

I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY AN ABLE AND FAITHFUL MINISTRY?

It is at once *qualified* and *disposed* to perform, with enlightened and unwearied assiduity, all the duties — whether of instruction, of defense, or of discipline — which belong to ambassadors of Christ, to pastors and rulers in his Church.

The general character implies PIETY, TALENTS, LEARNING, and DILIGENCE.

1. The *first* requisite to form a faithful and able minister is PIETY. By this I mean, that he is a regenerated man; that he has a living faith in that Savior whom he preaches to others; that the love of Christ habitually constrains him; that he has himself walked in those paths of humility, self-denial, and holy communion with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, in which it is the business of his life to endeavor to lead his fellow men.

I shall not now speak of the necessity of piety to a minister's personal salvation, nor of its inestimable importance to his personal comfort. I shall not dwell on the irksomeness (nay, the intolerable drudgery) of laboring in a vocation in which the heart does not go along, nor on the painful misgivings which must ever attend preaching an unknown Savior, and recommending untasted hopes and joys. Neither shall I attempt to describe, tremendous and overwhelming as it is, the aggravated doom of that man, who, from the heights of this sacred office, shall sink into the abyss of the damned: who, "after having preached to others, shall himself become a castaway." But my object is to show the importance, and the necessity, of this best of all attainments, in order to *qualify* any man for discharging the duties of the ministerial office. It is to show that, without piety, he cannot be an *able* minister. He cannot be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, giving to each his portion in due season."

How can a man who knows only the theory of religion undertake to be a practical guide in spiritual things? How can he adapt his instructions to all the varieties of Christian experience? How can he direct the awakened, the inquiring,

Cf. 1 Cor.
9:27

2 Tim. 2:15;
cf. Luke
12:42

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

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