

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

ministerial fidelity. Many very excellent men, indeed, have felt a jealousy of theological seminaries, as such, as if they were calculated for training up learned and eloquent, rather than pious ministers. Though I believe that this jealousy has been sometimes indulged unjustly, and often carried to an unwise and mischievous extreme; and though there appears to me no other ground for it; yet I cannot find in my heart to condemn it altogether. Nay, I trust that a portion of it will always be kept alive, as a guard, under God, against the evil which it deprecates. For I persuade myself that every minister of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States, is ready to adopt the language, with a little variation, of that great and excellent man who, for nearly thirty years, adorned the American Church, and the presidential chair of this College.

Accursed be all that learning which sets itself in opposition to vital piety! Accursed be all that learning which disguises, or is ashamed of, vital piety! Accursed be all that learning, which attempts to fill the place, or to supersede the honors, of vital piety! Nay, accursed be all that learning which is not made subservient to the promotion and the glory of vital piety! ¹

But piety, though it holds the first place among essential qualifications here, is not *all* that is necessary. It is not every pious man, nay, not every fervently pious man, that is qualified to be a minister, and far less an *able* minister. Another essential requisite to form the character of such a minister is,

2. TALENTS. By which I mean, not that every minister must, of necessity, be a *man of genius*; but that he must be a man of *good sense*, of *native discernment* and *discretion* — in other words, of a *sound respectable natural understanding*.

When our blessed Lord was about to send forth his first ministers, he said unto them, "Be ye wise as serpents," as well as "harmless as doves." And truly, there is no employment under heaven in which wisdom, practical wisdom, is so important, or rather, so imperiously and indispensably demanded, as in the "ministry of reconciliation." A man of a

Matt. 10:16

¹ See Witherspoon's sermon on "glorying in the cross of Christ."