

I. *The limits of our commission are the limits of our authority.*

Paul writes: "We are ambassadors for Christ." An ambassador is one who represents another; who acts in the stead of a sovereign. Within the limits of his instructions he carries all the authority of the monarch, the empire, the government, which he represents. But the moment he passes the bounds of those instructions, he transcends also the limits of his authority and may even forfeit his commission. It is therefore vital that we understand our commission in order that we may always act and speak with authority. Here is a whole province in God's universal empire in armed rebellion. We who are believers are sent to offer to every rebel pardon and reconciliation; as though God would beseech by us, to pray them in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. We are to declare the conditions of such reconciliation and restoration, but we cannot compel any rebel to lay down his arms and submit to God. Nor is this our province. Our authority is explicit: we are empowered to publish the good tidings throughout the world; there our authority begins and ends. So long as we confine ourselves to that, behind us, backing up our message, stands the whole Godhead! But the moment we begin to think of it as our work to "convert" men, we are tempted to tamper with the gospel, to abate its seeming severity, to make it more attractive; or even to invade the province of the Holy Spirit and seek to move directly upon the unrenewed heart and will.

It is a dangerous business, this trying to induce men to consent to the gospel. Paul refers to this perhaps when he says, "We are not as many who corrupt—(κατηλευοντες)—adulterate the word of God."\* These kapēloi, or hucksters, tavern-keepers, were notorious for adulterating their commodities, for the sake of large sales and selfish gains. What a temptation to the gospel preacher to soften the severity of the terms, for the sake of winning men! "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" "An hundred measures of oil." "Take thy bill and write fifty." What a snare to the church to accommodate her spiritual standard to the natural heart and become worldly, to draw the worldly! What a temptation to count converts and justify as legitimate the means by which their number is swelled to new proportions!

Now, be it remembered that, if, even for the sake of drawing men to God, the ambassador adds to or diminishes aught from his message, he no longer speaks with authority. Rebels may be induced to yield on our terms or their own terms; but until there is submission *on God's terms* there is no reconciliation! The only way to keep out of the clutch of this subtlest satanic temptation is to keep steadily before us that our work is evangelization rather than conversion. Let us preach the gospel just as our Lord has bidden us, and just as he gave it to us

\* 2 Cor. ii: 17.