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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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## A CHARGE

TO THE CLERGY OF OHIO, ON THE PREACHING OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED: DELIVERED BEFORE THE SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE DIOCESS, AT CHILLICOTHE, SEPT. 5TH, 1834, BY CHARLES P. M'ILVAINE, D. D., BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE STATE OF OHIO.

BRETHREN IN THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST.—It has pleased God to allow us the pleasure of assembling ourselves together, and consulting with one another, for the promotion of the blessed Gospel committed to our trust. I would embrace the opportunity thus presented, of addressing you, in obedience to an enactment of our Church, which requires her Bishops occasionally, and not unfrequently, to deliver a Charge to the Clergy of their respective dioceses. My object will be, the promotion of an increase of faithfulness and of fruit in the discharge of your work as ambassadors for Christ; humbly beseeching Him, without whom we can do nothing in wisdom, nothing in holiness, nothing to edification, to give me grace, that in all things I may speak "as the oracles of God" in "the mind of Christ."

You are well aware that the great work for which your sacred office was established, is the preaching of the Gospel.

However various the means and modes by which Christians of all orders are bound, in their respective spheres, and according to their distinctive vocations, to be co-workers with God in promoting his kingdom, all are subordinate to, all depend for sufficiency upon, the faithful and enlightened execution of that command of the Saviour to his ministry: "Go preach the Gospel." It was the simple, unquestioning obedience of an undaunted faith to this one command, united with unquenchable love to Christ and the souls of sinners, that constituted, under God, the whole power of the apostolic ministry, and gained those stupendous victories of the truth, at which the weaker faith and more hesitating obedience of modern times have so much wondered. And none can read the scriptures intelligently without perceiving, that, as in the beginning, so now also, and until the ending of all things terrestrial, it has pleased God that sinners shall be saved chiefly through the instrumentality of the preaching of the Gospel; and especially, that the great things to come—the ingathering of the nations, the universal reign of the Son of Man as the accepted King over all people and languages—were to be accomplished by means which, without excluding the use of many subordinate measures, will refer the grand result to the preaching of the Gospel, "the foolishness of preaching," as the chosen and chief ordinance of God, by which to make known his wisdom and power in saving them that believe. Hence should it be inferred, that, while there are many objects of Christian benevolence which have an imperious claim on the affections and assistance of Christians, none should stand so exalted, in the hearts of all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, as the increase of the number of devoted Ministers of the Gospel, and the furtherance of all who have received the ministry in that heavenly skill by which they may the most successfully preach the word, and that true Missionary spirit by which they may emulate the example of the Apostles, till there be no speech nor language where there voice is not heard.

Another thing you cannot have failed to notice. While such eminent importance is attached to the preaching of the Gospel,—so that it is written, that "faith cometh by hearing,"—there is one distinguishing feature of the preaching of the Apostles, of which they rested all their hope of advancing the cause of their Master. Various as were the topics on which they spoke, and skilful as they were to accommodate their instructions to the different circum-

stances and characters of their hearers, there was one great subject in which all hearers were taught to behold the beginning and the ending of religion, the whole consolation of a sinful world, the whole consolation, strength and glory of a Christian Minister. They made it their invariable principle, to know nothing, to glory in nothing, among men, but "Jesus Christ and him Crucified;" so that "every where, in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." To set forth the glories of his person and of his work, to teach him in his various offices and benefits, in his humiliation and death, his resurrection and exaltation, in his freeness of grace to receive, and his fulness of grace to save, the chief of sinners; to persuade men to flee to him as their Refuge, to follow him as their Shepherd, to submit to him as their King, to rejoice in him as their everlasting portion, and always and by all means to glorify him as Head over all things for his people,—this was their life's business, unto which they had so separated themselves, as to be virtually dead to what ever might hinder its promotion. Sitting at the feet of their inspiration, to learn by what teaching the Minister of the Gospel in these days may hope to be made instrumental "in bringing many sons unto glory," we obtain this most important lesson, that to preach "Christ crucified" is to preach the Gospel; that nothing can be done to any purpose, for the salvation of sinners, but so far as this one subject is exhibited in simplicity, that while all learning, and eloquence, and human wisdom, without this, can do nothing, all that is feeble and foolish among the wise men of the world, if it have but this, may be mighty through God to confound the wise, and win souls to Christ; consequently, that all our talents and prayers should be drawn this way, and concentrated upon this very thing, of learning, through the enlightening of the Holy Ghost, the more simply, and completely, "to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

Dear brethren, if this be a lesson for life, it is worth a thousand lives to know and practise it. Without it, what would it profit us, or the perishing souls to whom we are sent, should we understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and speak with the various tongues of men, and the eloquence of angels? Our preaching would be as effectual to the overturning of the kingdom of Satan in the hearts of men, as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, while we, in the balance of the sanctuary, should weigh as "less than nothing and vanity."

Hence you may perceive the subject to which the remainder of this discourse will be devoted. What is it, so to preach, that it may justly be said, in the sense of the Apostle, that "we preach Christ crucified."

There are many ways of approaching this excellence, without reaching it; and thus of falling into the fruits of an evangelical ministry, without perceiving the cause. Some of these approximations I will endeavour to describe.

It is possible to preach a great deal of important truth, having an essential relation to the Gospel, truth unmingled with any erroneous statement or principle; one's discourses may be very solemn and impressive, kindling strong emotions, and exciting deep apprehensions in intelligent congregations; and because the people are affected, it may be supposed that the preacher is faithful. Because the former perceive nothing positively wrong, and hear and feel much that is decidedly good, they not unfrequently regard it as unquestionable evidence of the Gospel character of the instruction to which they listen; and yet, without any strained supposition, it may be destitute of some or all of the great distinguishing features of the Gospel; or, if it contain them, may almost entirely conceal them, under the cumbersome framework in which they are set; and though it

spoke often of Christ, and pathetically describe his agony and death, may be so unavailing and confused, so general and feeble, as to all those vital doctrines which lead to him, and spring from him, and depend on him, which lay the foundation of and bind together the whole structure of Christian faith, as to be wholly unworthy the name of the preaching of Christ. Suppose that the Minister select such subjects as the uncertainty of life, the trial of death, the terrors of judgment, the everlasting retribution of the ungodly; let him depict the vanity of the world, the excellence of religion, the bliss of heaven; give him the persecution of Christ, and the various scenes in the tragedy of the crucifixion, here are subjects on which a lively and intelligent imagination, without any spirituality of mind, or acquaintance with the operations of grace on the heart, may be strong and impressive; and yet, how many imagine, that to preach these forcibly is to preach the Gospel! How often is preaching about Christ contoured with preaching Christ! preaching from the imagination, with preaching from the heart! The Minister may thus deceive himself, and the great majority of his people may be thus deceived; while some obscure, unlettered disciple, whose draughts of truth have been taken undiluted from the wells of salvation, will be sensible of some painful deficiency, and the anxious inquirer, thirsting for the Gospel, will listen and wait in vain to be taught what he must do to be saved. Let us remember the wide difference between being able to preach forcibly on the importance of religion on the one hand, and on the other, to show clearly in what all spiritual, saving religion consists. It is one thing to prove that there is no salvation but in Christ, and quite another to direct a soul, panting for mercy, how he is "in Christ, and be found in him." On such a text as, "One thing is needful," almost any intelligent and serious mind might preach without mistake or manifest deficiency. It requires much more preparation than mere intelligence and seriousness to preach well, with truth, and clearness, and fulness, upon such a text as, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

Again: A Minister may preach with plainness and firmness the obligations of man, the commandments of the law, the precepts of the Gospel, the entire condemnation of the sinner, and the necessity of universal repentance; he may exhibit a deep seriousness in his ministry, an earnest solicitude for the fruits of righteousness; never hesitating at the strongest representations of the wrath of God, and the sinner's peril, nor ever sparing the most urgent appeals to conscience, and exhortation to obedience; and yet he may come far short of the most important work of his ministry, and fail almost wholly of the conversion and sanctification of his people. While thus dwelling faithfully on the side of the law, perhaps with occasional glimpses of the Gospel; while thus confined so much to duty and danger, though, perhaps, with occasional views of grace and glory, he may not understand that one great lesson which a Minister should make his habitual study, how to exhibit the union and mutual relations of the law and Gospel, how to preach the Gospel under the solemn sanctions of the law, the law under the gracious encouragements of the Gospel: the one to convince of sin, the other to take away its condemnation, the former to furnish the rule, the latter the grace, of holy obedience. The Preacher may be very clear upon the sinner's ruin, but very dark and indefinite upon the nature and means of his remedy. He may succeed in convincing one of the insufficiency of his own righteousness to make him acceptable to God, but fail grievously in showing the all-sufficiency of the righteousness by faith. So fully does he teach the holy will

of God, as reaching to the thoughts and intents of the heart, that the hearer is brought to feel his nature inability, through inherent corruption, to do it. But at this step of preparation for all the gracious disclosures of the Gospel, his light goes out. The Preacher fails unfortunately to direct him to the grace of God in Christ, as that which "worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure." "One thing is needful," that grand argument of the Gospel, which, after the failure of all others, has triumphed, in all ages and places, such wonderful victories over the hearts of the ungodly, the simple holding forth of "Christ crucified," in his amazing love and abounding grace, his tenderness to pity, his freeness to receive, his power to save to the utmost, the fulness of his merits to remove the condemnation, and of his Spirit to sanctify the heart, of the chief of sinners.

Such a Preacher as I have endeavoured to describe, was, in a great measure, exemplified in the early ministry of the now Evangelical Clergy. His labours were fruitless; it remained, as if (to use his own words) he became impressed by the utter alienation of his heart, in all its affections and desires, from God. It was not till reconciliation became to him, the distinct and prominent object of his ministerial exertions; it was not till he took the scriptural way of laying the method of reconciliation before his people; it was not till the free offer of forgiveness, through the blood of Christ, was urged upon their acceptance, and the Holy Spirit given, through the channel of Christ's mediators, to all who ask it, was set before them as the necessary object of their dependence and their prayers; it was not, in one word, till the contemplation of his people was turned to these great and essential elements, in the business of a soul providing for its interests with God and the concerns of its eternity; that he never heard of these changes of character and life which before he had earnestly and zealously sought after.

Again: A Minister, in addition to the features already described, may make a great use, in almost every discourse, of the name of the Redeemer; and, occasionally, his person or office may be presented with some appropriate prominence, and taught with unexceptionable distinctness, and yet it may be only when the text, according to plain rhetorical propriety, demands its treatment, that Christ is thus set forth; and the Minister may not very frequently select such texts as would thus sustain him. Passing from one subject to another, their succession may bring him in course to something involving, of necessity, a concentrated attention to the Saviour, in some of the great bearings of his works; and then he may be sufficiently explicit and correct; while the spiritually-minded hearer, attending upon the whole train of his preaching, will look in vain for such a graceful bending of every discourse towards "the Author and Finisher of our faith" such a skilful interweaving of all other legitimate topics with those cardinal truths that centre in the cross, as will show at once, however remote the subject from the centre of the Gospel system, that it obeys the attraction, and shines in the light of Christ. There is no such habitual passing to and fro between the ruin of man by sin, and his remedy by the Saviour, between the covenant written on stone, and working death, and the covenant of grace, written on the heart, and working life; as that, whatever the preacher teaches, shall have left on it the sign of the cross, and the whole tenor of his work shall proclaim, that for him to preach is Christ.

Having thus endeavoured to set before you some of those ways by which one's ministry may preach the character of the preaching of Christ, without occupying decidedly and effectually that happy ground,