

And how does God meet the returning penitent? How does he receive him? In the most gracious manner. Just as an earthly father will receive a penitent child, both into his favor, and into his house. We have it here represented. "And he arose and came to his father; &c." vs. 20-24. In the same way God deals with the penitent, and returning sinner. He receives him into his favour and love. He bestows upon him his forgiveness. He puts him into his family again. He restores him to all the privileges of a son. He invests him with the character of a son. He puts on him the fine robe of Christ's righteousness: he arrays him with his own holiness—the sanctification of the Spirit; and he makes merry; for this his Son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.

It is thus that we are lost; and thus we are restored. We are brought back to the fold by Christ, the Shepherd of the sheep: we are recovered to God by Christ: we become again available for the purposes of God's glory: we are reinstated in our place in our father's house, in God's favor, and in the heavenly mansions.—We come to God as penitent children: we receive his forgiveness, we have Christ's righteousness put upon us: we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and are introduced at last into the joys and the glories of the heavenly mansions.

What is your state? Are you yet like the lost, wandering, sheep, away from God and from happiness, stumbling on the dark mountains of sin—ready to fall into the pit of destruction, to perish under the storm of divine wrath, the prey of every temptation, of the spirits of darkness, and, unless arrested by the mercy of God, unless saved by the great and good Shepherd, sinking into eternal ruin? Are you yet lost to God? Are your faculties useless to God? Are they not employed to his glory? Are you still wanderers from your father's house, ungrateful, rebellious children? Are you living upon the husks of this world? Are you following your own sinful courses?—Reflect upon your state. You are *lost*. You are lost to happiness, lost to God, lost to yourselves. You are in danger of everlasting destruction. You are ready to plunge into the yawning gulf of eternal misery. You are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and naked. Return now to the fold, to the Shepherd and bishop of your souls. See your danger, and seek safety only in the guardianship and care of Christ. Let your powers no

longer be spent uselessly, but give them to God. Return to your father's house. God will receive you into his favor. He will bestow upon you the place and privileges of sons and daughters. He yearns over you to do you good. He will meet you on the way. He will see your returning footsteps, and he will anticipate you, and give you the embrace of a tender and affectionate welcome.

THE SUPPORT OF THE MINISTRY A PART OF THE TRAINING OF A CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

The general rule as to the support of the gospel ministry is stated by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. ix. 13, 14), in the following terms, in which he refers in the first instance to the arrangements of the Mosaic institution; "Do you not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? *Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.*" The same Apostle shows in his own conduct that there may be exceptional cases—cases of such a nature that it may be right for a minister, instead of burdening his people, to labour working with his own hands, in order to minister to his own necessities, and to them that may be with him; Acts xx. 34, Eph. ii. 9. In many quarters a disposition has been shown by the people to convert the exception into the general rule; and it is to be lamented that, from an unwillingness to urge their own claims—from an earnest desire, at whatever sacrifice to themselves, to preach to perishing sinners the glorious gospel of the grace of God, ministers, in too many instances, have yielded to the tendency, and in the want of adequate support from their people, have endeavoured to provide for themselves by the profits of some other employment. Schools, farms, mills, and various other secular pursuits have been resorted to. These, in some cases, may have yielded after all but a scanty subsistence; and, while his worldly avocations may have interfered very materially with the discharge of his spiritual duties, the minister is left to struggle on under the depressing feeling that instead of "providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men," he is in great danger of bringing into contempt the sacred office which he holds. In other