

the tempted, and the doubting? How can he feed the sheep and the lambs of Christ? How can he sympathize with mourners in Zion? How can he comfort others with those consolations wherewith he himself has never been comforted of God? He cannot possibly perform, as he ought, any of these duties, and yet they are the most precious and interesting parts of the ministerial work. However gigantic his intellectual powers, however deep and various and accurate his learning, he is not *able*, in relation to any of these points, to *teach others*, seeing he is not taught himself. If he makes the attempt, it will be “the blind leading the blind;” and of this, unerring wisdom has told us the consequence.

See Matt.
11:5

It is rash, indeed, and unwarranted, to say that a man who knows nothing of the power of godliness may not be employed, by a sovereign God, as the means of saving benefit to others. God undoubtedly may, and probably sometimes does, “by way of miracle, raise a man to life by the bones of a dead prophet.” He may, and there is reason to believe he sometimes does, “honor his own word so far as to make it effectual to salvation, even when it falls from unhallowed lips.” The ministry even of Judas Iscariot was, probably, not without its benefit to the Church of Christ. But such a result is not, in ordinary cases, and certainly not in any considerable degree, to be expected. When unsanctified ministers are introduced into the Church, we may generally expect them to prove not only an offense to God, but also a curse to his people. Piety, orthodoxy, practical holiness, and all the spiritual glories of *the household of faith*, will commonly be found to decline in proportion to the number and influence of these enemies in disguise.

See 2 Kings
13:21

And here I cannot help bearing testimony against what appears to me a dangerous mistake — which, though it may not be common, yet sometimes occurs among parents and guardians of the more serious class. I mean the mistake of *destining* young persons to the gospel ministry from a very early period of life, before they can be supposed, from any enlightened view of the subject, to concur in the choice themselves; and before they give any satisfactory evidence of vital piety. Brethren, I venerate the parent who desires, and daily prays, that it may please God to prepare and dispose his

2 Cor. 5:18

child to serve him in “the ministry of reconciliation.” Nay, I think that parent worthy of the thanks of every friend to religion, who solemnly devotes his child, even from the earliest period of his life, to the service of the Church, and avowedly conducts every part of his education with a view to this great object; provided the original consecration, and every subsequent arrangement, is made on the condition, carefully and frequently *expressed*, as well as *implied*, that God shall be pleased to sanction and accept the offering, by imparting his grace, and giving a heart to love and desire the sacred work. But there is a wide difference between this, and resolving that a particular son shall be a minister, in the same manner, and on the same principles, as another is devoted to the medical profession, or to the bar, as a respectable employment in life — without recognizing vital piety, and the deliberate choice of the ministry, from religious motives, as indispensable qualifications. This kind of destination to the sacred office is as dangerous as it is unwarranted.

Let the Christian parent, however solemnly he may have devoted his child to the work of the ministry, and however fondly he may have anticipated his entrance on that blessed work; if he finds, at the proper age for deciding the question, no comfortable evidence of a heart regenerated, and governed by the Spirit of grace; let him deliberately advise — though his heart is wrung with anguish by the sacrifice — let him deliberately advise the choice of another profession. When young men begin to enter the gospel ministry because they were early destined to the office, because it is a respectable profession, or because they wish to gratify parents and friends — rather than because they love the office and its work, and have reason to hope that God has been pleased to “call them by his grace, and reveal his Son in them” — we may consider the ministry as in a fair way to be made, in fact, a *secular* employment, and the Church a prostituted theater for the schemes and ambition of worldly men.

Cf. Gal.
1:15-16

So deeply and vitally important is piety in forming a faithful and able ministry; and so often has it appeared to be forgotten, or, at least, undervalued amidst the brilliancy of more splendid accomplishments; that there cannot be too strict a guard placed on this point, both by public sentiment, and by