

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard Baxter:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28).

Though some think that Paul's exhortation to these elders does prove him their ruler, we who are this day to speak to you from the Lord, hope that we may freely do the like, without any jealousies of such a conclusion. Though we teach our people, as officers set over them in the Lord, yet may we teach one another as brethren in office, as well as in faith. If the people of our charge must "teach and admonish and exhort each other daily," no doubt teachers may do it to one another without any super-eminency of power or degree. We have the same sins to mortify, and the same graces to be quickened and strengthened, as our people have: we have greater works to do than they have, and greater difficulties to overcome, and therefore we have need to be warned and awakened, if not to be instructed, as well as they. So that I confess I think such meetings together should be more frequent, if we had nothing else to do but this. And we should deal as plainly and closely with one another as the most serious among us do with our flocks, lest if they only have sharp admonitions and reproofs, they only should be sound and lively in the faith.

That this was Paul's judgment, I need no other proof, than this rousing, heart-melting exhortation to the Ephesian elders. A short sermon, but not soon learned! Had the bishops and teachers of the Church but thoroughly learned this short exhortation, though to the neglect of many a volume which has taken up their time, and helped them to greater applause in the world, how happy had it been for the Church, and for themselves!

In further discoursing on this text, I propose to pursue the following method:

First, To consider what it is to take heed to ourselves.

Secondly, To show why we must take heed to ourselves.

1. The Nature of This Oversight

Let us consider what it means to take heed to ourselves.

1. See that the work of saving grace be thoroughly wrought in your own souls. Take heed to yourselves, lest you be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you preach. Beware lest, while you proclaim to the world the necessity of a Savior, your own hearts should neglect him, and you should miss an interest in him and his saving benefits. Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed of perishing; and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare food for them. Though there is a promise of shining as the stars, to those "who turn many to righteousness," that is only on supposition that they are first turned to it themselves. Their own sincerity in the faith is the condition of their glory, simply considered, though their great ministerial labors may be a condition of the promise of their greater glory.

Many have warned others that they come not to that place of torment, while yet they hastened to it themselves: many a preacher is now in hell, who has a hundred times called upon his hearers to use the utmost care and diligence to escape it. Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refuse it themselves; and for telling others those truths which they themselves neglect and abuse? Many a tailor goes in rags, that makes costly clothes for others; and many a cook scarcely licks his fingers, when he has dressed for others the most costly dishes. Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in his Master's work. Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them to believe, and heartily entertain that Savior whom you offer to them. (Mk. 12:31) He who bade you love your neighbors as yourselves, did imply that you should love yourselves, and not hate and destroy yourselves and them.

It is a fearful thing to be an unsanctified professor, but much more to be an unsanctified preacher. Does it not make you tremble when you open the Bible, lest you should there read the sentence of your own condemnation? When you pen your sermons, little do you think that you are drawing up indictments against (Eph.3:19) your own souls! When you are arguing against sin, that you are aggravating your own! When you proclaim to your hearers the unsearchable riches of Christ and his grace, that you are publishing your own iniquity in rejecting them, and your unhappiness in being destitute of them! What can you do in persuading men

to Christ, in drawing them from the world, in urging them to a life of faith and holiness, but (Eph.5:6) conscience, if it were awake, would tell you, that you speak all this to your own confusion? If you speak of hell, you speak of your own inheritance: if you describe the joys of heaven, you describe your own misery, seeing you have no right to "the inheritance of the saints in light." What can you say, for the most part, but it will be against your own souls? O miserable life! that a man should study and preach against himself, and spend his days in a course of self-condemning!

A graceless, inexperienced preacher is one of the most unhappy creatures upon earth: and yet he is ordinarily very insensible of his unhappiness; for he has so many counters that seem like the gold of saving grace, and so many splendid stones that resemble Christian jewels, that he is seldom troubled with the thoughts of his poverty; but (Rev3:15) thinks he is "rich, and increased in goods, and stands in need of nothing, when he is poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked." He is acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, he is exercised in holy duties, he lives not in open disgraceful sin, he serves at God's altar, he reproves other men's faults, and preaches up holiness both of heart and life; and how can this man choose but be holy? Oh what aggravated misery is this, to perish in the midst of plenty! To famish with the bread of life in our hands, while we offer it to others, and urge it on them! That those ordinances of God should be the occasion of our delusion, which are instituted to be the means of our conviction and salvation! and that while we hold the looking-glass of the gospel to others, to show them the face and aspect of their souls, we should either look on the back part of it ourselves, where we can see nothing, or turn it aside, that it may misrepresent us to ourselves!

If such a wretched man would take my counsel, he would make a stand, and call his heart and life to an account, and fall a preaching a while to himself, before he preach any more to others. He would consider, whether food in the mouth, that goes not into the stomach, will nourish; whether he that "names the (2 Tim.2:19) name of Christ should not depart from iniquity;" whether God will hear his prayers, if "he regard (Ps. 66:18) iniquity in his heart;" whether it will serve the turn at the day of reckoning to say, "Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in your name," when he shall hear these awful words, "Depart from me, I know (Mk 7:21-23) you not;" and what comfort it will be to Judas, when he has gone to his own place, to remember that he preached with the other apostles, or that he sat with Christ, and was called by him, "Friend." When such thoughts as these have entered into their souls, and kindly worked a while upon their consciences, I would advise them to go to their congregation, and preach over Origen's sermon on Psalm 50:16,17: "But unto the wicked God says, What have you to do to declare my statutes, or that you should take my covenant into your mouth? seeing you hate instruction, and cast my words behind you." And when they have read this text, to sit down, and expound and apply it by their tears; and then to make a full and free confession of their sin, and lament their case before the whole assembly, and desire their earnest prayers to God for pardoning and renewing grace; that hereafter they may preach a Savior whom they know, and may feel what they speak, and may commend the riches of the gospel from their own experience.

Alas! it is the common danger and calamity of the Church, to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors, and to have so many men become preachers before they are Christians; who are sanctified by dedication to the altar as the priests of God, before they are sanctified by hearty dedication as the disciples of Christ; and so to worship an unknown God, and to preach an unknown Christ, to pray through an unknown Spirit, to recommend a state of holiness and communion with God, and a glory and a happiness which are all unknown, and like to be unknown to them forever. He is like to be but a heartless preacher, that has not the Christ and grace that he preaches, in his heart.

O that all our students in our universities would well consider this! What a poor business is it to themselves, to spend their time in acquiring some little knowledge of the works of God, and of some of those names which the divided tongues of the nations have imposed on them, and not to know God himself, nor exalt him in their hearts, nor to be acquainted with that one renewing work that should make them happy!(Ps.39:6) They do but "walk in a vain show," and spend their lives like dreaming men, while they busy their wits and tongues about abundance of names and notions, and are strangers to God and the life of saints. If ever God awaken them by his saving grace, they will have cogitations and employments so much more serious than their unsanctified studies and disputations, that they will confess they did but dream before. A world of business they make themselves about nothing, while they are willful strangers to the primitive, independent, necessary Being, who is all in all.

Nothing can be rightly known, if God be not known; nor is any study well managed, nor to any great purpose, if God is not studied. We know little of the creature, until we know it as it stands related to the Creator: single letters, and syllables uncomposed, are no better than nonsense. He who overlooks him who is the "Alpha and Omega, the (Rev.1:8) beginning and the ending," and sees not him in all who is the All of all, does see nothing at all. All creatures, as such, are broken syllables; they signify nothing as separated from God. Were they

separated actually, they would cease to be, and the separation would be an annihilation; and when we separate them in our fancies, we make nothing of them to ourselves. It is one thing to know the creatures as Aristotle, and another thing to know them as a Christian. None but a Christian can read one line of his Physics so as to understand it rightly. It is a high and excellent study, and of greater use than many apprehend; but it is the smallest part of it that Aristotle can teach us.

When man was made perfect, and placed in a perfect world, where all things were in perfect order, the whole creation was then man's book, in which he was to read the nature and will of his great Creator. Every creature had the name of God so legibly engraved on it, that man might run and read it. He could not open his eyes, but he might see some image of God; but nowhere so fully and lively as in himself. It was, therefore, his work to study the whole volume of nature, but first and most to study himself. And if man had held on in this course, he would have continued and increased in the knowledge of God and himself; but when he would know and love the creature and himself in a way of separation from God, he lost the knowledge both of the creature and of the Creator, so far as it could beautify and was worth the name of knowledge. Instead of it, he has got the unhappy knowledge which he affected, even the empty notions and fantastic knowledge of the creature and himself, as thus separated. And thus, he who lived to the Creator, and upon him, does now live to and upon the other creatures, and on himself; and thus, "Every man at (Ps.39:5) his best estate" (the learned as well as the illiterate) "is altogether vanity. Surely every man walks in a vain show; surely they are disturbed in vain." (Rom.11:18-20)(Php.2:6)

It must also be well observed, that as God laid not aside the relation of a Creator by becoming our Redeemer, nor the right of his propriety and government of us in that relation, but the work of redemption stands, in some respect, in subordination to that of creation, and the law of the Redeemer to the law of the Creator; so also the duties which we owed to God as Creator have not ceased, but the duties that we owe to the Redeemer, as such, are subordinate thereto. It is the work of Christ to bring us back to God, and to restore us to the perfection of holiness and obedience; and as he is the way to the Father, so faith in him is the way to our former employment and enjoyment of God.

I hope you perceive what I aim at in all this, namely, that to see God in his creatures, and to love him, and converse with him, was the employment of man in his upright state; that this is so far from ceasing to be our duty, that it is the work of Christ to bring us, by faith, back to it; and therefore the most holy men are the most excellent students of God's works, and none but the holy can rightly study them or know them. (Ps111:2)"His works are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein;" but not for themselves, but for him that made them. Your study of physics and other sciences is not worth a rush, if it be not God that you seek after in them. To see and admire, to reverence and adore, to love and delight in God, as exhibited in his works—this is the true and only philosophy. The contrary is mere foolery, and is so called again and again by God himself. This is the sanctification of your studies, when they are devoted to God, and when he is the end, the object, and the life of them all.

And, therefore, I shall presume to tell you, by the way, that it is a grand error, and of dangerous consequence in Christian academies, (pardon the censure from one so unfit to pass it, seeing the necessity of the case commands it), that they study the creature before the Redeemer, and set themselves to physics, and metaphysics, and mathematics, before they set themselves to theology; whereas, no man that has not the vitals of theology, is capable of going beyond a fool in philosophy. Theology must lay the foundation, and lead the way of all our studies. If God must be searched after, in our search of the creature, (and we must affect no separated knowledge of them) then tutors must read God to their pupils in all; and divinity must be the beginning, the middle, the end, the life, the all, of their studies. Our physics and metaphysics must be reduced (Acts17:28) to theology; and nature must be read as (Col.1:16) one of God's books, which is purposely written for the revelation of himself. The Holy Scripture is the easier book: when you have first learned from it God, and his will, as to the most necessary things, address yourselves to the study of his works, and read every creature as a Christian and a divine. If you see not yourselves, and all things, as living, and moving, and having being in God, you see nothing, whatever you do you think see. If you perceive not, in your study of the creatures, that God is all, and in all, and that "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things," you may think, perhaps, that you "know something; but you know nothing as you ought to know." Do not think so basely of your physics, and of the works of God, as that they are only preparatory studies for boys. It is a most high and noble part of holiness, to search after, behold, admire, and love the great Creator in all his works. How much have the saints of God been employed in this high and holy exercise! The book of Job, and the Psalms, may show us that our physics are not so little kin to theology as some suppose.

I do, therefore, in zeal for the good of the Church, and their own success in their most necessary labors, propound it for the consideration of all pious tutors, whether they should not as timely, and as diligently, read

to their pupils, or cause them to read, the chief parts of practical divinity (and there is no other), as any of the sciences; and whether they should not go together from the very first? It is well that they hear sermons; but that is not enough. If tutors would make it their principal business to acquaint their pupils with the doctrine of salvation, and labor to set it home upon their hearts, that all might be received according to its weight, and read to their hearts as well as to their heads, and so carry on the rest of their instructions, that it may appear they make them but subservient unto this, and that their pupils may feel what they aim at in them all; and so that they would teach all their philosophy in habitu theologico—this might be a happy means to make a happy Church and a happy country. But, when languages and philosophy have almost all their time and diligence, and, instead of reading philosophy like divines, they read divinity like philosophers, as if it were a thing of no more moment than a lesson of music, or arithmetic, and not the doctrine of everlasting life—this it is that blasts so many in the bud, and pesters the Church with unsanctified teachers! Hence it is, that we have so many worldlings to preach of the invisible felicity, and so many carnal men to declare the mysteries of the Spirit; and (would that I would not have to say so) so many infidels to preach Christ, or so many atheists to preach the living God: and when they are taught philosophy before or without religion, what wonder if their philosophy be all or most of their religion!

Again, therefore, I address myself to all who have the charge of the education of youth, especially in matters of preparation for the ministry. You, that are schoolmasters and tutors, begin and end with the things of God. Speak daily to the hearts of your scholars those things that must be wrought into their hearts, or else they are undone. Let some piercing words fall frequently from your mouths, of God, and the state of their souls, and the life to come. Do not say, they are too young to understand and entertain them. You little know what impressions they may make. Not only the soul of the boy, but many souls may have cause to bless God, for your zeal and diligence, yes, for one such seasonable word. You have a great advantage above others to do them good; you have them before they are grown to maturity, and they will hear you when they will not hear another.

If they are destined to the ministry, you are preparing them for the special service of God, and must they not first have the knowledge of him whom they have to serve? Oh think with yourselves, what a sad thing it will be to their own souls, and what a wrong to the Church of God, if they come out from you with common and carnal hearts, to so great and holy and spiritual a work! Of a hundred students in one of our colleges, how many may there be that are serious, experienced, godly young men! If you should send half of them on a work which they are unfit for, what cruel work will they make in the Church or country! Whereas, if you be the means of their conversion and sanctification, how many souls may bless you, and what greater good can you do the Church? When once their hearts are savingly affected with the doctrine which they study and preach, they will study it more heartily, and preach it more heartily: their own experience will direct them to the fittest subjects, and will furnish them with matter, and quicken them to set it home to the conscience of their hearers. See, therefore, that you make not work for the groans and lamentation of the Church, nor for the great tormentor of the murderers of souls.

2. Content not yourselves with being in a state of grace, but be also careful that your graces are kept in vigorous and lively exercise, and that you preach to yourselves the sermons which you study, before you preach them to others. If you did this for your own sakes, it would not be lost labor; but I am speaking to you upon the public account, that you would do it for the sake of the Church, When your minds are in a holy, heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of the fruits of it. Your prayers, and praises, and doctrine will be sweet and heavenly to them. They will likely feel when you have been much with God: that which is most on your hearts, is like to be most in their ears.

I confess I must speak it by lamentable experience, that I publish to my flock the distempers of my own soul. When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching is cold; and when it is confused, my preaching is confused; and so I can often observe also in the best of my hearers, that when I have grown cold in preaching, they have grown cold too; and the next prayers which I have heard from them have been too like my preaching. We are the nurses of Christ's little ones. If we forbear taking food ourselves, we shall famish them; it will soon be visible in their leanness, and dull discharge of their several duties. If we let our love decline, we are not like to raise up theirs. If we abate our holy care and fear, it will appear in our preaching: if the matter show it not, the manner will. If we feed on unwholesome food, either errors or fruitless controversies, our hearers are like to fare the worse for it. Whereas, if we abound in faith, and love, and zeal, how would it overflow to the refreshing of our congregations, and how would it appear in the increase of the same graces in them!

O brethren, watch therefore over your own hearts: keep out lusts and passions, and worldly inclinations; keep up the life of faith, and love, and zeal: be much at home, and be much with God. If it be not your daily business to study your own hearts, and to subdue corruption, and to walk with God—if you make not this a work to which you constancy attend, all will go wrong, and you will starve your hearers; or, if you have an affected

fervency, you cannot expect a blessing to attend it from on high. Above all, be much in secret prayer and meditation. Thence you must fetch the heavenly fire that must kindle your sacrifices: remember, you cannot decline and neglect your duty, to your own hurt alone; many will be losers by it as well as you. For your people's sakes, therefore, look to your hearts. If a pang of spiritual pride should overtake you, and you should fall into any dangerous error, and vent your own inventions to draw away disciples after you, what a wound may this prove to the Church, of which you have the oversight; and you may become a plague to them instead of a blessing, and they may wish they had never seen your faces. Oh, therefore, take heed to your own judgments and affections. Vanity and error will slyly insinuate, and seldom come without fair presences: great distempers and apostasies have usually small beginnings. (2 Cor. 11:14) The prince of darkness does frequently impersonate an angel of light, to draw the children of light again into darkness. How easily also will distempers creep in upon our affections and our first love, and fear and care abate! Watch, therefore, for the sake of yourselves and others.

But, besides this general course of watchfulness, methinks a minister should take some special pains with his heart, before he is to go to the congregation: if it be then cold, how is he likely to warm the hearts of his hearers? Therefore, go then specially to God for life: read some rousing, awakening book, or meditate on the weight of the subject of which you are to speak, and on the great necessity of your people's souls, that you may go in the zeal of the Lord into his house. Maintain, in this manner, the life of grace in yourselves, that it may appear in all your sermons from the pulpit, that every one who comes cold to the assembly, may have some warmth imparted to him before he depart.

3. Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hindrances of the success of your own labors. It much hinders our work, when other men are all the week long contradicting to poor people in private, that which we have been speaking to them from the Word of God in public, because we cannot be at hand to expose their folly; but it will much more hinder your work, if you contradict yourselves, and if your actions give your tongue the lie, and if you build up an hour or two with your mouths, and all the week after pull down with your hands! This is the way to make men think that the Word of God is but an idle tale, and to make preaching seem no better than prating. He who means as he speaks, will surely do as he speaks. One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing.

Tell me, brethren, in the fear of God, do you regard the success of your labors, or do you not? Do you long to see it upon the souls of your hearers? If you do not, what do you preach for; what do you study for; and what do you call yourselves the ministers of Christ for? But if you do, then surely you cannot find in your heart to mar your work for a thing of nothing. What! do you regard the success of your labors, and yet will not part with a little to the poor, nor put up with an injury, or a foul word, nor stoop to the lowest, nor forbear your passionate or lordly carriage, no, not for the winning of souls, and attaining the end of all your labors! He values success little, indeed, who will sell it at so cheap a rate, or will not do so small a matter to attain it.

It is a palpable error of some ministers, who make such a disproportion between their preaching and their living; who study hard to preach exactly, and study little or not at all to live exactly. All the week long is little enough, to study how to speak two hours; and yet one hour seems too much to study how to live all the week. They are loath to misplace a word in their sermons, or to be guilty of any notable infirmity (and I blame them not, for the matter is holy and weighty), but they make nothing of misplacing affections, words, and actions, in the course of their lives. Oh how curiously have I heard some men preach; and how carelessly have I seen them live! They have been so accurate as to the preparation of their sermons, that seldom preaching seemed to them a virtue, that their language might be the more polite, and all the rhetorical writers they could meet with were pressed to serve them for the adorning of their style (and gauds were often their chief ornaments). They were so nice in hearing others, that no man pleased them that spoke as he thought, or that drowned not affections, or dulled not, or distempered not the heart by the predominant strains of a fantastic wit. And yet, when it came to matter of practice, and they were once out of church, how incurious were the men, and how little did they regard what they said or did, so it were not so palpably gross as to dishonor them! Those who preach precisely, would not live precisely! What a difference was there between their pulpit speeches and their familiar discourse? Those who were most impatient of barbarisms, solecisms, and paralogisms in a sermon, could easily tolerate them in their life and conversation.

Certainly, brethren, we have very great cause to take heed what we do, as well as what we say: if we will be the servants of Christ indeed, we must not be tongue servants only, but must serve him with our deeds, and be "doers of the work, that we may be blessed in our deed." (James 1:22,25) As our people must be "doers of the

word, and not hearers only;" so we must be doers and not speakers only, lest we "deceive our own selves." A practical doctrine must be practically preached. We must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well. We must think and think again, how to compose our lives, as may most tend to men's salvation, as well as our sermons.

When you are studying what to say to your people, if you have any concern for their souls, you will often be thinking with yourself, "How shall I get within them? and what shall I say, that is most likely to convince them, and convert them, and promote their salvation?" (cf. Ezra 7:10) And should you not as diligently think with yourself, "How shall I live, and what shall I do, and how shall I dispose of all that I have, as may most tend to the saving of men's souls?" Brethren, if the saving of souls be your end, you will certainly intend it out of the pulpit as well as in it! If it be your end, you will live for it, and contribute all your endeavors to attain it. You will ask concerning the money in your purse, as well as concerning the word of your mouth, "In what way shall I lay it out for the greatest good, especially to men's souls?" Oh that this were your daily study, how to use your wealth, your friends, and all you have for God, as well as your tongues! Then should we see that fruit of your labors, which is never else like to be seen. If you intend the end of the ministry in the pulpit only, it would seem you take yourselves for ministers no longer than you are there. And, if so, I do you think are unworthy to be esteemed ministers at all.

Let me then entreat you, brethren, to do well, as well as say well. Be "zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14) Spare not for any cost, if it may promote your Master's work.

(1) Maintain your innocence, and walk without offense. Let your lives condemn sin, and persuade men to duty. Would you have your people more careful of their souls, than you are of yours? If you would have them redeem their time, (Eph. 5:15) do not squander yours. If you would not have them vain in their conference, see that you speak yourselves the things which may edify, and tend to "minister grace to the hearers." (Eph. 4:29) Order your own families well, if you would have them do so by theirs. Be not proud and lordly, if you would have them to be lowly. There are no virtues wherein your example will do more, at least to abate men's prejudice, than humility and meekness and self-denial. (Rom. 12:21) Forgive injuries; and "be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (1 Peter 2:22) Do as our Lord, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again." If sinners be stubborn and stout and contemptuous, flesh and blood will persuade you to take up their weapons, and to master them by their carnal means: but that is not the way (further than necessary self-preservation or public good may require), but overcome them with kindness and patience and gentleness. The former may show that you have more worldly power than they (wherein yet they are ordinarily too hard for the faithful); but it is the latter only that will tell them that you excel them in spiritual excellency. If you believe that Christ is more worthy of imitation than Caesar or Alexander, and that it is more glory to be a Christian than to be a conqueror, yes to be a man than a beast—which often exceed us in strength—contend with charity, and not with violence; set meekness and love and patience against force, and not force against force. Remember, you are obliged to be the servants of all. "Condescend to men of low estate." Be not strange to the poor of your flock; they are apt to take your strangeness for contempt. Familiarity, improved to holy ends, may do abundance of good. Speak not stoutly or disrespectfully to any one; but be courteous to the lowest, as to your equal in Christ. A kind and winning carriage is a simple way of doing men good. (Jude 3; Rom. 12:16)

(2) Let me entreat you to abound in works of charity and benevolence. Go to the poor, and see what they want, and show your compassion at once to their soul and body. Buy them a catechism, and other small books that are likely to do them good, and make them promise to read them with care and attention. Stretch your purse to the utmost, and do all the good you can. Do not think of being rich; seek not great things for yourselves or your posterity. What if you do impoverish yourselves to do a greater good; will this be loss or gain? If you believe that God is the safest purse-bearer, and that to expend in his service is the greatest usury, show them that you do believe it.

I know that flesh and blood will fight before it will lose its prey, and will never want somewhat to say against this duty that is against its interest; but mark what I say (and the Lord set it home upon your hearts), that man who has anything in the world so dear to him, that he cannot spare it for Christ, if he call for it, is no true Christian. And because a carnal heart will not believe that Christ calls for it when he cannot spare it, and, therefore, makes that his self-deceiving shift, I say further, that the man who will not be persuaded that duty is duty, because he cannot spare that for Christ which is therein to be expended, is no true Christian; for a false heart corrupts the understanding, and that again increases the delusions of the heart. Do not take it, therefore, as an undoing, to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness and to lay up treasure in heaven, though you leave yourselves but little on earth You lose no great advantage for heaven, by becoming poor: "In pursuing one's way, the lighter one travels the better." (Matt. 6:19)

I know, where the heart is carnal and covetous, words will not wring men's money out of their hands; they can say all this, and more to others; but saying is one thing, and believing is another. But with those that are true believers, methinks such considerations should prevail. O what abundance of good might ministers do, if they would but live in contempt of the world, and the riches and glory thereof, and expend all they have in their Master's service, and pinch their flesh, that they may have with which to do good! This would unlock more hearts to the reception of their doctrine, than all their oratory; and, without this, singularity in religion will seem but hypocrisy; and it is likely that it is so. "He who practices disinterestedness prays to the Lord; he who snatches a man from peril offers a rich sacrifice; these are our sacrifices; these are holy to God. Thus he who is more devout among us is he who is more self-effacing," says Minucius Felix. * Though we need not do as the papists, who betake themselves to monasteries, and cast away property, yet we must have nothing but what we have for God.

4. Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. (Rom. 2:1) Will you make it your work to magnify God, and, when you have done, dishonor him as much as others? Will you proclaim Christ's governing power, and yet condemn it, and rebel yourselves? Will you preach his laws, and willfully break them? If sin be evil, why do you live in it? if it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous, how dare you venture on it? if it be not, why do you tell men so? If God's threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? if they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them, and put them into such frights without a cause? Do you "know the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death;" and yet will you do them? "You that teach another, teach you not yourself? You that say a man should not commit adultery, or be drunk, or covetous, are you such yourself? You that make your boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonor you God?" (Rom. 1:32; 2:17; 2:21-24) What! shall the same tongue speak evil that speak against evil? Shall those lips censure, and slander, and backbite your neighbor, that cry down these and the like things in others?

Take heed to yourselves, lest you cry down sin, and yet do not overcome it; lest, while you seek to bring it down in others, you bow to it, and become its slaves yourselves: "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage." "To whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." O brethren! it is easier to chide at sin, than to overcome it. (2 Peter 2:19; Rom. 6:19)

5. Lastly, take heed to yourselves, that you not lack the qualifications necessary for your work. He must not be himself a babe in knowledge, that will teach men all those mysterious things which must be known for salvation. O what qualifications are necessary for a man who has such a charge upon him as we have! How many difficulties in divinity to be solved! and these, too, about the fundamental principles of religion! How many obscure texts of Scripture to be expounded! How many duties to be performed, wherein ourselves and others may miscarry, if in the matter, and manner, and end, we be not well informed! How many sins to be avoided, which, without understanding and foresight, cannot be done! What a number of sly and subtle temptations must we open to our people's eyes, that they may escape them! How many weighty and yet intricate cases of conscience have we almost daily to resolve! And can so much work, and such work as this, be done by raw, unqualified men? O what strong holds have we to batter, and how many of them! What subtle and obstinate resistance must we expect from every heart we deal with!

Prejudice has so blocked up our way, that we can scarcely procure a patient hearing. We cannot make a breach in their groundless hopes and carnal peace, but they have twenty shifts and seeming reasons to make it up again; and twenty enemies, that are seeming friends, are ready to help them. We dispute not with them upon equal terms. We have children to reason with, that cannot understand us. We have distracted men (in spirituals) to argue with, that will bawl us down with raging nonsense. We have willful, unreasonable people to deal with, who, when they are silenced, are never the more convinced, and who, when they can give you no reason, will give you their resolution; like the man that Salvian* had to deal with, who, being resolved to devour a poor man's substance, and being entreated by him to forbear, replied, "He could not grant his request, for he had made a vow to take it;" so that the preacher, by reason of this most religious evil deed, was gladly to depart. We dispute the case against men's wills and passions, as much as against their understandings; and these have neither reason nor ears. Their best arguments are, "I will not believe you, nor all the preachers in the world, in such things. I will not change my mind, or life; I will not leave my sins; I will never be so precise, come of it what will." We have not one, but multitudes of raging passions, and contradicting enemies, to dispute against at once, whenever we go about the conversion of a sinner; as if a man were to dispute in a fair or a tumult, or in the midst of a crowd of violent scolds. What equal dealing, and what success, could here be expected? Yet such is our work; and it is a work that must be done.

O brethren! what men should we be in skill, resolution, and unwearied diligence, who have all this do? Did Paul

cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And shall we be proud, or careless, or lazy, as if we were sufficient? As Peter says to every Christian, in consideration of our great approaching change, "What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!" so may I say to every minister, "Seeing all these things lie upon our hands, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy endeavors and resolutions for our work!" This is not a burden for the shoulders of a child. What skill does every part of our work require! and of how much moment is every part! (2 Cor. 2:16; 2 Peter 3:1)

To preach a sermon, I think, is not the hardest part; and yet what skill is necessary to make the truth plain; to convince the hearers, to let irresistible light in to their consciences, and to keep it there, and drive all home; to screw the truth into their minds, and work Christ into their affections; to meet every objection, and clearly to resolve it; to drive sinners to a stand, and make them see that there is no hope, but that they must unavoidably either be converted or condemned—and to do all this, as regards language and manner, as befits our work, and yet as is most suitable to the capacities of our hearers. This, and a great deal more that should be done in every sermon, must surely require a great deal of holy skill. So great a God, whose message we deliver, should be honored by our delivery of it. It is a lamentable case, that in a message from the God of heaven, of everlasting moment to the souls of men, we should behave ourselves so weakly, so unhandsomely, so imprudently, or so slightly, that the whole business should miscarry in our hands, and God should be dishonored, and his work disgraced, and sinners rather hardened than converted; and all this through our weakness or neglect! How often have carnal hearers gone home jeering at the palpable and dishonorable failings of the preacher! How many sleep under us, because our hearts and tongues are sleepy, and we bring not with us so much skill and zeal as to awake them!

Moreover, what skill is necessary to defend the truth against those that deny it, and to deal with disputing cavilers, according to their several modes and case! And if we fail through weakness, how will they exult over us! Yet that is the smallest matter: but who knows how many weak ones may thereby be perverted, to their own undoing, and to the trouble of the Church? What skill is necessary to deal in private with one poor ignorant soul for his conversion!

O brethren! do you not shrink and tremble under the sense of all this work? Will a common measure of holy skill and ability, of prudence and other qualifications, serve for such a task as this? I know necessity may cause the Church to tolerate the weak; but woe to us, if we tolerate and indulge our own weakness! Do not reason and conscience tell you, that if you dare venture on so high a work as this, you should spare no pains to be qualified for the performance of it? It is not now and then an idle snatch or taste of studies that will serve to make an able and sound theologian.

I know that laziness has learned to allege the vanity of all our studies, and how entirely the Spirit must qualify us for, and assist us in our work; as if God commanded us the use of means, and then warranted us to neglect them; as if it were his way to cause us to thrive in a course of idleness, and to bring us to knowledge by dreams when we are asleep, or to take us up into heaven, and show us his counsels, while we think of no such matter, but are idling away our time on earth! O that men should dare, by their laziness, to "quench the Spirit," and then pretend the Spirit for the doing of it! "O outrageous, shameful and unnatural deed!" God has required us, that we be "not slothful in business," but "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Such we must provoke our hearers to be, and such we must be ourselves. O. therefore, brethren, lose no time! Study, and pray, and confer, and practice; for in these four ways your abilities must be increased. Take heed to yourselves, lest you are weak through your own negligence, and lest you mar the work of God by your weakness. (1 Thess. 5:19; Rom. 12:11)

2. The Motives to This Oversight

Having showed you what it is to take heed to ourselves, I shall next lay before you some motives to awaken you to this duty.

1. Take heed to yourselves, for you have a heaven to win or lose, and souls that must be happy or miserable forever; and therefore it concerns you to begin at home, and to take heed to yourselves as well as to others. Preaching well may succeed to the salvation of others, without the holiness of your own hearts and lives; it is, at least, possible, though less usual; but it is impossible it should save yourselves. "Many will say in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name?" to whom he will answer, "I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity." (Matt. 7:21-23) O sirs, how many men have preached Christ, and yet have perished for want of a saving interest in him! How many, who are now in hell, have told their people of the torments of hell, and warned them to escape from it! How many have preached of the wrath of God against sinners, who are now enduring it! O what sadder case can there be in the world, than for a man, who made it his very trade and calling to proclaim salvation, and to help others to heaven, yet after all to be himself shut out! Alas! that we

should have so many books in our libraries which tell us the way to heaven; that we should spend so many years in reading these books, and studying the doctrine of eternal life, and after all this to miss it! that we should study so many sermons of salvation, and yet fall short of it! that we should preach so many sermons of damnation, and yet fall into it? And all because we preached so many sermons of Christ, while we neglected him; of the Spirit, while we resisted him; of faith, while we did not ourselves believe; of repentance and conversion, while we continued in an impenitent and unconverted state; and of a heavenly life, while we remained carnal and earthly ourselves. If we will be divines only in tongue and title, and have not the Divine image upon our souls, nor give up ourselves to the Divine honor and will, no wonder if we be separated from the Divine presence, and denied the fruition of God forever.

Believe it, sirs, God is no respecter of persons: (Rom. 2:11) he saves not men for their coats or callings; a holy calling will not save an unholy man. If you stand at the door of the kingdom of grace, to light others in, and will not go in yourselves, you shall knock in vain at the gates of glory, that would not enter at the door of grace. You shall then find that your lamps should have had the oil of grace, as well as of ministerial gifts—of holiness, as well as of doctrine—if you would have had a part in the glory which you preached. Do I need to tell you, that preachers of the gospel must be judged by the gospel; and stand at the same bar, and be sentenced on the same terms, and dealt with as severely, as any other men? Can you think to be saved, then, by your clergy; and to come off by a "He passed for a clergyman," when there is wanting the "He believed and lived as a Christian." Alas, it will not be! You know it will not be. Take heed therefore to yourselves, for your own sakes; seeing you have souls to save or lose, as well as others.

2. Take heed to yourselves, for you have a depraved nature, and sinful inclinations, as well as others. If innocent Adam had need of heed, and lost himself and us for want of it, how much more need have such as we! Sin dwells in us, when we have preached ever so much against it; and one degree prepares the heart for another, and one sin inclines the mind to more. If one thief be in the house, he will let in the rest; because they have the same disposition and design. A spark is the beginning of a flame; and a small disease may cause a greater. (1 Cor. 5:6) A man who knows himself to be purblind, should take heed to his feet. Alas! in our hearts, as well as in our hearers, there is an averseness to God, a strangeness to him, unreasonable and almost unruly passions! In us there are, at the best, the remnants of pride, unbelief, self-seeking, hypocrisy, and all the most hateful, deadly sins. And does it not then concern us to take heed to ourselves? Is so much of the fire of hell yet unextinguished, that was at first kindled in us? Are there so many traitors in our very hearts, and is it not necessary for us to take heed? You will scarcely let your little children go themselves while they are weak, without calling upon them to take heed of falling. And, alas! how weak are those of us that seem strongest! How apt to stumble at a very straw! How small a matter will cast us down, by enticing us to folly; or kindling our passions and inordinate desires, by perverting our judgments, weakening our resolutions, cooling our zeal, and abating our diligence! Ministers are not only sons of Adam, but sinners against the grace of Christ, as well as others; and so have increased their radical sin. These treacherous hearts of yours will, one time or other, deceive you, if you take not heed. Those sins that seem now to lie dead will revive: your pride, and worldliness, and many a noisome vice, will spring up, that you thought had been weeded out by the roots. It is most necessary, therefore, that men of so much infirmity should take heed to themselves, and be careful in the oversight of their own souls.

3. Take heed to yourselves, because the tempter will more ply you with his temptations than other men. If you will be the leaders against the prince of darkness, he will spare you no further than God restrained him. He bears the greatest malice to those that are engaged to do him the greatest mischief. As he hates Christ more than any of us, because he is the General of the field, the Captain of our salvation, and does more than all the world besides against his kingdom; so does he hate the leaders under him, more than the common soldiers: he knows what a rout he may make among them, if the leaders fall before their eyes (Heb 2:10). He has long tried that way of fighting, neither against great nor small comparatively, but of smiting the shepherds, that he may scatter the flock: and so great has been his success this way, that he will continue to follow it as far as he is able. Take heed, Therefore, brethren, for the enemy has a special eye upon you. You shall have his most subtle insinuations, and incessant solicitations, and violent assaults. As wise and learned as you are, take heed to yourselves, lest he outwit you. The devil is a greater scholar than you, and a nimbler disputant: he can transform himself into an angel of light to deceive: (2 Co. 11:14) he will get within you, and trip up your heels before you are aware: he will play the juggler with you undiscerned, and cheat you of your faith or innocence, and you shall not know that you have lost it; no, he will make you believe it is multiplied or increased, when it is lost. You shall see neither hook nor line, much less the subtle angler himself, while he is offering you his bait. And his bait shall be so fitted to your temper and disposition, that he will be sure to find advantages within you, and make your own principles and inclinations betray you; and whenever he ruins you, he will make you the instruments of ruin to others.

O what a conquest will the devil think he has got, if he can make a minister lazy and unfaithful, if he can tempt a minister into covetousness or scandal! He will glory against the Church, and say, "These are your holy preachers! See what their preciseness is, and where it brings them." He will glory against Jesus Christ himself, and say, "These are your champions! I can make your chief servants abuse you; I can make the stewards of your house unfaithful." If he did so insult God upon a false surmise, and tell him he could make Job curse him to his face, what will he do if he should prevail against you (Job 1-2)? And at last he will insult as much over you, that he could draw you to be false to your great trust, and to blemish your holy profession, and to do so much service to him that was your enemy. O, do not so far gratify Satan; do not make him so much sport; suffer him not to use you as the Philistines did Samson, first to deprive you of your strength, and then to put out your eyes, and so to make you the matter of his triumph and derision (Judges 13-17).

4. Take heed to yourselves, because there are many eyes upon you, and there will be many to observe your falls. You cannot miscarry but the world will ring of it (Heb 12:1-2, Mt 5:16). The eclipses of the sun by day are seldom without witnesses. As you take yourselves for the lights of the churches, you may expect that men's eyes will be upon you. If other men may sin without observation, you cannot. And you should thankfully consider how great a mercy this is, that you have so many eyes to watch over you, and so many ready to tell you of your faults; and thus have greater helps than others, at least for restraining you from sin. Though they may do it with a malicious mind, yet you have the advantage of it.

God forbid that we should prove so impudent as to do evil in the public view of all, and to sin willfully while the world is gazing on us! "Those who sleep, sleep in the night; and those who be drunken are drunken in the night (1 Thess 5:7." Why, consider that you are ever in the open light: even the light of your own doctrine will expose your evil doings. While you are as lights set upon a hill, do not think to lie hid (Mt 5:14). Take heed therefore to yourselves, and do your work as those that remember that the world looks on them, and that with the quick-sighted eye of malice, ready to make the worst of all, to find the smallest fault where it is, to aggravate it where they find it, to divulge it and to take advantage of it to their own designs, and to make faults where they cannot find them. How cautiously, then, should we walk before so many ill-minded observers!

5. Take heed to yourselves, for your sins have more heinous aggravations than other men's. It was a saying of king Alphonsus, that "a great man cannot commit a small sin;" much more may we say, that a learned man, or a teacher of others, cannot commit a small sin; or, at least, that the sin is great as committed by him, which is smaller as committed by another (Jas. 3:1).

(1) You are more likely than others to sin against knowledge, because you have more than they; at least, you sin against more light, or means of knowledge. What! do you not know that covetousness and pride are sins? do you not know what it is to be unfaithful to your trust, and, by negligence or self-seeking, to betray men's souls? You know your "Master's will; and, if you do it not, you shall be beaten with many stripes (Luke 12:47)." There must be the more willfulness, by how much there is the more knowledge.

(2) Your sins have more hypocrisy in them than other men's, by how much the more you have spoken against them. O what a heinous dining is it in us, to study how to disgrace sin to the utmost, and make it as odious in the eyes of our people as we can, and when we have done, to live in it, and secretly cherish that which we publicly disgrace! What vile hypocrisy is it, to make it our daily work to cry it down, and yet to keep to it; to call it publicly all nothing, and privately to make it our bed-fellow and companion; to bind heavy burdens on others, and not to touch them ourselves with a finger! What can you say to this in judgment? Did you think as ill of sin as you spoke, or did you not? If you did not, why would you dissemblingly speak against it? If you did, why would you keep it and commit it? O bear not that badge of a hypocritical Pharisee, "They say, but do not (Mt 23:3)." Many a minister of the gospel will be confounded, and not be able to look up, by reason of this heavy charge of hypocrisy.

(3) Your sins have more perfidiousness in them than other men's, by how much the more you have engaged yourselves against them. Besides all your common engagements as Christians, you have many more as ministers. How often have you proclaimed the evil and danger of sin, and called sinners from it? How often have you denounced against it the terrors of the Lord? All this surely implied that you renounced it yourselves. Every sermon that you preached against it, every exhortation, every confession of it in the congregation, did lay an engagement upon you to forsake it. Every soul that you baptized, and every administration of the supper of the Lord, did import your own renouncing of the world and the flesh, and your engagement to Christ. How often, and how openly, have you borne witness to the odiousness and damnable nature of sin? and yet will you entertain it, notwithstanding all these professions and testimonies of your own? O what treachery is it to make such a stir against it in the pulpit, and, after all, to entertain it in your heart, and give it the room that is due to God, and even prefer it before the glory of the saints!

6. Take heed to yourselves, because such great works as ours require greater grace than other men's. Weaker gifts and graces may carry a man through in a more even course of life, that is not liable to so great trials. Smaller strength may serve for lighter works and burdens. But if you will venture on the great undertakings of the ministry; if you will lead on the troops of Christ against Satan and his followers; if you will engage yourselves against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places; if you will undertake to rescue captive sinners out of the devil's paws; do not think that a heedless, careless course will accomplish so great a work as this (Eph.6:12). You must look to come off with greater shame and deeper wounds of conscience, than if you had lived a common life, if you think to go through such momentous things as these with a careless soul. It is not only the work that calls for heed, but the workman also, that he may be fit for business of such weight. We have seen many men who lived as private Christians, in good reputation for parts and piety, when they took upon them either the magistracy or military employment, where the work was above their gifts, and temptations did overmatch their strength, they proved scandalous disgraced men. And we have seen some private Christians of good esteem, who, having thought too highly of their parts, and thrust themselves into the ministerial office, have proved weak and empty men, and have become greater burdens to the Church than some whom we endeavored to cast out. They might have done God more service in the higher rank of private men, than they do among the lowest of the ministry. If, then, you will venture into the midst of enemies, and bear the burden and heat of the day, take heed to yourselves.

7. Take heed to yourselves, for the honor of your Lord and Master, and of his holy truth and ways, lies more on you than on other men. As you may render him more service, so you may do him more disservice than others. The nearer men stand to God, the greater dishonor has he by their miscarriages; and the more will they be imputed by foolish men to God himself. The heavy judgments executed on Eli and on his house were because they kicked at his sacrifice and offering: "Therefore was the sin of the young men very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord (ISam.2:17)." It was that great aggravation, of "causing the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme (II Sam.12:14)," which provoked God to deal more sharply with David, than he would otherwise have done.

If you be indeed Christians, the glory of God will be dearer to you than your lives. Take heed therefore what you do against it, as you would take heed what you do against your lives. Would it not wound you to the heart to hear the name and truth of God reproached for your sakes? to see men point to you, and say, "There goes a covetous priest, a secret tippler, a scandalous man; these are those who preach for strictness, while they themselves can live as loose as others; they condemn us by their sermons, and condemn themselves by their lives; notwithstanding all their talk, they are as bad as we"? O brethren, could your hearts endure to hear men cast the dung of your iniquities in the face of the holy God, and in the face of the gospel, and of all that desire to fear the Lord? Would it not break your hearts to think that all the godly Christians about you should suffer reproach for your misdoings? Why, if one of you that is a leader of the flock, should be ensnared but once into some scandalous crime, there is scarcely a man or woman that seeks diligently after their salvation, within the hearing of it, but, besides the grief of their hearts for your sin, are likely to have it cast in their teeth by the ungodly about them, however much they may detest it, and lament it. The ungodly husband will tell his wife, and the ungodly parents will tell their children, and ungodly neighbors and fellow-servants will be telling one another of it, saying, "These are your godly preachers! See what comes of all your stir. What better are you than others? You are even all alike." Such words as these must all the godly in the country hear for your sakes. "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offense comes (Mt.18:7)!"

O take heed, brethren, of every word you speak and of every step you tread, for you bear the ark of the Lord, you are entrusted with his honor! If you that "know his will, and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourselves are guides of the blind, and lights to them that are in darkness, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes (Rom 2:18-20),"—if you, I say, should live contrary to your doctrine, and "by breaking the law should dishonor God, the name of God will be blasphemed" among the ignorant and ungodly "through you (Rom 2:23-24)." And you are not unacquainted with that standing decree of heaven "Them that honor me I will honor; and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed (ISam 2:30)." Never did man dishonor God, but it proved the greatest dishonor to himself. God will find out ways enough to wipe off any stain that is cast upon him; but you will not so easily remove the shame and sorrow from yourselves.

8. Lastly, Take heed to yourselves, for the success of all your labors does very much depend upon this. God uses to fit men for great works, before he employs them as his instruments in accomplishing them. Now, if the work of the Lord be not soundly done upon your own hearts, how can you expect that he will bless your labors for effecting it in others? He may do it, if he please, but you have much cause to doubt whether he will. I shall here mention some reasons which may satisfy you, that he who would be a means of saving others, must take

heed to himself, and that God does more seldom prosper the labors of unsanctified men.

(1) Can it be expected that God will bless that man's labors (I mean comparatively, as to other ministers), who works not for God, but for himself (ICor 4:2)? Now, this is the case with every unsanctified man. None but converted men do make God their chief end, and do all or anything heartily for his honor; others make the ministry but a trade to live by. They choose it rather than another calling, because their parents destined them to it, or because it affords them a competent maintenance; because it is a life wherein they have more opportunity to furnish their intellects with all kind of science; or because it is not so toilsome to the body, to those that have a mind to favor their flesh; because it is accompanied with some reverence and respect from men, and because they think it a fine thing to be leaders and teachers, and have others "receive the law at their mouth." For such ends as these are they ministers, and for these do they preach; and, were it not for these, or similar objects, they would soon give over. And can it be expected, that God should much bless the labors of such men as these? It is not for him they preach, but themselves, and their own reputation or gain. It is not him, but themselves, that they seek and serve; and, therefore, no wonder if he leave them to themselves for the success, and if their labors have no greater a blessing than themselves can give, and if the word reach no further than their own strength can make it reach.

(2) Can you think that he is likely to be as successful as others, who deals not heartily and faithfully in his work, who believes not what he says, and is not truly serious when he seems to be most diligent? And can you think that any unsanctified man can be hearty and serious in the ministerial work? A kind of seriousness indeed he may have, such as proceeds from a common faith or opinion, that the Word is true; or he may be actuated by a natural fervor, or by selfish ends. But the seriousness and fidelity of a sound believer, who ultimately intends God's glory, and men's salvation, this he has not. O sirs, all your preaching and persuading of others, will be but dreaming and vile hypocrisy, until the work be thoroughly done upon your own