so many who do this work with all their might. But, alas, how imperfectly and how negligently do the most, even of those that we take for godly ministers, go through their work! How few of us do so behave ourselves in our office, as men that are wholly devoted thereto, and who have consecrated all they have to the same end! And because you shall see my grounds for this confession, I shall mention some instances of our sinful negligence.

(1) If we were duly devoted to our work, we should not be so negligent in our studies. Few men are at the pains that are necessary for the right informing of their understanding, and fitting them for their further work. Some men have no delight in their studies, but take only now and then an hour, as an unwelcome task which they are forced to undergo, and are glad when they are from under the yoke. Will neither the natural desire of knowledge, nor the spiritual desire of knowing God and things Divine, nor the consciousness of our great ignorance and weakness, nor the sense of the weight of our ministerial work--will none of all these things keep us closer to our studies, and make us more painful in seeking after truth? O what abundance of things are there that a minister should understand! And what a great defect is it to be ignorant of them! And how much shall we miss such knowledge in our work! Many ministers study only to compose their sermons, and very little more, when there are so many books to be read, and so many matters that we should not be unacquainted with. No, in the study of our sermons we are too negligent, gathering only a few naked truths, and not considering of the most forcible expressions by which we may set them home to men's consciences and hearts. We must study how to convince and get within men, and how to bring each truth to the quick, and not leave all this to our extemporary promptitude, unless in cases of necessity. Certainly, brethren, experience will teach you that men are not made learned or wise without hard study and unwearied labor and experience.

(2) If we were heartily devoted to our work, it would be done more vigorously, and more seriously, than it is by the most of us. How few ministers do preach with all their might, or speak about everlasting joys and

everlasting torments in such a manner as may make men believe that they are in good earnest! It would make a man's heart ache, to see a company of dead, drowsy sinners sitting under a minister, and not hear a word that is likely to quicken or awaken them. Alas, we speak so drowsily and so softly, that sleepy sinners cannot hear. The blow falls so light that hard-hearted sinners cannot feel. The most of ministers will not so much as exert their voice, and stir up themselves to an earnest utterance. But if they do speak loud and earnestly, how few do answer it with weight and earnestness of matter! And yet without this, the voice does little good; the people will esteem it but mere bawling, when the matter does not correspond. It would grieve one to the heart to hear what excellent doctrine some ministers have in hand, while yet they let it die in their hands for want of close and lively application; what fit matter they have for convincing sinners, and how little they make of it; what good they might do if they would set it home, and yet they cannot or will not do it.

O sirs, how plainly, how closely, how earnestly, should we deliver a message of such moment as ours, when the everlasting life or everlasting death of our fellow-men is involved in it! Methinks we are in nothing so wanting as in this seriousness; yet is there nothing more unsuitable to such a business, than to be slight and dull. What! Speak coldly for God, and for men's salvation? Can we believe that our people must be converted or condemned, and yet speak in a drowsy tone? In the name of God, brethren, labor to awaken your own hearts, before you go to the pulpit, that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners. Remember they must be awakened or damned, and that a sleepy preacher will hardly awaken drowsy sinners. Though you give the holy things of God the highest praises in words, yet, if you do it coldly, you will seem by your manner to unsay what you said in the matter. It is a kind of contempt of great things, especially of so great things, to speak of them without much affection and fervency. The manner, as well as the words, must set them forth. If we are commanded, 'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might (Ecc. 9:10),' then certainly such a work as preaching for men's salvation should be done with all our might. But, alas, how few in number are such men! It is only here and there, even among good ministers, that we find one who has an earnest, persuasive, powerful way of speaking, that the people can feel him preach when they hear him.

Though I move you not to a constant loudness in your delivery (for that will make your fervency contemptible), yet see that you have a constant seriousness; and when the matter requires it (as it should do, in the application at least), then lift up your voice, and spare not your spirits. Speak to your people as to men that must be awakened, either here or in hell. Look around upon them with the eye of faith, and with compassion, and think in what a state of joy or torment they must all be forever; and then, methinks, it will make you earnest, and melt your heart to a sense of their condition. Oh, speak not one cold or careless word about so great a business as heaven or hell. Whatever you do, let the people see that you are in good earnest. Truly, brethren, they are great works which have to be done, and you must not think that trifling will dispatch them. You cannot break men's hearts by jesting with them, or telling them a smooth tale, or pronouncing a gaudy oration. Men will not cast away their dearest pleasures at the drowsy request of one that seems not to mean as he speaks, or to care much whether his request be granted or not. If you say that the work is God's, and he may do it by the weakest means, I answer, It is true, he may do so; but yet his ordinary way is to work by means, and to make not only the matter that is preached, but also the manner of preaching instrumental to the work.

With the most of our hearers, the very pronunciation and tone of speech is a great point. The best matter will scarcely move them, if it be not movingly delivered. See, especially, that there be no affectation, but that you speak as familiarly to them as you would do, if you were talking to any of them personally. The

want of a familiar tone and expression is a great fault in most of our deliveries, and that which we should be very careful to amend. When a man has a reading or declaiming tone, like a school-boy saying his lesson, or repeating an oration, few are moved with anything that he says. Let us, therefore, rouse up ourselves to the work of the Lord, and speak to our people as for their lives, and save them as by violence, 'pulling them out of the fire (Jude 2:3).' Satan will not be charmed out of his possession: we must lay siege to the souls of sinners, which are his garrison, and find out where his chief strength lies. We must lay the battery of God's ordnance against it, and ply it close, until a breach is made; and then suffer them not by their shifts to repair it again. As we have reasonable creatures to deal with, and as they abuse their reason against the truth, we must see that our sermons be all convincing, and that we make the light of Scripture and Reason shine so bright in the faces of the ungodly, that it may even force them to see, unless they willfully shut their eyes. A sermon full of mere words, how needy soever it be composed, while it wants the light of evidence, and the life of zeal, is but an image or a well-dressed carcass.

In preaching, there is a communion of souls, and a communication of somewhat from ours to theirs. As we and they have understandings and wills and affections, so must the bent of our endeavors be to communicate the fullest light of evidence from our understandings to theirs, and to warm their hearts, by kindling in them holy affections as by a communication from our own. The great things which we have to commend to our hearers have reason enough on their side, and lie plain before them in the Word of God. We should, therefore, be furnished with all kind of evidence, so that we may come as with a torrent upon their understandings, and with our reasonings and expostulations to pour shame upon all their vain objections, and bear down all before us, that they may be forced to yield to the power of truth.

(3) If we are heartily devoted to the work of God, why do we not compassionate the poor unprovided congregations around us, and take care to help them to find able ministers; and, in the mean time, go out now and then to their assistance, when the business of our particular charge will give us any leave? A sermon in the more ignorant places, purposely for the work of conversion, delivered by the most lively, powerful preachers, might be a great help where constant means are wanting.

3. Another sad discovery that we have not so devoted ourselves and all we have to the service of God as we ought, is our prevailing regard to our worldly interests in opposition to the interest and work of Christ. This I shall manifest in three instances:

(1) The temporizing of ministers. I would not have any to be contentious with those that govern them, nor to be disobedient to any of their lawful commands. But it is not the least reproach of ministers, that the most of them, for worldly advantage, do always suit themselves to the party which is most likely to promote their ends. If they look for secular advantages, they suit themselves to the secular power; if for popular applause, they suit themselves to the Church party that is most in credit. This, alas, is an epidemic malady. In Constantine's days how prevalent were the Orthodox! In Constantine's days they almost all turned Arians, so that there were very few bishops that did not apostatize or betray the truth, even of the very men that had been in the Council of Nicaea. Indeed when not only Liberius, but great Ossius himself fell, who had been the president in so many orthodox councils, what better could be expected of weaker men? Were it not for secular advantage, how should it come to pass that ministers, in all countries of the world, are either all, or almost all, of that religion that is most in credit, and most consistent with their worldly interests? Among the Greeks, they are all of the Greek profession; among the Papists, they are almost all Papists; in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, they are almost all Lutherans; and so in other countries. It is strange that they should be all in the right in one country, and all in the wrong in another, if carnal advantages did not sway much with men, when they engage in the search of truth. The variety of

intellect, and numberless other circumstances, would unavoidably occasion a great variety of opinions on various points. But let the prince, and the stream of men in power, go one way, and you shall have the generality of ministers agree with them to a hair, and that without any extraordinary search. How generally did the common sort of ministers change their religion with the prince, at several times, in this land! Not all, indeed, as our Martyrology can witness, but yet the most. And the same tractable distemper does still follow us, so that it occasions our enemies to say that reputation and preferment are our religion and our reward.

(2) We too much mind worldly things, and shrink from duties that will injure or hinder our temporal interests. How common is it for ministers to drown themselves in worldly business! Too many are such as the sectaries would have us to be, who tell us that we should go to the plough and labor for our living, and preach without so much study. This is a lesson which is easily learned. Men show no anxiety to cast off care, that their own souls and the Church may have all their care.

And especially, how commonly are those duties neglected, that are likely, if performed, to diminish our estates! Are there not many, for example, that dare not, that will not, set up the exercise of discipline in their churches, because it may hinder the people from paying them their dues? They will not offend sinners with discipline, lest they offend them in their estates. I find money is too strong an argument for some men to answer, that yet can proclaim 'the love of it to be the root of all evil,' and can make long orations of the danger of covetousness. I will at present say no more to them but this: If it was so deadly a sin in Simon Magus to offer to buy the gift of God with money, what is it to sell his gift, his cause, and the souls of men for money? And what reason have we to fear, lest our money perish with us!

(3) Our barrenness in works of charity, and in improving all we have for our Master's service. If worldly interest did not much prevail against the interest of Christ and the Church, surely most ministers would be more fruitful in good works, and would more lay out what they have for his glory. Experience has fully proved that works of charity do most powerfully remove prejudice, and open the heart to words of piety. If men see that you are addicted to do good, they will the more easily believe that you are good, and that it is good which you persuade them to. When they see that you love them, and seek their good, they will the more easily trust you. And when they see that you seek not the things of the world, they will the less suspect your intentions, and the more easily be drawn by you to seek that which you seek. Oh, how much good might ministers do, if they did set themselves wholly to do good, and would dedicate all their faculties and substance to that end! Say not that it is a small matter to do good to men's bodies, and that this will but win them to us, and not to God; for it is prejudice that is a great hindrance of men's conversion, and this will help to remove it. We might do men more good, if they were but willing to learn of us; and this will make them willing, and then our further diligence may profit them. I beseech you, brethren, do not think that it is ordinary charity that is expected from you, any more than ordinary piety. You must, in proportion to your talents, go much beyond others. It is not enough to give a little to a poor man: others do that as well as you. But what singular thing do you do with your estates for your Master's service? I know you cannot give away that which you have not; but methinks all that you have should be devoted to God. I know the great objection is, 'We have a wife and children to provide for: a little will not serve them at present, and we are not bound to leave them beggars.' To this I answer:

[a] There are few texts of Scripture more abused than that of the apostle, 'He who provides not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.' This is made a pretense for gathering up portions, and providing a full estate for posterity. Rather, the apostle speaks only against them that did cast their poor kindred and family on the Church, to be maintained out

of the common stock, when they were able to do it themselves; as if one has a widow in his house that is his mother or daughter, and would have her to be kept by the parish when he has enough himself. The following words show that it is present provision, and not future portions, that the apostle speaks of, when he bids 'them that have widows relieve them, and let not the church be charged, that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.'

[b] You may so educate your children as other persons do, that they may be able to gain their own livelihood by some honest trade or employment, without other great provisions. I know that your charity and care must begin at home, but it must not end there. You are bound to do the best you can to educate your children, so as they may be capable of being most serviceable to God, but not to leave them rich, nor to forbear other necessary works of charity, merely to make a larger provision for them. There must be some proportion between the provision we make for our families, and for the Church of Christ. A truly charitable self-denying heart, that has devoted itself and all that it has to God, would be the best judge of the due proportions, and would see which way of expense is likely to do God the greatest service, and that way it would take.

[c] I confess I would not have men lie too long under temptations to incontinency, lest they wound themselves and their profession by their falls. But yet methinks it is hard that men can do no more to mortify the concupiscence of the flesh, that they may live in a single condition, and have none of those temptations from wife and children, to hinder them from furthering their ministerial ends by charitable works. If he who marries not does better than he who does marry, surely ministers should labor to do that which is best. And if he who can 'receive this saying,' must receive it, we should endeavor after it (1 Cor. 7:38). This is one of the highest points of the Romish policy, which alleges that it is the duty of bishops, priests, and other religious orders, not to marry, by which means they have no posterity to drain the church's revenues, nor to take up their care. But they make the public cause to be their interest, and they lay out themselves for it while they live, and leave all they have to it when they die (1 Tim. 4:3). It is a pity that for a better cause we can no more imitate them in self-denial, where it might be done.

[d] But those who must marry, should take such as can maintain themselves and their children, or maintain them at the rate which their temporal means will afford, and devote as much of the church's means to the church's service as they can.

I would put no man upon extremes. But in this case, flesh and blood does even make good men so partial, that they take their duties, and duties of very great worth and weight, to be extremes. If worldly vanities did not blind us, we might see when a public, or other greater good, did call us to deny ourselves and our families. Why should we not live more nearly and poorer in the world, rather than leave those works undone, which may be of greater use than our plentiful provision? But we consult in points of duty with flesh and blood; and what counsel it will give us, we may easily know. It will tell us we must have a competency; and many pious men's competency is but little below the rich man's rates in the parable (Luke 16:19). If they be not clothed in the best, and 'fare sumptuously every day,' they have not a competency. A man that preaches an immortal crown, should not seek much after transitory vanity. And he who preaches the contempt of riches should himself condemn them and show it by his life. And he who preaches self-denial and mortification should practice these virtues in the eyes of them to whom he preaches, if he would have his doctrine believed. All Christians are sanctified; and, therefore, themselves, and all that they have, are consecrated 'to the Master's use (2 Tim. 2:21).'

But ministers are doubly sanctified: they are devoted to God, both as Christians and as ministers; and, therefore, they are doubly obligated to honor him with all they have.

Oh, brethren, what abundance of good works are before us, and to how few of them do we put our hands! I know the world expects more from us than we have; but if we cannot answer the expectations of the unreasonable, let us do what we can to answer the expectations of God, and of conscience, and of all just men. 'This is the will of God, that with well doing we should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men (I Peter 2:15).'

Those ministers, especially, that have larger incomes must be larger in doing good. I will give but one instance at this time. There are some ministers who have a hundred and fifty, two hundred, or three hundred pounds a year of salary, and have so large parishes that they are not able to do a quarter of the ministerial work, nor once in a year to deal personally with half their people for their instruction. Yet they will content themselves with public preaching, as if that were all that was necessary, and leave almost all the rest undone, to the everlasting danger or damnation of multitudes, rather than maintain one or two diligent men to assist them. Or if they have an assistant, it is but some young man who is but poorly qualified for the work, and not one that will faithfully and diligently watch over the flock, and afford them that personal instruction which is so necessary. If this be not serving ourselves of God, and selling men's souls for our fuller maintenance in the world, what is? Methinks such men should fear, lest, while they are accounted excellent preachers and godly ministers by men, they should be accounted cruel soul-murderers by Christ; and lest the cries of those souls which they have betrayed to damnation, should ring in their ears forever and ever. Will preaching a good sermon serve the turn, while you never look more after them, but deny them that closer help that is necessary, and alienate that maintenance to your own flesh, which should provide relief for so many souls? How can you open your mouths against oppressors, when you yourselves are so great oppressors, not only of men's bodies, but of their souls? How can you preach against unmercifulness, while you are so unmerciful? And how can you talk against unfaithful ministers, while you are so unfaithful yourselves? The sin is not small because it is unobserved, and is not odious in the eyes of men, or because the charity which you withhold is such as the people blame you not for withholding. Satan himself, their greatest enemy, has their consent all along in the work of their perdition. It is no extenuation, therefore, of your sin, that you have their consent: for that you may sooner have for their everlasting hurt, than for their everlasting good.

And now, sirs, I beseech you to take what has been said into consideration. See whether this be not the great and lamentable sin of the ministers of the gospel, that they be not fully devoted to God, and give not up themselves, and all that they have, to the carrying on of the blessed work which they have undertaken? See whether flesh-pleasing and self-seeking, and an interest distinct from that of Christ, do not make us neglect much of our duty, and serve God in the cheapest and most applauded part of his work, and withdraw from that which would subject us to cost and sufferings? And see whether this do not show that too many of us are earthly that seem to be heavenly, and mind the things below, while they preach the things above, and idolize the world while they call men to condemn it? And as Salvian says, 'No one neglects salvation more than he who prefers something above God.' Despisers of God will prove despisers of their own salvation.

4. We are sadly guilty of undervaluing the unity and peace of the whole Church. Though I scarcely meet with any one who will not speak for unity and peace, or, at least, that will expressly speak against it, yet is it not common to meet with those who are studious to promote it. But too commonly do we find men averse to it, and jealous of it, if not themselves the instruments of division. The Papists have so long abused the name of the catholic Church, that, in opposition to them, many either put it out of their creeds, or only retain the name while they understand not, or consider not the nature of the thing. Or they think it is

enough to believe that there is such a body, though they behave not themselves as members of it. If the Papists will idolize the Church, shall we therefore deny it, disregard it, or divide it? It is a great and a common sin throughout the Christian world, to take up religion in a way of faction; and instead of a love and tender care of the universal Church, to confine that love and respect to a party. Not but that we must prefer, in our estimation and communion, the purer parts before the impure, and refuse to participate with any in their sins; yet the most infirm and diseased part should be compassionated and assisted to the utmost of our power. And communion must be held as far as is lawful, and nowhere avoided, but upon the urgency of necessity; as we must love those of our neighborhood that have the plague or leprosy, and afford them all the relief we can. We acknowledge all our just relations to them, and communicate to them, though we may not have local communion with them; and in other diseases which are not so infectious, we may be the more with them for their help, by how much the more they need it.

Of the multitude that say they are of the catholic Church, it is rare to meet with men of a catholic spirit. Men have not a universal consideration of, and respect to, the whole Church, but look upon their own party as if it were the whole. If there be some called Lutherans, some Calvinists, some subordinate divisions among these, and so of other parties among us, most of them will pray hard for the prosperity of their party, and rejoice and give thanks when it goes well with them. But if any other party suffer, they little regard it, as if it were no loss at all to the Church. If it be the smallest parcel that possesses not many nations, no, nor cities on earth, they are ready to carry it, as if they were the whole Church, and as if it went well with the Church when it goes well with them. We cry down the Pope as Antichrist, for including the Church in the Romish pale, and no doubt but it is abominable schism: but, alas, how many do imitate them too far, while they reprove them! And as the Papists foist the word Roman into their creed, and turn the catholic Church into the Roman Catholic church, as if there were no other Catholics, and the Church were of no larger extent, so is it with many others as to their several parties. Some will have it to be the Lutheran catholic church, and some the Reformed catholic church; some the Anabaptist catholic church, and so of some others. And if they differ not among themselves, they are little troubled at differing from others, though it be from almost all the Christian world. The peace of their party they take for the peace of the Church. No wonder, therefore, if they carry it no further.

How rare is it to meet with a man that smarts or bleeds with the Church's wounds, or sensibly takes them to heart as his own, or that ever had solicitous thoughts of a curer. No; but almost every party thinks that the happiness of the rest consists in turning to them. And because they be not of their mind, they cry, Down with them! and are glad to hear of their fall, as thinking that is the way to the Church's rising, that is, their own. How few are there who understand the true state of controversies between the several parties; or that ever well discerned how many of them are but verbal, and how many are real! And if those that understand it do, in order to right information and accommodation, disclose it to others, it is taken as an extenuation of their error, and as a carnal compliance with them in their sin. Few men grow zealous for peace until they grow old, or have much experience of men's spirits and principles; and see better the true state of the Church, and the several differences, than they did before. And then they begin to write their Irenicons, and many such are extant at this day. As a young man in the heat of his lust and passion was judged to be no fit auditor of moral philosophy, so we find that those same young men who may be zealous for peace and unity, when they are grown more experienced, are zealous for their factions against these in their youthful heat. And therefore, such peacemakers as these before-mentioned do seldom do much greater good than to quiet their own consciences in the discharge of so great a duty; and to moderate some few, and save them from further guilt; and to leave behind them, when they are dead, a witness against a willful, self-conceited, unpeaceable world.

No, commonly it brings a man under suspicion either of favoring some heresy or abating his zeal, if he do but attempt a pacificatory work. As if there were no zeal necessary for the great fundamental verities of the Church's unity and peace, but only for parties, and some particular truths.

And a great advantage the devil has got this way, by employing his own agents, the unhappy Socinians, in writing so many treatises for catholic and arch-catholic unity and peace, which they did for their own ends. By which means the enemy of peace has brought it to pass, that whoever makes motion for peace, is presently under suspicion of being one that has need of it for an indulgence to his own errors. A fearful case, that heresy should be credited, as if none were such friends to unity and peace as they; and that so great and necessary a duty, upon which the Church's welfare does so depend, should be brought into such suspicion or disgrace.

Brethren, I speak not all this without apparent reason. We have as sad divisions among us in England, considering the piety of the persons, and the smallness of the matter of our discord, as most nations under heaven have known. The most that keeps us at odds is but the right form and order of Church government. Is the distance so great, that Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Independent might not be well agreed? Were they but heartily willing and forward for peace, they might. I know they might. I have spoken with some moderate men of all the parties, and I perceive, by their concessions, it were an easy work. Were men's hearts but sensible of the Church's case, and unfeignedly touched with love to one another, and did they but heartily set themselves to seek it, the settling of a safe and happy peace were an easy work. If we could not in every point agree, we might easily narrow our differences, and hold communion upon our agreement in the main, determining on the safest way for managing our few and small disagreements, without the danger or trouble of the Church. But is this much done? It is not done. To the shame of all our faces be it spoken, it is not done. Let each party flatter themselves now as they please, it will be recorded to the shame of the ministry of England while the gospel shall abide in the world.

And oh what heinous aggravations do accompany this sin! Never men, since the apostles' days, I think, did make greater profession of godliness. The most of them are bound by solemn oaths and covenants, for unity and reformation. They all confess the worth of peace, and most of them will preach for it, and talk for it, while yet they sit still and neglect it, as if it were not worth the looking after. They will read and preach on those texts that command us to 'follow peace with all men,' and 'as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with them (Heb. 12:14, Rom. 12:18).' Yet they are so far from following it, and doing all they possibly can for it, that many snarl at it, and malign and censure any that endeavor to promote it. They act as if all zeal for peace did proceed from an abatement of our zeal for holiness, and as if holiness and peace were so fallen out, that there were no reconciling them. Yet it has been found, by long experience, that concord is a sure friend to piety, and piety always moves to concord; while, on the other hand, errors and heresies are bred by discord, as discord is bred and fed by them. We have seen, to our sorrow, that where the servants of God should have lived together as one--of one heart, and one soul, and one lip--and should have promoted each other's faith and holiness, and admonished and assisted each other against sin, and rejoiced together in the hope of future glory, we have, on the contrary, lived in mutual jealousies. We have drowned holy love in bitter contentions, and studied to disgrace and undermine one another, and to increase our own parties by right or wrong. We, that were used to glory of our love to the brethren as a mark of our sincerity in the faith, have now turned it into the love of a party only; and those that are against that party have more of our spleen and envy and malice, than our love. I know this is not so with all, nor prevalently with any true believer, yet it is so common that it may cause us to question the sincerity of many that are thought by themselves and others to be most sincere.

And it is not ourselves only that are scorched in this flame, but we have drawn our people into it, and cherished them in it, so that most of the godly in the nation are fallen into parties, and have turned much of their ancient piety into vain opinions and disputes and envyings and animosities. Yes, whereas it was used to be made the certain mark of a graceless wretch to deride the godly, how few are there now that stick at secretly deriding and slandering those that are not of their opinions! A pious Prelatical man can reverently scorn and slander a Presbyterian; and a Presbyterian an Independent; and an Independent both. And, what is the worst of all, the common ignorant people take notice of all this, and do not only deride us, but are hardened by us against religion. And when we go about to persuade them to be religious, they see so many parties, that they know not which to join; and think that it is as good to be of none at all, as of any, since they are uncertain which is the right. Thus thousands are grown into a contempt of all religion, by our divisions; and many poor carnal wretches begin to think themselves in the better case of the two, because they hold to their old formalities, when we hold to nothing.

I know that some of these men are learned and reverend, and intend not such mischievous ends as these. The hardening of men in ignorance is not their design. But this is the thing effected. To intend well in doing ill is no rarity. Who can, in reverence to any man on earth, sit still and hold his tongue, while he sees people thus run to their own destruction, and the souls of men undone by the contentions of divines for their several parties and interests? The Lord that knows my heart, knows (if I know it myself) that as I am not of any one of these parties, so I speak not a word of this in a factious partiality for one party, or against another, as such, much less in spleen against any person. But if I dare in conscience, I would have silenced all this, for fear of giving them offence whom I must honor. But what am I but a servant of Christ? And what is my life worth, but to do him service? And whose favor can recompense me for the ruin of the Church? And who can be silent while souls are undone? Not I, for my part, while God is my Master, and his Word my rule; his work my business; and the success of it, for the saving of souls, my end. Who can be reconciled to that which so lamentably crosses his Master's interest, and his main end in life? Nor yet would I have spoken any of this, had it been only in respect to my own charge, where, I bless God, the sore is but small, in comparison of what it is in many other places. But the knowledge of some neighboring congregations, and of others more remote, has drawn out these observations from me.

We may talk of peace, indeed, as long as we live, but we shall never obtain it but by returning to the apostolical simplicity. The Papists' faith is too big for all men to agree upon, or even all their own, if they enforced it not with arguments drawn from the fire, the halter, and the strappado. And many anti-Papists do

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