

BISHOP McILVAINE'S CHARGE TO THE CLERGY OF OHIO.

Again,—one 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 exhortations 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 the 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 shewing 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 entire 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 importunately 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 gained 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 uttermost; 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 endeavored to describe was in a great measure exemplified in the earlier ministry of the now evangelical Chalmers. His labour was fruitless. It remained so till (to use his own words) he got impressed by the utter alienation of his heart in all its affections and desires from God; it was not till reconciliation to him became 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 mediatorship to all who ask it, was set before them as the unceasing 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 ever heard of those 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 this treatment that Christ is thus set forth; and the minister may not very frequently select such texts as would thus constrain 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 work; 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 shew at once, how ever 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 endeavored to set before you some of those ways by which one's ministry may approach the character of the preaching of Christ, without occupying decidedly and effectually that happy ground, it is time to attend more directly to the inquiry how we may in our habitual ministry preach "Christ crucified"? The gospel is a system of truth and duty; its parts all harmonious and mutually relevant and dependant. It has a centre, luminous, glorious, all-controlling, to which all the parts around refer for the light in which they are revealed, and the harmony of their every bearing.—You can neither illustrate this system till you have shown its central power and light, nor fully describe its centre without exhibiting the various relations and dependencies of its surrounding system. The centre is Christ. All lines meet in Him—all light and life come from Him—all truth is dark till He has risen upon the scene. Lesser lights are only to rule the night: it is for the sun to rule the day.—Now what is the best mode of exhibiting this wonderful arrangement of grace, so that he who runs may read? Where will you begin? At the outskirts of the system, taking up first its remoter elements, and reasoning on from one relation to another till you get to Christ? To do this clearly you must give it the time of many discourses. In some circumstances, and after a more direct method has been well employed, it may be well. But supposing a people ignorant in a great measure of the first principles of the gospel, how can you keep them waiting so long in the dark? They have come to see the King; and however unimportant may seem to you their tardy introduction, every thing seems to them impertinent, till they have been admitted to his presence. You find your hearer as a benighted traveller, afraid to continue his way, lest there be a precipice at his feet. You may present him with a chart of his road, but how will it help him so long as he cannot see? He waits the sunrise. One ray from the sun will serve him better than a thousand maps to be read in the dark. Then, but not till then, will a chart of the country be important. Astronomers in teaching the doctrine of the solar system, begin with the sun. They proceed directly to tell what it is, and what it does. This is the first thing to be understood. Nothing in the science can be explained till this is explained. Let the teacher of the gospel system imitate the example. So I perceive the Apostles began. In their preaching, I behold no gradual, ceremonious approach from a great distance, like the parallels of a seige, to the one object of their ministry. There was one personage with whom it was the immediate business of their apostleship to introduce to sinners, "Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth." There was one capital event in his history, which was their immediate business to make known to every creature, "Jesus crucified as a propitiation for the sin of the whole world." To these their ministry immediately leaped. Here they always broke ground first; and set up their tower of attack. Just at the point where their enemies, in magnificent triumph, supposed the gospel had died, with the cross of its entombed founder for its only memorial, his disciples, in the triumph of faith, and lifting up that cross for a banner, made their beginning. Just that which laid the stumbling block to the Jew and secured such foolishness to the Greek, they adopted as the head and front of their preaching; advancing boldly upon both, Jew and Greek, like

David with his single stone against the contemptuous giant of Gath; glorying in nothing, determined to know nothing "Save JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED." Thus saith St. Paul—"I delivered up to you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness did they at once lift up Christ on the cross, as an ensign to the people. They could not spare time to be rooting out prejudices, and gradually preparing the minds of the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles for the great subject of Christ's atonement. They knew no way of removing darkness so sure as that of introducing the sun; no way of subduing the enmity of the heart to the gospel so short as that of making men acquainted with the very essence of the gospel. Human device would have said to St. Paul, make use of your philosophy for an introduction to your theology, call science to your aid; shew the fitness of things—impress your audience with a respectful idea of your attainments in the wisdom of the school—aim at the nerve of Demosthenes—put on the golden robes of Cicero—speak of your Master in his manhood, in his miracles, benevolence and piety; compare his precepts with those of heathen sages; but cast a veil over his ignominious death, and the humiliating plan of salvation through faith in his sufferings, till the public mind shall be somewhat inured to the less offensive features of his religion. "No," said St. Paul, "lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." There was a declaration of the Master which an apostle could not misunderstand; "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." In this they read the secret of their success. Lifted up on the cross by his enemies he had been already. Lifted up in the sight of all people, he was now to be by the ministry of the word. Their principle was, God "giveth the increase," and "hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;" that no flesh (that neither preacher nor convert) should glory in his presence; but that all may feel that it is "Christ Jesus who, of God, is made unto them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Here then, my brethren, have we our lesson. Our first, as well as last and habitual duty, everywhere amidst all prejudices, ignorance and enmity, is to take ground with all confidence. At the centre of the system, and at once set up the cross. We must exalt Christ in his death—establish his propitiatory character; publish its sufficiency to the whole world. Thus will you begin your message where a sinner begins his hopes and life. To open your negotiation any where else, is but to delay it. But having begun here, what remains? The sun has risen; now see that it remains unclouded, always in full view from the remotest circle of your hearers, so that the weakest and lowest eye may see. Now you must keep up attention to this supreme object, by telling your people all that the Scriptures tell you of Christ. Your business is that they may "know Christ and be found in him." Consequently there is nothing revealed as pertaining to him that is not profitable to them, or that you have a right to keep back. You are to make him known in the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. The love of the Father in sending his only begotten Son, and the Son in coming to be made a curse for us, can be preached only in view of the Son in the self-existent and infinite glory of the Godhead. You cannot separate the cross for which he came from the throne whence he came, without divesting his death of its atoning virtue and his love of all its wonders. In the same vital connexion is the Incarnation of the Son of God. The mysteries of Bethlehem are closely allied to those of Calvary. To understand how he bore our sorrows, we must learn how he took our nature. You cannot teach his obedience unto the death without his condescension to be born in the likeness of man. In setting forth the lamb of God, in his death as a sacrifice you must also set him forth in his life as an example "without blemish and without spot." There is too little preaching of "the man that was in Christ Jesus." It was his preparation for the sacrifice. It must be ours for all the benefits which that sacrifice has purchased. But the preaching of Christ too often terminates with the event of his crucifixion; as if when the sacrifice was finished