

sustained by the Divine persons in the economy of redemption; the various offices sustained by Christ; His various relations to His people as identified with them, not in the unity of the covenant alone, but in that spiritual and mystical bond on which He himself so largely expatiates; the union and communion with him in his death and in his life, in His resurrection and in His glory. And the law, let it be preached, and more preached, in the fullest, minutest exposition of its requirements, if only accompanied with the full enunciation of the motives to obedience. Of nothing do we feel more certain than that a right appreciation of the scheme of Christian doctrine will only dispose to the higher appreciation of all moral obligations, and will better enable the preacher to illustrate the spirituality of the law. I only wish the morality of the pulpit were more minute; the inner Christian life traced, the conflicts, the trials, the victories of the new nature—in other words, the cross of Christ preached in its moral and exemplary, as well as meritorious, influence on our death to sin and life to righteousness. One thing, however, I cannot reconcile with an adequate estimate of our great and special message: using texts, the richest perhaps in Scripture, as mere mottoes for essays on some subordinate point, in neglect of their main design (Dr. Willis here referred to discourses he had heard delivered to large and earnest auditories on John xvii: 4, and Heb. vii: 15, the one text being chosen to enforce the general obligation on every man to know the work given him to do, to try to be able to say like the Saviour, “I have finished it;” the other, or rather its latter words, separated from the rest, made a mere motto for an argument on immortality, or for pressing the deep interests involved in “endless life”: all good points in their time and place, but to which the greater meaning of the Scripture was for the time sacrificed.) There are but fifty and two Sabbaths in a year; surely the choice opportunity afforded by such texts should not be lost, or the subsidiary lesson preferred to the direct and primary, to the loss indeed of the subsidiary design itself.

I conclude by reminding candidates for the ministry—may I not put others also in remembrance?—how suggestive of our duty is the description of our calling. It is that of preachers of “the word,” “preachers of Christ,” “stewards of the mysteries of God,” “shepherds,” pastors appointed to feed the flock. Limiting myself at present to this last, I think there is much in it that appeals to our fidelity, our conscientiousness, our love. We are not to strain figures. The *flock* of Christ is composed of intelligent beings. They know the Shepherd’s voice from that of strangers; and we shall all rejoice, I dare say, the more, as they, like the Bereans, search the Scriptures and prove what they hear by what they read; but there is a large class of Christian hearers who, some from amiable deference to the supposed superior knowledge of a pastor, others from the less worthy cause of too much indifference or unconcern, leave themselves much in the preacher’s hands. They readily take on the image of that version of the truth which the preacher of their choice, and the man of their friendship, uses to serve up to them. Whatever may be said of the censoriousness of hearers, I think the more prevailing rule is a facile deference to a preacher’s views, and an aptitude in hearers to adjust themselves to the standard of opinion, and perhaps of religious feeling too, which is set forth weekly from the pulpit of their own sanctuary. There is among Protestants as well as Romanists—though less, we think, among us—a disposition to take a great deal, even in religious matters, on trust, or to be easily satisfied with a version of the Gospel—albeit meagre and defective—which