

to preach; then we speak with all the authority and power of God behind us. But however much we may yearn over souls, we must keep to our instructions, lest passing them we not only forfeit all authority, but betray the souls we seek to save.

II. *The limits of our commission are the limits also of our responsibility.*

That word, responsibility, is full of awe. How far are we held accountable for the souls of others? When is their blood on our skirts, and when is it no longer required at our hand? To be held to answer for the final loss of one soul is a load that no believer can bear; Paul's exclamation gets thousand-fold emphasis: "Who is sufficient for these things!" But, thank God! it is not so. We need look no further than that gospel in Ezekiel to learn the law of responsibility.* Originally God alone was responsible, for he only had power to save, or even knowledge of salvation. When he appointed ambassadors and committed to them the message, that *transferred responsibility to them*. The messenger becomes a mediator: having the good tidings and being commissioned to stand between God and the dying souls of men. Now observe, that from the moment the gospel is fully and faithfully proclaimed, *responsibility is again transferred to the hearer!* In every step and stage of this process and progress, the transfer of knowledge implies the transfer of obligation. The wicked is warned; he may not be won; but the watchman is free of blame.

The moment the gospel herald becomes unduly anxious about its *reception*, he risks forgetting his own work and intruding upon that of the hearer, and of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps he loses courage, boldness, peace. He begins to doubt and distrust not himself only but God. He is mixing up his own responsibility with that of those to whom he speaks. In other words, the herald reproaches himself with the heedlessness of his hearers; the ambassador, with the perversity of his sovereign's foes. No! blessed be God, to discharge our duty, by earnestly and lovingly preaching the gospel, is to be discharged of all further responsibility.

Paul had passion for souls—"great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart"—could wish himself "accursed from Christ, for his brethren." Surely no cold heart, no mere sense of duty, goaded him on. Yet when, at Antioch in Pisidia, those "brethren" "judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life, and even raised persecution against him, he "shook off the dust of his feet," in solemn token that he shook off all responsibility for their condemnation, and departed; and at Miletus he said to the Ephesian elders, "I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God!"

We may be as faithful as Paul, but all we can do at our best will

* Ezekiel xviii., xxxiii.